

## National and International Weekly Current Affairs 05 to 11 Feb 2024

### National News

#### Micro Credentials - In Higher Education

- **Higher education institutes (HEIs)** in India are urged to actively **address the employability gap** among students by connecting them with future career opportunities.
- The disparity between knowledge acquired in HEIs and the skills needed for employment highlights the need for innovative solutions.

#### Understanding Micro-Credentials:

- Micro-credentials are **short-duration learning activities** with validated outcomes, offered online, physically, or in hybrid modes.
- Unlike traditional degrees, which require several years of study, **micro-credentials provide a 'just-in-time' approach** to acquiring modern skills.
- They cater to lifelong learners, including working professionals unable to attend formal degree programs.
- **Micro-credentials**, being portable and stackable on digital platforms like the **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)**, offer students the flexibility to integrate diverse skills into their education.

#### Way forward:

- **Indian HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions)** must embrace the role of agents of transformation by incorporating micro-credentials into their strategic goals.
- **Regulators and HEIs** should collaborate to harmonize micro-credentials with existing academic programs, establishing clear validation metrics.

#### C-CARES Web Portal

Union Minister of Coal, Mines, and Parliamentary Affairs, Shri Pralhad Joshi, recently inaugurated the C-CARES web portal developed by C-DAC for CMPFO.

#### Key points:

- C-CARES, designed by the **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)**, addresses the digitalization challenges of CMPFO, aiming to modernize its record-keeping and operational processes.
- Established in **1948** under the Ministry of Coal, **CMPFO is an autonomous organization**

managing Provident Fund and Pension schemes for coal sector workers.

- Currently, it serves 3.3 lakh Provident Fund subscribers and 6.1 lakh pensioners in the coal sector.

#### CBSE Urges Schools for National Credit Framework Preparation

- CBSE has requested affiliated schools to plan **credit allocation patterns** in line with the **National Credit Framework (NCrF)**.
- Draft guidelines have been proposed by **CBSE**, currently open for feedback.

#### Credit Allocation and Subject Structure:

- CBSE plans to introduce a **new credit framework for Classes 9 to 12**, emphasizing the allocation of credits to subjects.
- Students are required to clear five subjects, with additional hours allocated for **internal assessments in subjects like Physical Education, Health, Art Education, and a third language**.

#### Expansion of Subjects:

- The proposal suggests an expansion of compulsory subjects from 5 to 10 for Classes 9 and 10.
- Additional subjects include a compulsory **third language, interdisciplinary studies, physical education, art education, and a skill-related subject**.

Schools are encouraged to adopt the credit system internally to ensure preparedness for official implementation next year.

#### Delimitation Exercise

- Delimitation entails **fixing the number of seats and boundaries of constituencies**, including reserved seats for SC and ST, as per **Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution**.
- It's carried out by the **Delimitation Commission after each Census**.

#### Background:

- Delimitation has been frozen as per the **1971 Census** in order to encourage population control measures.
- This was done through the **42nd Amendment Act till the year 2000 and was extended by the 84th Amendment Act till 2026**.

#### Issues:

- The uneven population growth among states poses challenges.
- Discussions revolve around **redistributing seats among states or increasing the total number of seats, both potentially disadvantageous to certain regions.**

#### International Practices

- **United States:** Seats in the House of Representatives are redistributed after each Census, aiming for equal proportion representation among states.
- **European Union:** The EU Parliament allocates seats based on a principle of degressive proportionality, where population size influences the number of seats.

(Mentioned figure is just an estimate)

#### Request for Neutrality

- The United Naga Council (UNC) Appeals for Non-involvement of Nagas in **Meitei-Kuki-Zo Conflict.**
- The UNC, representing Nagas in Manipur, seeks to distance Nagas from the ongoing ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zos.

#### Overview of Ethnic Violence in Manipur

- On 3 May 2023, ethnic tensions flared up in Manipur, a north-eastern state in India, primarily between the **Meitei community residing in the Imphal Valley and the Kuki-Zo tribal group inhabiting the surrounding hills.**

#### Causes:

- Following a court directive on 14 April 2023, the **Manipur High Court instructed the state government to forward a proposal to the central government regarding the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.**

#### Cabinet Approval for Multi-Tracking Projects

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved **six multi-tracking projects across Indian Railways.**
- These projects aim to **enhance travel convenience, reduce logistics costs, decrease oil imports, and lower CO2 emissions.**

#### Key points:

- During the construction phase, the projects are anticipated to generate approximately **three crore man-days of direct employment.**
- The financial outlay for these projects is estimated to be around **Rs 12,343 crore**, with an expected completion timeline by **2029-30.**
- The projects span across 18 districts in six states—**Rajasthan, Assam, Telangana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Nagaland—expanding the Indian Railways network by 1020 kilometers.**
- The projects are part of the **PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan** for multimodal connectivity, emphasizing integrated planning to facilitate seamless movement of people, goods, and services.

#### Legislative Changes in Jammu and Kashmir

- The Rajya Sabha recently passed bills to include various communities into the **Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) lists in Jammu and Kashmir.**
- Among the amendments, the **Pahari ethnic group** was added to the **ST list**, addressing the ongoing protests by the **Gujjar-Bakarwal community.**
- Additionally, the Bills incorporated the Paddari Tribe, Gadda Brahmin, and Koli communities into the **ST list.**
- The **Valmiki community**, along with its synonyms, was included in the **SC list.**

#### DigiReady Certification (DRC) Portal

- The DRC portal is a collaborative effort between the **Quality Council of India (QCI) and the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC).**

It aims to evaluate and certify the digital preparedness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (**MSMEs**) for seamless integration as sellers on the ONDC platform.

#### Maharashtra State News

#### World Cancer Day

- **World Cancer Day** is observed annually on **February 4th**
- It was initiated on **February 4, 2000**, at the **World Summit Against Cancer for the New Millennium in Paris.**

- It aims to unite the world in the fight against cancer.
- **Between 2022 and 2024, the focus of World Cancer Day is to help “Close the cancer gap.”**
- The **theme** for this year is **“Together, we challenge those in power”**.
- This theme encompasses the global demand for leaders to prioritize and invest in cancer prevention and care and to do more to achieve a just and cancer-free world

#### About:

- Cancer is a complex group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled cell growth that can invade and damage surrounding tissues.
- It often arises from genetic mutations within cells, leading to abnormal proliferation and disruptions in the body's natural regulatory mechanisms.
- While cancer can affect any part of the body, various factors influence individual risk and specific types.

#### Panel for effective implementation of sickle cell disease programme

- The Maharashtra government has established a **committee for the first time to ensure the effective implementation of the Sickle Cell Disease Control Programme.**
- The state government has issued **directives for the formation of committees at the state, district, and taluka levels**
- It also assigns them the critical tasks of investigating, treating, and preventing sickle cell disease.
- This initiative is specifically tailored to **address the healthcare needs of rural, remote, and tribal areas.**

#### Open varsity signs MoUs for training of drone operators

- The **Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)** has signed **Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** with **several institutions** to offer **training programs for drone operators.**
- It will be in line with the **National Education Policy 2020** with the aim to provide all possible measures to develop skills of people that will increase their employability.

This initiative also aims to:

- Address the growing demand for skilled drone operators in various sectors.
- Provide accessible and affordable drone training to individuals across India.
- Equip trainees with the knowledge and skills to operate drones safely and effectively, complying with regulations.

#### BoM records highest growth in deposit mobilization among PSU banks in Q3

- **Bank of Maharashtra has recorded the highest growth rate** in terms of **deposit mobilization** among public sector lenders at a time when most lenders are facing difficulty in **achieving double-digit growth.**
- Out of 12 **public sector banks, only Bank of Maharashtra and State Bank of India (could log a double-digit growth** in deposits in the **third quarter** ended December 2023.
- The **Pune-based lender Bank of Maharashtra reported a 17.89% growth in deposits followed by SBI at 12.84%** during the quarter, according to published quarterly numbers of the public sector banks.

#### Olympian Dattu Bhokanal caps comeback with sprint single scull gold

- **Dattu Bhokanal has won the men's singles scull gold in the National Sprint rowing championships** at the Army Rowing Node.
- He is an Olympian and Asian Games **gold medallist in quadruple scull**, pipped Services rower Salman Khan **by three-tenth of a second**, crossing the finish line in 1 minute 29.5 seconds compared to the latter's 1:29.8, to claim the title.

#### International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

- The **International Day of Zero Tolerance for female genital mutilation (FGM)** is observed annually on **6 February.**
- This provides an opportunity for all stakeholders involved in **ending FGM to celebrate achievements**, advocate for abandonment of the practice and raise awareness.
- **2024 Theme: Her Voice. Her Future**
- This year marks the 13th anniversary of this international day.

- In 2024, nearly 4.4 million girls - or more than 12,000 each day - are at risk of FGM around the world.

### Mascot of Pench Tiger Reserve

- **Hori, a Malabar pied hornbill**, has been chosen as the **mascot for the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR)**.
- Known as **Dhanesh in Marathi** and Dhan Chidiya by local tribals, the bird holds cultural significance in the region.
- The PTR management has officially named the mascot "**Hori**".

### Pench Tiger Reserve:

- Maharashtra, being the third largest state in India and a leader in protecting biodiversity, bears **maximum numbers (six) of tiger reserves in India along with Madhya Pradesh**.
- Pench Tiger Reserve situated in the **northern part of eastern Vidarbha** is spread in Ramtek, Parseoni and Saoner tehsil of Nagpur district.
- **It is the 25th tiger reserve of India.**
- The Pench Tiger reserve (PTR) which derives its name from its lifeline - **the River Pench is spread over 741.41 Sq.km of area.**

### Government Initiatives to Combat Air Pollution

- In response to a directive from the Bombay High Court, the BMC introduced a new Android application named "**Mumbai Air**" to address complaints related to air pollution.
- The app's launch was part of the **court's order to establish a website and mobile app for this purpose.**

### Establishment of State-Level Committee

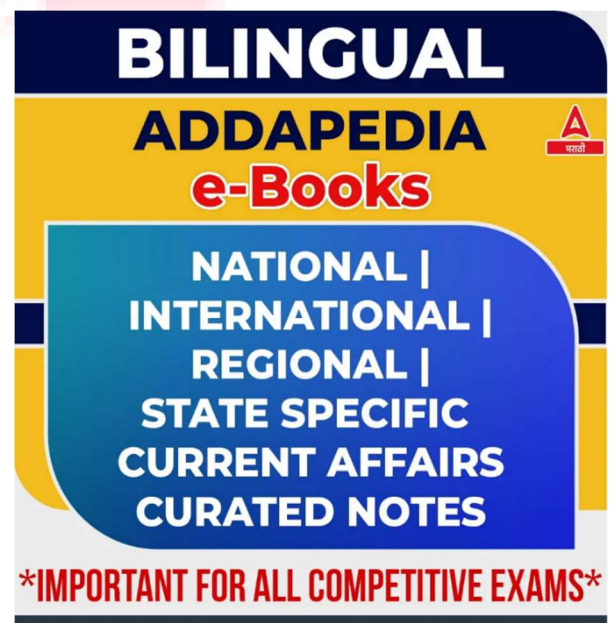
- The state environment department has established a state-level committee aimed at **devising strategies to alleviate the prevalent air pollution issues within the city.**
- This move comes after the Bombay High Court, prompted by various reports and a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), mandated the enactment of legislation akin to the central **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act to combat the alarming Air Quality Index (AQI) and pollution levels in Mumbai.**

### Thane's New Landmark

- Thane, known as the City of Lakes, is unveiling a new landmark, the **Grand Central Park, spanning 20.5 acres in Kolshet.**
- Chief Minister Eknath Shinde will inaugurate this public park on February 8.
- The Grand Central Park draws inspiration from iconic parks like **New York's Grand Central Park and London's Hyde Park.**
- It's a product of the Thane Municipal Corporation's Suvidha plot development project.
- Boasting over **3,500 tree species**, the park offers diverse amenities for visitors.
- It includes themed sections such as **Mughal, Chinese, Moroccan, and Japanese gardens.**
- **The Grand Central Park stands as Thane's largest developed park among its 80-plus parks.**

### BMC Budget 2024-25

- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has unveiled a budget of **₹59,954.75 crore for the financial year 2024-25, marking a notable increase of 10.5% compared to the previous fiscal year.**
- The civic administration presented the budget to municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal, who was appointed as BMC administrator by the state government after the five-year term of corporators ended in March 2022.



## Major Green Initiative: Maharashtra to Convert 5000 Diesel Buses to LNG

- Maharashtra is undertaking an initiative to convert 5000 of its diesel buses to Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)
- It marks a significant stride towards environmental sustainability and cleaner air.
- This will reduce diesel vehicle pollution by 10%.
- The conversion will be done in six phases, with a provision for LNG fuel in 90 stations across the state.
- In order to promote green transportation, the industry department has collaborated with Kings Gas Pvt.
- This transformative project is anticipated to yield substantial benefits, including:
  - Reduced Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions
  - Improved Air Quality
  - Enhanced Public Health
  - Economic Advantages
  - Energy Security

## Maharashtra Government Releases Guidelines for Student Internships Across Diverse Sectors

- Maharashtra govt issues guidelines for student internships, encouraging collaboration with industries, NGOs, and professionals.
- As per the National Education Policy, internships are mandatory for 8-12 credits.
- Each college is required to establish an internship cell, offering diverse opportunities and conducting preparatory programs.
- Students can list preferences, and colleges must select projects aligning with local industry needs.
- Alongside industries, NGOs, financial institutions, and banks, students can also pursue internships under professionals, such as chartered accountants, lawyers, or artists.
- After internships, students present comprehensive reports, promoting knowledge exchange.

## Mumbai region reports 26% animal bites; rabies deaths rise 3-fold in Maharashtra

- The Mumbai region has seen a significant rise in animal bites, with a 26% increase reported in the past five years.
- WHO estimates that rabies kills 55,000 each year, including 20,000 from India.
- In 2023, Maharashtra registered 30 rabies deaths as compared to 10 in 2019.
- Maharashtra witnessed a concerning 3-fold increase in rabies deaths within the same period.

### About:

- Rabies is a vaccine-preventable viral disease that spreads from animal bites and is 100% fatal except in a couple of cases in the world.

## Agency charge reduced to 1% from 5% for CC roads plan

- Despite concerns expressed by two members, the state cabinet has approved Rs 28,500 crore to construct 6,000km of cement concrete roads through the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM).
- The state provides 30% of funds while 70% is raised by the concessionaire from the market.
- The concessionaire is Maharashtra State Infrastructure Development Corporation (MSIDC), formed last May under the public works department.

## Green growth can drive Maha to meet \$1tn economy target

- The International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST), a prominent environmental think tank, has called for a just energy transition in Maharashtra to support green growth and green jobs and to achieve a \$1 trillion economy in five years.
- iFOREST recently released a report at an event 'Just Energy Transition in Maharashtra: An Opportunity for Green Growth and Green Jobs'.
- The report, which is the first comprehensive assessment of challenges and opportunities of a green energy transition in the state, covers all major sectors that will be

highly or moderately impacted in the years to come.

- It highlights opportunities for green growth and jobs which can be catalyzed through the right govt policy levers, and required private and public investments.

### **Pilot vaccination drive against Japanese Encephalitis for children from March**

- The state health department, by march, will initiate a pilot vaccination drive against Japanese Encephalitis (JE) for children in four regions of Maharashtra including Pune city, Pimpri-Chinchwad, Raigad and Parbhani.
- The first phase of the JE vaccination for children was carried out a couple of years ago in 16 districts of Maharashtra including Gondia, Gadchiroli, Wardha, Solapur, Bhandara and Dharashiv among others.

About:

- Japanese encephalitis (JE) is a potentially life-threatening mosquito-borne viral infection primarily affecting the brain.
- The causative agent is the Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV), a member of the flavivirus family, closely related to dengue, yellow fever, and West Nile viruses.
- JEV is transmitted primarily through the bites of infected Culex mosquitoes, particularly active at dusk and dawn in rural areas.
- Pigs and wild birds serve as virus reservoirs, but direct transmission from person to person is not possible.

### **Tata Trusts to launch India's first small animal hospital in Mumbai**

- Tata Trusts is set to launch India's first state-of-the-art Small Animal Hospital in Mahalaxmi, Mumbai.
- The hospital is a first-of-its-kind and spans over 98,000-square-foot, across 5 floors with a capacity of over 200 beds.
- Inspired by philanthropist and former Tata Group Chairman Ratan Tata's vision for a super speciality hospital for pets, the facility will provide round the clock services through pet-sensitized veterinarians, nurses and technicians trained to deliver quality care with a mission to save lives.

- The hospital will be launched in March 2024.

### **CM announces 837cr for Maha project on cybersecurity**

- MH CM at the formal inauguration of the Maharashtra State Police Games 2024 (Feb 4 to Feb 10) in Nashik said that the govt has taken up a project worth Rs 837 crore to enhance the cybersecurity mechanism
- It includes command and control centre, technology-assisted investigation, centre of excellence, cloud based data centre, security operation centre for cybersecurity to enable the police to look into every angle and details of crimes to catch the culprits
- The state is committed to increasing the manpower in the police force for which it has recruited 17,000 policemen.
- The govt has also decided to start a loan scheme for construction of houses for police through banks as earlier.

### **Art of Living launches Kisan Basket, signs MoU with state to promote natural farming**

- Global spiritual organization Art of Living Foundation launched Kisan Basket, a platform that will allow consumers to directly order from farmers.
- The Foundation signed an MoU with the state government to this effect in the presence of Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.
- The organization said they are already implementing natural farming over 1.3 million hectares in the state to bring about holistic rural development.
- More than 10,000 tribal farmers have been trained around Sambhaji Nagar district in natural farming and sustainable agriculture, making them self-reliant.

Did you Know?

- The project found mention in PM Modi's Mann Ki Baat show as well.

### **Adani's Gondkhairi coal mine secures EC, path clear for pollution board application**

- The Adani Group has got the environmental clearance (EC) from the ministry of forest environment and climate change (MOEFCC)

for its underground coal mine at Gondkhairi in Kalmeshwar taluka, 20 km from the city.

- This is the first mine of Adani Group in Maharashtra.
- The EC paves the way for the company to apply for consent to operate before the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB).

## National Deworming Day

About:

- This coal mine project has been a source of concern due to its potential environmental impact. Coal mining can release harmful pollutants into the air and water, and can also contribute to climate change.
- The project has also been criticized for its potential displacement of local communities.
- National Deworming Day (NDD) is observed annually on February 10th in India
- It aims to make every child in the country "worm-free."
- It was launched in 2015, and the initiative targets children aged 1-19 years, both enrolled and non-enrolled in schools, through platforms like schools and Anganwadi centers.
- Theme of National Deworming Day 2024 is "Eliminate STH: Invest in a healthier future for children"
- It revolves around public health, with a specific focus on preventing and controlling parasitic worm infections, particularly in children

Significance:

Reduces worm infections:

- Soil-transmitted helminths (intestinal worms) are prevalent in India, leading to health issues like anemia, malnutrition, impaired cognitive development, and reduced school attendance. NDD tackles this by mass deworming children.

Improves overall health:

- By eliminating worms, NDD improves children's overall health, nutritional status, and quality of life, contributing to better educational outcomes and future potential.

## World Pulses Day

- In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly declared February 10 as World Pulses Day.
- This day was established to emphasize the importance of pulses in mitigating global food challenges, improving human health, and improving soil health.
- This includes dry edible seeds like lentils, chickpeas, beans, and dry peas.
- The theme for World Pulses Day 2024 is 'Pulses: Nourishing soil and people.'
- This theme emphasizes the positive impact of pulses on both soil health and human nutrition.

Did you Know?

- Burkina Faso proposed the observance of World Pulses Day.
- The Year 2016 was declared as the International Year of Pulses.
- India is the largest producer of pulses in the world.

## Move to eradicate bonded labour in Katkari community

- The Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission has moved to eradicate bonded labour prevalent among members of the Katkari community, which is under the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) category.

About:

- The Katkari community is an Adivasi (indigenous) group in Maharashtra, facing a severe issue of bonded labor, also known as "vethbigari."
- This system traps families in debt-based servitude, often lasting generations.
- Despite its illegality since 1976, various factors contribute to its persistence.

Challenges:

- Deep-rooted Social Structures
- Illiteracy and Lack of Awareness
- Livelihood Insecurity
- Inadequate Law Enforcement

## Govt approves new alignment of Shaktipeeth Mahamarg

- MH State govt approved the alignment of the Maharashtra Shakti Peeth Mahamarg,

the **greenfield expressway** to connect Nagpur and Goa.

- The **802-km-long expressway** will pass through **12 districts**.
- Once completed, it will be the **longest expressway in the state**.
- The **Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC)** will execute the project.

### State News

#### Uttar Pradesh Model for Tackling Malnutrition

- Uttar Pradesh demonstrates the effectiveness of **women's empowerment in combating malnutrition** through community-based micro enterprises.
- Self-help groups produce **fortified and nutritious foods** for pregnant/breastfeeding mothers and children, distributed through the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** programme.

#### ICDS Programme:

- The Umbrella scheme - **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** is a centrally sponsored scheme initiated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 1975.

#### Schemes under ICDS

- Anganwadi Services Scheme
- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
- National Creche Scheme
- Scheme for Adolescent Girls
- Child Protection Scheme
- POSHAN Abhiyaan

#### Major Objectives of ICDS:

- Improve the nutritional and health status of children aged **0-6 years**.
- Ensure proper **psychological, physical, and social development of the child**.
- Reduce **mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and school dropout rates**.
- Coordinate policy and implementation across departments.
- Enhance the capability of mothers to meet the health and nutritional needs of their children.

- **Educate and empower adolescent girls for self-reliance and awareness.**

#### Uttarakhand's UCC Bill

- Uttarakhand Chief Minister **Pushkar Singh Dhami** presents the **Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the State Assembly**.
- The UCC encompasses various aspects such as live-in relationships and divorce, aiming for uniformity across communities.
- Notably, **Scheduled Tribes** are excluded from the Bill's provisions.

#### Key Provisions

- The UCC ensures equal rights in divorce matters, eliminating practices like **'Halala' and 'Iddat'**.
- Marriages under the UCC are restricted to **one man and one woman**, with specified ages for marriage.
- Registration of marriages and divorces becomes mandatory, **penalizing non-compliance**.
- The Bill addresses **live-in relationships**, imposing penalties for non-registration or false information.
- **Children** born from such relationships are recognized as legitimate under the UCC.
- **Sons and daughters are granted equal rights** in property inheritance, regardless of their status.
- **Widows and children gain equal inheritance** rights in a deceased person's property, a departure from previous laws.

#### About UCC:

- **Article 44**, enshrined in Chapter IV of the 1950 Constitution of India, outlines that **"The State shall make efforts to ensure the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) across all of India's territories."**
- **Chapter IV of the Indian Constitution elaborates on DPSP (Articles 36-51)**, which are guidelines for the State to enact policies for the overall welfare of society.
- Our Constituent Assembly adopted the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) from the **1937 Irish Constitution**.
- The UCC seeks to establish uniform personal laws applicable to all religions in India.



- Areas covered by the UCC include Marriage, Inheritance, Maintenance, Guardianship, Succession, Adoption, and others.

### International News

#### Myanmar's Civil Unrest

- Myanmar's internal conflict intensifies as opposition to military rule strengthens, with **Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) gaining control in various regions.**
- The recent capture of **Paletwa by the Arakan Army**, a town with strategic importance on the **western border**, underscores the growing complexity of the situation.
- The fall of Paletwa shifts the dynamics between the Chin and Arakan ethnic groups, sparking tensions over historical territorial claims.

#### Impact on Kaladan Project:

- The developments in Paletwa affect **India's Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)**, aimed at providing **northeast India with an alternative trade route.**
- Delays in the Kaladan project are attributed to various challenges, including security concerns and local attitudes toward the project.

#### China's Economic Expansion and Geopolitical Influence

- China's investments in Myanmar, particularly in the **Rakhine State**, include **oil and gas pipelines** and plans for a deep-sea port and economic zone.
- **The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)** aims to further enhance connectivity between the two countries, potentially altering regional power dynamics.
- China's influence in Myanmar poses challenges for **India's connectivity and development projects, necessitating a nuanced approach to regional diplomacy.**

#### India - China Bilateral Trade

- In 2023, India-China bilateral trade surged to a new peak, surpassing the previous year's figures despite a temporary slowdown.
- The Chinese envoy to India, **Ma Jia**, disclosed that trade between the two countries reached **\$136.2 billion.**

#### Key points:

- Ma Jia revealed that bilateral trade volume in **2023 saw a year-on-year growth of 1.5%**, with India's exports to China also experiencing a notable 6% increase.
- The year 2022 witnessed a significant milestone in bilateral trade, with transactions amounting to **\$135.98 billion.**
- Notably, imports from China exceeded **\$100 billion, marking a 21% increase** despite persistent tensions over the military standoff at the **Line of Actual Control (LAC).**

#### US Environmental Protection Efforts

- The Biden administration introduces **stricter standards to combat soot pollution**, aiming to reduce fine particle matter emitted from various sources.
- The initiative anticipates **preventing thousands of premature deaths** annually, receiving praise from environmental and public health groups.

#### Policy Details and Impact

- The new rule sets a **maximum level of 9 micrograms of fine particle pollution per cubic meter of air**, down from the previous standard of 12 micrograms.
- It imposes air quality targets for states and countries to meet, affecting various sources of pollution such as power plants, vehicles, industries, and wildfires.

### 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

#### Tax-to-GDP Ratio Set to Reach New High in FY25

- Revenue Secretary, Sanjay Malhotra, forecasts **India's tax-to-GDP ratio to hit a**

record 11.7% in 2024-25, with direct taxes leading the increase.

- Simplification and rationalization of the tax regime are ongoing to minimize disputes and enforcement issues.

#### Key findings:

- This is primarily because of direct taxes increasing from **6.1% of GDP in 2022-23 to 6.6% this year and 6.7% next year.**
- As the economy grows and per capita income increases, the tax-to-GDP also increases.
- Malhotra anticipates a surge in direct tax collection, driven by more taxpayers opting for the new tax regime.
- The new regime offers a higher tax-free income threshold but disallows deductions.

### Summits & Conferences News

#### 1st BIMSTEC Aquatics Championships

- Anurag Singh Thakur initiated the BIMSTEC Aquatics Championships 2024 in **New Delhi's Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Swimming Pool Complex which will be held from February 6th to 9th, 2024.**
- The championship marks the first of its kind within the **BIMSTEC region.**

#### Vision and Background

- Narendra Modi announced the **BIMSTEC Youth Water Sports competition during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in 2018.**
- Initially planned for 2021, the event was rescheduled to 2024 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Competitions include Swimming, Water Polo, and Diving events for the Under 20 age category.

#### BIMSTEC:

- BIMSTEC (**The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**) constitutes a unique link between South and South-East Asian countries with five members from **South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka)** and two members from **South-East Asia (Myanmar & Thailand).**
- BIMSTEC It is an economic bloc that came into being in **June 1997** through the **Bangkok Declaration.**

- BIMSTEC was initially formed with four member states- Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand on June 6, 1997.
- Nepal became an observer state in 1998 and became a full-time member of the bloc along with Bhutan in February 2004.

#### World Sustainable Development Summit 2024

- **Annual Flagship Event:** The WSDS is the annual flagship event of The **Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).**
- **Legacy:** Instituted in 2001, the Summit series has a legacy of over two decades, aiming to make '**sustainable development**' a globally shared goal.
- **Global South Focus:** It is the only independently convened international summit on sustainable development and environment, with a focus on the Global South.
- **Objective:** WSDS strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of global communities by assembling the world's most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform.
- **23rd Edition:** WSDS 2024 marks the **23rd edition of the summit.**
- **Theme:** The theme for WSDS 2024 is '**Leadership for Sustainable Development and Climate Justice**'.

#### The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)

- **Leading Think Tank:** TERI is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for the sustainable development of India and the Global South.
- **Multidimensional Organization:** It is an independent, multidimensional organization with capabilities in research, policy, consultancy, and implementation.
- **History:** Established in 1974 as an information center on energy issues, TERI initiated research activities in 1982 with a focus on efficient utilization of energy and sustainable use of natural resources.

#### Focus Areas:

- Promoting efficient use of resources
- Increasing access to and uptake of sustainable inputs and practices
- Reducing the impact on the environment and climate.
- **Location:** TERI is headquartered in New Delhi.

## Indian Ocean Conference

- The 7th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) 2024, was held on February 9-10, 2024, in **Perth, Australia**.
- **It was attended by representatives from 40 countries and Foreign Ministers from various regional nations participated in the event.**

### Conference Objectives:

The primary focus of the conference was to facilitate discussions on regional cooperation and propose solutions concerning:

- **Regional security**
- **Economic development**
- **Environmental protection**
- **Maritime safety within the Indian Ocean region.**

### Theme:

- The theme of the conference was "**Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean,**" emphasizing the importance of stability and sustainability in the region's geopolitical and environmental landscape.

### About:

IOC is an annual event fostering cooperation between countries bordering the Indian Ocean.

## Schemes and Committees News

### 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.

### Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana

- The Union Cabinet has greenlit the implementation of the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana**, a subsidiary scheme falling under the broader **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana**.
- This scheme primarily targets **micro and small enterprises within the fisheries sector.**

### Key points:

- The scheme is anticipated to witness an investment of **₹6,000 crore** over the span of the next four years (FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27) in all States/Union Territories.
- Cabinet also sanctioned an extension of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund until **2026**.

### Objectives of PM-MKSSY

- **Incremental formalization** of the **unorganized fisheries sector** by encouraging self-registration of fishers, fish farmers, and supportive workers via a **National Fisheries Sector Digital Platform**.
- Providing **one-time incentives** to beneficiaries for acquiring aquaculture insurance.
- Encouraging the growth of fisheries and aquaculture microenterprises through performance grants.
- Facilitating access to **institutional financing** for micro and small enterprises within the fisheries sector.
- Motivating **micro and small enterprises** with performance grants to adopt and expand fish and fishery product safety and quality assurance systems.

### Swadesh Darshan Scheme

- The Ministry of Tourism has added the **UNESCO World Heritage sites of Ajanta and Ellora caves** in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar to the **Swadesh Darshan Scheme II**.
- This initiative aims to foster sustainable and responsible tourism destinations in India.

### About:

- The **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**, launched in **2015** by the **Ministry of Tourism**, Government of India, focuses on developing sustainable and responsible tourism destinations nationwide.

- It operates on **100% central funding**, assisting states, Union Territories, and Central Agencies in tourism infrastructure development.

### Swadesh Darshan 2.0

- SD2.0 seeks to attract **private sector investments and foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in tourism**, focusing on infrastructure operation and maintenance.
- **Themes:** Major tourism themes identified under SD2.0 include Culture and Heritage, Adventure Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Wellness Tourism, MICE Tourism, Rural Tourism, Beach Tourism, and Cruises – Ocean & Inland.

### Awards News

### 66th Annual Grammy Awards

- The 66th Annual Grammy Awards, hosted by Trevor Noah, showcased the music industry's elite at the Crypto.com Arena in **Los Angeles, California**.

### Best Global Music Album: Shakti's "This Moment"

- Musicians **Shankar Mahadevan and Zakir Hussain's fusion band Shakti** won the Grammy Award for Best Global Music Album with their latest release, **"This Moment."**
- The group, including guitarist John McLaughlin and others, received recognition for their exceptional contribution to global music.

### Album of the Year: Taylor Swift's "Midnights"

- American singer-songwriter **Taylor Swift** secured the highly anticipated Album of the Year award for her album **"Midnights,"** surpassing notable nominees such as SZA, Jon Batiste, and others.

### Record of the Year: Miley Cyrus' "Flowers"

- Miley Cyrus' hit **"Flowers"** bagged the Record of the Year award, adding to the night's diverse musical achievements.

### Song of the Year: Billie Eilish's "What Was I Made For?"

- Billie Eilish's soulful ballad **"What Was I Made For?"** from Greta Gerwig's fantasy comedy

Barbie was named the Song of the Year, contributing to the celebration of musical excellence.

### Trevor Noah's Fourth Hosting Stint

- South African comedian and writer **Trevor Noah** hosted the Grammy Awards for the fourth time, infusing humor and charisma into the evening.

### Bharat Ratna Awardees Announced

- The Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor, will be conferred upon three notable figures: **M.S. Swaminathan, P.V. Narasimha Rao, and Chaudhary Charan Singh**.
- These individuals join the list of esteemed awardees, which includes **L.K. Advani and Karpooori Thakur**, making this year's tally the longest ever announced.

### Key points:

- This year's announcement marks a record with **five Bharat Ratna awardees**, surpassing the previous highest count from 1999.
- Notably, four out of the five awards are being given **posthumously**.

### Defense News

### 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

#### 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).

### Science and Technology News

#### Ergosphere: making a black hole work

- Rotating black holes, also known as **Kerr black holes**, originate from massive stars that exhaust their fuel, leading to a **supernova explosion.**
- The remaining **core** collapses under its own gravity, **forming a black hole.**

#### Nature of Black Hole Center:

- The **core of a black hole** contains a gravitational singularity, where the principles of general relativity break down.
- The immense gravitational pull of a black hole originates from this singularity.

#### Event Horizon and Singularity:

- The event horizon, a **spherical boundary** around the singularity, prevents anything from escaping once inside, unless it surpasses the speed of light—an impossibility.
- The gravitational pull of the black hole is experienced beyond this boundary.

#### Ergosphere:

- Beyond the **event horizon**, rotating black holes possess an **ergosphere, a larger sphere allowing objects to enter and exit if moving rapidly**, but still below the speed of light.
- The term 'ergosphere' is derived from the Greek word 'ergon,' meaning 'work.'

- It is named so because **matter and energy can be extracted from the ergosphere, unlike beyond the event horizon.**

### Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)

- The Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy has announced the **installation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)** equipment in thermal power plants to comply with emission norms set by regulatory bodies.

#### Proposed norms:

For TPPs installed prior to 31st December 2016: the permissible emission of SO<sub>2</sub> - 600mg/Nm<sup>3</sup> for < 500 MW TPPs; 200mg/Nm<sup>3</sup> for TPPs having > 500 MW capacity, For all TPPs installed after 1st January 2017: 100mg/Nm<sup>3</sup>.

#### Installation Timelines for FGD Equipment

To meet Sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emission norms, thermal power plants are installing FGD equipment with specified timelines based on location categories:

##### Category A:

- Within 10 km radius of National Capital Region (NCR) or cities with a population of one million or more (as per 2011 census).
- Deadline: 31st December 2024.

##### Category B:

- Within 10 km radius of Critically Polluted Areas or Non-attainment cities as defined by CPCB.
- Deadline: 31st December 2025.

##### Category C:

- Areas not included in Category A or B.
- Deadline: 31st December 2026.

### Miscellaneous News

### India Energy Week 2024

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate India second edition of **Energy Week 2024 in Goa** on Tuesday.

#### Overview:

- The Energy Week, scheduled from February 6 to 9, will be India's largest energy exhibition and conference.
- It aims to achieve '**aatmanirbharta**' in energy and will include a roundtable with global oil & gas CEOs, emphasizing India's energy transition goals.

- Around **17 energy ministers** from different countries are expected to attend, showcasing a global perspective.
- **The event will focus on encouraging and integrating startups into the energy value chain, fostering innovation.**
- The Energy Week will have six dedicated country pavilions- **Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, the UK and the USA.**
- Organized by the **Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry** under the aegis of the **ministry of petroleum and natural gas**, India Energy Week, 2024 would provide a platform for discussions, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among industry experts, policy makers, academia and entrepreneurs.

### Dusted Apollo

#### Context:

- The Dusted Apollo, a rare high-altitude butterfly, has been sighted and photographed in **Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district.**
- Previously undocumented in Himachal Pradesh, this species inhabits altitudes ranging from **3,500 to 4,800 meters in the inner Himalayas.**

#### Key points:

- The Dusted Apollo bears a strong resemblance to the **Ladakh Banded Apollo.**
- Apollo butterflies face threats from poaching due to their commercial significance, highlighting the urgent need for conservation efforts to protect endangered species.

### The Healthy Indian Project (THIP) and Vaccine Safety Net (VSN)

- **The Healthy Indian Project (THIP)** has recently joined the **Vaccine Safety Net (VSN)** established by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- This collaboration aims to provide **reliable vaccine safety information to the Indian population**, aligning with global efforts to ensure accurate immunization details.

#### Details:

- **THIP is a prominent health information platform in India.**
- This membership highlights THIP's dedication to delivering credible and verified vaccine safety information to the people of India.

- VSN, consisting of **110 websites from 45 countries and offering information in 43 languages**, serves as a global network providing trustworthy vaccine safety information.

#### Key highlights:

- THIP's inclusion in VSN enhances the credibility of its vaccine safety information.
- Adherence to strict standards and regular evaluations ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of THIP's content.
- Membership in VSN grants THIP access to a broader audience, facilitating the dissemination of accurate vaccine information across diverse populations in India.
- THIP, as a VSN member, plays a pivotal role in promoting public health initiatives in India.

#### Kyasanur Forest Disease

- Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as **monkey fever**, is a viral infection first identified in 1956 in the **Kysanur Forest area of Sorab Taluk in Shivamogga district, Karnataka**.
- Since January 1 this year, **two people have died** due to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD).

#### Transmission and Symptoms

- KFD is transmitted through **tick bites**, with symptoms typically appearing three to eight days post-bite.
- Common symptoms include **fever, headache, body pain, and redness of the eyes**.
- Gastrointestinal symptoms may follow, and severe cases can involve nosebleeds. Diagnosis involves a blood test.

#### Current Situation and Measures

- **There is no specific treatment for KFD**
- While KFD was initially confined to Shivamogga district, it has since spread to other districts in Karnataka and neighboring states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Maharashtra.
- The government is also exploring vaccine development in collaboration with organizations like the Indian Immunologicals.

#### Aadi Mahotsav 2024

- The President inaugurated **Aadi Mahotsav 2024, an annual National Tribal Festival held at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium in New Delhi**.

- Organized by TRIFED under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, this event showcases the rich diversity of India's tribal heritage.

#### Objectives:

- **Showcasing Talent:** Aadi Mahotsav serves as a platform to showcase the extraordinary talent and craftsmanship of tribal artisans, displaying a vast array of tribal art, handicrafts, natural produce, and cuisine.
- **Empowerment:** The festival aims to empower tribal communities by providing them with a direct market to sell their products, generate income, and gain recognition for their skills.
- **Celebrating Diversity:** It's a celebration of the vibrant and diverse tribal culture, promoting awareness, understanding, and appreciation for their unique traditions and contributions to India's heritage.

#### TRIFED:

- **Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation of India** is a national level cooperative body under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India founded in **1987**.

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