

## National News

### Delhi Solar Policy-2024

- The government aims for **20% of Delhi's electricity consumption** to be from solar power by 2027.
- The government has allocated **₹570 crore** for the implementation of the policy.

### Impact on Household Bills

- Households generating solar power can reduce their bills to zero if consumption is below 200 units a month.
- Example: If a household consumes 400 units but generates 100 units of solar power, they will be charged only for 300 units.
- **Aim** of the policy is to reduce air pollution from diesel generators.
- Zero electricity charges for households and reduced bills for industries to counter inflation.

### Centre extends ban on SIMI for 5 years

- SIMI was declared an **"unlawful association"** under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in 2001.
- **Reasons:** The Union Home Ministry cites SIMI's involvement in terrorism, disruption of peace, and threats to the sovereignty, security, and integrity of India

### Reason for Extension:

- Ministry cites SIMI's involvement in **terrorism, disturbing peace, and threatening the sovereignty, security, and integrity of Bharat (India).**
- 17 cases were registered against former SIMI cadres in the past five years, with 11 instances leading to convictions for crimes committed between 2006 and 2014.
- The fresh cases include two first information reports (FIR) registered at the Gangapur police station in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan on August 25, 2019 for "throwing stones from the top of Jama Masjid on the rally of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)" on the VHP's Foundation Day.

### Indian Stamp Bill, 2023

The Centre has proposed to replace the existing India Stamp Act, 1899 with the new Indian Stamp Bill, 2023.

#### Key changes:

- Provisions allow states and the Centre to introduce new instruments for stamp duty.
- The bill suggests withdrawing duty exemption for ships and vessels.
- Increase in the monetary threshold for revenue receipt issuance from Rs 20 to Rs 1,000.
- Inclusion of provisions for digital signatures.
- Redefinition of terms like "executed" and "execution" to mean "signed" and "signature," including electronic records and signatures as defined by the **Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000.**

### Boosting Research and Innovation in India

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's interim Budget speech announces a **corpus of ₹1 lakh crore.**
- The funds will be available at minimal or nil interest rates.
- Aimed at encouraging private sector investment in research and development in sunrise sectors.

### National Research Foundation Bill

- DST allocates ₹2,000 crore in 2024-25 towards the National Research Foundation.

#### About:

- The bill aims to establish the **National Research Foundation (NRF)** to seed, grow, and promote Research and Development (R&D) across India's educational and research institutions.
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### National Quantum Mission

- The National Quantum Mission, a much talked about scheme of the DST, has for the first time been provisioned **₹2,819 crore.**

#### About:

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, approved the

### National Quantum Mission (NQM) on 19th April 2023.

- The Mission objectives include developing intermediate-scale quantum computers with 50-1000 physical qubits in 8 years in various platforms like superconducting and photonic technology.

### Maharashtra State News

### Maharashtra to bring in Ferrero academy to India

- As a part of the **Lakshyavedh** scheme, the Maharashtra government has **signed up with JC Ferrero Tennis Academy of Spain to develop the racquet game in the state.**
- Under the programme, **JCFTA will work with the Maha Tennis Foundation (MTF)** and the sport's governing body in the state (MSLTA) to train the players as well as the coaches through the latest training methodology.
- **Hemant Bendrey, the coach of India's top women's player Ankita Raina, will head the programme**

Think:

- Read about Lakshyavedh scheme

### MH Govt. to recognise as Kunbis kin of Marathas whose Kunbi caste records found

- The Maharashtra government issued a notification recognizing blood relatives of Maratha community members with documented Kunbi ancestry as belonging to the Kunbi caste.
- The Kunbi community, an agrarian community, falls under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, while Marathas currently lack reservation benefits.
- "Sage soyare" (blood relatives) include close family members across generations within the same caste
- This move aims to address demands from some Maratha groups seeking OBC benefits

### Thane's Masunda Lake: 1200-Year-Old

- **Masunda Lake, also known as Upvan Lake, is a 1200-year-old artificial lake in Thane, Maharashtra**
- The lake was built by the Shilahara dynasty in the 9th century AD. It was originally used for irrigation and drinking water

About:

- **Thane was once known as "City of Lakes"**
- **Historically** Thane boasted **over 60 lakes** and their accompanying temples.
- **Today only 36 Lakes** remain in the Thane Municipal corporation area.

### Beating retreat ceremony

- The **Beating Retreat ceremony** is a vibrant spectacle marking the culmination of **Republic Day festivities in India.**
- It is held on the **evening of January 29th at the iconic Vijay Chowk in New Delhi.**
- The music bands of **Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)** will play 31 captivating and foot-tapping Indian tunes before a distinguished audience.
- Audience comprises President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces **Smt. Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh,** other Union Ministers, senior officials and the general public.
- The event will come to a close with the ever-popular tune of '**Sare Jahan se Acha**'.
- '**Beating Retreat**' traces its origins to the early 1950s when Major Roberts of the Indian Army indigenously developed the unique ceremony of display by the massed bands.

### Martyr's Day

- **Martyrs' Day, also known as Shaheed Diwas,** is a day observed in several countries to honor and remember those who have died for their cause, particularly those who have died for their nation.
- This day also marks the assassination of **Mahatma Gandhi, the "Father of the Nation."**
- Gandhi was shot dead in 1948 by **Nathuram Godse**

- He was on his way to address a prayer meeting at Birla Bhawan in Delhi when the fateful incident occurred.

### State colleges to design plan for electoral literacy

- **The Higher and Technical Education Department** of the Maharashtra government has **directed all state colleges to design a plan for promoting electoral literacy among students.**
- This initiative **aims to raise awareness about the voting process**, importance of informed participation, and combat voter apathy among the young generation.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** on electoral literacy was linked **between the Election Commission of India and the Ministry of Education.**

### Maharashtra remains No 2 in overall enrollment in the country

- **Maharashtra** continues to hold the strong position of **second in the country** when it comes to **overall educational enrollment.**
- This signifies the **state's commitment to providing access to education for its citizens at all levels.**
- Also, the students seeking **admissions in postgraduate and PhD courses in the state have steadily risen**, indicating widespread disparity in trends at different levels in education.
- **UP holds the First position.**

### Green energy, steel plant: MH govt signs MoUs worth Rs 3.16 lakh cr in a day

- The **Maharashtra government signed a massive ₹3.16 lakh crore** worth of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in a single day, marking a significant stride towards green energy and industrial development.
- These MoUs fall into two key categories:

#### Green Energy:

- **Value:** ₹2.76 lakh crore MoUs signed with seven companies
- **Focus:** Green hydrogen projects with a combined capacity of 910 kilotons per annum (KTPA)

- **Benefits:** Generate 63,900 jobs, reduce carbon emissions by 511 crore kg annually, align with
- **Companies involved:** NTPC Green Energy, Avada Green Hydrogen, Renew E-Fuels, Inox Air Products, L&T Green Tech, JSW Green Hydrogen, Welspun Godavari GH2

#### Steel Manufacturing Plant:

- **Value:** ₹40,000 crore MoU
- **Benefits:** Create 83,900 jobs, boost industrial growth

### Walmart Foundation announces 3 grants to strengthen agriculture in Maharashtra

- The **Walmart Foundation recently awarded three grants totaling over \$3 million** to empower smallholder farmers and strengthen agriculture in Maharashtra.
- These grants target:
- **BAIF Development Research Foundation:** \$1.56 million to improve livelihoods and gender integration through value chain **initiatives in tribal regions (Palghar, Nasik, Jalgaon), impacting 14,700 farmers.**
- **Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR):** \$1 million to enhance climate resilience and water management for 15,000 farmers across five districts.
- **Collective Good Foundation:** \$500,000 to drive climate-resilient growth for 10,000 farmers (70% women) across five districts through FPOs and access to financial resources.

### Maratha forts to be India's nomination for UNESCO World Heritage List

- India has **nominated a group of 12 forts, collectively known as "Maratha Military Landscapes of India"**, for inscription on the prestigious **UNESCO World Heritage List.**
- **These forts, spread across Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu**, showcase the brilliance and ingenuity of **Maratha military architecture and strategy.**
- The **nomination highlights the forts' diverse locations (hill forts, island forts, etc.) and their role in shaping the Maratha Empire's rise and resilience.**

#### The 12 forts nominated are

- Salher
- Shivneri

- Lohagad
- Khanderi
- Raigad
- Rajgad
- Pratapgad
- Suvarnadurg
- Panhala
- Vijaydurg and
- Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and
- Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.

### International Holocaust Remembrance Day observed in Mumbai

- Members of Mumbai's Jewish community gathered to commemorate International Holocaust Day, which is observed by the United Nations General Assembly on January 27
- The Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed to pay respects to the nearly 6 million Jews killed in Europe during and after the Second World War.

### 2,851 farmers ended lives in 2023 despite loan waivers, schemes

- According to data compiled by the state relief and rehabilitation department, 2,851 farmers had to end their lives last year in view of distress
- In 2022, 2,942 debt-ridden farmers died by suicide and in 2021, the number was 2,743.
- Vidarbha (1,439) saw the highest number of farmer suicide cases in 2023, followed by Marathwada (1,088).

### World Leprosy Day

- World Leprosy day is celebrated in India annually on 30 January.
- World Leprosy Day helps to create awareness about the disease and eliminate the stigma and discrimination faced by those who suffer from the disease.
- The theme for World Leprosy Day 2024 is "Beat Leprosy"

#### About:

- World Leprosy Day is observed on the last Sunday of January across the globe.

### Ashok Saraf to be honored with MH Bhushan Award 2023

- Ashok Saraf, who is well known for his stellar performances in Marathi and Hindi films, has been selected for Maharashtra Bhushan Award 2023.
- The actor will be honored for his immense contribution to the field of art.

### Indian Coast Guard Day

- Indian Coast Guard Day is celebrated annually on February 1st to commemorate the formation of the Indian Coast Guard in 1977.

This vital organization plays a crucial role in safeguarding India's maritime interests, including:

1. **Maritime Security:** Guarding against piracy, terrorism, and illegal activities at sea.
1. **Search and Rescue:** Conducting rescue operations during maritime emergencies and saving lives.
2. **Environmental Protection:** Preventing marine pollution and enforcing environmental regulations.
3. **Fisheries Protection:** Combating illegal fishing and protecting marine resources.
4. **Disaster Relief:** Providing assistance during natural disasters and coastal emergencies.

### New guidelines after ASER 2023 report

#### Context:

- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 report, focusing on Nanded district as a representative for Maharashtra, revealed worrying deficiencies in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) skills among 14-18-year-olds in government schools.
- To address these concerns, the Maharashtra State School Education Department issued new guidelines.

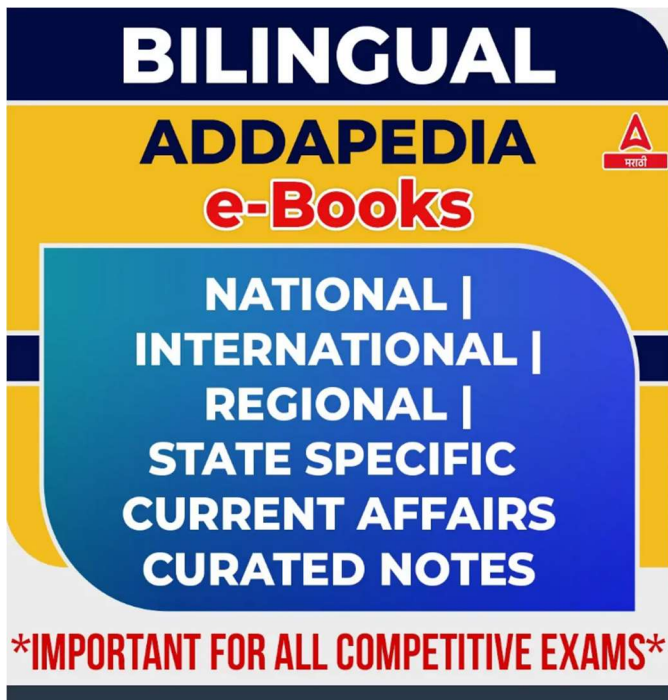
#### Key New Guidelines:

- Surprise Inspections and Learning Assessments:
- Performance-Based Teacher Training
- Enhanced Reporting and Accountability



## PM Narendra Modi to Be Honored with Shiv Sanman Award

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to be honored with the prestigious Shiv Samman Award on February 19, 2024
- It coincides with the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the legendary Maratha warrior king.
- The award, instituted by the Satara royal family and Shiv devotees, recognizes individuals who embody the ideals of Shivaji Maharaj, including bravery, leadership.



## Vidarbha has huge potential to attract industries

- Union Minister Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said that Maharashtra's Vidarbha region has the potential to attract investments and asserted that Gadchiroli will become the highest tax-paying district in the State in five years

### About:

- The region is bordered by the state of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and the Marathwada and Khandesh regions of Maharashtra.

- Vidarbha region comprises **11 districts** in total: Amravati, Akola, Bhandara, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Nagpur, Wardha, Washim, and Yavatmal. Nagpur, the largest of them all, and Gadchiroli, home to a **fossil park**.
- Vidarbha region is known for its rich biodiversity and is home to several wildlife parks and sanctuaries - Some of them are **Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, one of the largest and oldest national parks in Maharashtra; Pench National Park, one of the premier national parks and tiger reserves in the country; Melghat Tiger Reserve; Navegaon Nagzira National Park; and Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.**

## Agricultural conversion and afforestation destroys savanna biodiversity in MH

- **Savannas are unique ecosystems** with a balance of trees and grasses, crucial for biodiversity and local communities.
- **Maharashtra hosts diverse savannas with endemic plants and grazing grounds** for pastoral communities.

### Threats to Savanna Biodiversity

1. **Agricultural conversion:** Replacing savannas with intensive tillage agriculture destroys native plants and disrupts ecological balance.
2. **Afforestation:** Converting savannas to tree plantations, aiming for forest restoration or carbon sequestration, can unintentionally harm savanna-adapted species.

### Impacts:

1. **Loss of native species:** Keystone perennial grasses and other flora crucial for the ecosystem are eliminated.
2. **Degradation of habitat:** Fragmented landscapes and altered soil properties hinder natural recovery.
3. **Livelihoods affected:** Dhangar communities depending on savannas for grazing lose vital resources.

## World Wetlands Day 2024

- **World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on February 2nd**
- **It aims to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands** for both people and the planet.

- It also commemorates the signing of the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971**, an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- The **theme for 2024 is: "Wetlands and Human Wellbeing"**
- It focuses on the interconnectedness between wetlands and various aspects of human wellbeing, including physical, mental and environmental health

#### About:

- **Wetlands are ecosystems** where water saturates the land for extended periods, creating unique habitats for diverse plants and animals.
- Examples include **marshes, swamps, bogs, mangroves, and even rice paddies.**

#### Did you Know?

- The **state of Tamil Nadu (14) has the most Ramsar sites in India**, followed by the state of Uttar Pradesh with 10 sites.
- **India currently has 80 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites).**

### CSMIA registers 87% YOY growth of e-commerce shipments

#### Context:

- **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA)** in Mumbai experienced an **impressive 87% year-on-year (YOY) growth in e-commerce shipments during the festive season of 2023.**
- This surge is attributed to the growing popularity of online shopping and the increased demand for faster deliveries.
- Perishable items saw a significant rise, with mango exports witnessing a record-breaking **318% growth, reaching 4,700 metric tons.**
- This growth highlights the critical role of airports in supporting the e-commerce ecosystem and the need for efficient cargo handling infrastructure.

### Maha to implement 'Vatsalya' to reduce mother & child mortality

- In order to reduce mother and child mortality, **the state government is set to implement the 'Vatsalya' programme in Maharashtra**
- It will be done **by integrating various maternal- and child- care programmes.**

- Under this **first-of-its-kind programme, pregnancy and postpartum care** will be provided to the mother and child up to three years post-delivery

### Rs 798 crore for Mumbai railway infrastructure works

- The **Indian government allocated Rs 798 crore in the interim budget** for ongoing capacity expansion projects in **Mumbai's Western and Central Railways under Mumbai Urban Transport Projects (MUTP).**
- This allocation **aims to improve Mumbai's suburban railway network, a crucial lifeline for millions** of commuters.
- Specific projects funded might include additional platforms, new lines, and rolling stock upgrades.

### Bullet train gets Rs 25000 crore in interim budget

- The **budget allocated Rs 25,000 crore to India's first High-Speed Rail (HSR) corridor**, the bullet train project connecting Mumbai and Ahmedabad.
- This is a **significant boost for the project, facing** land acquisition delays and cost escalations.
- The funds will likely be **used for civil works contracts and further project development.**

### BMC Unveils Rs 59,954 Crore Budget for 2024-25, Marking 10.5% Increase

- The **Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)** presented its budget for the fiscal year **2024-25**, outlining a significant **10.5% increase** from the previous year.
- The total **budget stands at Rs. 59,954 crore**, showcasing ambitious plans for Mumbai's development.
- The focus lies on enhancing infrastructure, public services, and overall quality of life for residents.
- **Estimated revenue income for 2024-25 is Rs. 35,749 crore**, indicating a **Rs. 2,459 crore rise** compared to the previous year's estimates.

- A **surplus budget of Rs. 58.22 crore** highlights the BMC's commitment to fiscal responsibility.

### **BMC announces ₹3,497.82 crore budget for education**

- The **Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)** has presented a budget of **₹3,497.82 crore** for the education sector in its upcoming fiscal year.
- This marks a significant increase from the previous year's allocation, highlighting the BMC's commitment to **improving educational opportunities** for students in Mumbai.

#### **Key highlights of the budget:**

- Increased allocation for infrastructure development in schools and colleges.
- Focus on improving teacher training and recruitment.
- Introduction of new scholarship schemes for underprivileged students.
- Allocation for digitization initiatives in schools.
- Emphasis on promoting extracurricular activities and holistic development.

### **Boosting Green Public Transport: BEST Mumbai Receives ₹928 Crore for E-Buses**

- The **Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST)** Undertaking, which caters to **over 30 lakh** bus passengers daily, has been allocated a **mere 1.5% of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) massive ₹59,954.75-crore budget for 2024-25**.
- In the budget presented, the civic body allocated **₹928.65 crore to BEST**, although the cash-strapped undertaking had **sought ₹3,000 crore**.
- The BMC's budget document considers BEST's financial position and proposes to give the undertaking **₹800 crore as a grant, and another ₹128.65 crore towards purchasing 2,000 electric buses**.
- The grant **will help BEST meet expenses towards infrastructure** development, purchase of capital equipment, repayment of loans, payment to wet lease operators, employee expenses such as bonus and gratuity, dues of pensioners, electricity dues and so on.

### **Free higher education proposed for female students with family income below ₹8 lakh**

- The state government has principally sanctioned the **provision of free higher education to female students** from families with **incomes below ₹8 lakh**
- Currently, **female students admitted under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Economically Weaker Section (EWS) categories receive a 50% fee waiver**.

### **PM Modi to inaugurate partial stretch of Mumbai's coastal road on Feb 19**

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate** a partial stretch of the highly anticipated **coastal road project on February 19th**.
- This opening marks a crucial milestone in addressing chronic traffic congestion in the city.

#### **Project Details:**

- **Inaugurated Segment:** The southbound lane, extending from Bindumadhav Thackeray Chowk in Worli to Marine Drive, will be officially opened to the public.
- **Public Access:** Following the inauguration, the southbound lane will become operational for public use starting February 20th
- **Project Scope:** The entire coastal road project comprises two phases:
- **Phase 1 (Southbound):** Currently being inaugurated, this 10.58 km stretch aims to ease traffic flow between Nariman Point and Marine Drive.
- **Phase 2 (Northbound):** Scheduled to open by May 15th, this 8-lane section features twin tunnels, further enhancing connectivity.
- **Project Cost:** The total project cost stands at an estimated ₹12,721 crore (₹13,983 crore according to some sources).

#### **State News**

### **Nitish Kumar's Ninth Term as Bihar Chief Minister**

- Nitish Kumar, President of Janata Dal (United), took oath as **Bihar Chief Minister for the ninth time**.

- This marks his fifth switch in political alliances since 2015.
- He rejoined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) after leaving it 18 months ago.

#### Key Points:

- Alongside Nitish Kumar, six Ministers and two Deputy Chief Ministers **Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha** from the BJP were sworn in.
- The Cabinet is expected to be expanded further in the near future.

### International News

#### China's ties with Africa

- Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Wang Yi**, embarked on his 11th annual trip to Africa, visiting Egypt, Tunisia, Togo, and the Ivory Coast.
- The visit aimed at enhancing economic and security cooperation, implementing outcomes of the **China-Africa Leaders Dialogue in August 2023**.

#### Key Points:

##### Purpose of visit:

- Execution of three key initiatives: industrialization support, agricultural modernization, and talent development cooperation.
- Setting the groundwork for the upcoming Forum on **China-Africa Cooperation 2024 (FOCAC)**.
- Mediation efforts for peace in Gaza, specifically addressing the **Rafah border shared with Egypt**.

#### Why is Africa China's Primary Focus?

- Historical ties dating back to the **1950s**, with China supporting African liberation movements.
- Importance of African support in China acquiring a **UN Security Council seat in the 70s**.
- Evolution from ideological support to the **"Go Out Policy"** encouraging Chinese companies to invest in Africa in 1999.
- Growth of **Sino-African relations through FOCAC dialogues, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, and strategic military presence.

#### Objectives of China in Africa:

- Securing access to **crucial resources (cobalt, platinum, coltan)** vital for China's tech industry.
- Strengthening geopolitical alliances with Africa to sway **international resolutions in forums like the UN General Assembly**.
- Promoting the use of the **Chinese Yuan (RMB)** in trade, offering financial incentives, and restructuring African debt.
- Exploiting commercial opportunities through Africa's import of **finished goods, supporting Chinese exports and economy**.

#### Concerns and Criticisms:

- Western concerns about Chinese investments being **predatory, leading to debt traps**.
- Varied African responses, with some poorly managing debt (**e.g., Kenya, Zambia**) and others benefiting from manageable arrangements.
- Chinese **'non-interference'** stance providing space for authoritarian regimes in Africa to maintain power.

#### Foreign Secretary's Visit to Bhutan: Strengthening Bilateral Ties

- Foreign Secretary **Vinay Kwatra** arrives in Bhutan for a three-day visit.
- Visit closely follows Bhutan's new Prime Minister **Tshering Tobgay's appointment ceremony**.

#### Key Points:

##### Agenda

- Special emphasis on advancing cooperation between India and Bhutan on the **Gelephu mega 'Mindfulness City' project**, introduced by Mr. Kwatra during his preview visit in July 2023.
- Mr. Kwatra's agenda includes discussions on bilateral ties with his Bhutanese counterpart.

#### Maldives Seeks Sri Lanka's Medical Evacuation Support

**India-Maldives Strain:** The Maldives has turned to Sri Lanka for medical evacuation assistance, seeking alternatives amid **strained relations with India**.

#### Key Points:

- **Maldivian Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation Mohamed Ameen** met with Sri Lankan counterpart **Nimal Siripala de Silva** in Colombo.



- Minister Ameen shared on 'X' platform that Sri Lanka has agreed to assist in medical evacuation, emphasizing the creation of a framework for immediate approval on urgent requirements.
- President Muizzu's initiative to establish an **air ambulance service by March 2024** aims to enhance prompt medical evacuation capabilities, allowing patients to travel even to distant locations like Thailand.

#### Way forward:

- The Maldives' collaboration with Sri Lanka for medical evacuation signals a **strategic move to diversify partnerships, particularly amid strained relations with India.**
- The initiative aligns with President Muizzu's broader efforts to enhance emergency medical services, addressing recent challenges and aiming for international collaborations.

### Appointment News

#### Champai Soren's Swearing-in as 12th CM of Jharkhand

- Champai Soren, a leader of **Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)**, took oath as the **twelfth Chief Minister of Jharkhand.**
- Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MLA Satyanand Bhokta and Congress MLA Alamgir Alam were sworn in as Cabinet Ministers in the new government.

### Economy News

#### FinMin's Projections and Economic Review of India

- The Finance Ministry anticipates India's real GDP growth to be around **7% in 2024-25.**
- Possibility of surpassing **7% growth by 2030.**
- Ambitious goal to make India the **third-largest economy globally, reaching \$5 trillion in the next three years.**

#### Two Phases of Growth:

- Review categorizes India's growth into two phases—**1950 to 2014** and **'2014-2024: Decade of transformative growth.'**
- Acknowledges challenges in the early years of the Modi administration, with **GDP growth below 5% in 2012-13 and 2013-14, high food inflation, and structural constraints.**

#### IMF's Global Economic Outlook (2024)

- The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** has recently upgraded its forecast for global economic growth.
- This positive adjustment applies to the **two largest economies, the United States and China**, attributing it to a faster-than-expected easing of inflation.
- The IMF forecast global growth of **3.1% in 2024**, 0.2 percentage point higher than its October projection.
- The historical average for the **2000-2019 period was 3.8%.** Global trade was expected to expand by 3.3% in 2024 and 3.6% in 2025, well below the historical average of 4.9%.

#### Budget Allocation for MGNREGS (Financial Year 2024-25)

- ₹86,000 crore** allocated for MGNREGS in the financial year **2024-25.**
- Represents a **₹26,000 crore** increase compared to the **2023-24** Budget estimates.
- Despite the increase, the net gain for the rural employment scheme may be **zero or negative.**

#### Insufficient Allocation:

- To meet the employment needs, activists argue that **₹3 lakh crore** is essential.
- The allocated budget of **₹86,000 crore** is significantly short, considering outstanding dues and additional work requirements.
- Raises concerns about jeopardizing the guaranteed right to work under MGNREGS and constitutes a violation of this fundamental entitlement.

#### Investment in Rail Infrastructure

- ₹2.55 lakh crore** allocated for 2024-25, reflecting a 5.8% increase from the previous year's **₹2.41 lakh crore.**

#### Economic Corridor Programs

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the Centre will implement **three major economic corridor programmes — energy, mineral, and cement corridor**, also being referred to as Energy Economic Corridor; port connectivity corridor aka Rail Sagar; and high-traffic density corridors, aka Amrit Chaturbhuj.

#### Key Points:

- **The National High-Speed Rail Corridor's bullet train project** receives a substantial increase in allocation, rising from ₹19,592 crore to ₹25,000 crore.
- Budget allocation for investment in public sector units and joint ventures decreased from ₹34,353 crore in 2023-24 to ₹31,107 crore in 2024-25.
- Overhauling 40,000 coaches over the next five years for an improved passenger experience, costing ₹15,200 crore.

### Agreement news

#### Germany seeks inter-governmental deal for submarines with India

- Germany presents an **inter-governmental proposal to sell 6 advanced conventional submarines to India.**
- The proposal is part of **India's Navy P-75I procurement program.**
- Discussions were recently held in New Delhi with a senior German delegation.
- The deal, expected to cost over ₹45,000 crore, is in competition between Germany and Spain.

#### India's Navy P-75I procurement program

- Planned class of diesel-electric submarines for the Indian Navy.

#### Project Overview

- It is an acquisition plan for six conventional diesel-electric attack submarines.
- Project mainly emphasizes advanced capabilities, including air-independent propulsion (AIP), ISR, SOF, ASHW, ASW, ASuW, land-attack capabilities, and more.
- All six submarines to be constructed in India.
- **The project aligns with the Make in India initiative,** emphasizing self-sufficiency and indigenous manufacturing in defense projects.

#### South China Sea

- The **Philippines and Vietnam** signed crucial agreements on Tuesday to address incidents in the South China Sea and enhance cooperation between their coast guards.
- The alliance is expected to draw disapproval from China, which asserts extensive claims over the **South China Sea.**

#### Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

- The South China Sea is a **hotspot for territorial disputes involving China, the Philippines, and other nations.**
- China claims almost the entire South China Sea as its sovereign territory.
- The Philippines, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian nations claim various islands, islets, reefs, and shoals around their coasts.
- Approximately **\$5 trillion in international trade** flows through the South China Sea annually.

#### About:

- The South China Sea is situated just south of the Chinese mainland and is bordered by the countries of **Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.**
- The South China Sea is one of the most **important economic and environmental regions in the world.**
- More than **half of the world's fishing vessels** are in the South China Sea, and millions of people depend on these waters for their food and livelihoods.
- The major island and reef formations in the South China Sea are the **Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas, the Natuna Islands and Scarborough Shoal.**

#### Nine-dash line

- In 1947, the Kuomintang party, ruling the country at the time, introduced the concept of the **"nine-dash line" on a map.**
- This line was a territorial demarcation outlining China's claimed waters and islands in the South China Sea.

### Schemes and Committees News

#### Committee on Population Growth and Demographic Changes

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the formation of a high-power committee.
- **Committee's focus:** Address challenges arising from "fast population growth and demographic changes."

#### Key Points:

#### Mandate of the Committee

- Committee tasked with making comprehensive recommendations aligned with the goal of **Viksit Bharat (developed India)**.

#### Lack of Reliable Data

- The committee's announcement follows the **indefinite postponement of the Census**, leading to a lack of reliable data on population growth.
- Despite limited statistics, security concerns in border areas are being highlighted based on perceived demographic changes.

#### Pradhan Mantri Suryoday Yojana

- The government plans to promote **household rooftop solar systems (h-RTS)** through the Pradhan Mantri Suryoday Yojana.
- The focus is on households consuming less than 300 units of electricity monthly.
- The scheme aims to provide up to **300 units of free electricity to one crore families**.
- Estimated cost of the scheme is at least ₹1 lakh crore.
- The Union government is likely to bear the entire cost of setting up rooftop solar systems.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman mentioned the potential benefits of **₹15,000 to ₹18,000** annually for beneficiary households.
- India currently has **6.7 lakh households** with rooftop solar systems, and the scheme aims for an exponential expansion to reach one crore households.

#### Awards News

#### Defense News

#### SADA TANSEEQ

- The first-ever India-Saudi Arabia joint military exercise, named 'SADA TANSEEQ,' commenced in **Rajasthan**.
- The exercise aims to foster interoperability, bonhomie, and camaraderie between the troops of both nations.

#### Participating Contingents:

- The **Saudi Arabian contingent**, represented by 45 personnel, is from the Royal Saudi Land Forces.
- The **Indian Army contingent**, also comprising 45 personnel, is represented by a battalion from the Brigade of the Guards (Mechanised Infantry).

#### Objective:

- The primary goal of the exercise is to train troops from both sides for joint operations in semi-desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The exercise is scheduled to take place until **February 10**.

#### Exercise Vayushakti-2024

- The Indian Air Force will conduct **Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 on 17 February 2024** at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range near Jaisalmer.

#### Key points:

- The last edition of Exercise Vayu Shakti took place on **16 February 2019**.
- Vayu Shakti will demonstrate the offensive and defensive capabilities of the Indian Air Force, including both day and night operations.
- The exercise will showcase **joint operations with the Indian Army**.

#### Participating Aircraft:

- **Diverse Fleet:** This year, **121 aircraft** will participate, featuring indigenous aircraft like Tejas, Prachand, and Dhruv, as well as other notable aircraft such as Rafale, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi-30 MKI, Jaguar, Hawk, C-130J, Chinook, Apache, and Mi-17.
- The indigenous Surface to Air Weapon systems Akash and Samar will demonstrate their capability to track and shoot down intruding aircraft.

#### Ranks & Reports News

#### Survey on Women's Workforce Participation in India

- The **Union Ministries of Labour & Employment and Women & Child Development** have initiated a joint survey to explore and enhance women's participation in the workforce.
- The announcement was made by Union Minister Smriti Irani during an event themed **"Women in the workforce for Viksit Bharat."**

#### Survey Objectives:

- The survey aims to assess the prevalence of women-friendly practices within companies across the country.
- Concerns expressed by international agencies, including the International Labour Organization, have prompted this initiative.

### Increasing Women Participation:

- The latest data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reveals a positive trend.
- In 2017-18, the women participation rate was **23.3%**, and by 2022-23, it has significantly increased to **37%**.

### Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

- The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is a crucial initiative conducted by the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)**.
- This **quarterly survey** is designed to gather data and generate estimates related to key employment and unemployment indicators at both the national and state levels.
- The PLFS was launched in **April 2017**.

### India's Snow Leopard Count: A Comprehensive Four-Year Survey

- Results of a first-of-its-kind, four-year-long estimation exercise on India's snow leopard population were made public.
- India is home to an estimated **718 snow leopards**.

#### Key Points:

- The **Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) initiative started in 2019**.
- Collaborative efforts involved the World Wide Fund for Nature-India, the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, and the Wildlife Institute of India.
- The **Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**, an autonomous body of the Union Environment Ministry, employed software and statistical methods to estimate the number of individual cats.

#### Geographical Distribution

- **Ladakh** emerged with the highest estimated number of **snow leopards (477)**, followed by **Uttarakhand (124)**, Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (9).
- These estimates provide crucial insights into the distribution of snow leopards across various mountainous terrains in India.
- The current estimate positions India's snow leopard population at **10% to 15% of the global population**.

#### Conservation Status and Threats

- **IUCN Red list Status: Vulnerable**

- Listed in **Schedule-I** species of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- Threats to the species include free-ranging dogs, human-wildlife conflicts, and poaching.

### Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 2023

- India's ranking on the **Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2023 is 93 out of 180 countries**.
- India's overall score in 2023 was **39, a minor decrease from 40 in 2022**.
- **The country's rank in 2022 was 85**.

#### Corruption Perception Index (CPI):

- The CPI is an annual assessment that evaluates countries based on their perceived levels of public sector corruption.
- Published by Transparency International, a global non-governmental organization combating corruption.

#### Key Points:

- **Scale:** Countries are scored on a scale of 0 to 100, where a higher score indicates lower perceived corruption and a cleaner public sector.
- **Ranking:** Based on their scores, countries are then ranked, with the least corrupt being positioned higher.
- **Data Sources:** The CPI aggregates data from various sources, including surveys and assessments by organizations and institutions that evaluate corruption levels.
- **Expert Opinions:** It includes the opinions of experts and business leaders regarding the level of corruption in the public sector.

### Core sector output growth slowed to a 14-month low in December

- Output growth of India's eight core sectors dropped to a **14-month low of 3.8% in December**.
- This is a significant decline compared to the 8.3% pace observed a year earlier and the revised growth of **7.9% in November 2023**.

#### Key Points:

- **Electricity generation**, with a 20% weightage in the Index of Core Industries (ICI), reached an eight-month low of 0.6% in December.
- **Crude oil** output contracted for the second consecutive month, shrinking by 1%, marking the sharpest decline since June 2023.



- **Coal production** grew by 10.6%, the slowest year-on-year uptick in six months, but output was at its highest level since April 2023.
- **Cement** output rebounded from a 4% contraction in November, expanding by 1.3% in December

**About:**

- The **Office of Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade releases Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)**.
- ICI measures combined and individual performance of production in selected eight core industries viz. Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement and Electricity.
- **The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27%** of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

**Sports News**

**Australian Open**

- Rohan Bopanna, in partnership with Matthew Ebden, achieves historic victory in men's doubles at the Australian Open.

**Key Points:**

- Bopanna, at 43 years, became the **oldest man to win a Grand Slam title in the Open era**.

**About:**

- The Australian Open, initially known as the Australasian Championships, commenced in **1905**.
- Renamed as the Australian Open in **1969**, it stands as the oldest Grand Slam tournament.
- The tournament occurs annually across two weeks, concluding with the finals held on the **last weekend of January**.
- **Melbourne Park**, a prominent sporting complex situated in Melbourne, Australia, serves as the hosting venue for the Australian Open.
- The Australian Open comprises **five primary events**: men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles, and mixed doubles.
- The Australian Open holds the prestigious title of being the inaugural Grand Slam tournament in any given calendar year.
- Australian Open is the lone Grand Slam event played on **hard courts**.

**Science and Technology News**

**ISRO's INSAT-3DS Satellite**

- The INSAT-3DS satellite flagged off to the launch port at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota** by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Scheduled to be launched on board GSLV F14 next month.

**Objectives and Significance:**

- Exclusive meteorological satellite designed to provide **continuity of services to existing INSAT-3D and 3DR satellites (which aid in weather monitoring)**
- Aims to significantly enhance the capabilities of the **INSAT system**.

**Advanced Payloads:**

- State-of-the-art payloads include a **six-channel imager and 19-channel sounder meteorology payloads**.
- Communication payloads, a **data relay transponder (DRT)**, and a **satellite-aided search and rescue (SAS&R) transponder**.
- DRT instrument receives meteorological and oceanographic data, augmenting weather forecasting capabilities.
- SAS&R transponder incorporated for relaying distress signals/alerts, facilitating global search and rescue services.

**Miscellaneous News**

**Laughing gull (Leucophaeus atricilla)**

**First-Time Sighting in the Country:**

- Laughing gull, a migratory bird from **North America**, discovered for the first time in the country.
- Sightings reported at the **Chittari estuary in Kasaragod district**.

**Key Points:**

- Known for **unique laughter-like calls**, the laughing gull traveled thousands of kilometers from North America to the **coastal region of Kerala**.

**Identification Amidst Diverse Avian Population:**

- Smaller than the **brown-headed gull**, with distinctive features such as a **dark upper part, black legs, long drooping bill, and a dark smudge on the back of the head**.

**Contribution to India's Bird Species Count:**

- The discovery elevates the total number of bird species found in India to **1,367**.
- Kasaragod district contributes **400 species** to the state's overall count of **554**.

#### Conservation Status:

- **Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List**, as the species has a large and stable population.

#### India's UNESCO World Heritage Nomination

- India has nominated the "**Maratha Military Landscapes**" for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for **2024-25**.
- This nomination highlights a network of forts showcasing the strategic military powers during the **Maratha rule**.

#### List of Nominated Forts:

- The 12 forts included in this nomination are the forts of **Salher, Shivneri, Lohagad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg and Sindhudurg** in Maharashtra and **Gingee** in Tamil Nadu.

#### Significance:

- The "Maratha Military Landscapes" evolved between the **17th and 19th centuries**.
- These landscapes represent an exceptional **fortification and military system** envisioned by Maratha rulers.
- The forts vary in hierarchies, scales, and typological features, reflecting integration with distinctive landscapes—**Sahyadri mountain ranges, Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau, and Eastern Ghats**.

#### Eravikulam National Park

- The park undergoes closure from February 1 for the calving season of the **Nilgiri Tahr**.
- This annual closure is essential for the protection and conservation of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr during their breeding period.

#### Eravikulam National Park Overview:

- Established in **1978**, Eravikulam National Park is the first national park in Kerala.
- Originally created to protect the endangered **Nilgiri Tahr**, it has evolved into a diverse ecosystem supporting various flora and fauna.
- The park is named after the **Neelakurinji flower**, known for its enchanting blue bloom occurring every 12 years.

#### Geography:

- Located in the **Kannan Devan Hills**, part of the Western Ghats mountain range.
- No major rivers flow within the park, but numerous perennial streams intersect, eventually becoming tributaries of the Periyar and Cauvery rivers.
- **Lakkom Waterfalls**, an attractive natural feature, is situated within the park's boundaries.
- **Anamudi, South India's highest peak** at 2,695 meters, is a prominent feature of the park.

#### World Wetlands Day 2024

- World Wetlands Day is observed annually on **February 2** to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands and their conservation.
- This day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran**, an international treaty aimed at conserving and sustainably using wetlands around the world.
- **India** is also the part of Ramsar Convention and is one of the most active players in the group.
- Recently, the number of wetlands in India grew from **75 to 80**.

#### Theme:

The theme for World Wetlands Day changes each year to focus on different aspects of wetland conservation and management. Likewise, the theme of World Wetlands Day 2024 is '**Wetlands and human wellbeing**'.

#### Martand Sun temple

Recently, members of a lesser-known Hindutva group forcibly entered the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected Martand Sun Temple**, raising concerns about the temple's security.

#### About:

##### Historical Significance

- Built in the **8th century by King Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota Dynasty**, the Martand Sun Temple serves as a testament to the ruler's political ambitions and desire to showcase his authority through grand construction.
- Reflecting **Kashmiri architecture**, the temple seamlessly integrates Greek, Roman, Iranian, and Indian styles, creating a masterpiece

celebrated for its grandeur and artistic excellence.

- Situated atop a plateau, the temple offers breathtaking views, designed as a **colonnaded mandapa encircled by a courtyard**.
- The central shrine dedicated to the **Sun God**, originally surrounded by **84 smaller shrines**, features intricately carved columns illustrating scenes from Hindu mythology, including deities, celestial beings, and mythological figures.
- Noteworthy is the **influence of Greek, Gandharan, Gupta, and Chinese architectural** styles, creating a unique fusion that reflects the cultural assimilation of the region.

### Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

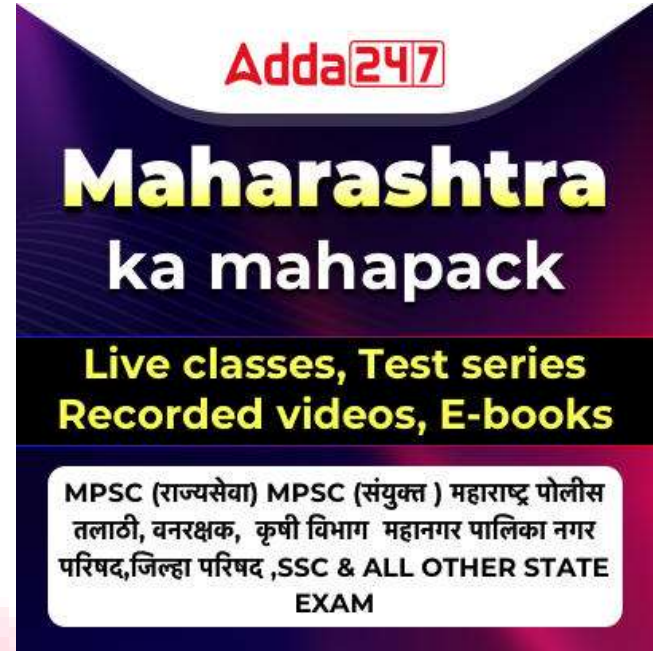
- The Tamil Nadu government officially declares **Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary as the 18th wildlife sanctuary in the state**.
- Designation covers 80,114.80 hectares of reserve forests in **Bargur Hills, Erode district**.

#### Geographical Significance:

- Functions as a critical corridor linking the **Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve with the Cauvery South Wildlife Sanctuary**.
- Occupies a strategic position in the Eastern Ghats, merging with the Western Ghats at the Nilgiris.

#### Role in Conservation:

- Functions as a corridor connecting the **Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) to the Male Mahadeshwara Hills Tiger Reserve** and the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It plays a crucial role in maintaining a viable tiger population, identified as a tiger corridor by the National Tiger Conservation Authority.



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