19 Mar 2025
National and International News

Election Commission of India (ECI)	**Why in news?**
	● The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to meet with petitioners, including Lok Sabha member Mahua Moitra and representatives of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), to hear their request for uploading authenticated, scanned, and legible booth-wise voting accounts on its official website after each phase of polling.
	
	Key Points:
	● The Election Commission of India is a permanent and independent constitutional authority, established under **Article 324 of the Indian Constitution.**
	● ECI is responsible for **conducting elections to the Parliament, state legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice President of India.**
	● It does not oversee elections for urban local bodies like municipalities and panchayats, which the State Election Commissions manage.
	● **Functions and jurisdiction:**
	  ○ **Advisory role:** ECI advises the President or Governor on matters related to the disqualification of members of Parliament and state legislatures, especially in cases involving corrupt electoral practices.
	  ○ **Quasi-Judicial role:** ECI can disqualify candidates for failing to submit election expense accounts and resolve disputes regarding the recognition of political parties and the allocation of election symbols.
	  ○ **Administrative role:** ECI handles the delimitation of electoral constituencies, voter registration, updating of electoral rolls, and scheduling of election dates.
	    ■ It also ensures adherence to the Model Code of Conduct during elections and monitors political campaign expenditures.

Israel Palestine Conflict	**Why in news?** ● **Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip have resulted in the deaths of more than 400 Palestinians.** **Key Points:** ● The Israel-Palestine conflict arises from **interconnected historical assertions, nationalist aspirations, and religious significance in the Middle East**, centered on territory and identity struggles. ● Started with the **rise of Zionism in the late 19th century and mirrored by the rise of Arab nationalism,** the conflict

escalated in the 20th century, especially after Israel's establishment in 1948.

- **Zionism** is the national endeavor of the Jewish people, **supporting and advocating for the restoration of a Jewish homeland, traditionally identified with the area of Palestine or the Biblical land of Israel.**

- **Conflict Regions:**
  - **About Gaza Strip:**
    - **- Location:** The Gaza Strip is a coastal Palestinian region along the **Mediterranean Sea**, bordered by **Israel and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.** Together with the West Bank, it forms the **State of Palestine, with Israel situated between the two territories.**
    - **- Governance: Hamas,** a politico-military entity, has administered the Gaza Strip since its electoral victory in 2006.
    - **- Control:** While Israel maintains authority over Gaza's airspace and coastline, it has also implemented limitations on goods entering the territory. Additionally, Egypt manages its border with Gaza.
  - **West Bank:**
    - **- Location:** This territory is landlocked and is **bordered by Israel and Jordan,** with the **Dead Sea** marking part of its boundary.
    - **- Administration:** A section of Jerusalem is within the West Bank. The region is governed by Fatah, previously recognised as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement.
  - **Jerusalem:**
    - **- Location:** Located on a plateau in the Judean Mountains between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. It's roughly in the center of Israel and is bordered by several Palestinian territories.
    - **- Administration:** Jerusalem is divided into several districts: Jewish-majority West Jerusalem and the predominantly Palestinian East Jerusalem, which includes the Old City.

Israel's boundaries today

Palestinian territories

Lokpal	**Why in news?**
	● A bench of the Supreme Court, led by Justice B.R. Gavai, decided to examine whether judges of constitutional courts fall under the jurisdiction of the Lokpal, which oversees public functionaries like the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, and Members of Parliament.
	Key Points:
	● It is a statutory body established under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013.
	● **Mandate:** To inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for related matters.
	● **Organisational Structure:**
	○ It consists of a chair person and eight Members, out of whom four are Judicial Members.
	○ The Chairperson should be either the former Chief Justice of India,or a former Judge of the Supreme

Court, or an eminent person who fulfills the eligibility criteria as specified.
- ○ The judicial member of the Lokpal should be either a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.
- ○ A minimum of fifty percent of the Members will be from SC/ST/OBC/Minorities and women.
- **Jurisdiction:**
  - ○ It has jurisdiction to inquire into allegations of corruption against anyone who is or has been Prime Minister, a Minister in the Union government, or a Member of Parliament, as well as officials of the Union Government under Groups A, B, C, and D.
  - ○ It covers chairpersons, members, officers, and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust, or autonomous body either established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly funded by the Union or State government.
  - ○ It also covers any society, trust, or body that receives a foreign contribution above Rs 10 lakh.

India Malaysia Relations

Why in news?
- A Ministry of State (MoS) level bilateral meeting between India and Malaysia was held in New Delhi.

Key Points:
- **Diplomatic Relations:** India and Malaysia established diplomatic relations shortly after Malaysia gained independence from British rule in **1957.**
- **Trade and Economic Relations:** Malaysia is the **13th largest trading partner for India** while India stands amongst the 10 largest trading partners globally.
  - ○ Malaysia stands as an **important trade partner, as both countries have engaged in various economic agreements such as the India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).**
- **Strategic Partnership:** India and Malaysia have aimed to strengthen their strategic partnership through various initiatives, including high-level visits, joint commissions, and dialogues.
- **Cultural Ties:** Indian influence in Malaysia can be seen in various aspects of Malaysian culture, including language, religion (Hinduism and Buddhism), architecture, cuisine, and festivals.
- **ASEAN Centrality:** Malaysia holds a crucial position in expanding India's trade with ASEAN, aligning with India's Act East Policy, advancing maritime connectivity in the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea, and supporting ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Perspective (AOIP) and the Indo-Pacific Initiative

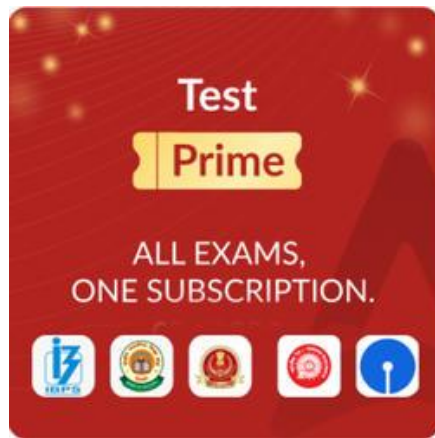|	

	(IPOI).
	 ● **Key Facts About Malaysia:**
	     ○ **Location:** Southeast Asia; divided into Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, separated by the South China Sea.
	     ○ **Capital:** Kuala Lumpur.
	     ○ **Nature:** Tropical rainforests, it is a part of the world's 17 megadiverse countries, home to species like Malayan tigers, pygmy elephants, and Bornean orangutans.

Defence Exercises: Exercise VARUNA	**Why in news?** ● The 23rd edition of the bilateral naval exercise VARUNA, a testament to the enduring maritime partnership between India and France, is set to take place from 19 to 22 Mar 25. **Key Points:** ● It is the **bilateral Naval Exercise between India and France.** ● This bilateral exercise between the two navies was initiated in 1993. ● It was **named 'VARUNA' in 2001 and has become a hallmark of India France strategic bilateral relationship.** ● It will feature advanced air defence drills and fighter exercises, including mock air-to-air combat between the **French Rafale-M and Indian MiG-29K,** designed to refine tactical and operational capabilities. ● Anti-submarine warfare exercises will provide rigorous training in underwater domain awareness, while surface warfare operations will demonstrate synchronised manoeuvres and engagements by the Indian and French fleets. ● Maritime patrol aircraft will enhance situational awareness, and replenishment-at-sea exercises will fortify logistical cooperation.
National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR)	**Why in news?** ● The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in collaboration with the Drone Federation India (DFI), launched the National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR) under the 'SwaYaan - Capacity Building for Human Resource Development in Unmanned Aircraft Systems' initiative. ● The initiative is part of the Government of India's broader effort to enhance entrepreneurship in academia and encourage applied research in drone technology. **Key Points:** ● NIDAR under the project SwaYaan aims to inspire and engage India's student and research communities to develop collaborative autonomous drones, addressing real-world challenges across two critical domains: ○ **Disaster Management (Scout & Deliver Drones):**

Identifying and assisting survivors in disaster-affected areas using autonomous drones for scouting, communication, and parcel delivery.

- **Precision Agriculture (Scan & Spray Drones):** Enhancing productivity and sustainability in agriculture through targeted interventions like crop health monitoring and precise pesticide/nutrient delivery.

- The competition is expected to enhance technical proficiency, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and project management skills among participants, preparing them for impactful careers in emerging technology domains.

About SwaYaan initiative:

- The SwaYaan initiative, **approved by MeitY in July, 2022, focuses on capacity building for human resource development in Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), including drones and related technologies.**
- The project aims to train 42,560 participants, combining both formal and non-formal educational programs to create a skilled workforce in drone technology.
- The initiative is implemented through a hub-and-spoke model involving 30 premium institutions like IISc, IITs, IIITs, NITs, CDAC, and NIELIT.
- Five key work themes guide the **project—Drone Electronics, GNC Algorithms Simulation, Aeromechanics, Drone Applications, and Allied UAS Technologies—ensuring specialized focus areas.**

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