

Contents

SOCIAL ISSUES	3
WOMEN	3
World Bank's - Women, Business and Law Index	3
France makes abortion a constitutional right	3
Ending discrimination: On the Union of India and Others vs Ex. Lt. Selina John case	4
Safe City Project	4
Female Genital Mutilation	5
Women more likely to develop Alzheimer's	5
Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality	6
CHILDREN	6
Is downloading Child pornography an offence or not?	6
Operation Smile-X	7
Nutritional crisis in India	7
Activity-based curriculum drawn up for anganwadis	7
OTHER VULNERABLE SECTIONS	8
Draft norms look to make Railways more disabled-friendly	8
Informal workers' vulnerability risks	9
UNHRC Resolution for Intersex Rights	9
EDUCATION	10
ASER 2023: Beyond Basics Report	10
Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report	11
Foundational Literacy & Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) ..	11
Micro-credentials in higher education	12
Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings	12
HEALTH	13
PHFI is 2nd in the global ranking of Public Health Institutions ..	13
IRDAI removes age cap on health insurance purchase	13
India reported 1.41 million new cancer cases in 2022	14
WHO's Global Initiative on Digital Health	14
WHO guidelines for multi-modal Generative AI in Healthcare ..	15
'High sugar' content in Nestle's baby food in India	15
India sitting on obesity curve: Lancet study	16
India's 1st ICU admission norms	16
WHO launches first ever Patient Safety Rights Charter	17
Anemia prevalence in 8 States over-estimated	18
Lancet projects fall in India's fertility rate	18
India TB Report-2024	19
Remove Bournvita from 'health drinks' section	19
Resurgence of mumps in Kerala	20
MISCELLANEOUS	20
Human Development Report (HDR) 2023-24	20
Multidimensional Poverty in India	21
Unemployment rate declined to the lowest level in 2023	21
Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report	22
World Poverty Clock	23
Death Penalty India Report (DPIR)	23
More Indians leaving the country	24
Food Security Information Network (FSIN) on food crisis	24
Food Waste Index Report 2024	25
World Happiness Report 2024	26
South Asia Development Update Report	26
UNFPA's State of World Population - 2024 Report	27
GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES	28
River Rejuvenation Project 'Devika'	28
Prerana: An Experiential Learning Program	28

ERNET India's web portal	28
"PRITHvi Vlgyan (PRITHVI)" Scheme	29
SVAMITVA Scheme	29
Know India Programme	30
SAMARTH Curated Programs	30
Project PRAYAS	31
Development projects for Lakshadweep	31
Vaibhav Scheme	32
Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)	32
Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC): Pilot project launched	32
SARTHI Portal	33
SWATI Portal	33
Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund	34
PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana	34
Smart Gram Panchayat Project	34
PM-SVANidhi boosted the annual income of street vendors	35
Sangam: 'Digital Twin' initiative	35
National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAP-SE)	36
Pilot Project for Road Crash Victims	36
ADITI scheme	37
Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme, 2024	37
'NITI for States' digital platform	37
Initiatives for School and Teacher Education	38
Mahtari Vandan Yojana	39
PM-SURAJ	39
PB-SHABD	39
Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme	40
Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana	40
Anaemia Project for adolescent girls	41
Project ODISERV	41
SWAMIH fund	41
Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS)	42
One Vehicle, One FASTag	43

SOCIAL ISSUES

WOMEN

World Bank's - Women, Business and Law Index

News Excerpt:

In the latest edition of the **Women, Business and Law Index**, **India** holds the **113th position out of 190 countries**. The index indicates the gap between legal rights (Impact of Laws & Regulations on Economic Opportunity of Women) enjoyed by men and women in the workplace.

Key Parameters of the Index:

This index gauges legal gender disparities by assessing 10 crucial parameters, such as pay, safety, mobility, entrepreneurship, and assets.

- India's ranking has been slightly enhanced with the inclusion of safety and childcare indicators.
- **Global Comparison:**
 - While India's score remains constant at 74.4%, several countries like **Denmark, Canada, and Finland** score a perfect 100.
 - The index shows that in India, women enjoy 60% of the legal rights compared to men, which is lower than the global average of 64.2%.
- **Quality childcare services and care work burden:**
 - Women in India also bear the burden of spending an average of 2.4 more hours daily on unpaid care work, primarily childcare.
- **Female Labor Force Participation:**
 - India strives to increase the female labour force participation rate, which, at 37% in 2022-23, lags behind some advanced economies like those in the OECD, where the rate surpassed 50% in 2022.

France makes abortion a constitutional right

News Excerpt:

France has become the first country in the world to **explicitly include the right to abortion** in its **constitution**.

The constitutional amendment:

- The amended **Article 34** of the French constitution states that "the law determines the conditions in which a woman has the **guaranteed freedom** to have recourse to an **abortion**".
 - **France first legalized abortion** in **1975**, and it was a **legal right in France**.
- The amendment has been hailed as a victory for feminists and a defeat for anti-choice activists.
- The French amendment is an explicit response to the trend seen in countries like **Hungary**, which, in 2022, placed significant bureaucratic hurdles before women seeking an abortion, and **Poland**, where a near-total ban was imposed in 2021.

Access to safe abortion as a human right:

- At the **1994 International Conference on Population and Development** in Cairo, 179 governments signed a **program of action** that included a commitment to **prevent unsafe abortion**.
- In **2015**, the **United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** expanded to call for **universal access to reproductive health care services**.
- The **WHO** first recognized **unsafe abortion as a public health problem in 1967**.
 - In **2003**, it developed **technical and policy guidelines** that included a **recommendation that states pass abortion laws to protect women's health**.
- According to the **UN Population Fund**, addressing the unmet need for family planning would both considerably **reduce maternal mortality** and **reduce abortion** by up to 70% in the developing world.

The legal status of abortion in India:

- **Section 312** of the **IPC** criminalizes voluntarily "**causing miscarriage**" even when the miscarriage is with the pregnant woman's consent, except when the miscarriage is caused to save the woman's life.
 - This means that the woman herself, or anyone else, including a medical practitioner, could be prosecuted for an abortion.
- In **1971**, **The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (MTP Act)** was introduced to "liberalize" **access to abortion** since the restrictive criminal provision was leading to women using **unsafe and dangerous methods for termination of pregnancy**.
 - The law was enacted on the recommendation of the **Shantilal Shah Committee**.
- In **2021**, Parliament **amended the MTP Act**.
 - Under the **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021**, abortion is permitted after **medical opinion under stipulated circumstances**.
 - The 2021 Act **increased the upper limit** of the gestation period to which a woman can seek a medical abortion to **24 weeks from 20 weeks** permitted in the 1971 Act.
 - **Gestational age**, calculated in weeks, is the medical term for **how far along the pregnancy** is. It is measured from the **first day of the woman's last menstruation or period**.
 - It also **extended MTP services**, under the **clause of failure of contraceptive**, to **unmarried women** to provide access to safe abortion based on a woman's choice, irrespective of marital status.

- The opinion of **only one registered medical practitioner** will be required for the abortion of a foetus **up to 20 weeks** of gestation and **two for the termination** of pregnancy from **20 to 24 weeks** of gestation, and the opinion of a **state-level medical board** is required for abortions **over 24 weeks**, in case of suspected **foetal abnormalities**.

Ending discrimination: On the Union of India and Others vs Ex. Lt. Selina John case

News Excerpt:

In a case where a woman nursing officer was terminated from the Military Nursing Service on the grounds of marriage, the Supreme Court firmly termed the same to be a **'coarse case of gender discrimination and inequality'**.

Supreme Court's verdict:

- Dismissing the Centre's appeal, the Supreme Court maintained that releasing or discharging an employee based on marriage is arbitrary and constitutes gender discrimination.
- The Court firmly rejected the patriarchal rule that led to her termination, emphasizing that such actions undermine human dignity, the right to non-discrimination, and fair treatment.
- The Court also granted her full and final settlement by ordering the Centre to compensate her with Rs.60 lakh.
- This landmark Supreme Court decision not only addresses the specific case of Selina John but also sends a powerful message against gender discrimination in the workplace, reinforcing the **principles of equality, non-discrimination, and fair treatment**.

Safe City Project

News Excerpt:

U.N. Women will work closely with **Kerala's gender parks** and provide **technical assistance** for the **Safe City project** and **gender data hub**.

Kerala's Gender Parks:

- Its **objective** is to establish a **secure and sustained ecosystem to empower women entrepreneurs** and provide them with a platform to market their products.
- The **Gender Museum, Gender Library, Convention Centre, and an amphitheatre** formed the project's first phase.

Safe City Project:

- The Safe City project **aims to create a safe, secure and empowering environment for women in public places** to enable them to pursue all opportunities **without the threat of gender-based violence and/or harassment**.
 - It further aims to prevent and **curb all forms of crimes against women and girl children** in public

places by providing **safer urban infrastructure** and efficient **access to law enforcement agencies**.

- An initiative of the Government of India under the **Nirbhaya funds scheme** for ensuring the safety of women and children.
 - The Empowered Committee under the Nirbhaya Fund has approved Safe City projects in eight selected cities (**Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow**).

Gender Budgeting:

- The Government of India adopted Gender Budgeting (GB) as a powerful tool for **promoting gender equality** and **ensuring adequate budgetary provisions** through gender-responsive planning and budgeting processes.
 - The **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)** is the nodal Ministry for Gender Budgeting.
- **'Mission Shakti'** is a scheme in mission mode aimed at strengthening interventions for women's safety, security, and empowerment during the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-25. It has **two sub-schemes** -
 - **'Sambal'** for the **safety and security of women** and
 - **'Samarthya'** for **women's empowerment**.
- The **Gender Budgeting Scheme** is an integral **component** under the **'Samarthya'** sub-scheme.

About UN Women:

- UN Women is the United Nations entity **dedicated to gender equality** and women's empowerment. It **works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals** a reality for women and girls.
- It stands behind **women's equal participation in all aspects of life**, focusing on four strategic priorities:
 - Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from **governance systems**.
 - Women have income security, decent work and **economic autonomy**.
 - All women and girls live a life **free from all forms of violence**.
 - Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable **peace and resilience** and benefit equally from **preventing natural disasters, conflicts, and humanitarian action**.
- The United Nations has made significant progress in advancing gender equality through landmark agreements such as the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**.

Female Genital Mutilation

News Excerpt:

On the **International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation** on **February 6**, the World Health Organization (WHO) reiterated its commitment to prevent and respond to female genital mutilation (FGM).

10 X FASTER
Progress in eliminating FGM needs to be 10 times faster to meet the global target of elimination by 2030.

Evidence suggests FGM is practiced in at least 90 COUNTRIES worldwide.

4 MILLION GIRLS annually are at risk of undergoing FGM. Most girls are cut before they reach the **AGE OF 15**.

A NON-STIGMATIZING approach is needed when engaging with communities to eliminate FGM.

ENFORCEMENT of laws criminalizing FGM remains **WEAK**; these laws are more effective when used to promote awareness and well-being.

Elimination efforts should be focused on **mothers, practitioners, older women, health care workers, men & boys, and traditional & faith-based leaders.**

Services for survivors of FGM **ARE BEING DISRUPTED**, as health care workers prioritize COVID-19 cases.

1 IN 4 girls and women who have undergone FGM have been cut by health care providers.

2 MILLION additional girls will undergo FGM before 2030 due to COVID-19.

FGM prevention must be **MAINSTREAMED** into efforts to address violence against women and girls.

* Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation(A/75/279). Report of the Secretary-General, 30 July 2020

About Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

- FGM refers to the partial or total **removal of the external female genitalia** or **other injury** to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
 - It has no health benefits, and it is estimated that over 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM, with about 3 million girls at risk of undergoing the practice each year.
 - The practice is primarily concentrated in Western, Eastern, and North-Eastern Africa, as well as some Middle Eastern and Asian countries.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** and other international organizations strongly condemn the practice of FGM and advocate for its abandonment, emphasizing that it is a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

- As part of the Sustainable Development Goals, the global community has set a target to abandon the practice of female genital mutilation by the year 2030.

Women more likely to develop Alzheimer's

News Excerpt:

The latest research suggests that activating a brain protein called CYP46A1 could help protect women from developing Alzheimer's.

Women and Alzheimer:

- **Women** make up **two-thirds of people with Alzheimer's**.
 - **Alzheimer's** is a progressive, life-limiting, **neurodegenerative condition** that **damages** and **destroys** parts of the **nervous system**, especially the **brain**, over time.
- **Early menopause** is a **risk factor** for developing Alzheimer's disease.
- Research suggests that women who experience early menopause and go on to get Alzheimer's disease have **higher levels of a protein called tau** in their brains.
 - Tau is a protein that **stabilizes neurons** — the nerve cells that send messages all over the body to allow oneself to do everything from breathing to talking, eating, walking, and thinking.
- In people with Alzheimer's, **tau forms toxic tangles**, which contribute to the deterioration of brain functions and memory loss.

About the research:

- The **main function of CYP46A1 (brain protein)** is to **get rid of excess cholesterol** by **transforming** it into a cholesterol product called **24S-hydroxycholesterol (24SOH)**.
 - 24SOH increases hormone activity, especially oestrogen, and increases oestrogen activity, which develops healthier and better-functioning neurons.
 - **Higher 24SOH levels** corresponded to **lower levels** of Alzheimer's pathological markers like **tau** - but only in women.
- CYP46A1 activators like **Efavirenz** may offer a **new therapeutic approach**.
 - This approach is different from **hormone replacement therapies (HRT)**.
 - The **use of HRT** seems to **reduce the risk** of women developing Alzheimer's disease - but **only if** given at the time of menopause symptoms.
 - There seems to be **no protective effect if given after menopause** - and HRT is controversial after being linked to a higher risk of cancer.

Alliance for Global Good- Gender Equity and Equality.

News Excerpt:

Recently, At the **World Economic Forum's 54th annual meeting at Davos, Switzerland**, held from 15-19 January 2024, India participated in the spirit of "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**", aligning with the overarching **WEF theme for the year, 'Rebuilding Trust'**.

Key Points of the Meeting:

- One of the key takeaways was the announcement of the launch of a "**Global Good Alliance for Gender Equity and Equality**" with the support and endorsement of WEF and the Government of India.
- This year's unique initiative at WEF, led by the Union Minister of Women & Child Development, was the first-ever women's leadership lounge (**We Lead lounge**) by CII and BMGF.
 - The lounge hosted various panel discussions and meetings on "**Women-led Development**" themes, increasing women's participation in the economy, bridging the digital gender gap, engendering women's health, etc.

World Economic Forum			
The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.	It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.	It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests.	The Forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

Global Good Alliance for Gender Equity and Equality:

- The idea of this Alliance emerged from the G 20 Leaders' Declaration and India's abiding commitment to the cause of women-led development.
- This new Alliance's primary and stated objective is **to bring together global best practices, knowledge sharing and investments in the identified areas of women's health, education, and enterprise.**
- The Alliance will be taking forward the commitments of the G20 leaders for the benefit of the larger global community as a follow-up to the activities of the Engagement Group and initiatives under the G20 framework, inter alia, the **Business 20, Women 20 and G20 EMPOWER.**
- Supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Alliance will be housed and anchored by the CII Centre for Women Leadership.
 - The World Economic Forum has become a '**Network Partner**' and Invest India as an '**Institutional Partner**'.

CHILDREN

Is downloading Child pornography an offence or not?

News Excerpt:

Recently, the Madras High Court (HC) said that merely watching child pornography is not an offence under **Section 67B of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000**, as the accused had merely downloaded it onto his electronic gadget and had watched it in private.

About:

Section 67B of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:

- The IT Act and rules made thereunder contain several provisions for **safeguarding users in cyberspace.**
- The IT Act penalizes various cybercrimes relating to computer resources.
- **Section 67B The IT Act:**
 - This section deals with the **punishment for publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts in electronic form.**
 - It specifically **targets the dissemination of child pornography** or sexually explicit content involving minors through digital means.
- Sections 67, 67A, and 67B of the IT Act cover all punishable actions related to child pornography.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:

- POCSO was enacted to safeguard children from sexual abuse and sexual offences.
- The Act defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years.
- Section 14(1) of the (POCSO) Act, 2012:
 - It pertains to the **punishment for using a child for pornographic purposes.**
 - It prohibits the involvement of a child in any form of pornography or sexually explicit content, including its production, distribution, and publication.

Section 482 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973:

- It empowers the HC to exercise its **inherent powers** to make orders necessary for the **ends of justice or to prevent abuse of the court's process.**
- This section grants the HC-**wide discretionary powers** to pass orders to secure the ends of justice, such as quashing FIRs (First Information Reports) or criminal proceedings or granting anticipatory bail.

Operation Smile-X

News Excerpt:

The **Telangana police**, in coordination with other government departments, **rescued 3478 children, including 405 girls**, during 'Operation Smile-X' conducted in January.

About Operation Smile-X:

- Operation Smile-X is a **month-long operation** organized by the **Telangana police every year**.
- The operation was conducted to **trace missing children, children trapped in child labour, begging and trafficked children** to rescue them.
- These children were subsequently reunited with their parents or entrusted to childcare homes.

Nutritional crisis in India

News Excerpt:

India has ranked **high** in a study calculating the **prevalence of children** aged 6-23 months who have **not eaten anything** over a 24-hour period across 92 low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).

About the study:

- The research, recently published in the journal **JAMA Network Open**, looked at 2.7 lakh babies aged 6 to 23 months in 92 LMICs.
 - Of the total sample size, 51.4% were boys.
- **Zero-food children** are the ones who did **not consume** any animal milk, formula or solid or semisolid food during the **last 24 hours**.

Key findings of the study:

- The data showed that **13.9 million children**, or 10.4% of the sample, had **not eaten anything** in the studied countries.
 - In the total sample, 20% of children **aged 6 to 11 months** had zero food, which decreased to 6.6% for those **aged 12 to 17 months** and further to 4.1% for those **aged 18 to 23 months**.
- **Prevalence rate of zero food children:**
 - The **highest** rates are seen in **South Asia** (15.7%) and **West and Central Africa** (10.5%).
 - **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** had the **lowest** prevalence and number of zero-food children, at 1.9%.
 - **East Asia** and the **Pacific** had the **second-lowest** prevalence, at 2.9%.
 - **India** has the third **highest** prevalence among 92 LMICs.
 - With **19.3%** of 'zero-food' children, India was third highest globally after West African countries **Guinea** (21.8%) and **Mali** (20.5%).
- **Absolute numbers of zero-food children:**

- **India** had the most '**zero-food**' children at **6.7 million** — **almost half** of all the zero-food children in the surveys.
- **Nigeria** had the **second-highest number** of zero-food children (962,000), followed by Pakistan (849,000).
- **Pakistan, Ethiopia** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** also showed substantial numbers of zero-food children.
- The states of **Uttar Pradesh** (28.4%), **Bihar** (14.2%), **Maharashtra** (7.1%), **Rajasthan** (6.5%), and **Madhya Pradesh** (6%) account for nearly two-thirds of the zero-food children in India.
- More than **99% of the children** who experienced **zero-food** situations had been **breastfed**.

Activity-based curriculum drawn up for anganwadis

News Excerpt:

National Framework of Early Childhood Stimulation framework document says learning begins at birth; staff in 14 lakh anganwadis to be trained and parents encouraged to engage toddlers in activities to reach milestones.

Key points about the National Framework of Early Childhood Stimulation 2024:

- It lays down **month-by-month activities** to be conducted by parents, **anganwadi staff, and ASHA** workers for **children from birth to 3 years of age**.
- Framework document has been finalized by an internal committee comprising representatives from **the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Department of School Education and Literacy, the Ministry of Education, the National Council of Educational Research and Training, the Institute of Home Economics, the Delhi University and civil society organizations**.
- '**The Navchetana**', activity-based curriculum follows the **National Education Policy 2020's** call for a continuum of learning.
- The curriculum involves talking, playing, moving, listening to music and sounds, and stimulation of all the other senses — particularly sight and touch in order to reach developmental milestones across domains, and develop "**early language, and emergent literacy and numeracy**".
- It includes **36 sets of activities for children from 0 to 36 months**.
 - Activities range from reaching for objects, imitating sounds, spinning bangles, putting objects in and out of a jar **in the first year**

- **After a year**, children can feed themselves, explore the house, help in the kitchen, play with dough, and use mirrors.
- **At 18 months**, they scribble with crayons.
- **At 24 months**, they sort and match shoes.
- **By age three**, they cycle, say their names, and identify colors.
- The framework aims to help **identify children with developmental delays** so activities can be adapted accordingly.

Navchetana:

- **Navchetana**, the National Framework for Early Childhood Stimulation aims to help children develop holistically, based on the principles of serve and return, **caregivers' three acts: love, talk, play, and positive guidance**.
- Special focus has been given for the **screening, inclusion and referrals of Divyang children**.
- The Framework provides a stepping stone for children for their long-term development, aiming to ensure that all children start their learning journeys on an equal footing. Further it aims to empower **Anganwadi functionaries**, the world's largest women-led childcare workforce, with greater knowledge and capabilities for early childhood stimulation.

OTHER VULNERABLE SECTIONS

Draft norms look to make Railways more disabled-friendly.

News Excerpt:

The Union government has **released draft guidelines on the accessibility of railway stations and train facilities for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)**.

Key highlights of the guidelines:

- **Website Features Tailored for 'Divyangjans':**
 - These features will follow **universal design principles and World Wide Web Consortium guidelines, integrating technology-enabled accessibility features** such as **text-to-speech and user-friendly pictograms**.
- **Mobile App and One-Click Template for Enhanced Information:**
 - **A dedicated mobile app and a one-click template** have been developed to display all the information and facilities available for PwDs at stations and in trains.
- **Inclusive Announcements and Signage at Train Stations:**

- Credible announcements regarding facilities for disabled persons will be integrated into public announcement systems at train stations and platforms.
- This includes **sign language, captioning, digital displays, standardised illuminated signage across all stations, and Braille signage**.
- **Enhancing Accessibility Infrastructure:**
 - **Frontline staff** will be trained in sign language to ensure effective communication.
 - The guidelines call for **accessible entry and exit points, ramps and handrails, designated accessible parking areas with clear signage, low-height ticket counters with accessibility signage** and accessible **help booths** manned by **Divyangjan Sahayaks**.
- **Creating Unobstructed Zones and Specialized Facilities:**
 - The guidelines emphasized **creating unobstructed platform zones**, incorporating tactile guiding blocks, and **providing accessible toilets, drinking water booths, and foot-over bridges**.
- **Inclusive Train Coaches and Monitoring Mechanisms:**
 - **Integration of accessible features in new train coaches**, prominent signage, **Braille coach numbers, contrasting colours for exteriors**, and inclusive coach interiors with accessible toilets and seating arrangements are recommended.

Current status of Disability:

- **December 3** marks the International Day for Persons with Disabilities (**PwDs**). With around **1.3 billion people** globally living with **disabilities**, the majority residing in **developing countries and rural areas**, it underscores the urgent need for inclusive policies and actions that address the disparities they face, such as poverty, limited access to education, and discrimination.

Government initiatives for the empowerment of Divyangjans:

- **DISHA (Early Intervention and School Readiness Scheme)**
 - It aims at setting up Disha Centres for early intervention for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) through therapies, training and providing support to family members.
- **VIKAAS (Day Care):**
 - This is a daycare scheme, primarily to expand the range of opportunities available to a person with a disability for enhancing interpersonal and vocational skills as they transition to higher age groups.
- **SAHYOGI (Caregiver training scheme):**

- It aims to set up Caregiver Cells (CGCs) to provide training and create a skilled workforce of caregivers to provide adequate and nurturing care for **Persons with Disabilities (PWD)** and their families who require it.
- **PRERNA (Marketing Assistance):**
 - Prerna is the marketing assistance scheme of the National Trust to create viable and widespread channels for the sale of products and services produced by Persons with disability (PwD) covered under the **National Trust Act**.
- **BADHTE KADAM (Awareness and Community Interaction):**
 - It aims to create community awareness, sensitization, social integration and mainstreaming of Persons with Disabilities.

Informal workers' vulnerability risks

News Excerpt:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**) has released a report titled **"Breaking the vicious circles of informal employment and low-paying work"**.

Key Highlights of the report:

- Today, **nearly 60% of the world's employed population works informally**, and over **90% in low-income countries**.
 - These informal workers **face high poverty and occupational risks, and the lack of adequate social protection arrangements** leaves workers and their families in the informal economy especially vulnerable.
- On average, around 60% of all children aged under 15 years in developing and emerging economies live in completely informal households.
 - The OECD found that the figure is 80% or higher in some African countries.
- The **report identified four ways in which children inherit vulnerabilities** when their parents work in informal settings:
 - **More children live in fully informal households**, meaning direct exposure to informal employment.
 - **School attendance gaps** between children from fully informal, mixed, and formal households **widen as they progress to higher levels of education**;
 - Their education receives **less financial resources and parental time**;
 - **Transitioning from school to work takes longer** and is more uncertain for them.
- An **individual's likelihood of landing a formal job** is positively and significantly **influenced not only by their own level of education but also by their parents' education and employment**.

- Children from fully informal households are more likely to work informally as adults simply because they were raised in an informal household.
- **Children's school attendance is another indicator of parental informality.**
 - **Children from fully informal households** have significantly **lower school attendance rates** than those from mixed or fully formal households.
- **Formal households spend more on education per child** than informal households.
 - The **COVID-19 crisis exacerbated these existing inequalities** by limiting access to parental assistance.

UNHRC Resolution for Intersex Rights

News Excerpt:

The **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** voted to adopt a resolution designed to protect the rights of intersex people, the first initiative of its kind.

Key highlights:

- 24 countries voted in favor, twenty-three abstained, and none voted against the resolution, which was spearheaded by **Finland, South Africa, Chile** and **Australia**.
- The resolution calls on states to **combat discrimination, violence, and harmful practices** against persons with innate variations in sex characteristics and address their root causes, as well as

UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC):

- UNHRC is an **intergovernmental body** within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the **promotion and protection of human rights** worldwide, **addressing situations** of human rights violations, and **making recommendations** on them.
- It **meets at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG)**.

Intersex persons:

- Intersex persons are born with a wide range of natural variations in their sex characteristics that **don't fit the typical definition of male or female, including sexual anatomy, reproductive organs or chromosome patterns**.
- It's estimated that up to **1.7% of the population** is born with intersex traits, according to UN data.
- Working with civil society and intersex rights defenders, UNHRC has led several initiatives to promote the visibility and rights of intersex people and issued a **Technical Note in 2023** for States and other stakeholders on UN recommendations on the rights of intersex people and **good practices** in their implementation.

help intersex people realize the **enjoyment** of the **highest attainable standard** of physical and mental health.

- It also requests that the Office of the U.N. The High Commissioner for Human Rights **publishes** a report examining in detail **discriminatory laws and policies, acts of violence and harmful practices** against persons with innate variations in sex characteristics in all regions of the world.

EDUCATION

ASER 2023: Beyond Basics Report

News Excerpt:

ASER (Annual Status of Education Report)'s 2023 survey results show gaps in learning. It focused on 14-to-18-year-old children in rural India, specifically on their ability to apply reading and math skills to everyday situations and their aspirations.

About Pratham:

- Pratham is a **non-governmental organization (NGO)** based in India. The organization conducts large-scale assessments, including the ASER, to understand the State of education in rural areas and identify areas for improvement.
- It launched the **Read India campaign**, which aims to improve reading and arithmetic skills among children.

About ASER:

- ASER was initiated in 2005 and conducted annually until 2014, transitioned to an alternate-year cycle in 2016.
- The core ASER survey focuses on children aged 3 to 16, assessing their enrollment, foundational reading, and arithmetic abilities.
- The **ASER 2023 report, titled 'Beyond Basics,'** offers a detailed exploration of the lives of 14- to 18-year-olds, covering 34,745 youth in 28 districts across 26 states.
- ASER 2023 aligns with **Sustainable Development Goal 4**, focusing on inclusive and equitable quality education, addressing technical, vocational, and tertiary education targets, digital literacy, and overall literacy and numeracy.

Key Outcomes of ASER 2023:

- **Enrollment Trends and Educational Streams:**
 - The report underscores that **86.8% of youth in the age group of 14-18 are enrolled in educational institutions.**
 - **Choice of educational streams:** Arts/humanities emerges as the most popular stream among enrolled youth, accounting for 55.7%, while STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) follows closely at 31.7%.
- **Math and Reading Proficiency:**

Enrollment

Table 1: Distribution of youth by age and enrollment status (%)

Age	Enrolled in:			Not enrolled	Total
	School (Std X or below)	School (Std XI or XII)	Under-graduate or other		
14	94.7	1.4	0.1	3.9	100
15	81.0	11.6	0.2	7.2	100
16	44.8	42.6	1.6	10.9	100
17	15.0	57.3	9.4	18.3	100
18	6.9	31.1	29.5	32.6	100
All youth	52.5	27.6	6.7	13.2	100

'Not enrolled' includes youth who never enrolled or have dropped out.
'Undergraduate or other' includes youth who are enrolled in college to pursue an undergraduate degree or a certificate or diploma course.

- Only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds can correctly solve division problems (3-digit by 1-digit), a skill usually expected in third and fourth grade.
- The report indicates that a significant percentage of students **cannot read Class-II-level text fluently in their regional languages, struggle with basic math problems, and 40% of youth in the age group cannot read sentences in English.**
- **Digital Access and Literacy:**
 - Nearly 90% of surveyed households have smartphones, indicating widespread access to digital technology. Only 9% have a computer/laptop at home, impacting digital skills. Nearly 80% use smartphones for entertainment purposes.
 - 52% lack knowledge of online safety, affecting tasks like reporting/blocking profiles and managing passwords.
- **Gender Disparities:**
 - Humanities are more popular among females (60.6%), while males favoured STEM more (36.3%).
 - Females outperform males in reading a Standard II level text in their regional language (76% vs. 70.9%).
 - Boys have greater access to smartphones and outperform girls in digital tasks. Males are more likely (43.7%) to own smartphones compared to females (19.8%).
- **Vocational Training and Aspirations:**
 - Only 5.6% of youth aged 14 to 18 are currently engaged in vocational training.
- **The Role of Schools and Beyond:**
 - As the majority of respondents in Class 11 or higher were studying humanities-related subjects, questions arose about their prospects in a job market that traditionally values STEM knowledge.

Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report

News Excerpt:

Digital technologies and algorithm-driven software - especially social media - present high risks of privacy invasion and cyberbullying according to the **UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO)** latest report.

Key highlights:

- **Social media negatively affects well-being and reinforces gender stereotypes.**
- Exposure to social media can **negatively affect** self-esteem and body image, particularly for girls.
- Consequently, this can impact their **mental health and well-being**, both of which are essential for academic success.
- **Facebook's research** found that 32% of teenage girls said **Instagram** made them feel worse when they felt bad about their bodies.
- Girls suffer more **cyberbullying** than boys. Across **OECD countries** with available data, 12% of 15-year-old girls reported being cyberbullied, compared to 8% of boys.
- There is a rise in image-based sexual content, **AI-generated deep fakes**, and 'self-generated' sexual imagery circulating online and in classrooms.
- The findings demonstrate the importance of greater investment in education, including media and information literacy, and smarter regulation of digital platforms, in line with UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms.

Negative gender stereotypes dampen girls' STEM aspirations:

- There is a feedback loop in which girls are exposed to **negative gender norms** amplified by **social media**.
 - Girls are steered away from studying **science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)** subjects that are considered **male-oriented fields**.
 - Girls are deprived of the opportunity to shape the very tools that expose them to these stereotypes.
- **According to UNESCO data**, women make up only 35% of tertiary STEM graduates around the world, a figure that has not changed in the past 10 years.
 - Persistent biases deter women from pursuing STEM careers, ultimately resulting in a **lack of women in the technology workforce**.
- Women hold less than **25% of jobs in science, engineering, information, and communication**

technologies fields across the world's leading economies.

- Although 68% of countries have policies in place to **support STEM education**, only **half of these policies** specifically support girls and women.

GEM Report:

- Established in 2002, the GEM Report is an editorially independent report, hosted and published by **UNESCO**.
- At the **2015 World Education Forum**, it received a mandate from 160 governments to monitor and report on progress on education in the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with particular reference to the **SDG 4 monitoring framework**, and the implementation of national and international strategies to help hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments.
- **SDG 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Foundational Literacy & Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)

News Excerpt:

According to the **Union Education Ministry**, the Government conducted the **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)** as part of **Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram** across **23 States**.

About Foundational Literacy & Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT):

- The **Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL)**, Ministry of Education conducted FLNAT as part of the **ULLAS (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society) - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram** across 23 states.
- This test is developed to evaluate registered non-literate learners' foundational literacy and numeracy skills.
- The assessment comprises three subjects - Reading, Writing, and Numeracy.
- Previously, two FLNATs were conducted in 2023 - in March and September.
- The test was conducted in the learners' regional language, which is in line with NEP 2020's focus on promoting multilingualism and using the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction.
- The test is crucial in assessing the impact of teaching-learning sessions conducted as part of the ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram.

- Qualifying learners **received a certificate issued by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)**, recognizing their achievement in acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skill.

About ULLAS (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society):

- The scheme's **objectives** are to impart not only **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** but also to cover other components necessary for a citizen of the 21st century, such as **Critical Life Skills, Vocational Skills Development, Basic Education and Continuing Education**.
- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** for the period **FYs 2022-2027**.
- The scheme will be implemented through **volunteerism and online mode**.
- The scheme will cover **non-literates aged 15 and above** in all states/UTs in the country.
- The target for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy for FYs 2022-27 is **5 (five) crore learners @ 1.00 crore learners per year** by using the "Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System (OTLAS)" in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Nav Bharat Saaksharata Karyakram:

- **Nav Bharat Saaksharata Karyakram, or New India Literacy Programme**, is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** approved by the Government of India for implementation during FYs **2022-27**.
- The scheme aligns with the recommendations of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
- It targets all **non-literates of age 15 years and above** in the country, focusing on **females and educationally backward states**.
- It has five components, namely;
 - **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy**
 - **Critical Life Skills**
 - **Basic Education**
 - **Vocational Skills**
 - **Continuing Education**.
- The scheme is to be implemented through **volunteer teachers**.

Micro-credentials in higher education

News Excerpt:

Micro-credentials are transforming higher education by **bridging the gap** between students' **knowledge acquired** in higher education institutions (HEIs) and the **skills needed** for employment.

Micro-credentials:

- They are **short-duration learning activities** with proof of specific learning outcomes that are validated through a standard and reliable assessment process.
- Micro-credentials are offered **online, physically, or in hybrid modes** at various levels, such as beginning, intermediate, or advanced.
- Multiple players such as Atingi, Credly, edX, Google, LinkedIn and Microsoft offer micro-credentials. Universities in Australia, Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States also provide micro-credentials.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings

News Excerpt:

JNU is best for development studies in India, while IIM-Ahmedabad tops for management in recently released **QS World University Rankings**.

Key findings:

- In the 2024 QS World University Rankings by Subject, **sixty-nine Indian universities** have earned spots, marking a **19.4% increase** from the previous year's 355 entries.
- According to the **rankings** by Subject, **IIM-Ahmedabad** ranks among the **top 25** institutions globally for **business and management studies**, while **IIM-Bangalore** and **IIM-Calcutta** are within the **top 50**.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru University** leads among Indian universities, securing the **20th position** globally for development studies, and the **Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences** in Chennai holds the **24th position** globally for dentistry studies.
- Though the **12 Institutes of Eminence (IoE)** represent a small fraction of Indian universities, they contribute significantly, accounting for **40%** of the country's 180 total entries.
 - Additionally, the **IoE leads with 47 of the 69 top-100** Indian positions and **14 of the 21 positions** across 55 academic disciplines and **five faculty areas** in this edition of the rankings.
- The **University of Delhi** emerges as the **most represented Indian institution** in the rankings with **30 entries**, followed closely by **IIT Bombay** with **28 entries** and **IIT Kharapur** with **27 entries**.
- Noteworthy **improvements** are seen at **IIT Madras**, which has **22 entries**, eight of which have improved, six of which declined, and four of which remained unchanged. Similarly, **IIT Delhi** secured **19 entries**, 11 of which showed improvement, three of which declined, and three of which remained unchanged.
- Notably, **72% of the Indian entries** this year have either **debuted**, shown **improvement**, or **maintained** their positions. At the same time, only **18%** experienced a

decline, showcasing an impressive **17% year-on-year improvement** for India.

- The rankings show significant progress in India, with a **20% improvement** in the **citations per paper** indicator, reflecting **strong research capability**.
- India has emerged as one of the world's **fastest-growing research centres**, with a **54% surge** in **research output** from **2017 to 2022**, surpassing the global average and outpacing Western peers.
- While **India ranks fourth** globally in **research volume**, it ranks **ninth** in **research impact**, indicating the need for prioritising high-quality, impactful research dissemination.

HEALTH

PHFI is 2nd in the global ranking of Public Health Institutions

News Excerpt:

In the first global rankings for schools of public health, the **Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)** has secured an impressive **second place**, surpassing Harvard.

About the Public Health Academic Ranking (PHAR):

- The rankings are part of a report titled '**A New Model for Ranking Schools of Public Health: The Public Health Academic Ranking**' published in the International Journal of Public Health. The **PHAR** is the **first international bibliometric university ranking system** designed for academic public health.
- The **Institute of Global Health, University of Geneva**, funded the ranking project.
- Bibliometric data was collected on **26 schools of public health from each continent between August and September 2022**.
 - **Eleven research indicators/scores covering four criteria** were included - **Productivity, Quality, Accessibility for readers, international collaboration for the period 2017–2021**.

On a contrasting note, a study done by researchers about the healthcare centres in **5 North Indian States** showed a **pattern of improving quality and utilization** over time, but the nature of progress is **largely cosmetic**, and the **pace is slow**.

Status of healthcare in North India:

- The researchers studied the performance of 241 health centres — 26 CHCs, 65 PHCs and 150 sub-centres, spread across Bihar (23), Chhattisgarh (36), Himachal Pradesh (45), Jharkhand (37) and Rajasthan (100).
- **Himachal Pradesh** has been a pioneer, with functional centres serving **83% of its population**, but States like **Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan** have introduced valuable initiatives.

IRDAI removes age cap on health insurance purchase

News Excerpt:

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has removed the age limit for purchasing health insurance policies, with effect from April 1, 2024.

About the news:

- **Previously**, individuals were **restricted to buying new insurance policies** only until the **age of 65**.
- With the recent changes, **anyone, regardless of age**, is now **eligible to purchase new health insurance**.
 - Now Insurers must ensure they offer health insurance products catering to **all age groups**.
 - They may design products specifically for **senior citizens, students, children, maternity**, and other groups as specified by the Competent Authority.

Significance of the move:

- This move by the IRDAI aims to create a **more inclusive healthcare ecosystem** in India and to **encourage insurance providers to diversify their product offerings**.
- This may lead to **better access to healthcare** and **reduced burden of medical expenditure for senior citizens**.

Other changes introduced:

- IRDAI has also directed health insurance providers to **introduce tailored policies** for specific demographics, such as **senior citizens**, and establish **dedicated channels for handling their claims and grievances**.
- Following the recent notification, insurers are also **prohibited from refusing** to issue policies to individuals with **severe medical conditions like cancer, heart or renal failure, and AIDS**.
- IRDAI has also **reduced the health insurance waiting period** from **48 months to 36 months**.
 - All pre-existing conditions should be covered after 36 months, regardless of whether the policyholder disclosed them initially or not.
 - In other words, health insurers are prohibited from rejecting claims based on pre-existing conditions after these 36 months.
- Insurance companies are **barred from introducing indemnity-based health policies**, which **compensate for hospital expenses**.
 - Instead, they are **only permitted to provide benefit-based policies**, offering **fixed costs upon the occurrence of a covered disease**.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI):

- IRDAI is an **autonomous and statutory body** that is responsible for **managing and regulating the insurance and reinsurance industry** in India.
- IRDAI is a **10-member body- a chairman, five full-time members, and four part-time members.**
- It was constituted under the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999** and it is headquartered in **Hyderabad.**

India reported 1.41 million new cancer cases in 2022

News Excerpt:

According to the **World Health Organization's (WHO)** latest global cancer burden estimates released on February 1, 2024, the number of new cancer cases rose by 20 million in 2022.

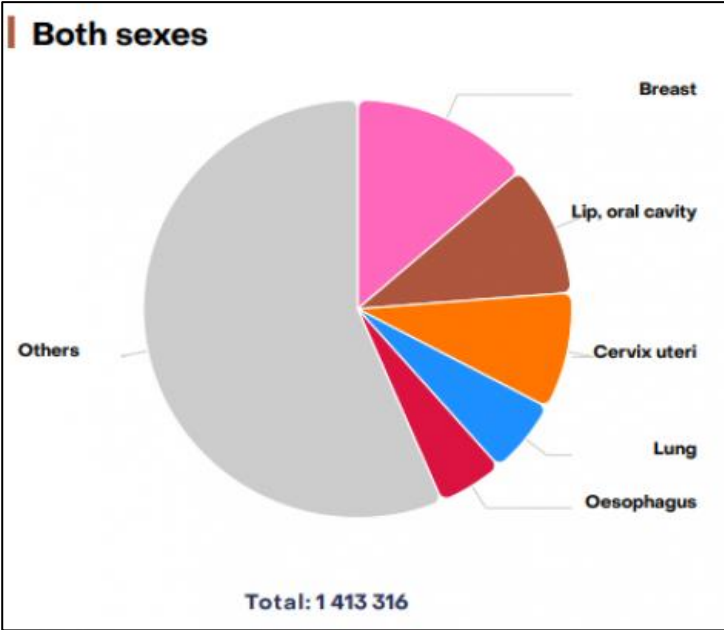
The global cancer burden estimates:

- According to WHO, globally -
 - Lung cancer was the most commonly occurring, with **2.5 million new cases or 12.4%.**
 - **Female** breast cancer ranked second (11.6%), followed by **colorectal** cancer (9.6%), **prostate** cancer (7.3%) and **stomach** cancer (4.9%).
- Further, about 9.7 million global deaths due to cancer were reported in 2022, with 916,827 cancer deaths reported in India alone in 2022.
 - The estimates included the deaths of 4.7 lakh men and 4.5 lakh women in the country.

India's cancer burden:

- India reported 1.41 million new cases, with a higher proportion of female patients — 6.9 lakh men and 7 lakh women.
 - **Lip, oral cavity, lung and oesophagus cancer** were the four leading types of cancer for men.
 - For women, it was **breast, cervix, uterine cancer and ovarian** cancer.
- Breast cancer had the highest proportion in the country, with 1.9 lakh new cases, accounting for 13.6% of all patients and over 26% of women.
 - The approximation reflected the global estimates that ranked female breast cancer as the second highest reported, with 2.3 million cases worldwide.
- In India, breast cancer was followed by:
 - **lip and oral cavity** (143,759 new cases, 10.2%),
 - **cervix and uterine** (127,526 new cases, 9%),
 - **lung** (81,748 new cases, 5.8%),

- **oesophageal cancers** (70,637 new cases, 5.5%).



Government Initiatives:

- **National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP):** Aims to reduce tobacco use, a major risk factor for various cancers.
- **Vaccination against HPV:** The government has introduced HPV vaccination for girls aged 9-14 years to prevent cervical cancer.
- **Cancer awareness campaigns:** Regular campaigns are conducted to raise awareness about risk factors, symptoms, and early cancer detection.
- **National Cancer Screening Programme:** Offers free breast, oral, and cervical cancer screening in high-risk groups.
- **Mobile cancer screening camps:** Organize regular camps in rural and underserved areas to provide access to screening services.
- **Telemedicine consultations:** Enable access to specialist consultations for early diagnosis and management.
- **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):** Provides health insurance cover up to Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization, including cancer treatment.

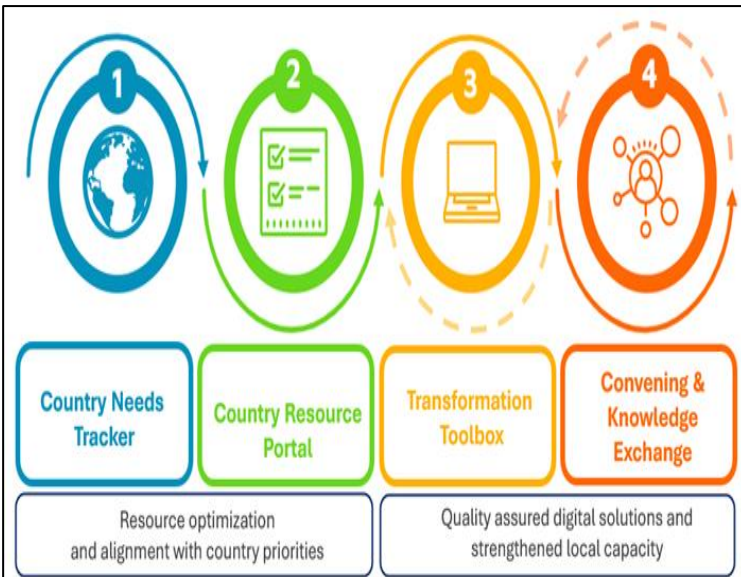
WHO's Global Initiative on Digital Health

News Excerpt:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH), a **platform for sharing knowledge and digital products among countries.**

About the Global Initiative on Digital Health:

- **GIDH** is one of the **key initiatives of India's G-20 Presidency** and was **announced in August 2023 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.**
- The platform was launched virtually in **February 2024.** The **WHO manages the network.**
- It is launched to enhance and align resources to support **digital health transformation led by individual countries,** achieved through improved collaboration and the exchange of knowledge.
 - It acts as a vehicle to facilitate the implementation of the **Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025.**
- **Membership:** Membership is open to all institutions engaged in digital health.
- The initiative will be a network of networks with **four main components:**



WHO guidelines for multi-modal Generative AI in Healthcare

News Excerpt:

Recently, WHO released comprehensive guidance on the **ethical use and governance of Large Multi-Modal Models (LMM) in healthcare.**

About LMMs:

- It is the fast-growing generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, capable of processing diverse data inputs like text, videos and images, and is revolutionising healthcare delivery and medical research.
- LMMs are known for their ability to **mimic human communication and perform tasks without explicit programming** and have been adopted more rapidly than any other consumer technology in history.

- Platforms like ChatGPT and Bard have become household names since their introduction.
- **Applications of LMMs in healthcare:**
 - **Diagnosis and clinical care,** such as responding to patients' written queries.
 - Patient-guided use for investigating symptoms and treatments.
 - **Clerical and administrative tasks** in electronic health records.
 - Medical and nursing education with simulated patient encounters.
 - Scientific research and drug development.

'High sugar' content in Nestle's baby food in India

News Excerpt:

Nestle's baby food products sold in India have higher sugar

Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025:

- The **WHO published** the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025 in **2021.**
- It serves as a **guide for member states to enhance health systems.**
- This global strategy aims to strengthen health systems by applying digital health technologies to consumers, health professionals, healthcare providers, and industry, empowering patients and achieving the vision of health for all.

Digital health initiatives of the Government of India:

- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):**
 - It was launched in 2021.
 - ABDM will connect the digital health solutions of hospitals across the country with each other.
- Teleconsultation platform **E-Sanjeevani** has provided 140 million consultations so far.
 - It facilitates quick and easy access to doctors and medical specialists from smartphones.

content, in comparison to the same products sold in European markets, according to a report.

What does the report say?

- The report claims that **Nestle's wheat-based product, Cerelac,** which is sold **without any added sugars** in the **UK and Germany,** contained **2.7 grams** of added **sugar** per serving in **India.**

What are added sugars?

- Added sugars are **sweetening agents** such as **syrops** that are added in processed foods and beverages.
- They are considered to be **more harmful than the naturally occurring sugars** found in **fruits and milk.**

- When sugar is added to baby formula food, babies are much more likely to drink it up because of the **pleasing taste**.

Concern about sugar in baby food:

- The inclusion of added sugars in infant formulas amplifies the **threat of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease** at an early age for populations, like India's, with a known propensity to such diseases.
- Introducing sugar-containing feeds at the age of **six months** is highly detrimental to **Indian infants** who are already **fragile**. Damage to organ systems at this stage leaves **permanent metabolic scars**.
- Formula-fed infants** continuously exposed to a **predominantly sweet taste** are more likely to develop a **preference for such flavors** later in their lives.

Why added sugar is not required by infants?

- Newborn babies primarily receive their nutrition from **breast milk** or **infant formula** in case of **inadequate breast milk availability**.
- These sources already contain an **appropriate balance of sugars (lactose)** along with essential **fats**, proteins, minerals and **nutrients crucial** for a baby's growth and development.
- Breast milk is **naturally sweet** due to **lactose**, which provides the necessary energy for the baby's growing body.
- Giving sugar beyond what is naturally present in breast milk or formula can be problematic for the child.

What do Indian guidelines say?

- They **do not prescribe any upper limit for added sugars**. The regulations allow use of corn syrup and malt in cereal-based infant food.
- Despite World Health Organization (**WHO**) recommends against added sugar in foods meant for children under the age of three years, Indian regulators do allow a limited amount of sucrose and fructose in baby food.
- It also allows the use of **sucrose** and **fructose** as a **carbohydrate source**, provided it makes up **less than 20% of the carbohydrates in the food**.

India sitting on obesity curve: Lancet study

News Excerpt:

The new study reveals that **44 million women and 26 million men aged above 20** in India are obese; this figure was just 2.4 million women and 1.1 million men in 1990.

Key Findings of the study:

- The Lancet found that **12.5 million children** (7.3 million boys and 5.2 million girls) in the country, **aged between 5 and 19**, were **grossly overweight in 2022**, up from 0.4 million in 1990.

- India ranks **182nd** among 197 countries for the prevalence of **Obesity in women** and **180th for men** in 2022.

THE OBESITY MAP					
India			World		
	1990	2022		1990	2022
Men	1.1	26	Men	67	374
Women	2.4	44	Women	128	504
Boys	0.2	7.3	Boys and girls (total)	31	160
Girls	0.2	5.2			

Source: Lancet All figures in million

The country

ranked **174th** in the world **for both girls and boys**.

- The report showed more than 3% prevalence among children and teens, an increase of over 3% points from 1990.
- Obesity is also a concern among adults, **with female obesity** prevalence increasing sharply; women had a 9.8% prevalence, an increase of 8.6 percentage points from 1990.
 - This number stood at 5.4% for men, an increase of 4.9 percentage points.
- Obesity, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is an **abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat** that poses health risks.
 - A body mass index (**BMI**) **over 25 is considered overweight**, and **over 30 is obese**.
 - Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of **body fat based on height and weight** that applies to adult men and women.

India's 1st ICU admission norms

News Excerpt:

The Union **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** has released the first-ever Intensive Care Unit (**ICU**) admission and discharge **guidelines**.

Key highlights of the guidelines:

- Nature of guidelines:**
 - The guidelines are **only advisory** in nature and are **not binding** on hospitals or doctors.
- Intensivist or Critical Care Specialist:**
 - These have been categorised as specialists with specific **training, certification, and experience** in managing critically ill patients in an ICU.
 - But if doctors do **not** have the requisite **qualifications or training**, those with extensive experience in intensive care in India **after MBBS** — quantified as **at least three years' experience in ICU** — can also work as an ICU doctor.
- Monitoring Criteria:**
 - Parameters such as **blood pressure, pulse rate, respiratory rate, breathing pattern, heart rate, oxygen saturation, urine output, and neurological status** are highlighted as critical

indicators that should be continuously monitored for patients awaiting an ICU bed.

- **Admission Criteria:**

- **Inclusion list:**

- Patients with an altered level of **consciousness** or with a recent onset **hemodynamic instability** — such as **shock** and irregular heartbeat.
- Patients with acute illness requiring intensive monitoring or **organ support** should be given ICU care.
- Patients with **medical conditions** or **diseases** anticipating **deterioration**, those who have experienced any major **intraoperative complication**, and those who have undergone a **major surgery** should be admitted.

- **Exclusion list:**

- Hospitals cannot admit **critically ill patients** to the intensive care unit if they and their relatives **refuse** to do so.
- Those with **low-priority criteria** in a **pandemic** or **disaster situation** with **resource limitations** should not be admitted to ICU.
- Critically ill patients should not be admitted to ICU if any disease has a **treatment limitation plan**.
- Anyone with a **living will**, or **advanced directive** against ICU care and also terminally ill patients with a **medical judgment of futility** should **not** be admitted to the ICU.

- **Discharge Criteria:**

- The return of **physiological aberrations** to near **normal** or **baseline** status, reasonable resolution and **stability** of the acute illness that necessitated ICU admission, and patient/family **agreeing** for ICU discharge for a treatment-limiting decision or **palliative care**.

WHO launches first ever Patient Safety Rights Charter

News Excerpt:

WHO has launched a **Patient Safety Rights Charter** at the **Global Ministerial Summit on Patient Safety** held in **Santiago, Chile**.

About the Patient Safety Rights Charter:

- It outlines the core rights of all patients in the context of **safety of health care** and **seeks to assist governments** and other stakeholders to ensure that the **voices of patients are heard** and their **right to safe health care is protected**.
- Everyone, everywhere, has the right to safety as a patient.

- The launch of the Charter is a **tangible step forward in achieving a safer, more equitable world**.

Patient Safety:

- Patient safety refers to the **processes, procedures** and **cultures** established in **health systems** that **promote safety** and **minimise the risk of harm to patients**.
- It speaks about the fundamental principle of health care – **'Do no harm'**. Assuring patient safety should be a global priority, and a critical component needed to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals** and deliver the right to health.
- It can be seen as an **indicator of countries' broader commitment to respect, protect and fulfil health-related human rights**.

The 10 fundamental patient safety rights outlined in the Charter are the right to:

1. Timely, effective and appropriate care;
2. Safe health care processes and practices;
3. Qualified and competent health workers;
4. Safe medical products and their safe and rational use;
5. Safe and secure health care facilities;
6. Dignity, respect, non-discrimination, privacy and confidentiality;
7. Information, education and supported decision-making;
8. Access medical records;
9. To be heard and fair resolution;
10. Patient and family engagement.

The challenge to patient safety:

- **Patient harm** in health care is a global challenge. It occurs in countries of all income settings and at all levels of healthcare delivery.
- Harm to patients rarely results from a single incident, but due to **process failures** because of **poorly designed health systems**.
- Patient safety can be compromised due to **avoidable errors** such as **unsafe surgical procedures, medication errors, mis- or late diagnosis, poor injection practices, unsafe blood transfusion** and the **onset of life-threatening infections** such as **sepsis** and other healthcare-associated infections.
- **1 in every 10 patients** experience harm in healthcare; about **50% of this harm is preventable**.

Anemia prevalence in 8 States over-estimated

News Excerpt:

A study across eight States in India has found that the prevalence of anemia has been overestimated by previous surveys.

Methodology of study:

- While the **NFHS surveys** measured **haemoglobin** using **finger prick-based capillary blood**, the new study used **venous blood** to measure **haemoglobin** and **iron status through ferritin**.
 - Capillary blood haemoglobin** may **underestimate the true values** due to the phenomenon called **plasma-skimming**, leading to a slightly **lower red blood cell count** compared to venous blood.
 - Mixing of tissue fluid** during capillary blood sample collection can dilute haemoglobin levels, further reducing accuracy.
 - The **WHO** has also recently **recommended** that anemia be diagnosed from **venous blood estimations** of haemoglobin.

What is anaemia?

Anaemia happens when the number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin concentration within them is lower than normal.

What causes anaemia?

Common symptoms of anaemia include

Dietary changes can help reduce anaemia in some cases by

Key findings of the study:

- The majority of cases of anemia were mild, with **18.4%** of the entire sample experiencing **mild anemia**, **14.7%** with **moderate anemia**, and **1.8%** with **severe anemia**.
- Women** exhibited a **higher overall prevalence** of anemia compared to men, with **22% of women** experiencing moderate anemia compared to **7.6% of men**.
- Among different **age groups**:
 - 44%, 41%, and 45%** in **adolescent girls, adults, and elderly women**, respectively.

- For **adolescent boys, adults, and elderly men**, the prevalence of anemia was **24%, 21%, and 37%**, respectively.
- The **prevalence of anemia** was much **higher** as per the **NFHS surveys** that used capillary blood — **60.8%** for women, **62.6%** for adolescent girls, **26%** for men and **31.8%** for adolescent boys.
- State wise data:**
 - Assam** had the **highest prevalence** of total anemia, with **69.8% overall** and 78.3% among women.
 - Odisha** exhibited a prevalence of **55% overall** and 63% among women.
 - Meghalaya** showed the **lowest prevalence** of anemia at **12.1% overall** and 14.6% among women, followed by **Telangana** with **16.9% overall** and 24.6% among women.
- Iron deficiency:**
 - Iron deficiency **prevalence** within the **entire group** was at **18.4**.
 - It was **highest** among **adolescent girls** (31.5%) followed by adult women (27.7%), and elderly women (13.6%).
 - The prevalence of iron deficiency was **16.0%, 10.7% and 11.2%** for **adolescent boys, adults, and elderly men**, respectively.

Lancet projects fall in India's fertility rate

News Excerpt:

A recent **Lancet study** on global fertility rates indicates a **decline in India's total fertility rate (TFR)**.

Total Fertility Rate (TFR):

- It is the **average number of children a woman would give birth to** during her **lifetime** if she were to pass through her childbearing years (15-49 years) experiencing the present-day age-specific fertility rates.
- It is **calculated** by adding up all the age-specific fertility rates, multiplying this sum by five (the width of the age-group interval), and then dividing by 1,000.

Key highlights of the study:

India's fertility rate:

- In **2021**, India's TFR was **1.91 children per woman**, below the necessary **replacement fertility level of 2.1**.
- India's TFR has been seeing a decline over the last century, with the fertility rate **falling from 6.18 children per woman in 1950 to a projected 1.29 children per woman by 2050**. It can further fall to 1.04 children per woman in the year 2100.

Global fertility rate:

- The study estimates that by **2050, 155 of the 204 countries** will have **fertility below the replacement level**. This figure is expected to rise to **198 countries by 2100**.

- By 2100, the **estimated fertility rates** will be **below the replacement level** in more than 95% of the world's countries and territories, but disparities in rates will remain.

India TB Report-2024

News Excerpt:

According to the **India TB Report 2024** released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), the **gap** between the **estimated number and actual cases** of tuberculosis (TB) is **closing**.

Key highlights of India TB Report 2024:

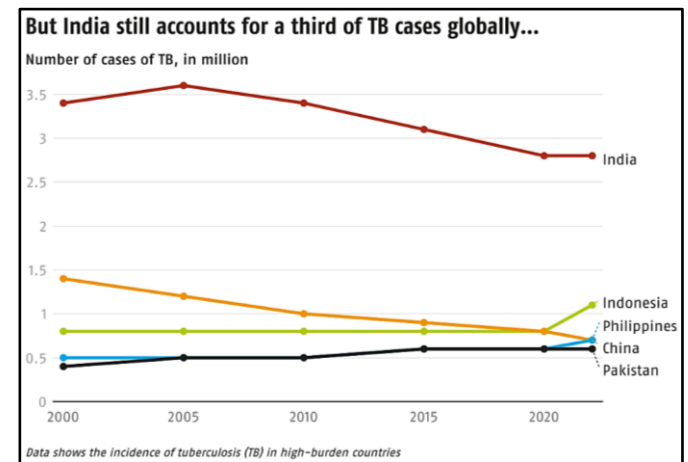
- Reduction in missing TB cases:** The gap between estimated and actual TB cases is **decreasing**, with only 2.3 lakh missing cases in 2023 compared to 3.2 lakh the previous year.
 - Tracking TB patients through the **Ni-kshay portal** has contributed to reducing missing cases.
- Notifications from the private sector have increased**, with nearly 33% (8.4 lakh) of the 25.5 lakh reported cases in 2023 coming from private healthcare providers.
- These estimates are based on **India's in-country model**, a new methodology developed by India and accepted by the **World Health Organisation**.
- A test to check for **medication resistance** was administered to 58% of patients with confirmed TB, up from 25% in 2015.
- India reached its 2023 target** of initiating treatment in **95% of diagnosed TB patients**.

Factors contributing to reduced TB incidence in India:

- Ni-KSHAY:**
 - NI-KSHAY (Ni=End, Kshay=TB) is the **web-enabled patient management system** under the **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP)**.
 - It is developed and maintained by the **Central TB Division (CTD)**, and MoHFW in collaboration with the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**, and the **World Health Organization India's Office**.
 - It also functions as the **National TB Surveillance System** and enables reporting of various surveillance data to the Government of India.
- Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (PMTBMBA):**
 - It is launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) of India to **eliminate tuberculosis (TB) by 2025**.
 - It emphasizes the need for a **multi-sectoral response** involving various **stakeholders**, including communities and societal institutions.
 - It is significant for its **community-driven approach** and its focus on **reducing the stigma** associated with TB.

World TB status:

- High TB incidence countries** such as China, the Philippines, and Pakistan reported fewer than a million cases in 2022.
- TB ranks as the **second leading cause of infectious deaths globally**, following Covid, according to the World Health Organization.
- While an estimated 11 million people worldwide were diagnosed with TB in 2022, over a million died from it.



Remove Bournvita from 'health drinks' section.

News Excerpt:

The **Commerce and Industry Ministry** said in an advisory to all **e-commerce companies** to remove drinks and beverages, including **Bournvita**, from the **health drinks category** from their **portals or sites**.

About the news:

- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (**NCPCR**) directed Bournvita to withdraw all **"misleading" advertisements, packaging and labels** following a video by social media influencer.
 - The influencer had highlighted the **high sugar content in the drink**, sparking criticism of the brand and a widespread debate.
 - NCPCR** after its inquiry concluded that there is **no 'health drink' defined under FSS Act 2006**.
- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (**FSSAI**) directed all e-commerce **food business operators (FBOs)** to ensure **appropriate categorisation of food products** being sold on their websites.
- This direction came after FSSAI observed instances of **certain cold drinks and beverages**, such as **dairy-based beverage mixes, cereal-based beverage mixes, and malt-based beverages**, being sold on these websites under the category of **'health drink'** or **'energy drink'**.

About National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):

- It is a statutory body constituted under section (3) of the **Commission of Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act 2005**.
- Its mandate is to ensure that all laws, policies, programs and administrative systems conform to the vision of the rights of the child as enunciated in the Constitution of India as well as the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**.
- **A child is defined as a person falling in the age group of 0 to 18 years.**

Resurgence of mumps in Kerala

News Excerpt:

Several states, including Maharashtra, Telangana, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, were reporting a **resurgence in measles cases**.

About Mumps:

- Mumps is a **viral and contagious infection** primarily transmitted by **respiratory secretions**, such as **droplets and saliva**, and **direct contact** with an infected person.
- Although mumps is common in children, it also occurs among pregnant women and can lead to complications.
- It is caused by **paramyxovirus, a member of the Rubulavirus family**.
- Mumps is a self-limiting, airborne viral disease and **presents as fever and headache in mostly children and adolescents, with painful swelling of the salivary glands (parotid glands) on both sides of the face**.
- There is no specific treatment, and the patient recovers **with rest and symptomatic management in about two weeks**.

Why is the mumps vaccine not part of the national immunization schedule?

- Despite being a **vaccine-preventable disease**, mumps has **never been a part of the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) because of the disease's no-mortality profile** and the perception that it has **low public health significance**.
- The Indian Academy of Paediatrics (IAP) advocates using the **MMR (Mumps-Measles-Rubella) vaccine in UIP**.

MISCELLANEOUS

Human Development Report (HDR) 2023-24

News Excerpt:

According to the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** report '**Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarised World**,' India ranks **134 out of 193** countries on the global Human

Development Index (HDI).

Key highlights of the report:

- **India:**
 - With an HDI value of **0.644**, the latest HDR places **India** in the **medium human development category**.
 - **Between 1990 and 2022**, the country's HDI (Human Development Index) value **increased by 48.4 per cent**, from 0.434 in 1990 to 0.644 in 2022.
 - **India** has also shown **progress in reducing gender inequality, ranking 108th out of 166 countries in the GII (Gender Inequality Index) 2022**.
 - The GII measures gender inequalities in three key dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market.
 - The country's GII value of 0.437 is better than the global average of 0.462 and the South Asian average of 0.478.
 - **India's reproductive health performance is better** than that of other countries in the medium human development group or **South Asia**.
 - India's adolescent birth rate in 2022 was 16.3 (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), an improvement from 17.1 in 2021.
 - **India has one of the largest gender gaps in the labour force participation rate** - a 47.8 percentage point difference between women (28.3%) and men (76.1%).
 - India's southern neighbour, **Sri Lanka**, is **ranked much ahead at 78**, while **China is ranked 75**. Both are classified under the **High Human Development category**.
 - **India ranks below Bhutan**, which is 125th, and **Bangladesh**, which is 129th.
 - India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh are all in the Medium Human Development category.
 - **Switzerland** has been **ranked number one**.
 - Nepal (146) and Pakistan (164) have been ranked lower than India.
 - **India's life expectancy at birth has slightly improved from 67.2 years in 2021 to 67.7 years in 2022**.
 - There was an **overall increase (5.88%) in expected years of schooling (EYS) from 11.9 to 12.6**, which improved 18 places when the EYS aspect was considered.
 - **India's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita has improved** from \$6,542 to \$6,951.
- **Global:**
 - The report notes that **inequality worldwide is rising again**: after 20 years of convergence, the gap between the richest and poorest countries has started to widen from 2020.



- These global inequalities are compounded by **substantial economic concentration**.
- Almost 40% of global trade in goods is concentrated in three or fewer countries.**
- In 2021, the market capitalization of each of the three largest tech companies surpassed the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than 90% of countries that year.
- India's loss in HDI due to inequality is 31.1%.**
 - South Asia's loss in the HDI due to inequality is among the highest in the world (after sub-Saharan Africa), followed by the Pacific.

Highlights of the report:

- In absolute numbers, NITI Aayog estimates a total of **24.82 crore people** escaped multidimensional poverty in the **last nine years**.
- According to the Discussion Paper, India has registered a significant decline in multidimensional poverty from **29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23**, i.e., a reduction of **17.89 %** points.
- Uttar Pradesh** registered the largest decline in the number of poor, with 5.94 crore people escaping multidimensional poverty during the last nine years, followed by **Bihar** at 3.77 crore, **Madhya Pradesh** at 2.30 crore and Rajasthan at 1.87 crore.
- According to the estimated share of MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index) poor in 2013-14 and 2022-23, **Bihar recorded a 53 % drop** from 56.3 % share of MPI poor in 2013-14 to 26.59 % in 2022-23.
- In 2005-06, the share of MPI poor in India's total population was 55.34 %. The discussion paper uses previously released MPI data based on **National Family Health Surveys (NFHS)** conducted in 2015-15 and 2019-21, and also uses NFHS-3 data from 2005-06 to understand long-term poverty trends.
- As a result, India is likely to achieve its multiple **SDG targets** of halving multidimensional poverty well before 2030.

Multidimensional Poverty in India

News Excerpt:

According to a discussion paper released by NITI Aayog, **the share of India's population living in multidimensional poverty is estimated to have fallen.**

National MPI:

- India's national MPI measure uses the globally accepted and robust methodology developed by the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)** and the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**.
- NITI Aayog**, as the nodal agency for MPI, has been responsible for constructing an indigenous index for monitoring the performance of states and Union Territories in addressing multidimensional poverty.
- India's definition of multidimensional poverty** is measured using **12 indicators**, including nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, maternal care, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, bank accounts and assets.

Unemployment rate declined to the lowest level in 2023

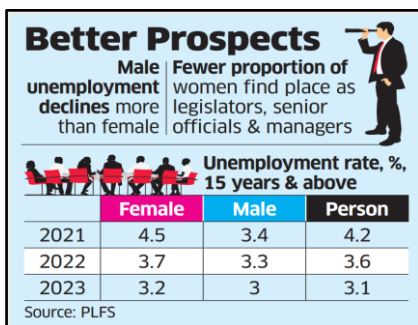
News Excerpt:

According to new data released by the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)**, India's

unemployment rate dropped to 3.1% in 2023 from 3.6% in 2022.

Findings of the survey:

- The data was part of the employment-unemployment indicators report (Periodic Labour Force Survey) released by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
 - NSO collects employment and unemployment status data in the country between July and June.
- A significant reason for the decline in the unemployment rate was the decline in urban unemployment.
 - Urban unemployment declined to 5.2% in 2023 compared with 5.9% in the previous year.
 - Rural unemployment was down 2.4% from 2.8% earlier.
- The latest survey also showed that the labour force participation rate (LFPR) increased significantly to 59.8% in 2023 from 56.1% in 2022 at the national level.
 - The rural LFPR stood at 63.4% in 2023, significantly up from 58.5% in 2022, whereas its urban LFPR rose to 51.4% from 50% in the corresponding period.



Male-Female Labour Force Participation:

- The male-female gap in unemployment increased according to the annual PLFS.
 - Female unemployment declined slower than male unemployment.
 - Despite female labour force participation rising to 41.3% in 2023 from 33.9% earlier, unemployment decreased to 3% from 3.3% earlier.
 - In contrast, male unemployment declined to 3.2% from 3.7% in urban areas.
- In both rural and urban areas, the decline in female unemployment was lower than the decline in male unemployment.
 - Female labour force participation in urban areas reached 27.2% for the first time.
 - However, their participation in the economy is declining.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS):

- The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) launched the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in April 2017.
- The PLFS gives estimates of Key employment and unemployment Indicators like:
 - Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):** The percentage of the population who are in the labour force (working, seeking work, or available for work).
 - Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** The percentage of employed persons in the population.
 - Unemployment Rate (UR):** The percentage of persons unemployed among the persons in the labour force.
 - Current Weekly Status (CWS):** The activity status determined based on a reference period of the last seven days preceding the date of the survey.

Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report

News Excerpt:

Recently, Data released by the UNESCAP as part of Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report: Showcasing Transformative Actions 2024 report indicated that the country still had several indicators where data availability was an issue.

India and Asia's challenges mentioned:

- The report noted 25 emerging challenges for the Indian economy, including rising childhood obesity rates, higher annual inflation, and resources made available to strengthen statistical capabilities.
- While the report lauded the efforts of certain countries, it pointed out that most were likely to miss the SDG target for 2030, and in fact, the gap between reaching the target was now 32 years.
 - So, the region would only be able to fulfil its SDG agenda by 2062.
- Efforts towards mitigating hunger (Goal 2), enhancing health and well-being (Goal 3), ensuring the availability of clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), expanding affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), and building sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) have been less pronounced and require heightened attention.
- The report highlighted women's difficulty accessing education and employment opportunities across the region despite progress in school enrolment rates.

Improvements mentioned in the report:

- The report showed that India's performance on 85 of Sustainable Development Goal parameters has improved, with progress stagnating on 27 counts and worsening on 36.
- According to the report, the overall average progress towards achieving all 17 SDGs in Asia and the Pacific

has increased slowly from 4.4 percent in 2017 to 17.0 percent in 2023.

- The report pointed out that **positive steps** have been taken towards **eliminating Poverty (Goal 1)** and **bolstering sustainable industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9)**.



- As a share of the total population, the number of people living in extreme Poverty has come down to **2.4 % from 3.3 % in 2022**.
 - This is the second big indication of the fight against Poverty.

World Poverty Clock

- It provides **real-time Poverty estimates through 2030** for nearly every country globally.
- It **monitors progress against Ending Extreme Poverty**, which is the UN's first SDG.
- The escape rate calculates the current rate of poverty reduction in the world.
- Funded by the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** and the **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany**.
- It shows the **number of people living in extreme Poverty worldwide, disaggregated by age, gender and rural/urban location**.

Death Penalty India Report (DPIR)

News Excerpt:

According to the Death Penalty in India: **Annual Statistics Report**, published by **Project 39A**, at the end of 2023, 120 death sentences were imposed by trial courts, and 561 prisoners were living under a death sentence in India.

Project 39A is a criminal justice research and legal aid program at the National Law University in Delhi. It is inspired by Article 39-A of the Indian Constitution, which promotes equal justice and opportunity by removing economic and social barriers.

Key highlight of the 2023 report (8th edition):

- In 2023, trial courts across the country imposed **120 death sentences**, with the highest number of sentences from **Uttar Pradesh**, i.e. 33, followed by 12 in Jharkhand and 11 each in Gujarat, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh and 10 in West Bengal.
 - This marks the **largest death row population** in nearly two decades.
 - The year witnessed a **45.71% increase** in the death row population since 2015.
- Only one death sentence was confirmed in 2023**, making it the year with the lowest rate of death sentence confirmations by the appellate courts since 2000.
- Uttar Pradesh had the largest death row population at 119 prisoners**.
- The highest number of trial courts death sentences in 2023 was imposed in murder cases involving sexual

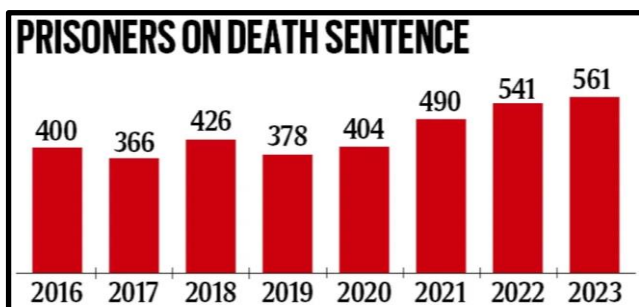
World Poverty Clock

News Excerpt:

According to recently published data by the World Poverty Clock, India has managed to bring down 'extreme poverty' below **3 % of its population**.

Key Points:

- As per government data, Extreme Poverty is now eliminated in India.
 - The World Poverty Clock updates show **India's extreme Poverty at less than 3 %**.
- This could mean achieving significant milestones in the direction of the first of **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**.
- The clock has taken **\$2.15 a day income to present the finding**.
- Accordingly, nearly **3.44 crore people will be living in extreme poverty in 2024, against 4.69 crore in 2022**.



offences, which is 64 (53.33%) out of 120 death sentences.

- The **Supreme Court did not confirm any death sentences** in 2023 while deciding 10 cases involving 11 prisoners. It acquitted 6 prisoners who were on death row, criticizing the quality of evidence and police investigation.
- The **President of India rejected one mercy petition in March 2023** in a case of kidnapping, rape and murder of a minor in 2008. There are a total of 488 death row prisoners awaiting judgment from the high courts.

More Indians leaving the country

News Excerpt:

The out-migration of the **poor**, the **professionals** and the **wealthy** has increased exponentially in the past decade.

Government statistics regarding out-migration:

- In Parliament, India's External Affairs Minister stated that **2,25,260 Indians had "renounced their Indian citizenship"** in 2022.
 - This compared to 85,256 in 2020.
- Taken together, a **total of 16,63,440** Indians had renounced their citizenship in the period **2011-22**.

Out Migration of Poor:	Out-migration of High Net-worth Individuals (HNIs):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From November 2022 to September 2023, up to 96,917 Indians were arrested while crossing illegally into the US alone. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ This compares with 19,883 Indians caught trying to sneak into the United States in 2019-20 illegally and 63,927 in 2021-22. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm Henley & Partners reported in 2022 that 7,500 HNIs had left India to take up residence and citizenship in a foreign country. • The global investment bank Morgan Stanley estimated that between 2014 and 2018, as many as 23,000 Indian millionaires had moved their principal home out of India.

- In the first six months of 2023, the figure was already at 87,026.
- With over **20 lakh Indians migrating overseas yearly**, the regionally and professionally diversified Indian diaspora is now **close to 30 million**, and non-resident Indians are now more than non-resident Chinese.

Food Security Information Network (FSIN) on food crisis

News Excerpt:

According to the UN agencies and development groups, food insecurity worsened around the world in 2023.

Key Points:

- With some **282 million people suffering from acute hunger** due to conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Sudan.
- **Extreme weather events and economic shocks** also added to the number of those facing acute food insecurity, which grew by 24 million people compared with 2022, according to the latest **Global report on food crises** from the **Food Security Information Network (FSIN)**.

Food Security Information Network

- It is a technical global platform for the **exchange of expertise, knowledge and best practices** on food security and nutrition analysis.
- The **Food Security Information Network (FSIN)** plays a leading role in food security and nutrition data analysis and information, particularly in countries facing acute hunger.
- Since 2017, FSIN has worked closely with the **Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC)**.
- Funded by the European Union, FSIN is supported and guided by a Steering Committee, and operates through a Secretariat.

- 2023 was the fifth consecutive year of rises in the number of people suffering acute food insecurity, defined as when populations face food deprivation that threatens lives or livelihoods, regardless of the causes or length of time.
- On a positive note, the **situation improved in 17 countries in 2023, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ukraine**, the report found.

Children starving:

- Since the first report by the **Global Food Crisis Network** covering 2016, the number of food-insecure people has risen from **108 million to 282 million**.

- Meanwhile, the share of the population affected within the areas concerned has doubled, **from 11 percent to 22 percent.**
- Protracted major food crises are ongoing in **Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Syria and Yemen.**

Drivers of food insecurity:

- **Conflict/insecurity:**
 - This includes **interstate and intra-state conflicts, internal violence, banditry and criminality, civil unrest or political crises often leading to population displacements and/or disruption of livelihoods and food systems.**
 - According to the report, situations of conflict or insecurity have become the main cause of acute hunger in **20 countries or territories, where 135 million people have suffered.**
- **Weather extremes:**
 - These include **droughts, floods, dry spells, storms, cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons, and the untimely start of rainy seasons.**
 - Extreme climatic events such as floods or droughts were the **main cause of acute food insecurity for 72 million people in 18 countries, while economic shocks pushed 75 million people into this situation in 21 countries.**
- **Economic shocks:**
 - Economic shocks at the country level can affect the food insecurity of households or individuals through various channels.
 - **High debt and limited fiscal space constrain economic growth,** increase vulnerability to economic shocks and detract from development spending.
 - According to the report, **decreasing global food prices did not transmit to low-income, import-dependent countries.**
- **Disease outbreaks**
 - Disease outbreaks are usually caused by an infection, transmitted through person-to-person contact, animal-person contact, or from the environment or other media.
 - Water, sanitation, food, and air quality are vital elements in the transmission of communicable diseases and in the spread of diseases prone to epidemics.
- **Crop pests and animal diseases:**
 - Transboundary plant pests and diseases can easily spread to several countries and reach epidemic proportions.

Food Waste Index Report 2024

News Excerpt:

According to the latest **UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Food Waste Index Report**, the **world wasted an estimated 19% of the food produced globally in 2022**, or about 1.05 billion metric tons.

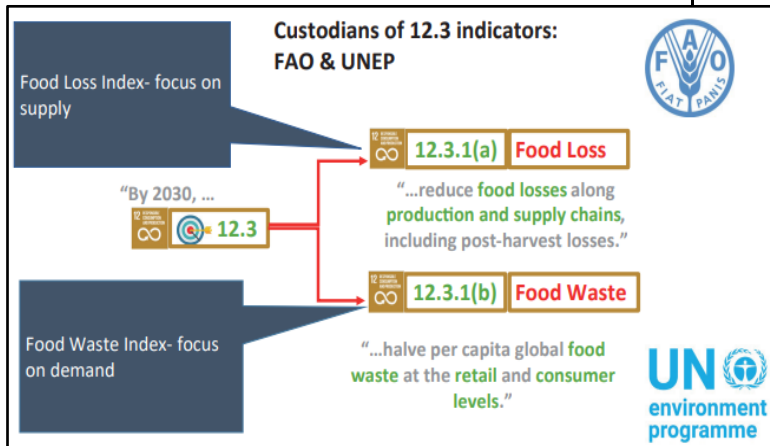
Important terms:

- **Food waste:** Food and its associated inedible parts removed from the human food supply chain.
 - It includes both **edible parts** (intended for human consumption) and **inedible parts** (not intended for human consumption), such as bones, rinds, and pits/stones.
- **Food loss:** All crop and livestock human-edible commodity quantities that completely exit the post-harvest/slaughter production/supply chain.
- **Food Waste Index:** It is overseen by UNEP, tracks the global and national generation of food and inedible parts wasted at the retail and consumer levels (household and food service).

Status of Food Waste:

- **Food Waste in India:**
 - Indian households waste an **estimated 78.2 million tonnes of food** annually, despite the country having the largest population suffering from hunger.
 - **India ranks 111th out of 125 countries on the Global Hunger Index**, indicating a serious level of hunger severity.
 - **Per capita food waste in India is estimated at 55 kg per year**, with rural areas wasting less compared to urban areas.
 - Data on food wastage in India is categorised under '**Medium Confidence**', indicating limitations in geographic coverage and sample size.
- **Global Food Waste:**
 - Globally, 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste (including inedible parts) were generated in 2022, amounting to **132 kg per capita.**
 - Household waste accounts for the majority (60%) of food waste, while commercial food systems, including food services and retail account for 28% and 12% respectively.
 - An additional **13% of food is lost in the supply chain** between harvest and market, often due to rejection or spoilage of edible food.
 - More than a billion meals are thrown away every day worldwide, representing about a fifth of all food produced globally and a third of humanity faces food insecurity.

- Food waste is not confined to 'rich' countries but also prevalent in upper-middle and lower-middle-income countries.



- **Education** and **caste** emerged as **significant factors** affecting life satisfaction in India. Individuals with **higher levels of education** and belonging to **higher social castes** reported **higher happiness levels**.
 - India's ranking for **happiness among young people**, aged 30 and below, was notably lower at **127th place**.
 - This **indicates potential challenges or disparities** the younger demographic faces
 - regarding overall life satisfaction and well-being.
 - India's ranking for **happiness among older people**, aged 60 and above, was slightly higher at **121st place**.
 - This suggests that **older individuals** in India may **perceive higher levels of life satisfaction** compared to their younger counterparts.

World Happiness Report 2024

News Excerpt:

In the World Happiness Report for 2024, **India** was ranked **126th out of the 150** countries.

About World Happiness Report:

- It is released annually around **March 20th** as part of the **International Day of Happiness** celebration by the **United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN SDSN)**.
 - The report is a partnership of **Gallup**, the **Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre**, the **UN SDSN**, and the **WHR's Editorial Board**. It considers **six variables: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption**.
- The World Happiness Report now provides **separate rankings by age group**.
- The **top 10 countries** are **Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Australia**.
 - Finland emerged as the happiest country in the world, topping the **World Happiness Report 2024**, the **seventh successive year**.
- **Afghanistan** remains at the bottom of the overall rankings as the world's **'unhappiest' nation**, followed by Congo, Sierra Leone, Lesotho, and Lebanon.

Key findings about India:

- **India's rank** in the happiness index is **lower than its neighbouring countries** like China (60th), Nepal (93rd), Pakistan (108th), Myanmar (118th), Sri Lanka (128th), and Bangladesh (129th).
- The report noted a **gender disparity** in happiness within India, with **older women reporting lower levels of life satisfaction** compared to older men.

South Asia Development Update Report

News Excerpt:

According to the **World Bank's April South Asia Development Update report**, **India** has moved **fewer people to non-agriculture jobs** than most neighbouring nations.

South Asia Development Update:

- Previously known as **South Asia Economic Focus**, is prepared **twice a year** by the **Office of the Chief Economist for the South Asia region** of the **World Bank**.
- The report presents the **near-term economic outlook** for **South Asia** as well as an in-depth analysis of **topical challenges** and **opportunities** for **policymakers** in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Key highlights of the report:

- **India** could only manage to move a **smaller share** of its **working-age population** away from **farm-related work** than many of its neighbours.
- **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka** and **Nepal** have managed to shift a **bigger share** of jobs to **non-agricultural work** than India.
- Only **Pakistan** and the **Maldives** show a **lower shift than India** among South Asian countries.
- **India-specific trends:**
 - The **share of working-age** Indians who are **employed in agri-based jobs** has come down over the years.
 - This employment ratio for India was **63.9%** in **2000**. It declined to **53.8%** in **2019**.
- **Gender trends:**
 - The increased **participation of women** in India could be driven by **rising self-employment** among them driven by economic distress.

- Most **South Asian countries** recorded a **decline** in the **employment ratio**.
 - The **employment ratio for men** in India **declined** by **9.6% points**, the lowest after Nepal and Bhutan, between 2000 and 2023.
- **India** and **Bangladesh** are among the countries that saw a **divergent gender trend** when it comes to employment.
 - **Women's employment ratio** in **India** increased by **1.4% points**. It was the **highest** for **Bangladesh** at **11.6% points**.

UNFPA's State of World Population - 2024 Report

News Excerpt:

India leads globally with an **estimated population of 144.17 crore**, followed by **China at 142.5 crore**, according to the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) State of World Population - 2024 report.

United Nations Population Fund:

- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) delivers a world where **every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled**.
- The agency began **operating in 1969** as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.
 - In the same year, the United Nations General Assembly declared, "Parents have the exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children."
 - Its name was changed to the United Nations Population Fund in 1987.
- The **goal** of UNFPA is to **ensure sexual and reproductive rights and choices for all**, especially women and young people, so that they can access high-quality sexual and reproductive health services, including voluntary family planning, maternal health care, and comprehensive sexuality education.
- It **aims to end unmet needs for family planning, preventable maternal death, and gender-based violence** and harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, **by 2030**.

Key highlights of the report:

- An estimated **24 per cent of India's population is aged 0-14**, while **17 per cent is within the 10-19 age range**.
- The **segment aged 10-24** is estimated to constitute **26 per cent**, with the **15-64 age group** making up **68 per cent**.
- **7 per cent of India's population is aged 65 years and above**, with men's life expectancy at 71 and women's at 74.
- 30 years of progress in **sexual and reproductive health** has mostly ignored the most marginalized communities worldwide.
- The **child marriage percentage in India was 23 between 2006 and 2023**.
- The **maternal deaths in India had fallen considerably**, accounting for **8 per cent** of all such fatalities worldwide. While disaggregating these figures by socioeconomic group, ethnicity, caste, or religion is challenging, these factors clearly play a role in health outcomes.
- **Women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence** than their peers without disabilities.
- Improvements in healthcare access have primarily benefited wealthier women and those who belong to ethnic groups that already have better access to healthcare.
- **Women and girls with disabilities, migrants and refugees, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ people, people living with HIV, and disadvantaged castes all face greater sexual and reproductive health risks** and also unequal access to sexual and reproductive health care.
- Millions of women and girls remain far behind, and progress is slowing or stalled on key measures - **800 women die every day giving birth, unchanged since 2016**. In 40 percent of countries with data, women's bodily autonomy is diminishing.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

River Rejuvenation Project 'Devika'

News Excerpt:

The government is set to unveil North India's **first** river rejuvenation project '**Devika**'.

About Project 'Devika'

- The project DEVIKA was launched by the Prime Minister in February 2019.
- It is built on the lines of '**Namami Gange**'.
- The **Liquid Waste Management (LWM) project** has been undertaken separately to protect the sanctity of the holy river in Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir.
- This project has been included in India's government's **National River Conservation Project (NRCP)**.
- The LWM project, with a network of pipes and manholes connecting all the households under the project, is being constructed by **J&K's Urban Environmental Engineering Department (UEED)** to protect its sanctity.
- The **sharing of fund allocation is in the ratio of 90:10** by the **Centre and UT** (Jammu & Kashmir), respectively.
- Besides a Liquid Waste Management Project, a **Solid Waste Management (SWM)** project will also be constructed under the Devika Rejuvenation Project, which is vital in many aspects of protecting the sanctity of the river.
- The project also includes **constructing three sewage treatment plants, developing two cremation ghats, protecting fencing and landscaping, small hydropower plants, and three solar power plants.**

Conservation of Lakes and Rivers:

- The National River Conservation Plan (**NRCP**) by the **Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)** aims to prevent the pollution of rivers and improve water quality.
- **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**, in association with the State Pollution Control Boards/Committees in different States/UTs, has been monitoring the water quality of rivers and other water bodies in the country through a network of monitoring stations under the **National Water Quality Monitoring Programme**.

Namami Gange Programme:

- It was launched under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** in June 2014 for a period up to March 31 2021, **to rejuvenate River Ganga and its tributaries** with a budgetary outlay of Rs.20,000 crore.
- Considering the need and spread of the Programme, the Government of India has further approved **Namami Gange Mission-II** with a budgetary outlay of Rs.22,500 crore till 2026.

About Devika River:

- The Devika River originates from the hilly Suddha Mahadev temple in the **Udhampur district** of **Jammu and Kashmir**.
- It flows down towards **western Punjab** (now in Pakistan), where it merges with the **Ravi River**.
- The river presently runs under its sandy surface.

Prerana: An Experiential Learning Program

News Excerpt:

The Department of School Education & Literacy, **Ministry of Education**, has **launched** 'Prerana: An Experiential Learning program'.

About PRERNA:

- **Objective:** It **aims** to provide participants with a unique, inspiring experience, foster **leadership qualities**, and integrate **Indian education system** principles with **value-based Education**, a key component of the National Education Policy (**NEP 2020**).
- **Target students:** Prerana is a **week-long residential program** for selected classes **IX to XII students**.
 - A batch of **20 selected students** (10 boys and 10 girls) from various parts of the country will attend the program **every week**.
- **Venue:**
 - The Prerana program will run from a **Vernacular School**, established in **1888**, in one of the oldest living cities of India, **Vadnagar**, district Mehsana, **Gujarat**. (home to ancient heritage sites and monuments inhabited since the early historic period)
- The program **aligns** with the **principles and ideals** of the **Prime Minister** of India, who is an **alumnus of the school**.
- Prerana School, curated by **IIT Gandhinagar**, is centered around **nine value-based themes**, encompassing ideals like self-respect, courage, dedication, compassion, unity, truthfulness, innovation, faith, and independence.

ERNET India's web portal

News Excerpt:

MeitY launches ERNET India's web portal for domain registration, DNS and value-added services for educational institutions.

About:

Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) Secretary Shri S Krishnan launched ERNET India's newly developed **integrated web portal for educational institutes** in the country at its head office in Delhi.

What is ERNET?

- The **ERNET** (Education and Research Network of India) is a **not-for-profit** scientific society under MeitY.
 - It is the exclusive domain registrar for all the education & research institutes having '**ac.in**', '**edu.in**' & '**res.in**' as domain names.
- **Vision:** To advance Indian Research and Education by operating and developing world-class Networks, Applications and Services.
- **Mission:** Provide Network Infrastructure Services and Connectivity addressing the requirements of India's Research and Education sector, facilitating them to become increasingly efficient and effective in their chosen field.
 - Undertaking cutting edge Research and Development in Networking and its Applications and also development of Human Resources in Networking.
- It is also in the field of establishing **data centres**.

Significance of ERNET India's web portal:

- The portal will offer domain registration, DNS and value-added services viz. **Website as a Service (WaaS)** and **Learning Management as a Service (LMaaS)**.
- The users can select from the variety of available templates for schools, colleges, and universities as per their requirements and create their **own website** and **Learning Management System (LMS)**.
- The user can publish the website and LMS by customizing the template with a single click. This web portal has been developed utilizing **open-source software** and emerging technologies such as **AI/ML**.

"PRITHvi Vigyan (PRITHVI)" Scheme

News Excerpt:

The **Union Cabinet** has **approved** the scheme "**PRITHvi Vigyan (PRITHVI)**" by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.

About:

- **Components:** The scheme encompasses five ongoing **sub-schemes** namely -
 - Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (**ACROSS**)
 - Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology (**O-SMART**)
 - Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (**PACER**)
 - Seismology and Geosciences (**SAGE**)
 - Research, Education, Training and Outreach (**REACHOUT**)
- **Implementation authority:**
 - It is to be implemented by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** from **2021 to 26** at an overall cost of **Rs. 4,797 crores**.

Significance of the Scheme:

- The overarching scheme of PRITHVI will **holistically address** all the **five components** of the earth system to improve the **understating** of the Earth System Sciences and to provide **reliable services** for the country.
- The overarching scheme of Prithvi Vigyan will enable **the development** of integrated multi-disciplinary earth science **research** and **innovative programs** across different MoES institutes.
- These integrated **R&D efforts** will help address the grand challenges of **weather and climate, ocean, cryosphere, seismological science, and services** and explore the living and non-living resources for their sustainable harnessing.

SVAMITVA Scheme

News excerpt:

SVAMITVA Scheme has won '**Best Innovation Award**' for Innovation **Sandbox presentation** during Public Policy Dialogues-2024 at Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

About the news:

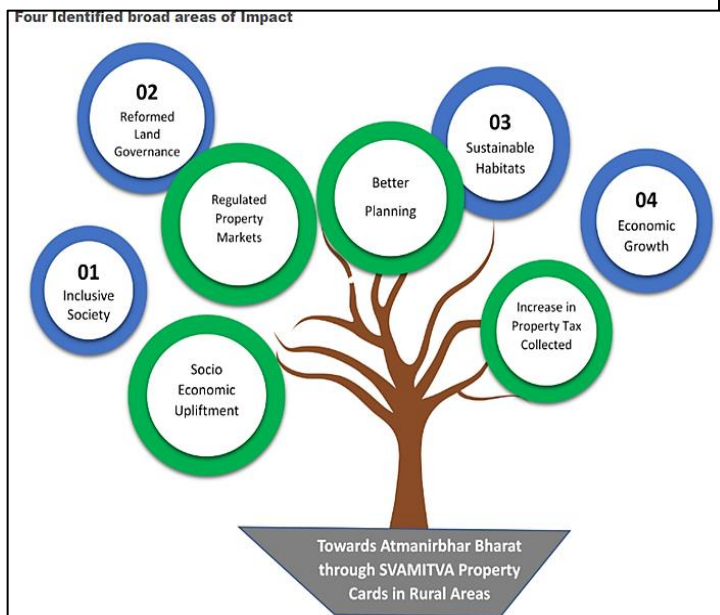
- The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj's** innovative efforts in leveraging technology to enhance the efficacy and accountability in the implementation of SVAMITVA Scheme were acknowledged as outstanding and transformative on previous occasions as well.
- SVAMITVA Scheme had won the prestigious **Gold Prize in National Awards for e-Governance 2023** in the category "**Use of Emerging Technology for Providing Citizen-Centric Services**" organized by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions at Indore, Madhya Pradesh.
- SVAMITVA Scheme was also awarded the **gold award** for the category "Innovative Use of Technology in e-Governance for Digital Transformation" at Digttech Conclave 2023 organized at Goa.

About SVAMITVA Scheme:

- The pilot phase of the SVAMITVA Scheme was launched on April 24, 2020, for implementation from 2020 to 21. The national rollout of this **Central Sector Scheme** of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** was launched on April 24, 2021.
- The scheme is a reformative step towards the establishment of **clear ownership of property** in rural inhabited ("Abadi") areas by mapping of land parcels using **drone technology** and providing a '**Record of Rights**' to village household owners with the issuance of legal ownership cards (Property cards/Title deeds) to the property owners.
- The Scheme is implemented with the collaborative efforts of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State**

Revenue Department, State Panchayati Raj Department, and Survey of India.

- **The scheme seeks to achieve the following objectives:**
 - Bring financial stability to the citizens in rural India by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
 - Creation of accurate land records for rural planning.
 - Determination of property tax would accrue to the GPs directly in States where it is devolved or add to the State exchequer.
 - Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS maps that can be leveraged by any department for their use.
 - Support the preparation of a better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) by making use of GIS maps.
 - Reduce property-related disputes and legal cases.



Know India Programme

News Excerpt:

'Know India Programme', the flagship programme of the **Ministry of External Affairs** for the youth diaspora has completed its 20 years.

About 'Know India Programme':

- It is one of the **longest-running diaspora engagement programmes** of the Government of India.
- The **70th Know India Programme**, held recently, welcomed 34 participants from Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Colombia.

- The programme was launched in **2003** to foster closer connections between Indian diaspora youth and their ancestral homeland.
- The **three-week programme** provides diaspora youth exposure to India's history and cultural heritage, along with the growth and development of modern India.
- It is **open to Persons of Indian Origin**, aged between **21 to 35 years**, from all the countries.

Feature of the programme:

- KIP participants explore India's rich history, cultural heritage, and contemporary achievements in areas such as economy, industry, Education, science, technology, telecommunications, information technology, and space science.
- They are privileged to participate in Learning Tours and visit various institutions in both the private and public sectors.
- These tours provide a platform for participants to gain deep insights and engage in meaningful interactions with field experts and specialists.

Some of the key elements of the Programme include:

- Visits to places of historical and cultural importance
- Familiarization with Yoga, Ayurveda, and classical forms of Music and Dance
- Visit institutions of democracy and governance like the Parliament of India, the Election Commission of India, and Rashtrapati Bhawan.
- Interaction with leading educational institutions
- Exposure to flagship economic and development schemes like **Digital India, StartUp India and Make in India**.
- Visits to industrial sites and public and private firms to highlight India's strength in the Manufacturing & Service sector.

SAMARTH Curated Programs

News Excerpt:

Six SAMARTH Curated Training Programs have been introduced on the iGOT Karmayogi Platform under the **Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions** for **State Government officials** by Karmayogi Bharat and **NITI Aayog**.

About the news:

Objective: These programs aim to elevate the skills and competencies of government officials, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of governance.

Details of the programs are as follows:

- **SAMARTH Blocks:** Tailored for citizen-facing officials and local administrators, SAMARTH Blocks, having 14 courses, focuses on **building foundational skills crucial for effective local governance**.
- **SAMARTH Zila:** Aimed at district-level officials, SAMARTH Zila, comprising 14 courses, is designed to equip learners with the knowledge and tools **required**

to address district-level challenges and drive effective service delivery.

- **SAMARTH Rajya:** Targeting state-level officials, the 14 courses of SAMARTH Rajya seek to equip learners with **the advanced skills** required for steering governance at the state level.
- **SAMARTH Rajya Sachiva:** Tailored for senior officials and state secretaries, this program consisting of 14 courses, focuses on **empowering learners** with the expertise needed to navigate complex policy landscapes and drive transformative change.
- **SAMARTH Policy:** The 5 courses of SAMARTH Policy delve into the intricacies of **policy formulation, policy writing, insights, data analysis, and evaluation.**
- **SAMARTH Procurement:** Catering to officials involved in procurement processes, SAMARTH Procurement, having 9 courses, provides specialized training in procurement guidelines, rules, strategies, and considerations.



- The project also adheres to the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** objectives and the **Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF).**

Development projects for Lakshadweep

News Excerpt:

The PM laid the foundation stone of development projects in Kavaratti, Lakshadweep.

- The development projects cover a wide range of sectors including technology, energy, water resources, healthcare and Education.
- The projects promise improved connectivity, sustainable solutions, and enhanced social services.

Development projects in Lakshadweep:

- **Fiber Optic Connectivity:** The PM inaugurated the Kochi-Lakshadweep Islands Submarine **Optical Fiber Connection (KLI - SOFC)** project, marking a significant leap in communication infrastructure.
 - This initiative ensures internet speed enhancement by over **100 times, from 1.7 Gbps to 200 Gbps.**
 - The dedicated submarine OFC will ensure a paradigm shift in communication infrastructure in the Lakshadweep islands, enabling faster and more reliable internet services, telemedicine, e-governance, educational initiatives, digital banking, digital currency usage, and digital literacy.
- **Water Infrastructure:** The **Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) plant** at Kadmat will generate 1.5 lakh litres of clean drinking water daily.
 - This pivotal project addresses Lakshadweep's water scarcity challenges, especially significant given the minimal availability of groundwater due to its coral island nature.
 - **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC)**
 - The **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC)** in Agatti and Minicoy islands further strengthen the islands' water resources and support tourism-related opportunities.
 - Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, water villa projects are being developed on the Kadmat and Suheli islands.
- **Renewable Energy:** Lakshadweep also got its first-ever **battery-backed solar power project** in Kavaratti. This solar power plant aims to reduce dependency on traditional Diesel-based Power Generation, aligning with the government's commitment to sustainable and renewable energy solutions.
- **Healthcare, Education & social initiatives:** The foundation stone was laid for the renovation of the Primary Health Care facility in Kalpeni.

Project PRAYAS

News Excerpt:

Project PRAYAS (Promoting Regular & Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals) was launched in New Delhi on December 21, 2023, to assist the migration.

About PRAYAS:

- The project is a joint collaboration between the **IOM India and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA).**
- Project PRAYAS aligns with Government of India's priorities for promoting safe and orderly migration and with **Goal 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM):

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is part of the United Nations System as the leading inter-governmental organization promoting since 1951 humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all, with 175 member states and a presence in 171 countries.
- **Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.**

- The five model Anganwadi Centres (Nand Ghars) were constructed on the five islands of Androth, Chetlat, Kadmat, Agatti, and Minicoy.
 - The government distributes laptops to students and bicycles under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.
 - PM Kisan Credit Cards were distributed to farmers and fishermen beneficiaries, reinforcing the government's support for agricultural and fishing communities.

Lakshadweep

- Lakshadweep is known for its exotic beaches and lush green landscape.
- The name Lakshadweep in Malayalam and Sanskrit means a hundred thousand islands.
- India's smallest Union Territory, Lakshadweep, is an archipelago consisting of **36 islands with an area of 32 sq km**.
- It is a uni-district Union Territory and comprises 12 **atolls**, three reefs, five submerged banks and ten inhabited islands.
- The **capital is Kavaratti**, and it is also the principal town of the UT. All Islands are 220 to 440 km away from the coastal city of Kochi in Kerala, in the emerald Arabian Sea.
- The **9 Degree Channel** divides the island of Minicoy from the main Lakshadweep archipelago. The **8 Degree Channel** Divides the **Minicoy and the north atoll of Maldives**.

Vaibhav Scheme

News Excerpt:

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) announced the first batch of Fellows of the Vaibhav scheme, which is meant **to attract Indian-origin scientists based abroad for short-term collaboration**.

About the Vaibhav Scheme:

- The scheme is **meant to facilitate meaningful collaboration and potentially attract diaspora scientists to work in India**.
- It aims to improve the research ecosystem of India's Higher Educational and Scientific Institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world through the mobility of faculty/researchers from overseas institutions to India.
- The fellowship program is **implemented by the DST, Ministry of Science and Technology**.
- **Details of the scheme:**
 - Twenty-two scientists **will spend anywhere from a month or two annually for a maximum of three years at Indian institutes** such as the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), the Indian Institutes of

Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research (IISER), and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

- Those selected will get a stipend of ₹4 lakh a month and accommodation.
- **The host institutions will get a research grant to enable them to host the fellows.**
- The scheme bears striking similarities to another scheme, called the Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty (**Vajra**) scheme, initiated in 2018. Vajra was open to all foreign scientists, whereas Vaibhav was exclusively for the Indian diaspora.

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

News Excerpt:

The Cabinet has approved "Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)", a **Central Sector** Sub-scheme under the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana** for the fisheries sector under the **Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying**.

Major Impact of PM-MKSSY:

- **National Fisheries Digital Platform:** This will provide 40 lakh small and micro-enterprises work-based identities.
- **Job Creation:** It is projected to create 1.7 lakh new jobs, with a special emphasis on employing 75,000 women, and also aims to generate 5.4 lakh continued employment opportunities in the micro and small enterprises value chain.
- **Performance-Based Incentives:** Gradual shift from conventional subsidies to performance-based incentives in fisheries.
- **Addressing Aquaculture Crop Losses:** Address issues of aquaculture crop losses due to disease through insurance coverage for aquaculture to strengthen production and productivity. Enhance export competitiveness through value addition, value realization, and value creation.
- **Strengthening Domestic Markets and Business Growth:** Facilitate the growth of businesses, creation of jobs, and creation of business opportunities.
- **Women Empowerment:** Women Empowerment through the creation of jobs and a safe working place.

Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC): Pilot project launched

News Excerpt:

The Centre has included 11 fair price shops in Himachal Pradesh on the state-run e-commerce portal **Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC)** to foster a more inclusive e-commerce ecosystem.

Significance of the Pilot Project:

- The pilot enables consumers in remote locations to access groceries and other essential products through ONDC while also helping fair-price shops to increase their utilization and revenue from market goods.
 - Now, household groceries available in usual Kirana stores can be made available **through fair-price shops on ONDC**.
 - **Buyers can purchase these products through ONDC buyer apps like Paytm.**
- The **Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD)** under the **Ministry of Commerce** is funding the program as a pilot with the **help of MicroSave**, which provides hand-holding support to fair price shops, and **nStore as the technology partner**.
- Fair-price shops are **run by the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation (NCCF) across India**.

SARTHI Portal

News Excerpt:

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare launched the centralized "**Kisan Rakshak Helpline 14447 and Portal (KRPB)**", **SARTHI Portal and Learning Management System (LMS) Platform** for the farming community under the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** emphasizing the Government's focus on leveraging technology for the betterment of farmers' lives.

About KRPB Portal:

- Since its inception in 2016, the PMFBY has been a safety net for farmers in India, protecting them from the unpredictability of nature through crop insurance.
- To address **the related challenges**, navigate the claim process, obtain timely assistance without difficulty, and ensure prompt support for farmers, the Government has introduced the **Krishi Rakshak Portal and Helpline (KRPB) 14447**.
- This platform provides multilingual support, enabling transparent communication and real-time resolution of grievances related to compensation delays and insurance queries.

About Sandbox for Agricultural and Rural Security, Technology and Insurance (SARTHI) Portal:

- The comprehensive digital insurance platform SARTHI was launched in collaboration with the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India**.
- SARTHI extends **coverage** to health, life, home, shop, agriculture implements, motor, and parametric products.
- The platform will have digital payment options, streamlined premium collection, effortless claim initiation, tracking, and resolution, and user-friendly interfaces for stakeholders.

- SARTHI marks a significant advancement beyond traditional crop insurance, offering a diverse array of products tailored to farmers' needs.
 - **Expanding insurance coverage** to include vital assets like tractor machinery.
 - Empower farmers to comprehensively **mitigate risks**.
 - Securing their livelihoods and fostering long-term sustainability in agriculture.

About Learning Management System (LMS):

- It was developed in **collaboration with the National E-Governance Division (NeGD)**.
- Its primary goal is to provide stakeholders, including farmers, insurance companies, Government officials, State Government representatives, and participants in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), with the **essential skills and knowledge needed for efficient crop insurance and agricultural credit**.
- The LMS will **facilitate training and knowledge sharing** through interactive modules, personalized training programs, and accessible resources.
- Stakeholders can deepen their understanding of agricultural practices, crop insurance protocols, and financial mechanisms.

SWATI Portal

News Excerpt:

The **Ministry of Science & Technology** launched the "**Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI)**" Portal, aimed at creating a single online portal representing **Indian Women and Girls in STEMM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine).

About the SWATI portal:

- The Portal is a complete interactive database and the first of its kind in India, which is developed, hosted, and maintained by the **National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR), New Delhi**.
- It was launched on the **International Day of Women and Girls in Science** at the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi.

Objectives:

- Serve in policymaking to **address the challenges of gender-gap** by encouraging and bringing together all the young women scientists, faculty members, researchers, and young startups from India and abroad under one umbrella to pursue the cause of science.
- Focusing on the importance of "**Science for Women & Women in Science**" as well as emerging opportunities and inclusiveness of women in S&T endeavours.
- Scaling up the effort exponentially to **include every Indian woman in science across all career stages and**

subjects, will enable reliable and statistically significant long-term research on the issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity in India.

- Create an active **search engine and searchable database** (Name, Affiliation, Area of interest).
- Recognizing women's pivotal role in societal progress, the initiative seeks to empower women through **increased participation in decision-making processes, especially in STEM fields.**
- **Current Statistics:** 3000 'WIS (Women in Science) Data Cards' have been incorporated.

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund

News Excerpt:

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister approved the continuation of the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) to be implemented under the **Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF)** with an **outlay of Rs.29,610.25 crore for another three years up to 2025-26.**

More about the news:

- The Government of India will provide a **3% interest subvention for 8 years**, including **two years of moratorium for loans up to 90%** from the **Scheduled Bank and National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), NABARD, and NDDB.**
- The dairy cooperatives will also **benefit from modernization and the strengthening of the dairy plants.**
- The Government of India will provide **credit guarantees to the MSME and Dairy Cooperatives** up to **25% of the credit borrowed from the Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs.750 crore.**

Objectives of the scheme:

- To help **increase milk, meat processing capacity** and product diversification, thereby providing greater access for unorganized rural milk and meat producers to organized milk and meat markets.
- To make **increased price realization available for the producer.**
- To make available **quality milk and meat products** for the domestic consumer.
- To fulfil the **protein-enriched quality food requirement of the country's growing population** and prevent malnutrition in one of the highest malnourished children's populations in the world.

Significance of the scheme:

- The scheme will be a channel towards **employment generation directly and indirectly to 35 lakh people** through entrepreneurship development and aims for wealth creation in the livestock sector. So far, the AHIDF

has benefitted directly /indirectly approximately 15 lakh farmers.

- AHIDF is emerging on a path towards achieving the Prime Minister's goal of **doubling farmers' income, tapping the livestock sector by bringing the private sector investment, bringing in the latest technologies for processing and value addition**, and contributing to the Nation's economy by promoting the export of Livestock products.
- Investments in processing and value-addition infrastructure by eligible beneficiaries would also **promote the export of these processed** and value-added commodities.

PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana

News Excerpt:

The Prime Minister announced PM Surya Ghar's scheme to encourage people to install solar panels on their rooftops.

About the scheme:

- **Objective:** The scheme, worth over **₹75,000 crore**, aims to light up one crore households by providing up to **300 units** of free electricity.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- **Substantive subsidies and concessional bank loans** will be provided to the scheme beneficiaries, which will be transferred directly to their bank accounts.
- All stakeholders will be integrated into a **National Online Portal**, which will provide further convenience.
- To popularize the scheme at the grassroots, **urban local bodies and panchayats** will be incentivized to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.

Significance of the scheme:

- The scheme will lead to **more income, lesser power bills**, and **employment generation** for people.
- The rooftop solar initiative, which incentivizes people to buy solar installations and feed energy back to the grid, could lead to **savings of ₹15,000 annually.**
- From substantive subsidies to heavily concessional bank loans, the scheme will ensure that there is no cost burden on the people.

Smart Gram Panchayat Project

News Excerpt:

The **Union Minister of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj** launched a pilot project, '**Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat**' to extend PM-WANI Service in Gram Panchayats of Bihar's Begusarai District.

About the pilot project:

- Now, Begusarai has become the **first District in Bihar to equip all its Gram Panchayats with Wi-Fi services** under the PM-WANI Scheme.

- The scheme emphasizes the necessity for Panchayat representatives and functionaries to **embrace technology for the empowerment, growth, and holistic development of Gram Panchayats.**
- The scheme will help meet the Government’s commitment to ensuring inclusive growth and empowerment, including the ambitious goal of making **3 crore women ‘Lakhpati Didis’.**
- The scheme emphasizes the importance of adopting **technology-driven solutions** to address the evolving needs of rural areas.
- The scheme also focuses on the transformative potential of **user-friendly and uninterrupted Wi-Fi services**, particularly highlighting their benefits to various segments of rural society, including members of **women self-help groups, Aajeevika Didis, Banking Correspondent (BC) Sakhi, farmers and students.**
- Gram Panchayats can facilitate various **developmental initiatives and empower their communities** in numerous ways, such as through education, healthcare, agriculture, e-governance, skill development, and economic opportunities.

PM-SVANidhi boosted the annual income of street vendors

News Excerpt:

A study commissioned by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs was carried out by the Centre for Analytical Finance of the Indian School of Business (ISB).

- It showed how the income of street vendors increased through **PM Street Vendor’s Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme.**

Summary of the report:

- The study reveals that the PM SVANidhi scheme resulted in an additional annual income of **Rs 23,460** for each beneficiary who availed the first tranche of Rs 10,000.
- Data on the PM-SVANidhi portal showed that **60.65 lakh** first-term loans, 16.95 lakh second-term loans, and **2.43 lakh** third-term loans have been disbursed so far under the scheme.
- The study covered **5,141 vendors across 22 states.** It showed that 94% of first-loan beneficiaries used the funds for business investments.
- Despite a **13.9% NPA** rate during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study highlights a **decline in NPAs over time.**

- The study also found that the **debt-to-income (DTI) ratio** of the beneficiaries (9%) was lower than what was expected of small businesses, reflecting the “high creditworthiness” of the vendors.
- However, the study also found that after the launch of PM SVANidhi, there had been **no significant improvement in the street vendors getting formal credit from other sources** — only 9% of the beneficiaries had loans from other financial institutions.

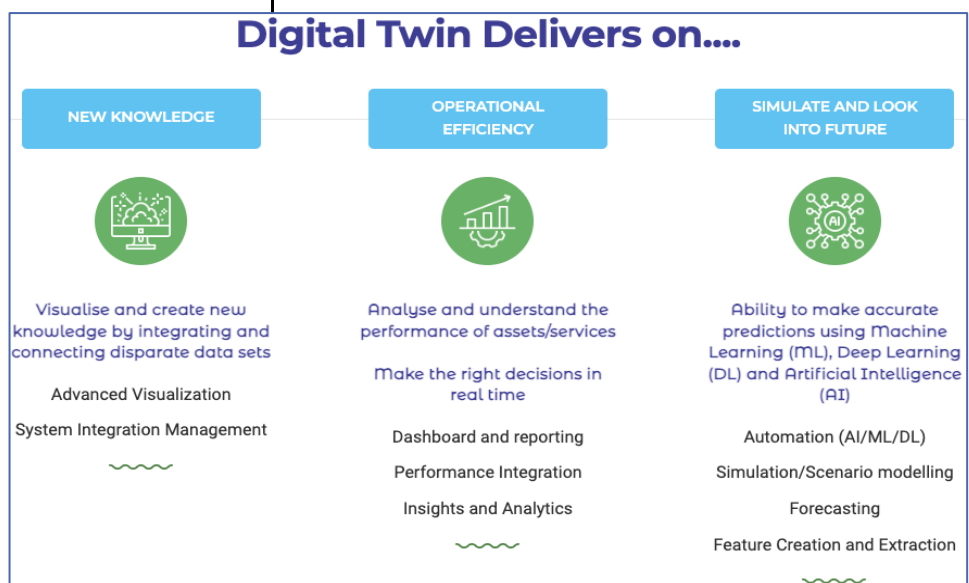
Sangam: ‘Digital Twin’ initiative

News Excerpt:

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has unveiled the 'Sangam: Digital Twin' initiative, an unparalleled venture inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) from industry pioneers, startups, MSMEs, Academia, innovators, and forward-thinkers.

What is the Digital Twin Initiative?

- Digital Twin technology **offers a solution by creating virtual replicas of physical assets**, allowing for real-time monitoring, simulation, and analysis for experimental iterations and feedback loops to adapt to the changes to achieve the best outcomes.
- Digital Twin is a **Proof of Concept (PoC)** distributed in two stages and will be conducted in one of the major cities of India.
 - The first stage is **Exploratory for clarity** of horizon and creative Exploration to unleash potential.
 - The second stage is for **practical demonstration** of specific use cases, generating a future blueprint that may serve as a roadmap to scale and replicate successful strategies in future infrastructure projects **through collaboration.**
- The initiative comes against the backdrop of the **past decade's breakthroughs** in communication and computation in the era of techade **striving for the vision 2047.**



- India has witnessed computational technologies, platforms, services, and high-speed connectivity advancements.

Importance of the Initiative:

- Sangam brings all stakeholders on one platform, aiming to transform innovative ideas into tangible solutions, bridge the gap between conceptualization and realization, and ultimately pave the way for groundbreaking infrastructure advancements.
- Sangam promotes a holistic approach to innovation, urging stakeholders to transcend traditional boundaries and harness unified data and collective intelligence.
- Sangam aims to demonstrate the practical implementation of innovative infrastructure planning solutions, develop a model framework for facilitating faster and more effective collaboration, and provide a future blueprint that may serve as a roadmap to scale and replicate successful strategies in future infrastructure projects.

National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAP-SE)

News Excerpt:

The Union Health Ministry has launched a National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAP-SE) in India.

Vision & Mission of NAPSE:

- **Vision:** To prevent and control snakebite envenoming in order to halve the number of deaths and cases of disability that it causes by 2030.
- **Mission:** To progressively reduce morbidity, mortality, and associated complications in humans due to snake bites.

About the National Action Plan for Snakebite Envenoming (NAPSE):

- **The NAP-SE is a guidance document for the states / UTs and stakeholders to develop their action plans.**
- **The NAP-SE has identified key strategic actions to be undertaken for the operationalization of human, wildlife and animal components.**
 - **Human Health:** Ensure provision of anti-snake venom at all health facilities, strengthening surveillance of snake bite cases and deaths in humans, and strengthening of emergency care services at District Hospitals and Health Centres.
 - **Wildlife Health:** Education awareness, antivenom distribution, strengthening of the key stakeholders, systematic research and monitoring and snake venom collection and snake relocation.
 - **Animal & Agriculture Health:** Prevention of snake bites in livestock, community engagement, etc.

Other plans launched:

1. EC materials:

- A **booklet** on 'Snakebite - Let's put an end to snakebite deaths': this booklet will be used to create awareness in the general community.
- **Posters and videos on Do's and Don'ts** for the general community.

2. Snakebite Helpline:

- It was informed that a **Snakebite Helpline no (15400)**, a vital resource that provides immediate assistance, guidance, and support to individuals and communities affected by snakebite incidents, will be piloted in five States (Puducherry, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Delhi).

3. National Rabies Control Programme Website:

- It is a comprehensive online platform dedicated to providing resources, updates, and insights on rabies, as well as information, treatment, and vaccinations.

4. National One Health Programme for Prevention and Control of Zoonoses:

- The National One Health Programme for Prevention and Control of Zoonoses was also onboarded on the Integrated Health Initiative Platform.

Pilot Project for Road Crash Victims

News Excerpt:

The government announced a pilot project to provide cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakh to all victims of road accidents.

About the Pilot Project:

- The pilot programme was announced by the **Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.**
- The pilot will be undertaken in Chandigarh to establish an "ecosystem for providing timely medical care to the victims of road accidents, including during the golden hour."
 - The **golden hour** is the one hour **following a traumatic injury**, during which there is the **highest likelihood of preventing death** by providing prompt medical care.
- Victims will be entitled to cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakhs per person for a maximum period of seven days from the date of the accident.
- The pilot scheme **will apply to all victims of road accidents**, which involve a motor vehicle that occurred on any category of road.
- The packages for trauma and polytrauma offered under **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana will also be co-opted under the scheme.**
- Claims raised by hospitals for providing treatment will be reimbursed from the **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund.**
- The **National Health Authority will be the implementing agency.**

- The implementation will rely on an **IT platform that will use data from the Road Ministry's Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD)**, where police personnel enter data on road accidents along with photos and videos.

About iRAD:

- The Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD) Project is an **initiative of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)**, Government of India and is **funded by the World Bank**, to improve road safety in the country.
- To achieve this, the **establishment of an accurate and uniform road accident data collection mechanism** from all over India is required.
- This is **followed by training & handholding support to stakeholder** departmental users through state/district roll-out managers & master trainers.

ADITI scheme

News Excerpt:

The **Union Ministry of Defence** has launched the **Acting Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI)** Scheme to promote innovations in critical and strategic defence technologies.

ADITI scheme:

- The scheme was launched during **DefConnect 2024** in New Delhi.
- It falls under the **iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence)** framework of the **Department of Defence Production (DDP)**, Ministry of Defence.
- The ADITI scheme allocated **Rs 750 crore** for the period **2023-24 to 2025-26**.
- Under the scheme, **start-ups** are eligible to receive a **grant-in-aid of up to Rs 25 crore** for their research, development, and innovation endeavours in defence technology.
- It is part of the government's efforts to **promote domestic manufacturing** and boost the economy, including earmarking **75% of the defence capital procurement budget for Indian companies**.

Related: Defence India Startup Challenge (DISC):

- The **11th DISC** with 22 problem statements has been launched by the **Defence Ministry** in partnership with the **Atal Innovation Mission**.
- The challenge is aimed at **supporting Startups/MSMEs/Innovators** to create prototypes and/or commercialize products and solutions in the area of National Defence and Security.

Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme, 2024

News Excerpt:

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** for the **Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme, 2024 (UNNATI – 2024)**.

Background of the UNNATI scheme:

- The Government of India has formulated the **New Industrial Development Scheme, UNNATI (Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme), 2024** as a **Central Sector Scheme** for the **development of Industries and generation of employment in the states of North East Region**.
- The scheme will be implemented by DPIIT in cooperation with the states.
- The scheme's main objective is to generate gainful employment, which will lead to the area's **overall socio-economic development in the Northeast region**.
- To maintain a proper **balance between industrial growth and the pristine environment of the NER**, the following two lists exist:
 - Positive list** for environment-friendly sectors, such as Renewable energy, EV charging stations, etc.
 - Negative list** for certain sectors that may hamper the environment, such as cement, plastic, etc.

Salient features of the scheme:

- Scheme period:** The scheme will be effective from the date of Notification up to 31.03.2034, along with 8 years of committed liabilities.
- Application period for registration:** Industrial unit will be allowed to apply for registration from the date of notification up to 31.03.2026.
- Grant of registration:** All applications for registration shall have to be disposed of by 31.03.2027.
- Commencement of Production or operation:** All eligible Industrial Units are to commence their production or operation within 4 years from the grant of registration.
- Districts are categorized into two zones:** Zone A (Industrially Advanced Districts) & Zone B (Industrially Backward Districts)
- Earmarking of funds:** 60% of the outlay of Part A has been earmarked to 8 NE states and 40% on a First-In-First-Out (FIFO) basis.

'NITI for States' digital platform

News Excerpt:

The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** unveiled the **NITI for States (NFS) digital platform** to strengthen cooperation between the Centre and states in achieving growth objectives.

About NFS:

- It is **developed by the NITI Aayog**.
- NFS serves as an integrated platform featuring 7,500 best practices from state governments and over a thousand case studies.
 - This wealth of information, combined with the Aayog's support, can be utilized to devise tailored solutions for specific states.
- **Aim: To integrate data across states**, centralizing findings to inform future decisions by state governments based on data-driven insights.
- The primary goal is to enable better policymaking as a **'one-stop shop'** for officials down to local levels to access robust, contextually relevant and actionable knowledge and insights for quality decision-making.
- The platform is integrated with Niti Aayog's National Data Analytics Platform as the main data source.

Features of Platform

- NFS includes **curated training modules for government officials**, focusing on enhancing behavioural, functional, and domain knowledge.
 - Helpdesks staffed by domain experts from the Aayog will address queries from state officials.
 - These skill development modules align with the **Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) Karmayogi platform**.
- The platform incorporates real-time data updation and monitoring, spanning 10 sectors and two cross-cutting themes.
 - Sectors include **agriculture, education, energy, health, livelihoods and skilling, manufacturing, micro, small and medium enterprises, tourism, urban, water resources, and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene)**.
 - Cross-cutting themes encompass **gender and climate change**.

NITI Aayog's role:

- NITI Aayog can play in guiding states towards fulfilling their developmental objectives in consonance with the central government's growth.

Significance of the platform:

- Niti for States will have a multi-sectoral live repository of 7,500 best practices, 5,000 policy documents, over 900 datasets, 1,400 data profiles of states, districts, blocks, etc., broken down by demography and socioeconomic indicators, and 350 NITI publications.
- The platform is an intuitive and user-friendly interface that allows users to easily navigate, and it is accessible through multiple devices, including mobile phones.
- Apart from the online portal, Niti Aayog will also launch a voice-enabled **Viksit Bharat Strategy Room** on its premises, which will, in the future, have multilingual capabilities in 22 languages.

Viksit Bharat Strategy Room:

- The operation of a Viksit Bharat Strategy Room is an interactive space for data visualization and analysis of best practices and policy trends.
- It also allows users to interact through voice-enabled AI and connect to multiple stakeholders through video conferencing.
- It is designed to become a plug-and-play model to enable replication at state, district, and block levels.
- **National E-Governance Division (NeGD)** has extended support to develop the first-of-its-kind Viksit Bharat Strategy Room while multi-lingual support has been provided by the Bhashini.
- Currently, **five states** have established immersive Viksit Bharat strategy rooms.

Initiatives for School and Teacher Education

News Excerpt:

The Ministry of Education launched several **initiatives in school and teacher education** developed by its **Department of School Education & Literacy (DoSEL)**.

About Initiatives:

- Initiatives launched will lead to effective implementation of NEP 2020, empower teachers & learners and make quality education more inclusive, innovative and equitable.
- Launch of **DIETS of Excellence, National Professional Standard for Teachers, National Mission for Mentoring, 52 Primers of NCERT, National Vidya Samiksha Kendra and 200 TV Channels**.
- **National Mission for Mentoring (NMM)**
 - The NEP 2020 has laid the framework for transforming the education system, and the **National Mission for Mentoring (NMM)** aims to provide valuable support and guidance to our dedicated teachers, ensuring their professional growth and empowering them to create a strong educational foundation for our students.
 - The mission will **run through a dedicated digital platform**. Teachers will have **access to quality mentoring sessions** from experienced professionals such as Mentors, catering to the diverse needs of learners with varying abilities.
 - The Bluebook on NMM will be **translated into the 22 scheduled languages, Braille and Audiobooks**, for wider circulation across the country.
- **National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)**
 - The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), as envisioned in NEP 2020, **focuses on improving the teachers' personal and professional development** by providing them with

an understanding of what is expected in terms of their performance and what needs to be done to enhance the same.

- **52 Primers in Indian languages**
 - The 52 Primers in Indian languages is going to be a transformational step for young learners, especially for **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**, providing them **access to education in their mother tongue/local language**.
- **PM e-Vidya**
 - Launch of **200 DTH TV Channels** under **PM e-Vidya DTH TV Channels** for School Education is an integral component of **the PMeVidya Initiative** which is **aimed at unifying all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education**.
- **National Vidya Samiksha Kendra**
 - NCERT has made **National Vidya Samiksha Kendra** functional for **facilitating research and development and capacity building programs**. Now, the National Vidya Samiksha Kendra has been integrated with their state counterparts.
 - It has currently enabled visibility, insights, and actionability across 11 programs.
- **DIETs of Excellence**
 - **Financial assistance**, totalling **Rs 9000 crores**, will be provided to States/UTs for the **physical upgradation of all 613 District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs)** to develop them as DIET of Excellence in the country in a phased manner in the next five years.

Mahtari Vandan Yojana

News Excerpt:

The Indian Prime Minister launched the **Mahatari Vandana Yojana** and disbursed the first instalment to boost **women empowerment** in **Chhattisgarh**.

About the Scheme:

- The scheme has been **launched in Chhattisgarh** to provide monthly financial assistance of Rs 1000 per month.
- The scheme will provide benefits to **all eligible married women of Chhattisgarh** who are **above 21 years** of age as of January 1, 2024.
- It has been envisioned **to ensure economic empowerment of women**, provide them financial security, promote gender equality and **strengthen the decisive role of women in the family**.
- **Widows, divorced, and deserted women** will also be eligible for this scheme.
- Around **70 lakh women in the state** will benefit from the scheme.

PM-SURAJ

News Excerpt:

The Prime Minister inaugurated the '**Pradhan Mantri Samajik Utthan and Rozgar Adharit Jankalyan**' (**PM-SURAJ**) national portal during an event organized **by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

About PM-SURAJ:

- **Objective:**
 - It is **aimed at uplifting the most marginalized sections of society**.
 - The objective is to **directly** provide financial assistance to **beneficiaries**, eliminating middlemen and commissions.
- **Implementation body:**
 - **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and its departments**.
- The portal is being launched to establish a **one-stop point** where people from disadvantaged sections of society can **apply** for and **monitor** the progress of all **loan and credit schemes** already available to them.
- Credit assistance to **one lakh entrepreneurs** hailing from disadvantaged communities will be provided.
- Credit support will be provided to eligible persons across the country and facilitated through **banks, NBFC-MFIs**, and other organizations.

Significance:

- The PM-SURAJ national Portal for credit support to disadvantaged sections **prioritizes** the **underprivileged** and is dedicated to placing them at the forefront of **development initiatives**.

PB-SHABD

News Excerpt:

PB-SHABD (Prasar Bharati-Shared Audio Visuals for Broadcast and Dissemination) was launched by the **Union Ministry Of Information And Broadcasting**.

About PB-SHABD:

- **PB-SHABD** is a news-sharing service portal and app launched by the public broadcaster **Prasar Bharati**.
- It is a news-wire-like service to offer free content across mediums, which will be **free of copyright or credit obligations**.
- PB SHABD platform has been **designed to provide daily news feeds in video, audio, text, photo and other formats** to subscribers from the media landscape.
- It will be offered as a **free service for one year to all news organizations registered with the ministry**.
 - This may include newspapers, periodicals, TV channels and even social media news channels registered with the I&B Ministry.

- The content provided will include news feeds, videos, audio, text, and images, which are available on the websites of DD News and Akashvani News, as well as the updated news on the Air mobile app.
- The PB-SHABD service will provide news stories in all major Indian languages across **fifty categories**.
- **The news organizations will be provided with clean feed and will not have to carry Doordarshan's logo.**

Expected Benefits of PB-SHABD:

- This is expected to **revolutionize the news industry** and will massively **support the smaller news organizations** that do not have the benefit of an extensive network for content gathering.
- The portal will create a lot of synergy and will be beneficial in the **dissemination of meaningful news content across the country**.
- The shared feeds can be used for **customized storytelling across different platforms**.

Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme

News Excerpt:

The Union government has allocated an annual fund of ₹20 crore to bail out poor prisoners languishing in prisons across the country due to financial constraints.

About the Scheme:

- The initiative is a part of the Centre's priority in **"reaching the last mile: no one to be left behind"** under which the "Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme" was launched in May last year.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has urged Heads of Prisons of all States and Union Territories **to utilize the funds to provide relief to poor prisoners**, who are either unable to pay the fine imposed on them or are unable to secure bail due to financial constraints.
- As per the guidelines under the scheme, the maximum assistance would be **40000/- for undertrial prisoners and 25000/- for convicted prisoners**, though higher assistance may be approved by the state-level oversight committee.
- MHA has asked the states/UTs to constitute an **"Empowered Committee" at the district level** and an **"Oversight Committee" at the headquarters level** to identify prisoners who could be given the benefit of the scheme.
 - **The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) was appointed as the Central Nodal Agency (CNA)** to implement the scheme.
- This scheme is **100% centrally funded** and aimed at helping prisoners belonging to socially disadvantaged and low-income groups who do not have the financial means to pay their bail surety or fine amount to secure their release.

Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana

News Excerpt:

The **Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship** inaugurated **"Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana"** under the **Skill India Mission**, empowering **PM Svanidhi Beneficiaries**.

The objective of Rashtriya Udyamita Vikas Pariyojana:

- It aims to **equip individuals with comprehensive entrepreneurship training**, aligning with the vision of India's Prime Minister of **creating job providers rather than job seekers**.
- This initiative **focuses on reskilling and upskilling employees to enhance their competitiveness and adaptability** in an era of disruptive technology.

About PM SVANidhi scheme:

- It comes under the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**.
- PM SVANidhi was **launched in 2020** to **help street vendors** resume their livelihoods **impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown** by offering them affordable working capital loans.
- **Feature of the scheme:**
 - A beneficiary can **avail of a Working Capital (WC) loan of up to Rs. 10,000** and, upon its repayment, Rs. 20,000. After repaying the second loan, a beneficiary can apply for a third loan of Rs. 50,000.
 - The **lending institutions will take no collateral**.
 - **No prepayment penalty will be charged** from the vendors for repayment before the scheduled date.

Skill India Digital (SID) Platform:

- It was **launched** by the **Ministry for Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2023**.
- This aims to synergize and transform **India's skills, education, employment, and entrepreneurship landscape**.

Key features of the scheme:

- It will **offer comprehensive entrepreneurship training over a period of 22 weeks**, combining theoretical knowledge with practical exposure through **experiential learning**.
- The **training** will be conducted **offline, online, and in hybrid modes**, with **certificates awarded upon completion**, enhancing the course's credibility and value.
- In the **pilot phase**, the project will be **implemented through 20 Centres of the National Institute of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD), Noida and 10 Centres of the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), Guwahati**.

- Under the pilot program, **street vendors in 10 big cities** of the country will be given a **stipend and training to expand their businesses**.
- The **Udyamita Kendra** will **leverage the expertise of the existing pool of resource persons from renowned institutions such as NIESBUD, IIE**, and other training institutions, enhancing the wealth of knowledge and practical insights into the entrepreneurship training programs.
- The project will be piloted initially in selected districts, with a **focus on ensuring 40% participation by women**.
- Launching this project underscores the government's multi-faceted approach to skill development, including the **modernization of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)** and the **establishment of the Skill India Digital (SID) Platform**, providing flexible skilling opportunities accessible nationwide.

Anaemia Project for adolescent girls

News Excerpt:

The Ministry of Ayush and the Ministry of Women and Child Development have signed a **MoU for the nutritional improvement in adolescent girls through Ayurveda Interventions**.

About the Project:

- It is a **Joint Public Health Initiative** for “**Anaemia Control among adolescent girls using Ayurveda interventions in the five districts under Mission Utkarsh**”.
 - Assam – Dhubri
 - Chhattisgarh - Bastar
 - Jharkhand – Paschimi Singhbhum
 - Maharashtra – Gadchiroli
 - Rajasthan – Dhaulpur.
- Both the Ministries have jointly decided that in the **first phase**, the focus may be given to improving the **anaemic status of adolescent girls (14-18 years) in five aspirational districts** of five states where the average prevalence of anaemia is approximately **69.5 %**. This project will cover approximately **10,000 Anganwadi Centres in the five districts**.

Project ODISERV

News Excerpt:

The **Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship** launched **Project ODISERV** in **Sambalpur** to prepare **young graduates of Odisha** for **employment opportunities in the financial services sector**.

About the Project:

- The project is an initiative of the **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** under the aegis of the **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE)** and **Bajaj Finserv Ltd.**
- The project will impart knowledge and skills to graduates, especially **first-generation graduates**, through **Bajaj Finserv's Certificate Programme for Banking Finance & Insurance (CPBFI) programme**.
- It launches the CPBFI programme in 60 colleges in Odisha across **11 cities and 10 districts**.
- The CPBFI programme (the partnership with NSDC & Bajaj Finserv) will be **introduced in 22 states across India, covering over 400 colleges**.
- The partnership aims to initially build the capabilities of 20,000 candidates through the **CPBFI programme**.

About the CPFBI (100 Hour Programme):

- It is a **100-hour comprehensive training programme** that prepares youth from **tier-II and tier-III cities** for employment in the financial services sector.
- The programme's **curriculum adapts to the ever-evolving landscape of finance, banking, and insurance** and incorporates the latest industry trends, technological advancements, and best practices.
- The partnership with NSDC will be elevated on **Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH)** to ensure students are not just academically equipped but also excel in the financial sector.
 - SIDH is a **comprehensive information gateway** for all government-led skilling and entrepreneurship initiatives.

About National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC):

- NSDC is the principal architect of the country's skill ecosystem.
- It is a unique Public Private Partnership (PPP) enterprise working under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India.
- NSDC was established to **catalyze the skilling ecosystem for private sector participation and be the strategic implementation and knowledge partner of the Skill India Mission** to build efficient vocational training initiatives that empower India's youth.

SWAMIH fund

News Excerpt:

The government-backed **SWAMIH (Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing) Fund** has helped complete over 28,000 homes and is projected to deliver another 60,000 homes.

About the news:

- According to the **National Real Estate Development Corporation (NAREDCO)**, the Fund played a **critical role in the growth of many ancillary industries** in the real estate and infrastructure sector having **successfully unlocked liquidity of more than Rs 35,000 crore**.
- The report also found that **housing inventory overhang has significantly dropped** from **41 months in 2017 to 15 months at the end of 2023**.
- The report also highlights the **positive impact of various other government-backed initiatives** such as **PMAY (Urban & Gramin), GST, demonetization**, and the growing adoption of technology in real estate.

About the SWAMIH Fund:

- It is a **social impact fund specifically formed to complete stressed and stalled residential projects**.
- The Fund is sponsored by the **Ministry of Finance**, Government of India, and is managed by **SBICAP Ventures Ltd.**, a **State Bank Group** company.
- Since the Fund considers **first-time developers, established developers with troubled projects, and developers with a poor track record of stalled projects**, it is considered the **lender of last resort for distressed projects**.
- The Fund's presence in a project often **acts as a catalyst for better collections** and sales, primarily in projects that have been delayed for years.

Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS)**News Excerpt:**

The **Ministry of Heavy Industries** has approved 11 Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturers to receive incentives under the recently introduced **Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS) 2024**.

About the news:

- A total of 11 firms have been approved for the **EMPS**.
- The scheme aims to **sustain the growth in EV sales, replacing the former Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles – II (FAME-II) scheme**.

Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme 2024 (EMPS 2024):

- The EMPS scheme was introduced by the **Ministry of Heavy Industries** to further **accelerate the country's adoption of EVs**.
- This is a **fund-limited scheme** with a **total outlay of Rs. 500 crore** for **4 months, w.e.f. 1st April 2024 till 31st July 2024**.
- The scheme aims for **faster adoption of electric two-wheelers (e-2W) and three-wheelers (e-3W)** to provide further impetus to the **green mobility** and

development of the electric vehicle (EV) **manufacturing ecosystem** in the country.

- The Scheme promotes an **efficient, competitive, and resilient** EV manufacturing industry in the country, thereby promoting the vision of **Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat**.

**Eligible EV categories:**

- **Two Wheelers (electric) (e-2W)**
- **Three-wheeler (electric)** including registered **e-rickshaws & e-carts and L5 (e-3W)**
- With greater emphasis on providing affordable and environment-friendly public transportation options for the masses, the scheme will apply mainly to those **e-2W and e-3Ws registered for commercial purposes**.
- Further, in addition to commercial use, **privately or corporate-owned** registered **e-2W** will also be eligible under the scheme.
- **No such benefits are extended to electric four-wheelers (e4W) and e-buses** under the EMPS scheme.
 - **The exclusion of e4W and e-buses** from the EMPS is due to **existing schemes** like the **Auto Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme** and **PM-eBus Sewa Scheme** catering to these categories.

EV sales data:

- EV sales this year have seen a significant **increase of over 45 percent**.
- This growth has propelled the **overall EV penetration in India to 6.3% from 4.8% in 2022**, exceeding the **5% mark**.

One Vehicle, One FASTag

News Excerpt:

The 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' **initiative** of the National Highways Authority of India (**NHAI**) was **implemented** on April 1, 2024.



About FASTag:

- FASTag is a Radio Frequency Identification (**RFID**) tag used for making **toll payments** directly from the customer's linked prepaid or savings/current account.
- FASTag is issued to each vehicle **based on the registration certificate (RC)** of the vehicle. Once it is affixed to a vehicle, it **cannot be transferred** to another vehicle.
- It is **affixed** to the **windscreen** of the vehicle and enables the customer to drive through toll plazas **without stopping** for any toll payments.
 - The toll fare is **directly deducted** from the **customer's linked account**.
- FASTag can be **purchased** from any of the National Electronic Toll Collection (**NETC**) **Member Banks**.
 - The National Payments Corporation of India (**NPCI**) has **developed** the **NETC program** to meet the electronic tolling requirements of the Indian market.

One Vehicle, One FASTag concept:

- It **aims** to deter the practice of using a single FASTag for multiple vehicles or associating multiple FASTags with one vehicle.
- The concept indicates that a vehicle owner is permitted to have **only one active FASTag for one vehicle**.

It has been observed that it is to be done **with** the mandatory **KYC** process to adhere to **the RBI's mandate**.

Significance of the initiative:

- It will **enhance the efficiency** of the Electronic Toll Collection system and provide seamless movement at the Toll Plazas.
- FASTag offers the convenience of **cashless payment** along with benefits like - **savings on fuel and time**, as the customer does not have to stop at the toll plaza.

