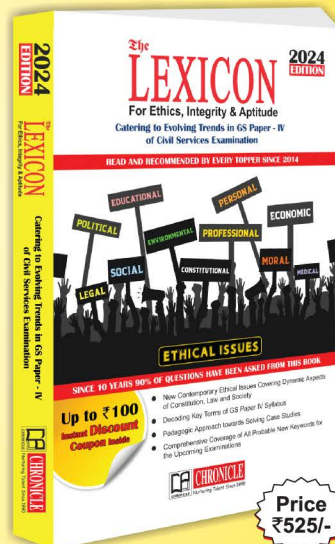


Civil Services

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UPSC & State PSCs Prelims 2024

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History and Indian Polity

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- India-UAE Relations
- Green Energy in India
- Supreme Court Judgment on Electoral Bond Scheme
- Amendments to FDI Policy on Space Sector
- India and Greece to Strengthen Bilateral Ties
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Practice Sets Special

History Indian Polity

- In this special section we are presenting 20 Practice Sets on Indian Polity and History for the upcoming UPSC and State Civil Services Preliminary Examinations.
- While developing this special section, we have selected only those topics from which questions are most likely to be asked in the upcoming examinations.
- In the past few years, the trend of asking statement and fact based, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary questions in the preliminary examinations has increased.
- Keeping this in mind, we have prepared the questions on the selected topics.

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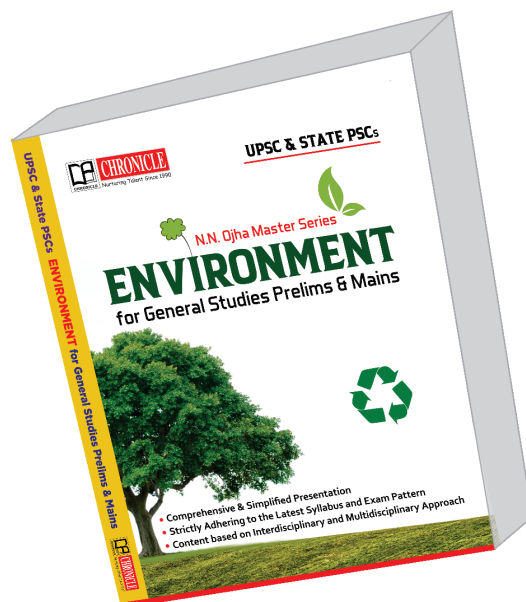
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India and the UAE are poised to strengthen their bilateral relationship across various dimensions, marking a new chapter of collaboration and mutual growth. The signing of crucial agreements during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UAE underscores a shared commitment to fostering closer ties and addressing common challenges.

■ Alok Singh

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 13th to 14th February, 2024, has cemented bilateral ties between the two nations. The visit witnessed the signing of crucial pacts aimed at enhancing cooperation in vital sectors including investments, electricity trade, and digital payment platforms. These agreements signify a milestone in India-UAE relations, highlighting a commitment to mutual growth and prosperity. The outcomes of the visit underscore the significance of collaboration between India and the UAE in fostering economic, technological, and strategic partnerships for the benefit of both nations.

Key Outcomes of the Visit

Prime Minister's visit to the UAE has yielded significant outcomes, marking a milestone in the bilateral relationship between the two nations. The key outcomes of the visit are outlined here.

- **MoU on Electricity Connection and Trade:** The signing of an MoU on cooperation in the field of electricity connection and trade underscores the shared commitment to strengthen energy security and promote clean energy trade. With a focus on green hydrogen and energy storage, this agreement paves the way for sustainable energy cooperation between India and the UAE.
- **IMEC Agreement:** The Inter-governmental Framework Agreement concerning Cooperation for the Empowerment and Operation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) aims to enhance regional connectivity and logistics platforms. Positioned as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, IMEC covers cooperation on logistics platforms, provision of supply chain services, and transportation of various cargo types, fostering deeper economic integration among participating countries.
- **Digital Infrastructure Cooperation:** A framework agreement for cooperation on digital infrastructure projects signifies the commitment to enhance investment cooperation between the UAE's Ministry of Investment and India's Ministry of Electronics and Information

Technology. This agreement promotes capabilities development, knowledge sharing, and expertise exchange in high-power computing, digital innovation, and other areas, fostering technological advancement and digital transformation.

- **National Maritime Heritage Complex:** The agreement on the development of the National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal in Gujarat reflects joint efforts to preserve and promote India's rich maritime heritage. This comprehensive project development initiative aims to establish museums, educational institutes, and tourism facilities, showcasing India's maritime history and culture to the world.
- **Cooperation Protocol at the National Archives:** The cooperation protocol between the National Library and Archives of the UAE and the National Archives of India seeks to promote extensive bilateral cooperation in archives management. By exchanging expertise, historical information, and research, this protocol enhances preservation and restoration efforts, enriching both nations' archival heritage.
- **Agreements on Payment Platforms Interlinking:** Agreements on interlinking payment platforms such as UPI (India) and AANI (UAE), as well as domestic debit/credit cards like RuPay (India) and JAYWAN (UAE), aim to facilitate seamless financial transactions and promote economic integration between India and the UAE, enhancing convenience and efficiency in cross-border transactions.

India-UAE: Areas of Bilateral Cooperation

Geopolitical & Geostrategic Cooperation

- The evolving relationship between India and the UAE spans economic, political, and strategic dimensions, holding significant importance in the geopolitics of the Middle East and South Asia. The growing trade ties, strategic collaboration, and shared interests in regional stability characterize their partnership and with UAE's inclusion in **BRICS** and the **IMEC**, it further strengthens their collaboration, enhancing regional stability and prosperity.

Green Energy in India

Vision, Prospects & Challenges

The world today is facing multifaceted challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, and disruptions in the pursuit of sustainable development. In this context, India stands at the crossroads of an energy transition critical for its future and the planet's well-being. Keeping in mind the sustainable development goals, India's power generation mix is rapidly shifting towards a more significant share of renewable energy.

■ **Ranjeet Shah**

According to recent estimates by rating agency ICRA (Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency), India's installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity, excluding large hydro plants, is estimated to increase to 170 GW by March 2025 from a level of 135 GW in December 2023.

As a large developing economy with over 1.4 billion people, India's climate adaptation and mitigation ambitions are not just transformational for India but for the entire planet. Furthermore, India is particularly well placed to become a global leader in renewable batteries and green hydrogen as these and other low-carbon technologies could create a market worth up to \$80 billion in India by 2030.

Nonetheless, green hydrogen will also play a major role in achieving the net zero and de-carbonising the hard-to-abate sectors. India aims to become a global hub for green hydrogen production and exports. India could easily create 5 million tonne green hydrogen demand, thereby replacing grey hydrogen in the refineries and fertiliser sector.

Furthermore, at COP26 in 2021, India pledged to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2070, which will require sharply increased reliance on renewables and clean technologies over fossil-fuel-based energy. As per India's updated commitments as part of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), the country is aiming to achieve an installed renewable capacity of 500 GW by 2030 and has declared plans to add 50 GW annually for the next five years to realise these targets. The country has also committed to reduce its carbon emissions by 45 per cent compared to 2005 levels by 2030.

What is Green Energy?

The terms 'green energy' and 'renewable energy' are often used interchangeably, but there is some essential (and sometimes confusing) difference between them.

Renewable Energy

- ◆ Renewable energy refers to energy derived from naturally replenishing sources, which are essentially inexhaustible over human time scales.

- ◆ Renewable energy sources include solar energy, wind energy, hydroelectric energy, biomass energy, and geothermal energy.
- ◆ These energy sources are considered renewable because they are continuously replenished by natural processes and can be used indefinitely without depleting the Earth's resources.

Green Energy

- ◆ Green energy is a subset of renewable energy that specifically focuses on sources that have minimal negative impact on the environment and produce low greenhouse gas emissions.
- ◆ For example, solar, wind, and geo-thermal power are often considered greener than biomass energy because the latter can sometimes involve deforestation or other environmentally damaging practices.

Overall, all green energy is renewable, but not all renewable energy is green. Green energy emphasizes sustainability and low environmental impact within the broader category of renewable energy sources.

Expanding Frontiers of Green Energy: The Indian Scenario

Solar Energy

Statistics

- ◆ India is endowed with vast solar energy potential. About 5,000 trillion kWh per year of energy is incident over India's land area with most parts receiving 4-7 kWh per sq. m per day.
- ◆ The country stands not as a mere spectator but as a prominent player in the global solar revolution. India currently stands 4th globally in solar power capacity.
- ◆ In the last five years, the country's solar installed capacity has also experienced a monumental transformation, increasing from 21,651 MW to 70,096 MW in 2023.

Technologies

- ◆ **There are three primary technologies by which solar energy is harnessed:**

Digital Transformation of Rural India

Leveraging Technology for Development of Rural Communities

Digitalization has great potential to improve livelihoods and transform rural areas. Continuous efforts are being made by the Government to provide an enabling environment for digitalization and digital innovation. In this context, rural connectivity is important to provide access to data and information at low cost. It will empower the rural population to realize their full potential.

■ Dr. Amarjeet Bhargava

On 13th February, 2024, a historic initiative ‘Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat’ was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj at a Gram Panchayat in Begusarai district of Bihar. This project is an important step towards digital empowerment of rural India. It is funded under the revised Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).

Historically, the rural economy of India has mainly been driven by agricultural activities. Most of our population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities as a means of their livelihood. Rural areas cannot be left out in the current globalized era, where every sector of the economy is highly influenced by Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

India is also witnessing a digital revolution at a rapid pace; the government’s ‘Digital India Initiative’ aims to transform

the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. While the urban population has access to digital technologies, rural areas are largely left out of this digital revolution. This digital divide threatens to hamper India’s economic growth and development, making the digital transformation of rural India critical to the country’s progress.

Need for Digitalization in Rural India

Digital transformation refers to the ability of individuals and communities to access and use digital technologies such as smartphones, computers, and the Internet.

- ◆ The lack of digital inclusion in rural India has significant impacts on economic opportunities, education, health care, and financial inclusion.
- ◆ Digitalization improves the production and distribution process and qualitatively impacts economic growth.

Question: Digital transformation holds immense potential for bringing about rapid socio-economic development of rural India. Discuss.

Answer: Digital transformation in rural India can help bridge the gap between urban and rural populations. Thus, the rural digitization could have the following potential for bringing socio-economic development:

- **Increase in Employment Opportunities:** The first and foremost benefit of digitalization is the increase in employment opportunities in rural areas. Provision of internet kiosks in rural areas can provide employment to a large number of small entrepreneurs.
- **Improvement in Education:** This will provide access to quality resources and create opportunities for distance learning. Rural people can be provided employment oriented skills through financial literacy.
- Teachers can prepare the lesson plan more effectively and they too can learn new teaching techniques over the internet.
- **Improved Access to Services:** There will be ease of access to government schemes, health care, education and social welfare.
- Medicine prescription of the doctors can be shared by the internet only and records can be managed and shared digitally
- **Improvement in Financial Inclusion:** Will help in empowerment of weaker sections and women living in rural areas.
- **Improvement in Agriculture:** With the help of digitalization, efforts can be made to promote agriculture in rural areas and increase productivity.
- **Improvement in Standard of Living:** Using internet services and other facilities provided by various schemes like Lifeline India can improve the standard of living of people by increasing their agricultural production as well as income.
- **Rural Development:** Digital transformation can accelerate transformation in e-payments, digital literacy, geographical mapping and rural development, among other benefits.

Digitalization in rural areas continues through transformative developments in e-payments, digital literacy, financial inclusion, geographical mapping and other areas of rural development. Thus, digital transformation strategy can be an effective solution to quickly solve long-term problems.

- [Supreme Court Judgment on Electoral Bond Scheme](#)
- [Amendments to FDI Policy on Space Sector](#)
- [India and Greece to Strengthen Bilateral Ties](#)
- [Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana](#)

Supreme Court Judgment on Electoral Bond Scheme

On 15th February, 2024, in a landmark unanimous judgment, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court (SC) struck down the electoral bonds scheme terming it as “unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary”.

Background

- Introduced in 2018, the electoral bonds scheme allows corporations and individuals to anonymously donate money to political parties by purchasing electoral bonds from the State Bank of India (SBI).
- This scheme was challenged by a number of parties, including the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Common Cause and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).
- The petitioners argued that citizens have a right to information about the parties and candidates seeking their votes.

The Judgment

Violation of the Right to Information

- The SC held that the scheme by permitting anonymous political donations infringed upon the fundamental right to information under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- It pointed out that such a right is not only restricted to fulfilling the freedom of speech and expression but plays a key role in furthering participatory democracy by holding the government accountable. Thus, it is not just a means to an end but an end in itself.

Striking Down Amendment to Section 29C of RPA, 1951

- Initially, Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, required parties to declare all contributions higher than Rs. 20,000, and specify whether they were received from individual persons or companies.
- However, the Finance Act, 2017, amended this provision to create an exception wherein such a requirement would not apply to donations received through electoral bonds.
- Striking down the amendment, the court observed that the original requirement to disclose contributions of more than R. 20,000 effectively balanced the voters’ right to

information with the right to privacy of donors especially since donations below this threshold were far less likely to influence political decisions.

Amendment to Section 182 of the Companies Act

- Amendment to Section 182 of the Companies Act (allowing blanket corporate political funding) is unconstitutional. Electoral bonds scheme has to be struck down as unconstitutional, said Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court said that before amendment, loss making companies were not able to contribute. The amendment does not recognize the harm of allowing loss-making companies to contribute due to quid pro quo.
- The amendment to Section 182 Companies Act is manifestly arbitrary for not making distinction between loss making and profit making companies.

The Proportionality Test

- The Court applied the proportionality test, which requires any restriction on fundamental rights to be: Legally authorized: Aiming to achieve a legitimate objective. Necessary: No other less restrictive measure can achieve the same objective. Proportionate: The restriction itself doesn’t go beyond what’s necessary.
- The Court concluded that the Electoral Bonds scheme failed the proportionality test.
- Specifically, it was deemed not the least restrictive option to achieve the objective of curbing black money.

Right to Donor Privacy Does Not Extend to Contributions Made

- The top court pointed out that financial contributions to political parties are usually made for two reasons - as an expression of support and two, as a quid pro quo measure.
- However, it underscored that huge political contributions made by corporations and companies should not be treated at par with financial contributions made by another section of the population: a student, a daily wage worker, an artist, or a teacher.
- Thus, the Chief Justice held that the right to privacy of political affiliation does not extend to those contribu-

India and Greece to Strengthen Bilateral Ties

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited India as the chief guest at the recently held Raisina Dialogue (21st February, 2024). During his visit, the deepening bilateral ties and shared strategic interests of India and Greece were emphasized.

Key Highlights of the Visit

Trade Ambitions

- Indian Prime Minister expressed optimism about achieving the target of doubling bilateral trade by 2030 during discussions with his Greek counterpart.
- India and Greece have set ambitious targets to double their bilateral trade to nearly \$4 billion by 2030 and bolster connectivity through infrastructure initiatives like the proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
- Bilateral trade between the two nations stood at \$1.9 billion in 2022-23.
- Pharmaceuticals, ports, chemicals, shipping, food, communications, and defence are identified as key sectors to drive the trade growth.

Defence and Security Collaboration

- Agreement to establish a joint working group on defence, maritime security, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity.
- Growing strategic partnership evident through recent military exercises and naval operations.

Geostrategic Significance

- India's heightened defence ties with Mediterranean nations, including Greece, signal a strategic move to expand influence in the region.
- Instability in the Mediterranean underscores the importance of deepening regional partnerships.

Diversification of Cooperation

- Discussions also encompassed space, advanced technologies, and the initiation of direct flight connectivity.
- Anticipated signing of a migration and mobility partnership agreement between both countries aligns with similar pacts with other European countries.

Greece's Emergence in the Indo-Pacific

- **Changing European Perspective:** While initially driven by France, Germany, and the Netherlands, Italy and now Greece are increasingly embracing the Indo-Pacific, reflecting a shifting European interest in the region.
- **Maritime Strength of Greece:** With the longest coastline in the EU, Greece's maritime prowess is evident, boasting the world's largest ship-owning nation status and a significant contribution of 8% to its GDP from shipping.

- **Expansion into the Indo-Pacific:** Greece aims to bridge Europe and Asia, viewing closer ties with India as a strategic entry point into Asia, as highlighted during Prime Minister's visit to Greece and subsequent commitments by Greek Prime Minister.
- **Inclusive Engagement and China Relations:** Greece's participation in the Indo-Pacific reflects its commitment to inclusivity, despite positive relations with China, challenging Beijing's claims of containment.

Significance of India-Greece Relations

Historical Association

- Dating back 2,500 years, interactions between India and Greece are evident through Alexander the Great's campaign and cultural exchanges during the Mauryan dynasty.
- Indo-Greek camaraderie is reflected in Gandhara art, and historical ties include Indian soldiers' sacrifices in Southern Europe during World War I and joint diplomatic stances.

Elevation to Strategic Partnership

- The announcement of a strategic partnership in August 2023 set the stage for a significant transformation in bilateral relations, driven by shared security, strategic, and economic concerns.

Pivot of Strategy and Economy

- Amidst fluctuations in the Eastern Mediterranean, India and Greece find common ground in countering regional challenges, including gas disputes and ideological fissures.
- Shared concerns over Turkey's backing of Pakistan in the Kashmir dispute draw India and Greece closer, leading to collaboration in defence manufacturing, cyber defence, and renewable energy.
- With bilateral trade targeted to double by 2030, areas of cooperation include defence, technology, education, and security infrastructure.

Economic Prospects

- Bilateral trade, though currently modest, shows potential for growth, with initiatives such as GMR's airport project in Crete reflecting increasing cooperation.
- Prospects for enhanced commercial exchanges are bolstered by ongoing negotiations for an Air Services Agreement and mutual efforts to attract foreign direct investment.

Shipping Partnership

- India eyes investment opportunities in Greek ports to modernize its shipping industry.



Polity & Governance

- Raisina Dialogue, 2024
- Nazool Land

- Investor Information and Analytics Platform
- 24th Meeting of PM-STIAC
- Adverse Possession
- General Diary under the Police Act, 1861
- Power of Arrest under Section 41A of the CrPC

Judiciary

- SC Directs Governments to Follow Broad Definition of Forest

Polity & Governance

Raisina Dialogue, 2024

The 9th edition of the Raisina Dialogue took place from 21st - 23rd February, 2024 in New Delhi.

Theme

- **Chaturanga:** Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create

Six Thematic Pillars

1. **Tech Frontiers:** Regulations & Realities
2. **Peace with the Planet:** Invest & Innovate
3. **War & Peace:** Armouries & Asymmetries
4. **Decolonising Multilateralism:** Institutions & Inclusion
5. **The Post 2030 Agenda:** People & Progress
6. **Defending Democracy:** Society & Sovereignty.

Key Takeaways of Raisina Dialogue 2024

Geopolitical Shifts

- Discussions on evolving power dynamics among major players.
- Adaptation of strategies and alliances in response to new challenges.

India as a Bridging Power

- Emphasis on India's role as a "bridging power" with a "multi-vector" policy.
- India's diplomatic outreach and efforts to foster global friendships.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

- Highlighting the significance of connectivity projects, including the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.
- Exploration of economic ties and trade agreements with Central and Eastern Europe.

Baltic-Nordic Forum

- Diplomatic outreach to Central and Eastern Europe through the Baltic-Nordic forum.

- Initiatives aimed at establishing trade agreements and investment ties.

Global Conflicts

- Focus on the Russian war in Ukraine and European perspectives.
- Discussions on handling an assertive China and "grey warfare."

Regional Security Concerns

- Addressing tensions in regions like the Indo-Pacific, Middle East, and Eastern Europe.
- Strategies for conflict resolution, peace-building, and managing regional rivalries.

Technology and Innovation

- Recognition of the role of technology and innovation in shaping geopolitics.
- Discussions on cybersecurity, digital transformation, and the implications for international relations.

Important Facts

Raisina Dialogue

- It is India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, and is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Since its inception in 2016, the Dialogue has been committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.
- Every year, leaders in politics, business, media, and civil society converge in New Delhi to discuss the state of the world and explore opportunities for cooperation on a wide range of contemporary matters.
- It is structured along the lines of the Shangri-La Dialogue.

Nazool Land

Recently, violence erupted in Uttarakhand after a mosque and a madrasa standing on Nazool land were demolished.

Public Policy



The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

On 12th February, 2024, the President gave assent to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024.

Need

- In the recent years across the country, there have been a large number of cases about question paper leaks.
- The move came against the backdrop of cancellation of a series of competitive tests such as the teacher recruitment exam in Rajasthan, Common Eligibility Test (CET) for Group-D posts in Haryana, recruitment exam for junior clerks in Gujarat and constable recruitment examination in Bihar following question paper leaks.

Objective

- To bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examination systems.
- To reassure the youth that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded and their future is safe.

Salient Features

Key Definitions under the Act

Public Examinations

- Public examinations refer to examinations conducted by authorities specified under the Schedule to the Bill, or notified by the central government. These include:
 - (i) Union Public Service Commission,
 - (ii) Staff Selection Commission,
 - (iii) Railway Recruitment Board,
 - (iv) National Testing Agency,
 - (v) Institute of Banking Personnel Selection, and
 - (vi) Departments of the central government and their attached offices for recruitment.

Candidate

- A candidate is defined as any individual who has received authorization from the public examination authority to partake in a public examination.
- This definition is inclusive, extending to individuals acting as scribes on behalf of candidates.

Communication Devices and IT Definitions

- It adopts definitions for “communication device”, “computer network”, “computer resource”, and “computer

system” from the Information Technology Act, 2000.

- This inclusion is crucial in the digital age, where the use of electronic devices and online resources has become prevalent in examination contexts.

Competent Authority

- The term refers to the Ministry or Department of the Central Government responsible for overseeing the public examination authority, ensuring a centralized and standardized approach to managing public examinations.

Offences in Relation to Public Examinations

- It defines several offences in relation to public examinations. It prohibits collusion or conspiracy to facilitate indulgence in any unfair means.
- **It specifies unfair means to include:**
 - (i) unauthorised access or leakage of question paper or answer key,
 - (ii) assisting a candidate during a public examination,
 - (iii) tampering with computer network or resources,
 - (iv) tampering with documents for shortlisting or finalising of merit list or rank, and
 - (v) conducting fake examination, issuing fake admit cards or offer letters to cheat, for monetary gain.
- **It also prohibits:**
 - (i) disclosing exam-related confidential information before time, and
 - (ii) unauthorised people from entering exam centres to create disruptions.
- Above offences will be punishable with imprisonment between three and five years, and a fine up to Rs 10 lakh.

Responsibilities of Service Providers

- In the event of violation of provisions of the Act, service providers must report to the police and the concerned examination authority.
- A service provider is an organisation that provides computer resources or any other support to a public examination authority.
- Failure to report such incidents will be an offence. In case, the service provider themselves commit an offence; the examination authority must report it to the police.
- It prohibits service providers from shifting the exam centre without permission from the examination authority.
- An offence by a service provider will be punishable with

Reports & Indices



National

NITI Aayog's Report on Senior Care Reforms in India

On 16th February, 2024, NITI Aayog released a position paper titled “Senior Care Reforms in India: Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm”, addressing the pressing need for a comprehensive approach to elder care.

Major Findings

Status of Elderly Population in India

- Senior citizens, i.e. people aged 60 years and above, currently comprise a little over 10% of the population, translating to about 104 million.
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) projects that elderly population will make up 158 million people by 2025, it is the one that is ageing at the fastest rate.
- By 2050, the elderly population in India would be 19.5% of the total population.

Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) 2021

- It is released by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, highlights that 75% of the elderly have one or more chronic diseases.
- The report highlights that 70% of the elderly population is dependent for everyday maintenance, and 78% is living without any pension cover.

Challenges Faced by the Elder Population

Health Domain

- ✓ Lack of a comprehensive and integrated package of services.
- ✓ Infrastructure gap in elderly care and inadequate emergency response.
- ✓ Shortage of skilled manpower.
- ✓ Lack of evidence-backed geriatric diseases knowledge repository.
- ✓ Insufficient focus on hygiene related issues.

Social Domain

- ✓ Limited scope of social security nets.
- ✓ Limited awareness regarding their rights and provisions available
- ✓ Changing family structure and loss of social support.

- ✓ Inadequate elderly-friendly infrastructure and R&D activities.

Economic Domain

- ✓ Financial illiteracy leads to financial abuse and fraud.
- ✓ Financial insecurity as elderly people are assumed to be ‘less productive’, pension and health facilities are inadequate.
- ✓ Lack of universal and comprehensive financial systems for old age security.
- ✓ Deficient support in lifetime financial planning.

Digital Domain

- Digital illiteracy among seniors.
- Insufficient access to digital goods.
- Paucity of digital training modules for the elderly.
- Unaffordable digital equipment and limited broadband connection.

Recommendations

Health Empowerment and Inclusion

- **Promote Health Literacy:** It should be done among seniors as well as their caregivers to enhance their understanding of geriatric health issues and related risks.
- **Strengthen Health Services:** The comprehensive primary healthcare services can be extended under Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centre initiative.
- **Enhance Skilled Workforce:** WHO Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health highlighted that investment in HRH can deliver a triple return of improved health outcomes, global health security, and economic growth.
- **Increase Accessibility of Services:** It can be done in terms of home health care, mental health services, Poshan Abhiyan for senior citizens etc.
- **Institutional Support:** A national senior care centre must be established to feed in continuous data for the formulation of evidence-based strategies and policies.

Social Empowerment and Inclusion

- **Integrated Social Security System:** Develop a Comprehensive and Integrated Social Security System for seniors through a multi-pronged approach, involving the government, private sector, and civil society organizations; to ensure their access to basic facilities like food, housing, sanitation facilities, etc.



Social Issues

- Muslim Women’s Right to Maintenance

Indian Society

- Right to adopt Child not a Fundamental Right

Health

- Mission Utkarsh to Combat Anaemia
- Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre Inaugurated in Supreme Court
- Edwards Syndrome
- WHO Guidelines for Clinical Management of Diphtheria
- Eradication of Guinea Worm Disease

Social Issues

Muslim Women’s Right to Maintenance

Recently, a division bench of the Supreme Court (SC) reserved its judgment in a plea on whether a divorced Muslim woman can seek maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

About the Case

- The maintenance petition was filed under Section 125 of the CrPC by a divorced Muslim woman.
- The petitioner’s argument, as presented by senior counsel, suggests that under the 1986 Act, a divorced Muslim woman is not entitled to pursue a maintenance petition under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) 1973.
- Instead, she should proceed under the specific provisions of the 1986 Act, which, according to the petitioner, offers more benefits to Muslim women compared to the CrPC.

What SC Said?

- The SC noted that the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 does not preclude a divorced Muslim woman from filing a petition under Section 125 CrPC seeking maintenance from her former husband.
- The apex court pointed out that Section 3 of the 1986 Act begins with a non-obstante clause (“notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force”), and thus it does not bar an alternative remedy under Section 125 of the CrPC.
- However, the observations in paragraph 33 of the judgment suggest that the 1986 Act has to be interpreted in such a manner that the divorced Muslim woman is entitled to all rights of maintenance as are available to other divorced women in the country.

- Consequently, the rights of divorced women cannot be taken away only from one section of divorced women of our country, lest it infringe Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution.
- The judges further highlighted that if in this case, the husband had paid a certain amount to the wife during the iddat period, then the bar under Section 127(3)(b) of the CrPC may have come into play.

Important Facts

Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986

- It was passed to protect the rights of Muslim women who have been divorced from their husband and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- The Act was passed by the Rajiv Gandhi government, with its absolute majority, to nullify the decision in the Shah Bano case.
- It is administered by any magistrate of the first class exercising jurisdiction under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- As per the Act, a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to reasonable and fair provision and maintenance from her former husband, and this should be paid within the period of iddat.

Indian Society

Right to adopt Child not a Fundamental Right

Recently, the Delhi High Court has ruled that the right to adopt a child cannot be considered a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Welfare Schemes



SWAYAM Plus Platform

On 27th February, 2024, the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched the 'SWAYAM Plus' platform.

About the Platform

- This platform aims to enhance the employability of both college students and lifelong learners.
- It is designed to offer programmes focused on enhancing employability and professional development through partnerships with prominent industry players like L&T, Microsoft, and Cisco.
- Operated by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Madras, this platform aims to extend educational opportunities to both traditional students and working professionals, aligning with the provisions of the NEP 2020 for flexible entry and exit points in education.

Focus

SWAYAM Plus primarily focuses on achieving the following:

- ✓ Building an ecosystem for all stakeholders in professional and career development, including learners, course providers, industry, academia, and strategic partners;
- ✓ Enabling a mechanism that provides credit recognition for high-quality certifications and courses offered by the best industry and academia partners;
- ✓ Reaching a large learner base by catering to learning across the country, with a focus on reaching learners from tier 2 and 3 towns and rural areas and offering employment focused courses, based on learner needs – across chosen disciplines with options to learn through resources in vernacular languages.

Features

- SWAYAM Plus envisions bringing in features such as access to mentorship, scholarships, and job placements as value-added services in due course of time, thus building a digital ecosystem for learners to pursue upskilling/re-skilling at all levels, namely certificate, diploma or degree.
- It also features innovative elements such as multilingual content (available in 12 major Indian languages of the country), AI-enabled guidance, credit recognition, and pathways to employment.

Significance

- **Creating Knowledge Economy:** By enabling individuals to balance work and studies through online courses, SWAYAM Plus empowers them to enhance their skills and career prospects, thus contributing to India's knowledge economy.

Important Facts

SWAYAM

- SWAYAM, which is a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform, offers educational modules and was launched by the Union Ministry of Education in 2017.
- It is designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality.

The courses hosted on SWAYAM are in 4 quadrants

- (i) video lecture,
- (ii) specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed,
- (iii) self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes, and
- (iv) an online discussion forum for clearing the doubts.

PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

On 13th February, 2024, Prime Minister launched PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana to provide free electricity to its beneficiaries.

About the Yojana

Aim

- With an investment of over Rs. 75,000 crores, it aims to provide up to 300 units of free electricity monthly to 1 crore households.

Eligibility

- The household must be an Indian citizen.
- The household must own a house with a roof that is suitable for installing solar panels.
- The household must have a valid electricity connection.
- The household must not have availed any other subsidy for solar panels.

Capital Subsidy

- Central government would provide upfront 40% subsidy on purchase and installation costs of rooftop solar equipment as direct benefit transfer into bank accounts.



Heritage Art & Culture

Art & Culture

- Ajanta and Ellora Caves Included in Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0

Art & Culture

Ajanta and Ellora Caves Included in Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0

Recently, the Ministry of Tourism included the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Ajanta and Ellora caves in its Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0.

About Ajanta and Ellora Caves

- Ajanta and Ellora caves are located in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad District) in Maharashtra.
- The Ajanta and Ellora cave complex is adorned with beautiful sculptures, paintings, and frescoes and includes Buddhist monasteries and Hindu and Jain temples.
- The Ajanta caves are 29 in number and were built between the 2nd century BC and the 6th century AD, whereas the Ellora caves are more spread out and 34 in number and date to the period between the 6th and 11th Centuries AD.
- Ajanta Caves are mostly Buddhist sites and were used as a retreat by Buddhist monks.
- The caves consisted of cells for meditation, assembly halls for discussions, and stupas for rituals.
- Ellora has a better mix of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist structures.
- The caves are adorned with sculptures that reflect the spiritual beliefs of the time.
- The sculptures range from depictions of deities, celestial beings, and mythological scenes to portraits of royalty and everyday life.
- The Kailash Temple in Ellora is an architectural marvel. It is one of the largest monolithic structures in the world.
- The structure is carved vertically from a single rock.

Important Facts

Swadesh Darshan 2.0

- The Ministry of Tourism has revamped its Swadesh Darshan scheme as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 (SD2.0) for the development of sustainable and responsible tourist destinations, covering tourism and allied infrastructure,

- Harappan-era Settlement Discovered in Gujarat
- Paruveta Utsavam
- Makha Bucha Ceremony
- Attukal Pongala
- Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara

History

- Kapilvastu Relics of Buddha

Personalities

- 200th Birth Anniversary of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati

tourism services, human capital development, destination management and promotion, backed by policy and institutional reforms.

- The objective of the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme envisages an increase in private-sector investment in tourism and hospitality.
- It may help in increasing Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in the field of tourism and the operation and maintenance of the assets created under the scheme.

Harappan-era Settlement Discovered in Gujarat

Recently, archaeologists discovered a Harappan-era fortified settlement named Morodharo in Kutch region of Gujarat.

About Morodharo Settlement

- It is a fortified settlement dating back to the Harappan era.
- The settlement looks mature (2,600-1,900 BCE) to late (1,900-1,300 BCE) Harappan.
- The fortification measures 102 m from east to west and 58 m from north to south.
- The thickness of the wall is an average of 3.3 m.
- It has a 10x10 m platform on the south-west side and a well on the north-east.
- Burial cairns, which are mounds of stones to demarcate a boundary, are also found here.
- Harappan pottery with perforated jar sherds, reserved slipware, and terracotta cakes were unearthed. All these items have a striking resemblance to those found in Dholavira.

Important Facts

Harappan Civilization

- The Indus Valley/Harappan civilisation was the first urban civilisation in South Asia, coexisting with Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- The Harappan civilisation occupied the largest area (approximately 8,00,000 sq. km) among the three civilisations.
- Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan), Mohenjo-Daro (Sindh, Pakistan), Dholavira, Lothal, and Surkotada (Gujarat),

ECONOMY WATCH

Agriculture

- Global Pulses Conference, 2024
- Nano Urea: Achieving Self-sufficiency in Urea Production

Agriculture

Global Pulses Conference, 2024

The Global Pulse Convention 2024, named 'Pulses: 2024' was organized in New Delhi from the 14th - the 17th February, 2024.

Key Highlights of Conference

- The Conference was jointly organised by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) and the Global Pulse Confederation.
- The Indian Government has taken adequate measures to improve the cultivation of pulses in the country by regularly increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- The production of pulses has increased by 60% in the last decade from 171 lakh tonnes in 2014 to 270 lakh tonnes in 2024.
- India has set a target of achieving self-reliance in the pulses sector by 2027.
- It is noteworthy that India has become self-sufficient in gram and many other pulse crops, only arhar and urad are slightly lacking.

Status of Pulse Production in India

- India is the largest producer (25% of global production), consumer (27% of world consumption) and importer (14%) of pulses in the world.
- Pulses account for around 20% of the area under food grains and contribute around 7-10% of the total foodgrains production in the country.
- **Top Pulses Producing States:** Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

Important Facts

Global Pulse Confederation (GPC)

- The Global Pulse Confederation (GPC) is head quartered in Dubai and licenced under the Dubai Government authority, Dubai Multi Commodity Centre (DMCC).

- Modification to National Livestock Mission

Banking & Insurance

- National Urban Co-operative Finance and Development Corporation Limited
- Market Capitalisation
- RBI Revises Framework for Regulatory Sandbox

Infrastructure

- 66th Meeting of Network Planning Group

Industry

- "Prabhaav": Assessment on Fund of Funds for Start-ups
- Rubber Board

- It is an organization that represents the pulse industry worldwide.
- It represents all aspects of the pulse industry, including growers, researchers, traders, government bodies, processors, and consumers.

World Pulses Day

- The United Nations General Assembly has designated 10th February as World Pulses Day to recognize the importance of pulse crops like chickpeas, dry beans and lentils as a global food.
- **The theme of World Pulses Day 2024 was - 'Pulses: nourishing soils and people'.**

Nano Urea: Achieving Self-sufficiency in Urea Production

India plans to replace the consumption of 2.5 million tonnes (mt) of conventional urea with nano urea in FY24.

Key Highlights

- India's urea consumption in the last 10 months up to February 2024 stood at 31.7 mt, down from 35.7 mt in the same period of the previous fiscal year.
- About 3.3 million tonnes of nano urea (worth about Rs. 7 crore) produced by the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) were sold from August 2021 to February 2024.
- The consumption of conventional urea has gone down in 344 districts, while the use of nano liquid urea has gone up in 74 districts.
- Three plants across the country produce conventional urea to meet domestic demand.
- With India's urea consumption growing at 6-7% a year, the government aims to use a fourth plant for its production. With this plant – owned by Talcher Fertilizers Limited in Odisha – urea production capacity could be increased by 1.25 mt a year.
- The three plants currently in use produce 28.4 mt of urea a year.
- This is in line with India's goal of achieving self-sufficiency in urea production by 2025.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Space Science

- ISRO Successfully Launches INSAT-3DS Weather Satellite
- ISRO Human-Rates CE-20 Rocket Engine for Gaganyaan Mission

Space Science

ISRO Successfully Launches INSAT-3DS Weather Satellite

On 17th February, 2024, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) achieved a milestone with the successful launch of the GSLV-F14/ INSAT-3DS Mission aboard GSLV-MkII.

INSAT-3DS Overview

- INSAT-3DS is a state-of-the-art meteorological satellite, succeeding INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR, designed for geostationary orbit.
- It is equipped with advanced payloads including multi-spectral imagers, a robust sounder payload, a data relay transponder and a satellite-aided search and rescue transponder.

Primary Objectives

- INSAT-3DS will monitor Earth's surface, conduct oceanic observations, and provide essential data for meteorological analysis.
- Expected to enhance meteorological services, benefiting sectors like agriculture, aviation, and disaster management.

Implications

- **Mission Success:** ISRO's successful launch demonstrates its continued prowess in space exploration and satellite deployment, further solidifying India's position in the global space arena.
- **Significance:** With enhanced data collection and dissemination capabilities, the satellite contributes to improved weather predictions and emergency response efforts.
- **Technological Advancements:** The advanced payloads onboard INSAT-3DS underscore India's commitment to leveraging space technology for societal benefits, particularly in the domains of weather forecasting and disaster management.

- DRDO's Green Propulsion System Aces In-Orbit Test
- NASA's PACE Satellite: A New Era of Earth Observation
- Discovery of Water on Asteroids

Defence Technology

- NAL Achieves Breakthrough with Solar-Powered High-Altitude UAV Prototype

New Technology & Innovations

- Novel Sodium-Catalyzed Method for Carbon Nanotube Synthesis
- Innovative ORAN Base Stations to Democratize Connectivity
- RRI's Breakthrough: Improved Imaging of Cold Atoms

- **International Collaboration:** INSAT-3DS' capabilities for global data dissemination and search and rescue operations highlight India's willingness to collaborate on international efforts for environmental sustainability and safety.

ISRO Human-Rates CE-20 Rocket Engine for Gaganyaan Mission

On 21st February, 2024, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) achieved another significant milestone by human-rating the CE-20 rocket engine, essential for India's Gaganyaan mission.

- Human-rating is a thorough process that consists of many variables being taken into account to safely design, build and launch a crewed spacecraft and return that spacecraft and its crew safely to the earth.

About CE-20

- CE-20, an indigenous cryogenic engine, enhances India's space capabilities, specifically for the GSLV Mk III (LVM-3) launch vehicle.
- It has been designed and developed by the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC), a subsidiary of ISRO.
- ISRO's cryogenic engine lineage includes KVD-1, CE-7.5, and CE-20, with CE-20 employing the gas-generator cycle for improved build and testability.

Analysis

- Cryogenic engines operate on cryogenic (extremely low-temperature) fuels and oxidizers, typically liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen.
- Liquid hydrogen's advantages in rocket propulsion necessitate specialized cryogenic engines, like the CE-20, despite the challenges in handling and storage.
- Liquid hydrogen, preferred for rocket motors, presents challenges in storage and handling due to its low temperature requirements and propensity to leak.
- ISRO's adoption of the gas-generator cycle in the CE-20 engine prioritizes ease of construction and testing, crucial for timely mission execution.



ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Sustainable Development

- UN Recognizes World Restoration Flagships
- Cameroon Adopts Nagoya Protocol
- Global Biodiversity Funding Strategies Set in GBFF Meeting

Sustainable Development

UN Recognizes World Restoration Flagships

On 13th February, 2024, the United Nations designated seven initiatives across Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean, and Southeast Asia as World Restoration Flagships, aiming to combat ecosystem degradation caused by various environmental threats.

Recognition and Impact

- These initiatives, awarded by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), are expected to restore 40 million hectares and create 500,000 jobs.
- The projects focus on ecosystem revival and preservation amidst challenges like wildfires, drought, deforestation, and pollution.
- The initiatives receive technical and financial support from the UN, becoming eligible for assistance to advance their restoration efforts.
- The awards coincide with the 6th session of the UN Environment Assembly, highlighting the global commitment to environmental restoration.

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

- The awards align with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), aiming to prevent, halt, and reverse ecosystem degradation worldwide.
- The UN emphasizes the importance of accelerating restoration efforts amid ongoing environmental crises.
- Social Impact and Community Engagement
- The initiatives engage local communities in restoration efforts, providing various benefits such as improved livelihoods, access to resources, and job creation.
- Measures include land title protection, sustainable agriculture practices, and conservation-focused development projects.

- EU Recommends 90% Emission Cut Target by 2040

Climate Change

- Vanishing Ice: Africa's Glacial Decline
- Hindu Kush Himalaya Region Declared Biosphere on the Brink

Biodiversity

- Giant Anaconda Discovered in Amazon
- Rare Butterfly Sighted in Himachal Pradesh
- New Worm for Eco-Friendly Pest Control
- Rare Lapwing Sighted in India
- Historic Ban on Donkey Skin Trade in Africa
- India Designates Five New Ramsar Sites

- The initiatives aim for long-term impact, with plans to expand restoration efforts and create additional jobs by 2030.

Cameroon Adopts Nagoya Protocol

Cameroon, home to rich biodiversity, recently embraced Nagoya Protocol, aiming for equitable benefits from genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

- Cameroon boasts **significant biodiversity** with around 11,000 species, many holding valuable genetic information.
- Foreign companies exploit these resources, but communities see little benefit, as illustrated by the example of *Prunus africana*.
- The adoption of the Nagoya Protocol seeks to rectify this imbalance and protect indigenous rights.
- Challenges remain, including the **need for implementing instruments** and institutional capacity.
- **The Global Environment Facility (GEF)** funds a project to support Nagoya Protocol implementation and research in Cameroon.
- This project focuses on bioprospecting for valuable species like the **bush mango**, prized for its medicinal properties.
- Bush mango is not only a **source of food and medicine** but also a potential income generator for local farmers.
- European interest in bush mango is growing, with certification processes underway to meet international standards.
- Agreements with cosmetic companies highlight the importance of understanding and leveraging Africa's biological resources.

Important Facts

Nagoya Protocol

- The Nagoya Protocol is a legally binding global agreement implementing access and benefit-sharing obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

- Adopted in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010, it came into force on October 12, 2014, after the fiftieth instrument of ratification was deposited.
- It establishes a transparent legal framework to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of genetic resources.

Global Biodiversity Funding Strategies Set in GBFF Meeting

Delegates convened in Washington DC for the inaugural council meeting of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) (8th-9th February), outlining crucial policies for its execution post the COP15 proposal.

Highlights of the Meeting

- **Policy Approvals for Resource Allocation and Project Cycle:** Delegates greenlit the Resource Allocation Policy and Project Cycle Policy, crucial for efficient allocation of donor funds.
- **Authority and Mandate of GEF Chief Executive:** The GBFF Resource Allocation Policy entrusts the Global Environment Facility (GEF) chief executive with approving projects worth up to \$5 million, with midterm reviews mandated for projects exceeding \$2 million.
- **Project Preparation Timeline:** GEF implementing agencies are given nine months to prepare and seek approval for projects post receiving project preparation grants.
- **Expected Work Programme:** GBFF’s initial work programme is anticipated later this year with financing expected by 2024 end.
- **Current Funding Status and Seed Capital Realization:** GBFF currently holds \$200 million Canadian dollars from Canada, \$10 million pounds from the UK, 40 million euros from Germany, and 10 million euros from Spain, slightly surpassing the \$200 million seed capital requirement.
- **Donor Funding Allocation and Project Approval:** The council approved \$918 million for 45 projects and \$203 million for 21 climate change adaptation projects, emphasizing biodiversity among the funded initiatives.
- **Financial Commitments and Mobilization Goals:** GEF aims to mobilize \$7.5 billion in co-financing, leveraging \$81 million for blended finance projects set to attract \$1.36 billion in external investments.

EU Recommends 90% Emission Cut Target by 2040

- On 6th February, 2024, the European Union Climate Commissioner recommended a 90% emission cut target by 2040, emphasizing a fair transition and economic stability while pursuing carbon neutrality by 2050.

Political Struggles and Compromises

- European Commission acknowledged the political challenges surrounding environmental issues, particularly the contentious plan to halve chemical pesticide use by 2030.
- The proposal has stalled amid divisions between EU lawmakers and member countries, reflecting growing discontent.

Future Steps and Climate Projections

- The EU Commission presents new post-2030 climate projections following the COP28 UN climate negotiations, informing future legislative efforts.
- The next European Commission is tasked with translating recommendations into proposed legislation for COP30.

Challenges and Criticisms

- The proposed 2040 targets may rely on carbon capture and storage technologies, drawing criticism from climate campaigners.
- Resistance to stricter environmental actions, particularly from the centre-right European People’s Party, underscores challenges in achieving ambitious goals.

Urgency and Global Context

- The United Nations warns of insufficient action to curb greenhouse gas emissions, stressing the urgent need to limit global warming.
- With temperatures rising and 2023 projected as the warmest year on record, pressure mounts on world leaders to address climate change effectively.

Climate Change

Vanishing Ice: Africa’s Glacial Decline

According to a recent report released on 12th February, 2024, satellite imagery analysis reveals a concerning trend as Africa’s ice is rapidly disappearing, with projections suggesting the continent may lose its iconic white peaks by mid-century.

Disappearing Glaciers

- **Shrinking Glacial Coverage:** High-resolution satellite images from 2021-2022 depict a drastic reduction in Africa’s tropical glaciers, particularly in the Rwenzori Mountains, Mount Kenya, and Kilimanjaro.
- **Diminished Glacier Areas:** The total area of tropical glaciers in East Africa has dwindled to 1.36 square kilometers, with significant declines observed on Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya, and the Rwenzori Range.
- **Historical Comparison:** Compared to data from the early 20th century, Kilimanjaro has retained a mere 8.6% of its glacier area, emphasizing the rapidity of glacial loss in the region.

- **Kilimanjaro's Decline:** Kilimanjaro, boasting the largest share of East African glaciers, has witnessed continuous retreat, resulting in the disappearance of several glaciers since 2011.
- **Mount Kenya's Retreat:** Glaciers on Mount Kenya have undergone significant retreat, with losses exceeding half of their extent between 2016 and 2021-22.
- **Rwenzori Range Dynamics:** The glacierized region of the Rwenzori Range has experienced a 67% retreat since 2005, with Mount Stanley accounting for the majority of remaining glacier area.

Climate Indicator

- Tropical glaciers serve as crucial markers of climate variability and change, with over 90% of modern glacier extents disappearing since the early 2020s.
- Africa's tropical glaciers, alongside those in the Andes and the Sudirman Range, are emblematic of high-altitude ice near the Equator, influenced by the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).
- The retreat of East African glaciers is linked to shifts in regional moisture patterns, indicative of a broader trend towards drier climates since the late 19th century.

Hindu Kush Himalaya Region Declared Biosphere on the Brink

On 5th February, 2024, scientists at the Third Lead Authors meeting of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) characterized the Hindu Kush Himalaya region as facing imminent collapse.

IPBES Nexus Assessment Meeting

- Over 130 global experts gathered in Kathmandu, Nepal, to examine the linkages between food and water security, health, biodiversity, and climate change.
- The meeting, hosted by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), aims to assess the complex relationships between biodiversity and various sectors.

State of the Hindu Kush Himalaya Region

- ICIMOD researchers described the alarming pace and scale of habitat loss and biodiversity decline in the region, spanning eight countries.
- Despite conservation efforts, the region has lost 70% of its original biodiversity over the last century, posing threats to both natural and human systems.

Urgent Call for Action

- Experts emphasize the urgent need for increased investment to reverse nature loss and prevent species extinction in the region.
- With 241 million people living in the area, including 31% who are food insecure, immediate action is crucial to safeguard ecosystems and livelihoods.

IPBES AND ITS ROLE

- IPBES, established in 2012 with 145 member states, functions similarly to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, focusing on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- The nexus assessment seeks to enhance understanding and identify policy options to address the interconnected challenges facing the region.

Biodiversity

Giant Anaconda Discovered in Amazon

Recently, a team of researchers in South America unveiled a previously unknown species of anaconda, capable of growing over 20 feet in length, during the production of a new streaming video series in the Amazon rainforest.

- The team, while exploring the Amazon rainforest, were granted rare access by the Waorani people to study a population of anacondas rumoured to be the largest in existence.
- The researchers encountered the massive anacondas slithering in the river system, showcasing their **impressive size and hunting capabilities**.
- Anecdotal reports from the Waorani people suggest even larger anacondas in the region, with lengths exceeding **24 feet and weights around 1,100 pounds**.
- Previously, researchers believed that **green anacondas in South America** belonged to the same species, but genetic analysis revealed distinct northern and southern green anaconda populations.
- The genetic difference between the two populations is significant, with a variation of 5.5%, comparable to the genetic difference between humans and chimpanzees.
- While the northern green anaconda is sizable compared to its South American counterparts, some species of pythons in Southeast Asia exceed its length, albeit with less weight.

Despite its impressive size, the discovery raises questions about how such a large species remained undocumented by biologists for so long, especially given ecological threats like deforestation.

Rare Butterfly Sighted in Himachal Pradesh

A rare high-altitude butterfly, the Dusted Apollo, has been sighted and photographed for the first time in Himachal Pradesh, indicating the thriving diversity of Apollo butterflies in the region, much to the delight of butterfly enthusiasts.

- The Dusted Apollo, discovered in 1890, inhabits the inner Himalayas, with its distribution range spanning from Ladakh to West Nepal, flying at altitudes between 3,500 to 4,800 meters.



WORLD WATCH

International Relations

- India-US Consular Dialogue Strengthens Bilateral Ties
- India-Japan Act East Forum Meeting
- India-Colombia MoU on Digital Transformation Solutions

International Relations

India-US Consular Dialogue Strengthens Bilateral Ties

On 23rd February, 2024, India and the US convened their 11th bilateral Consular Dialogue in New Delhi, addressing a spectrum of issues aimed at bolstering cooperation between the two nations.

- The dialogue encompassed discussions on **extradition, student and professional mobility, legal migration**, and protection of vulnerable groups like women and children.
- Both nations reaffirmed their commitment to nurturing **robust people-to-people connections** across consular matters of mutual interest.
- A pilot project in the US for expediting **domestic renewals of certain visa categories** was welcomed as a proactive measure to fortify bilateral ties.
- The Consular Dialogue concluded with an agreement to convene the next session in the US in 2025, fostering continuity and sustained collaboration.
- In 2023, the US Consular Team in India achieved a milestone by processing a record **1.4 million US visas**, significantly reducing visitor visa appointment wait times by 75%.
- **Visitor visas (B1/B2) surged to become the second-highest** category of applications in the US Mission's history, exceeding 700,000 applications.
- Substantial improvements in processing efficiency and staffing investments led to a drastic reduction in appointment wait times, from an average of 1,000 days to just 250 days nationwide.
- The US consular team in India issued over 140,000 student visas in 2023, marking a third consecutive year of setting a record for the highest number of student visas issued by any country.

- India, Taiwan Ink Migration Agreement to Boost Bilateral Ties
- India-Poland Agreement for Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters
- Dubai Introduces Five-Year Visa for Indian Travelers

World Issues

- UAE Dropped from FATF Grey List
- EU Launches Naval Mission to Protect Red Sea Shipping
- Europe Vows to Strengthen Defence

International Treaties

- 6th Regional Dialogue on Afghanistan
- Indian Ocean Conference

These developments underscored the unwavering commitment of both nations to facilitating smoother travel and fostering stronger bilateral relations.

India-Japan Act East Forum Meeting

On 19th February, 2024, India and Japan convened the seventh meeting of the India-Japan Act East Forum (AEF) in New Delhi.

Key Points

- **Objectives of the AEF:** The AEF aims to develop the Northeastern Region of India and enhance connectivity within the region and with South-East Asia.
- **Review of Progress:** Participants reviewed the progress of cross-border surveys to improve trade and logistics between India and Bangladesh.
- **Ongoing Projects and Areas of Cooperation:** Discussions covered various ongoing projects in connectivity, energy, urban development, skill development, agriculture, healthcare, disaster resilience, tourism, cultural exchange, and Japanese language education.
- **Exploration of New Cooperation Areas:** Representatives exchanged views on potential new areas of cooperation to further strengthen bilateral ties.

India-Colombia MoU on Digital Transformation Solutions

On 16th February, 2024, India and Colombia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on sharing successful digital solutions implemented at population scale for digital transformation.

- The MoU aims to promote digital transformation through **capacity-building programs, exchange of best practices**, and development of pilot solutions.
- Both countries emphasize the importance of **Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs)** for delivering equitable access to public and private services.

UPSC & State PSCs Prelims 2024

Indian Polity

Practice Sets

Set-I

1. Which amongst the following natural justice principle means ‘no one should be made a judge in his own cause’?

- (a) Nemo judex in causa sua
- (b) Audi alteram partem
- (c) Audi Nemo judex causa partem
- (d) None of the above

2. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law.
- 2. Article 21 ensures that due process of law procedure must satisfy certain requisites in the sense of being fair and reasonable. The procedure cannot be arbitrary, unfair or unreasonable.
- 3. The Supreme Court pronouncement of “due process of Law” in Maneka Gandhi case (1978), court asserted the principle of reasonableness while deciding a case.

How many of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

3. With reference to appointment/transfer of judges, consider the following statements:

- 1. The First and Second Judges’ cases resulted in the formation of the Collegium System by interpreting “consultation” with the CJI to really mean “concurrence” which is arrived at by the CJI upon discussion with the two senior-most judges.
- 2. The Third Judges’ case expanded the collegium to include the five senior-most judges, including the CJI.
- 3. The K Ashok Reddy case relied on the decision of the Second Judges’ case and held that the primacy of the judiciary in the matter of appointments.

How many of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

4. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by the people.

Statement II: Rajya Sabha represents the states and union territories of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation for Statement I
 - (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is not the correct explanation for Statement I
 - (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect
 - (d) Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct
5. The *Doctrine of Eminent Domain*, as a legal principle, entails
- (a) Governments the authority to take tribal property for private use.
 - (b) Governments the authority to take defence property for private use.
 - (c) Governments the authority to take private property for public use.
 - (d) None of the above

6. Which article of the constitution gives parliament the power to make laws to fructify an international agreement or treaty?

- (a) Article 252
- (b) Article 253
- (c) Article 254
- (d) Article 256

7. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Article 246 talks about the Parliamentary laws and the laws proposed by the State.
- 2. Under Article 247, the Parliament can pass laws on any item not listed in the State or Concurrent List.
- 3. Under Article 248, the Parliament can establish additional courts to better manage the country’s laws.

How many of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

8. With reference to Concurrent List of Indian Constitution, consider the following statements:

UPSC & State PSCs Prelims 2024

History

Practice Sets

Set-I

1. Consider the following statements:

1. The rebellion in Santhal Pargana against the British was led by Alluri Sitarama Raju.
2. Rampa rebellion against British rule was led by Tilka Manjhi.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1, nor 2

2. Which of the following pairs is not correctly matched?

Mahajanapada	Capital
(a) Kashi	- Varanasi
(b) Vatsa	- Kaushambi
(c) Vajji	- Vaishali
(d) Kosala	- Shuktimati

3. Consider the following regarding Akbar's land revenue system:

1. Akbar implemented the Dahsala system by taking the average of the land revenue of the last 10 years.
2. Akbar started using 'Ilahi Gaza' in place of the old standard unit 'Sikandari Gaza' for measuring land.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1, nor 2

4. Consider the following statements regarding the economic policy of the British in India:

1. After the Battle of Buxar, the British introduced the dual system of governance in India.
2. The main objective of the Permanent Settlement system brought by Lord Cornwallis was to provide stability to the Indian agricultural system.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1, nor 2

5. Consider the following statements regarding the administrative system of the Gupta period:

1. During the Gupta period, revenue collecting officer was called Sandhivigrahika.

2. From the point of view of administrative convenience, the state was divided into Bhuktis, Bhuktis into Vishayas, Vishayas into Vithis and Vithis into villages.
3. During this period, administrative rights were also given to the people of the priestly class through land grants.

How many of the above statement(s) is/are not correct?

- (a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None of the above

6. Which of the following statements is not correct regarding the administrative system of the Mughals?

- (a) Mansabdari system was a unique administrative system developed by the Mughals in India.
- (b) Ahadis were the highest military officers of various military departments recruited by the Mughal rulers.
- (c) The Sawar rank of a Mansabdar indicates the number of horsemen he keeps.
- (d) Tajwiz was a petition presented to the emperor by an aristocrat, recommending that the applicant be admitted as a Mansabdar.

7. Consider the following statements:

1. Prarthana Samaj was founded in Bombay by Dr. Atmaram Panduranga in the year 1867 with the aim of social reform.
2. Jyotiba Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in the year 1873.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1, nor 2

8. Consider the following statements regarding the Nagara style of temple construction:

1. Nagara style is prevalent in the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains.
2. One of the main characteristics of Nagara style temples is that the temples are surrounded by boundary walls.

STATE WATCH

In this section, we have briefly presented the schemes and programs started by various states, meetings and conferences organized at the state level, latest reports released by the state governments and other major developments from which questions are often asked in state-specific competitive examinations.

Assam

Kaji Nemu

- Recently, the Assam government declared the GI-tagged (2019) 'Kaji Nemu' (kaji Lemon) as the State fruit.
- Kaji Nemu is elongated and oblong compared to other lemon varieties.
- With its unique aroma and antioxidant properties, the Assam lemon enriched the local cuisines.
- The oval-shaped Kaji Nemu is a lot juicier than other lemon varieties. Kaji Nemu is majorly used in culinary and commercial purposes, and it is extensively used for its medicinal properties.
- It is grown in almost all the districts of the state and is available throughout the year.

Mission Basundhara 4.0

- Recently, Assam Chief Minister unveiled Mission Basundhara 4.0.
- It aims at transforming land management in Assam through systematic surveys and settlements.
- It focuses on surveying land within char areas (Char is a tract of land surrounded by the waters of an ocean, sea, lake, or stream).
- It will help establish a modern land revenue system within 5 years.
- It will implement National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS) in selected districts, which is a new service for digital geospatial maps.

Northeast's First Naturopathy Hospital

- Recently, Assam Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the Central Research Institute of Yoga & Naturopathy (CRIYN) and a 100-bedded Naturopathy hospital at Dihing Khamtighat in Dibrugarh.
- The institution, a pioneering force in Ayush, aims to blend traditional knowledge of Yoga and Naturopathy with modern technology.
- The institute will serve as an incubation center for startups in the wellness sector, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.
- It will offer clinical training facilities for capacity building in areas such as cardiac rehabilitation, diabetes management, and NCD risk reduction.
- With a focus on Integrated Medicine, CRIYN aims to integrate evidence-based protocols of Yoga and Naturopathy into conventional patient care. This approach enhances the quality of patient care and contributes to NCD risk reduction.

Gunotsav 2024

- Recently, the Gunotsav 2024 fifth round took place between January 3, 2024, and February 9, 2024.
- Initiated in 2017, Gunotsav is a state Government initiative for improvement of quality of school education.
- The four core areas viz. Scholastic (learning outcomes of children), Co-scholastic, Infrastructure and Community Participation are evaluated in Gunotsav exercise.
- Schools are graded as A+, A, B, C and D on the basis of performance (90% on Scholastic, 5% each on Co-scholastic & other areas and Community Participation & Contributions).
- This exercise helps in identifying the learning gaps and ensuring taking appropriate remedial measures for attaining grade specific learning outcomes by all children.

News Snippets

Here we have presented those contemporary developments which do not require detailed study; rather it is sufficient to read them in brief while preparing for the examination. Instead of including such developments in the initial regular columns of the magazine, we have presented them separately in this section.

India Watch

Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT)

- Recently, the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) froze the bank accounts of Congress party over 2018-19 returns but the appellate tribunal provided partial relief.
- ITAT is a quasi-judicial institution set up in January 1941.
- It specialises in dealing with appeals under the Direct Taxes Acts.
- It hears income tax appeals from taxpayers against orders passed by the Income Tax Authorities.
- The orders passed by the ITAT are final; an appeal lies to the High Court only if a substantial question of law arises for determination.
- Presently ITAT has 63 Benches in 27 different states covering almost all the cities having a seat of the High Court.
- The ITAT is headed by a President, who is appointed by the Central Government.
- Being the oldest tribunal in the country, ITAT is referred to as the 'Mother Tribunal'.

Community Radio in India

- Recently, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting organised a regional Community Radio Sammelan (South) celebrating 20 years of Community Radio in India.
- Community Radio is an important third tier in Radio Broadcasting, distinct from Public Service Radio broadcasting and Commercial Radio.
- Community Radio Stations (CRSs) are low power Radio Stations, which are meant to be set-up and operated by local communities.
- The Community Radio provides a platform to air local voices among the local community on issues concerning Health, Nutrition, Education, Agriculture, etc.
- Furthermore, since the broadcast is in local languages and dialects, people are able to relate to it instantly.
- Many CRSs record and preserve local songs for posterity and give local artists a platform to showcase their talent to the community.

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)

- Recently, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) issued a show cause notice to Air India in connection with the incident where an 80-year-old man passed away after he walked to the terminal due to a lack of wheelchair assistance at the airport.
- DGCA is the regulatory body in the field of civil aviation primarily dealing with safety issues, under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- It is responsible for the regulation of air transport services to/from/within India and for the enforcement of civil air regulations, air safety and airworthiness standards.
- It also coordinates all regulatory functions with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).
- It conducts regular safety inspections of all airlines and aircraft to meet the required safety standards.
- It also investigates any incidents or accidents that occur within the Indian airspace and takes appropriate action to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.
- It is also responsible for issuing licenses and certificates to pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, and other aviation personnel.

News Notes

In general competitive examinations, a large number of questions are asked from appointments, awards, military exercises, summits & conferences, important days, etc. for which coverage of current events in a concise form is sufficient. Keeping this in mind, we have presented these contemporary developments in a brief form in this section.

Persons in News	
Person	Why in News
Shubman Gill	• The Punjab Chief Electoral Officer's office has designated cricketer Shubman Gill as a "state icon" for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.
Sindhu Ganapathy	• Sindhu Ganapathy recently became the first transwoman Travelling Ticket Examiner (TTE) of Southern Railway.
Narendra Kumar	• Fit India Movement broke the mold by appointing Narendra Kumar Yadav, an IRS officer, as its new brand ambassador.
Geeta Batra	• She is an Indian economist who has been appointed as the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the World Bank's Global Environment Facility (GEF).
Shashi Tharoor	• He was honored with the 'Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur' (Knight of the Legion of Honour), France's highest civilian honor.

Appointments	
Person	Brief Description
Nawaf Salam	• Lebanese Judge Nawaf Salam has been elected as the new president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a three-year term.
Justice Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar	• The former Supreme Court judge has been appointed as the chairperson of the Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman of India.
Daljit Singh Chaudhary	• He has been appointed as the Director General (DG) of the National Security Guard (NSG). Chaudhary, currently serving as the DG of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), will now shoulder the additional responsibility of leading the NSG.
Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal	• He has assumed charge as the 72nd President of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), which is world's largest accounting body, here on Monday.
Mio Oka	• The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has appointed Mio Oka as its new Country Director for India, succeeding Takeo Konishi.
Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi	• He became the Army Vice Chief succeeding Lt Gen MV Suchindra Kumar.
Justice Ritu Bahri	• She recently became the first female Chief Justice of the Uttarakhand High Court.
Sachin Jain	• The World Gold Council (WGC), representing global gold miners, has named Sachin Jain as its new CEO for India.
Salil Parekh	• Salil Parekh, the Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Infosys, has been appointed to the Board of Directors of the US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF).
Sanjay Kumar Jain	• IRCTC, Mr Sanjay Kumar Jain, an accomplished Indian Railway Traffic Services (IRTS) Officer of the 1990 batch, has assumed the pivotal role of Chairman & Managing Director.
Ajay Kumar Choudhary	• He has been appointed as non-executive chairman and independent director of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
Rajendra Prasad Gupta	• He has been appointed as Rajasthan's New Advocate General.

Info Bytes

From Govt. News Services like PIB, AIR, etc.

- Where was the 8th Asia Economic Dialogue held?
- **Pune**
- Who was appointed as the Vigilance Commissioner by the government recently?
- **A S Rajeev**
- When is Central Excise Day observed in India?
- **24th February**
- Which cosmonaut set a new record for the longest time spent in space?
- **Oleg Kononenko**
- Which Bharatanatyam exponent's film on the Thanjavur Big Temple, also known as Brihadeeswara Temple was unveiled at UNESCO, France?
- **Bala Devi Chandrashekar**
- With which bank India has signed a \$200 million loan agreement to strengthen flood and riverbank erosion risk management along the Brahmaputra River in Assam?
- **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**
- Which country's team defeated India to win the U19 Cricket World Cup held in South Africa?
- **Australia**
- Where was Divya Kala Mela 2024 organised?
- **Agartala, Tripura**
- Where was the successful flight test of 'Abhyas', a High-Speed Expendable Aerial Target, conducted by DRDO?
- **Integrated Test Range, Chandipur**
- Who took oath as the first female Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court?
- **Justice Ritu Bahri**
- Who was elected as the first General Secretary of Northern Ireland on 3rd February, 2024?
- **Michel O'Neill**
- Who was honored with the Lakshminarayana International Award?
- **Pyarelal Sharma**
- Who was awarded the 'Sportsman of the Year (Team Sports)' at the Sportstar ACES Awards 2024?
- **Mohammad Shami**
- Which state government is planning to establish an AI city?
- **Telangana**
- What does NITI Aayog's GROW initiative aim to transform through agroforestry?
- **India's wastelands**
- What is the interest rate on deposits by EPFO for the fiscal year 2023-24?
- **8.25%**
- What is the new name of Paytm E-commerce after its rebranding?
- **Pai Platforms**
- Where will the headquarters of the Confederation of International Small Tea Holders relocate to from China?
- **India**
- What is the name of the collaboration agreement signed between AIIMS Delhi and University of Liverpool?
- **AIIMS Liverpool Collaborative Centre for Translational Research in Head and Neck Cancer (ALHNS)**
- What is the name of the portal launched aimed at representing Indian Women and Girls in STEMM?
- **SWATI (Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation)**
- What is the new name of Google's AI chatbot Bard?
- **Gemini**
- What day honors the enduring impact of radio on global communication and is celebrated on February 13?
- **World Radio Day**
- Which forest in Odisha's Koraput district has been declared as the state's fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site?
- **Gupteswar Forest**
- What scheme did the government launch, providing 300 units of free electricity monthly to one crore households?
- **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana**
- What historic achievement did Dubai make at the World Government Summit 2024?
- **Launch of World's First Air Taxi Service**
- What award did India clinch at the World Government Summit in Dubai?
- **9th Gov Tech award**
- What scheme did the Odisha government launch, offering interest-free loans to unemployed youths?
- **Swayam**
- Which country did India ink a significant bilateral investment treaty and trade corridor deal with during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit?
- **United Arab Emirates**
- Which is the first Indian company to surpass the Rs 20 lakh crore market capitalization mark?
- **Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL)**
- Which company expanded its presence in the insurance technology sector with the acquisition of Agg Global?
- **Wipro**
- Which country recently slipped into recession, losing its rank as the world's third-largest economy?
- **Japan**
- Which companies have joined forces to introduce the 'credit line on UPI' feature?
- **PayU and NPCI**
- With whom did the Ministry of Defence sign a contract worth Rs.1,752 Cr for Stabilised Remote Control Guns?
- **AWEIL**