NEXT IAS

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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THE DIGITAL SERVICES ACT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Context:

- The European Commission recently informed that the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** has started applying to all online platforms in the European Union.

About Digital Services Act

- It is a landmark legislation introduced by the European Union (EU) **to regulate online intermediaries and platforms.**
  - It was **adopted in 2022 and now applicable to all EU Member States**.
- It aims to create a safer and more open digital space, where the rights of users are protected and businesses can freely and fairly compete.
- It is designed to ensure that users have access to a wide range of safe products and services online.
- It aims to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and curb the spread of disinformation. It seeks to protect user safety, fundamental rights, and create a fair and open online platform environment.
- **Features:** Organisations for which the DSA applies are required to:
  - provide greater transparency on their services;
  - adopt procedures for handling take down notices, informing users in certain circumstances and addressing complaints;
  - refrain from certain practices, such as profiling, and/or improve control for users of their service.

Impacts

- **On Big Tech Firms:** It seeks to regulate how big tech companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon **target advertisements** and requires them to take more responsibility for dealing with illegal content and dangerous products on their platforms.
  - Non-compliance with the new rules could result in hefty fines.
- It **protects minors**, including a complete ban of targeting minors with ads based on profiling or on their personal data.

- It **empowers users with information about advertisements** such as why the ads are being shown to them and on who paid for the advertisement.
- It prohibits advertisements that target users based on sensitive data, such as political or religious beliefs, sexual preferences, etc.

India and Digital Services Act

- DSA is primarily targeted at the EU, its principles and regulations could influence digital policies worldwide, including in India.
  - It **validates and influences India's approach** to regulating big tech and online intermediaries.
- **The DSA** emphasis on online safety, trust, and accountability **resonates with the principles of India's proposed Digital India Act, 2023** which aims to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the dynamic growth of the internet and emerging technologies.

Concerns and Challenges Associated with the Act

- **Intermediary Liability Exemptions:** The DSA prevents private companies from deciding the interpretation of legal provisions, thus avoiding the definition of limits to freedom of expression.
- **User Rights and Obligations:** The DSA incorporates new rights for users and obligations for service providers in terms and conditions, transparency requirements, statements of reasons in cases of content removals, complaint handling systems, and out-of-court dispute settlements.
- **Enforcement Challenges:** As the DSA comes into enforcement, there remain challenges in ensuring compliance from large online platforms and search engines.
- **Governance Challenges:** The EU Commission points out **three main problems** relating to the governance of digital services:
  - The increasing exposure to illegal and harmful activities online;
  - The lack of cooperation between national authorities, and
  - The risks of legal fragmentation resulting from national initiatives that create new barriers in the internal market.

Conclusion

- The DSA represents a significant step forward in the regulation of the digital space. By creating a safer and more open digital environment, the DSA not only protects users but also promotes competition and innovation.

- As the digital world continues to evolve, the DSA will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping its future.

Source: TH

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA) AND INDIA

Context:

- Recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) agreed to start discussions with India to become a full member.

About the IEA

Key Publications of IEA:
- World Energy Outlook
- Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap For the Global Energy Sector
- Energy Technology Perspectives
- Global EV Outlook
- Oil Market Report
- World Energy Investment
- Clean Energy Transitions Programme

- It is a **Paris-based** intergovernmental organisation of **31 nations**.

- It was **established in 1974** as a response to physical disruptions in global oil supplies and to promote energy savings and conservation.

- It aims to **promote reliable, affordable, and clean energy** for its member countries and the rest of the world.

  - It advises industrialised nations on energy policies.

OECD:
- It came into force in 1961, and currently has 38 member countries.
  - **India is not a member.**

Objective:
- To promote policies that improve economic and social well-being, fostering economic growth, contributing to world trade, and enhancing the living standards of people in member countries.

Headquarters: Paris, France.

Criteria For Membership of IEA

- The **Agreement on an International Energy Program (IEP Agreement)** established the mandates and structure of the IEA under the umbrella of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

  - A candidate country to the IEA **must be a member country of the OECD.**

- Crude oil and/or **product reserves equivalent to 90 days** of the previous year's net imports, to which the government has immediate access (even if it does not own them directly) and could be used to address disruptions to global oil supply;

- A demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%;

- Legislation and organisation to operate the **Coordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM)** on a national basis;

Current Members

- Currently, it has **31 member countries, 13 association countries, and 5 accession countries**.

  - **Association countries** was formally launched in 2015 and currently includes 11 countries including **India, Brazil, China, South Africa**.

  - Countries are seeking **accession to full membership:** Chile, Colombia, Israel, Latvia and Costa Rica.
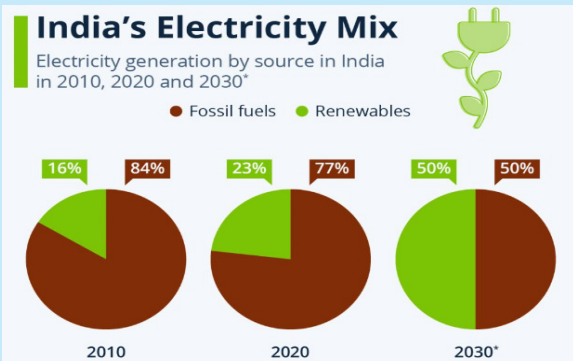
Rationale Behind India's Full Membership of IEA

- **Global Energy Governance:** India becoming an IEA member would mark a consequential change in **international energy governance.**

  - It includes collaboration across the full spectrum of the energy sector, with a focus on both **energy security and clean energy transitions.**

  - Earlier, India had inked a strategic partnership agreement with the IEA to strengthen cooperation in **global energy security, stability, and sustainability**.

- **Energy Security:** As the world's most populous country, India is set to play an increasingly central role in efforts to safeguard energy security.

- **Rapid Growth and Urbanisation:** India is the world's fastest-growing major economy.

- In the next three decades, India is poised to see the largest energy demand growth of any country in the world as industrialization and urbanisation surge and per capita income rises sharply.
  - The IEA believes that the world cannot plan for its energy future without India at the table.
- **Energy Transitions and Climate Change:** India's membership would drive inclusive energy transitions.
  - Renewable electricity is growing at a faster rate in India than any other major economy, with new capacity additions on track to **double by 2026.**
  - India's role in the IEA would be crucial in combating climate change.
- **Mutual Trust and Cooperation:** Full members strengthen mutual trust and cooperation, enhancing global energy security, stability, and sustainability.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Full membership leads to an extensive exchange of knowledge.
  - It brings *talent, technology, and innovation* to the table.

Do you know?
- India undertakes some of the world's largest energy access initiatives, and has **surpassed its Paris climate targets** ahead of schedule and remains firmly committed to addressing the global issue.
- India achieved its emissions intensity-related targets **11 years ahead of the committed time-frame** and **non-fossil fuel targets nine years ahead** of schedule.

India's Electricity Mix
Electricity generation by source in India in 2010, 2020 and 2030*
- Fossil fuels ● Renewables

2010	2020	2030*
16% / 84%	23% / 77%	50% / 50%

- India aims to reduce emissions intensity of **Gross Domestic Product by 45% by 2030** from 2005 levels and achieve **50%** cumulative electric power installed capacity from **non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030**.

- It has also committed to become a net-zero economy by 2070.
- India's proactive approach in leading initiatives like the **International Solar Alliance and the Mission LiFE**, which focuses on pro-planet lifestyle choices.

Key Concerns in Membership

- **OECD Membership:** Full membership prerequisites include OECD membership.
  - Currently, **India is not a member of the OECD**.
- **Strategic Oil Reserves:** Full members are required to maintain strategic oil reserves equivalent to 90 days of net imports.
  - India's current strategic oil reserves equal **9.5 days of its requirement**, and together with storage at refineries and depots, **it maintains a stockpile equivalent of 66 days requirement**.
  - This could be a significant challenge for India given its high energy consumption and dependence on oil imports.
- **Energy Policies:** As a full member, India would need to align its energy policies with those of the IEA.
  - It could involve significant changes to India's current energy policies and strategies.

Conclusion

- India's carbon emissions account for **about 4% of the global total** despite it being home to **17% of the global population**.
  - As a large developing economy, India's climate adaptation and mitigation ambitions are not just transformational for India but for the entire planet.
- **NITI Aayog and IEA** are committed to work together to enable India to grow, industrialise and provide a better quality of life to its citizens without the need to carbonise.

Source: TH

IMF'S FORECAST FOR MAJOR ECONOMIES

Context

- Recent **IMF** data show that **Japan slips to the world's fourth-largest economy**, behind the US, China and now Germany.

About Key Findings

Top 10 Largest Economies

Rank/ Country	GDP ($ billion)	GDP Per Capita ($ thousand)
1. USA	27,974	83.06
2. China	18,566	13.16
3. Germany	4,730	56.04
4. Japan	4,291	34.55
5. India	4,112	2.85
6. UK	3,592	52.43
7. France	3,182	48.22
8. Italy	2,280	38.93
9. Brazil	2,272	11.03
10. Canada	2,242	55.53

- IMF highlights that the Japanese economy shrank at **an annualised rate of 0.4%** in the October-December period of 2023.

  - **Japan's economy**, now the world's fourth-biggest, grew **1.9% in 2023 in nominal terms** – meaning it is not adjusted for inflation – but in dollar terms its gross domestic product (GDP) stood at $4.2 tn compared with $4.5 tn for Germany.

- It has gradually lost its competitiveness and productivity because of the **weak yen, an aging, shrinking population.**

Other Key Highlights

- The **United States** has maintained its status as the major global economy from 1960 to 2023.

- **China** has witnessed a notable upsurge in its economic progress, moving from the fourth rank in 1960 to the second rank in 2023.

  - The **Chinese economy** predominantly hinges upon **manufacturing, exports, and investment.**

  - It proudly possesses an extensive workforce, robust governmental backing, infrastructural advancements, and an expeditiously expanding consumer market.

- **India** has also experienced an economic boom since the implementation of economic liberalisation in the early 1990s.

  - **India is ranked 5th** in world's GDP rankings in 2024.

  - India's economy boasts diversity and swift growth, fuelled by key sectors such as **information technology, services, agriculture, and manufacturing.**

  - It capitalised on its broad domestic market, a youthful and technologically adept labour force, and an expanding middle class.

- The gap between developed countries and emerging nations is shrinking, with **India projected to overtake Japan** in nominal GDP in a few years.

Source: TH

CYBERSECURITY IN INDIA

In Context

- **An Indian parliamentary house panel** has asked the government to **strengthen the cyber security of central and state government websites** after it was revealed that **373 websites** were hacked between **January 2018 and September 2023.**

About

- The committee also pointed out that some government offices were using **outdated software on laptops and computers,** which made them vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

- The Committee emphasised on the adherence to the guidelines and recommended the Ministry to **update entire government infrastructure** regarding handling of cyber threats.

What is a Cyberattack?

- A cyber attack refers to any **deliberate, malicious attempt** to breach the security measures of a computer system, network, or device, with the intent to disrupt, steal, alter, or destroy data, information, or infrastructure.

- These attacks can target individuals, organizations, governments, or even entire nations.

Cyberattacks in India

- A report by Microsoft in 2023 revealed that **India** was amongst the **world's major targets** of cyber attacks by nation-state actors.

- India accounts for **13 percent of cyber-attacks** in the **Asia-Pacific (APAC) region,** making it one of the **top three** most attacked countries by nation-state actors.

- State-sponsored cyber attacks against India increased by **278%** between 2021 and September 2023.

- During this period, **targeted cyber attacks on government** agencies went up by **460%.**

India's Cybersecurity Concerns

- **Cyber Attacks on Critical Infrastructure:** Critical infrastructure sectors such as power, transportation, finance, and healthcare are increasingly digitized, making them vulnerable to cyber attacks.

  - In 2022, five servers of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had been hacked by ransomware.

  - An estimated 1.3 terabytes of data was encrypted. The hackers had made it impossible for AIIMS to access its own data.

- **Financial Cybercrime:** With the rapid expansion of digital banking and e-commerce, financial institutions and consumers are at risk of various cyber threats, including online banking fraud, phishing scams, ransomware attacks, and payment card fraud.

- **Cyber Espionage and State-Sponsored Attacks:** India is a prime target for cyber espionage by state-sponsored actors seeking to steal sensitive government, military, or corporate information.

  - Such attacks can compromise national security, economic competitiveness, and diplomatic relations.

- **Cyber Terrorism and Radicalization:** Extremist groups and terrorists exploit online platforms for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination of attacks.

  - India faces the challenge of countering cyber radicalization while ensuring the protection of free speech and civil liberties.

- **Emerging Technologies:** The adoption of emerging technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing introduces new cybersecurity risks.

- **Cybersecurity Skills Gap and Capacity Building:** India grapples with a shortage of skilled cybersecurity professionals and a lack of awareness among users and organizations about best practices for cyber hygiene and risk management.

  - Experts have also pointed to the need for job creation in the cybersecurity industry.

- **Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement:** While India has enacted cybersecurity laws and regulations, enforcement and compliance remain challenging.

  - While digitisation has accelerated the need for cybersecurity, India's cybersecurity regulations are weak and inadequate.

- **Infrastructural Gap:** India struggles, despite a digitally forward government and the world's largest IT-enabled service sectors.

  - The powerful tech force lacks critical infrastructure and weak cybersecurity regulation.

Government Initiatives

- **National Cyber Security Policy (NCSP):** It was introduced in **2013** to provide a framework for addressing cybersecurity challenges and ensuring a safe and secure cyberspace for citizens, businesses, and government entities.

  - It outlines strategies for capacity building, cooperation with stakeholders, and protection of critical information infrastructure.

- **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C):** It was established by MHA to provide a framework and eco-system for Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) for dealing with Cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

- **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):** CERT-In is the **national nodal agency** responsible for coordinating responses to cybersecurity incidents, providing early warning and advisories, and promoting cybersecurity awareness and capacity building initiatives across various sectors.

- **Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre):** Launched by CERT-In, the Cyber Swachhta Kendra aims to detect and remove botnets and malware infections from computers and devices across the country.

  - It provides free tools and services to users for securing their systems against cyber threats.

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (Cybercrime.gov.in):** The government launched this portal to enable citizens to report cybercrimes online and seek assistance from law enforcement agencies.

- **Information Security Education and Awareness (ISEA) Project:** The ISEA project focuses on promoting cybersecurity awareness and education initiatives among various stakeholders,

including students, professionals, government officials, and the general public.

- **Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative:** This initiative aims to enhance cybersecurity awareness and hygiene practices among individuals, organizations, and enterprises across India.

Conclusion

- These initiatives collectively contribute to **building a resilient cybersecurity ecosystem in India,** safeguarding critical infrastructure, protecting digital assets, and promoting trust and confidence in the digital economy.

- With India's embrace of broader digitalization, it has to have a cybersecurity-first attitude, without which there could be large scale data theft, with personal as well as financial implications.

- Ongoing efforts are essential to adapt to emerging cyber threats, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and foster a **culture of cybersecurity awareness.**

Source: HT

FARM SECTOR GROWTH

Context

- India's farm sector **Gross Value Added (GVA) is likely to see little or no growth** in the second half of 2023-24, with the full year-clocking about **1% growth**, rating firm ICRA said recently.

About

- It cites the **weak kharif crop estimates, mixed trends in rabi sowing** and concerns regarding **crop yields.**

- The mild growth in the agriculture, forestry and fishing GVA this fiscal, compared with **FY23's 4% uptick, would weigh on rural demand** in the near term.

- It also added that **if the coming monsoon was normal, sectoral GVA growth may recover to 3.4% in 2024-25.**

Farm sector growth in India

- India is the **second-largest producer of farm produce globally**, contributing significantly to the national economy and rural livelihoods.

- India is the **world's largest producer of milk, pulses and jute**, and ranks as the **second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruit and cotton**.

- Recent years have seen **modest growth** in the agricultural sector, averaging around **3%.**

Recent trends

- The Economic Survey 2022-23 noted that the agriculture sector in the country grew by **3% in 2021-22,** lower than an **average growth of 4.6% in the last six years.**

- In 2020-21, the growth in this sector was **3.3%**. In 2016-17, the growth rate was **6.8%**, followed by **6.6%** in 2017-18, **2.1%** in 2018-19 and **5.5%** in 2019-20.

- The Survey said p**rivate investment in agriculture increased to 9.3% in 2020-21.** The public investment, however, remained at **4.3%, the same as 2019-20**.

  - In 2011-12, the public investment in agriculture was **5.4%.**

Challenges

- **Low productivity:** Despite being a large producer, India's farm yields are significantly lower than global averages due to factors like fragmented landholdings, limited irrigation, and inadequate adoption of technology.

- **Market volatility**: Price fluctuations and inadequate market access make farm incomes unstable, discouraging investment and innovation.

- **Climate change:** Extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and water scarcity pose threats to agricultural productivity and farmer livelihoods.

- **Post-harvest losses:** Lack of proper storage, transportation, and processing infrastructure leads to significant losses, impacting farmer income and food security.

- **Rural-urban migration:** This creates a shortage of skilled agricultural labor, further hindering productivity growth.

Measures

- **Investments in research and development:** Focus on high-yielding, climate-resilient crop varieties, precision agriculture technologies, and improved irrigation methods.

- **Improving market access:** Develop and strengthen e-commerce platforms, farmer producer organizations (FPOs), and direct marketing channels to connect farmers to better markets.

- **Investments in rural infrastructure:** Build better roads, storage facilities, and cold chains to reduce post-harvest losses and improve market access.

- **Climate-smart agriculture:** Promote practices like conservation agriculture, water management, and drought-resistant varieties to adapt to climate change.

- **Skill development:** Train farmers in modern agricultural technologies, market awareness, and financial management to enhance their capabilities.

- **Financial inclusion:** Ensure easy access to credit and insurance schemes for farmers to invest in their farms and mitigate risks.

- **Land reforms:** Address issues like land fragmentation and tenancy regulations to improve land use efficiency and access to resources.

- **Promoting diversification:** Encourage farmers to adopt allied activities like horticulture, animal husbandry, and aquaculture to supplement their income and reduce dependence on traditional crops.

Government Initiatives

- **The Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) Scheme:** Grants-in-aid are released with the goal of supporting State Governments' efforts to make available the latest agricultural technologies and good agricultural practices in various thematic areas of agriculture and allied sector.

- **Krishi UDAN:** The scheme proposes assistance and incentive for the movement of agri-produce by air transport.

- **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-Kisan:** An income support of 6,000/- per year in three equal installments will be provided to all land holding farmer families.

- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY):** Aimed at the development of irrigation sources for providing a permanent solution to drought.

- **FDI**: The Government of India has allowed 100% FDI in the marketing of food products and in food product E-commerce under the automatic route.

- **Kisan Credit Card :** Access to institutional credit is being provided through Kisan Credit Card and other channels.

- **e-NAM initiative:** Markets across the nation are now open to farmers, to enable them to get more remunerative prices for their produce.

- **Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA):** Ensures Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers for various Kharif and Rabi crops while also keeping a robust procurement mechanism in place.

- **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY):** To increase the level of the food-processing industry and encourage rural entrepreneurship across the country including rural areas.

- **PM Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME)** Scheme: Provides financial, technical and business support for setting up/upgradation of 2 Lakh micro food processing enterprises through credit-linked subsidy.

Way Ahead

- **Transforming Indian agriculture** requires addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities.

- By **investing in technology, infrastructure, market access, and farmer empowerment**, India can achieve sustainable and inclusive farm sector growth, ensuring food security and rural prosperity.

Source: TH

PUBLIC ACCOUNT COMMITTEE ON PLASTIC WASTE POLLUTION

Context

- The **Public Account Committee** report on **'pollution caused by plastic'** was tabled in Parliament recently during the budget session.

> **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**
>
> - CPCB is a **statutory organization** established under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**.
>   - It is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.**
> - **Parent ministry:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

- **Functions:** Principal Functions of the CPCB, as spelt out in the Water Act, 1974, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 are
  - (i) to promote cleanliness of streams and wells in different areas of the States by prevention, control and abatement of water pollution, and
  - (ii) to improve the quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country.

Highlights of the report/Challenges

- **Huge waste generation**: Increased substantially from 15.9 lakh tonnes per annum (TPA) in 2015-16 to 41.2 lakh TPA in 2020-21.

- **Inadequate waste management infrastructure:** Data from 2019-20 shows that 50% of the total plastic waste in the country (34.7 lakh TPA) remained unutilised, leading it to pollute air, water and soil, and ultimately affect human health.

- **Data gap:** The PAC noted a big data gap, observing from **CAG's 2022 audit findings** that many state pollution control boards (SPCBs) did not provide data on plastic waste generation for the period 2016-18 to the CPCB and there were **inconsistencies in data shared by urban local bodies (ULBs) with SPCBs.**
  - It expressed disappointment with the **Central Pollution Control Board** over dealing with the **plastic waste problem in the country.**

- **Recycling inefficiencies:** The existing recycling system is largely informal and unregulated, leading to low-quality recycled plastic and limited environmental benefits.

- **Public awareness**: Lack of widespread awareness about the harmful impacts of plastic pollution hinders responsible waste management practices.

Suggestions/Measures

- **Reliable assessment method:** Underlining gaps in data, the panel expressed the need to have a **"reliable assessment" of the amount of plastic waste being generated** and said it should be the first step towards managing the problem efficiently.

- **Mandatory" reporting:** It recommended "mandatory" reporting of data online on the national dashboard.

- **Comprehensive policy:** A comprehensive policy is required for containing pollution caused by plastics.

- **Alternatives**: It observed that "finding a cost effective and dependable alternative to plastic" by providing funds for R&D was a prerequisite for its elimination.

- **Awareness**:Spreading awareness about eco-friendly alternatives and ill-effects of SUP is crucial.

- **Other measures:** Making implementing agencies accountable, promoting use of recycled plastic content and increasing recycling facilities may be taken to efficiently enforce the ban on SUP on ground.

Government initiatives:

- **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016:** This regulation prohibits manufacture, sale, and use of certain single-use plastic items like carry bags, straws, and cups.
  - **Ban on SUP:** The ministry of environment had banned hard-to-collect/recycle, single use plastic (SUP) items with effect from July 1, 2022.
  - **Prohibition:** Prohibited manufacture, import, sale and use of plastic carry bags thinner than **120 microns** from December 31 2022.

- **National Policy on Solid Waste Management, 2016:** This policy emphasizes waste minimization, source segregation, and scientific processing, including plastic waste.

- **EPR rules:** It also notified extended producer responsibility (EPR) rules to streamline collection and recycling of plastic waste.

- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:** This mission includes promoting waste segregation at source, composting biodegradable waste, and setting up waste processing facilities, contributing to plastic waste management indirectly.

- **Indian Swachhata League:**It is an unique youth-led, inter-city initiative to promote engagement of young people in the Swachata related activities.

Way Ahead:

- Addressing plastic waste pollution requires a **multi-pronged approach** involving government, industry, civil society, and individual citizens.

- **Effective implementation of existing regulations**, **technological advancements**, and a shift towards a **circular economy** are crucial for a cleaner and healthier environment.

Source: TOI

FACTS IN NEWS

TERAI ARC LANDSCAPE

In News

- The **Terai Arc Landscape (TAL)** has been recognized and honored as one of the seven **UN World Restoration Flagships .**

About Terai Arc Landscape(TAL)

- It extends over **900 km** from the **Bagmati River (**Nepal) in the east to the Yamuna River (India) in the west.

- It comprises the **Shivalik hills**, the adjoining bhabhar areas and the Terai flood plains.

- It is spread across the Indian states of **Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and the low lying hills of Nepal**.

- The landscape boasts of some of **India's most well-known Tiger Reserves and Protected Areas** such as Corbett Tiger Reserve, Rajaji National Park, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Valmiki Tiger Reserve and Nepal's Bardia Wildlife Sanctuary, Chitwan National Park, and Sukhla Phanta Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Importance:** TAL envisions a globally unique landscape where biodiversity is conserved, ecological integrity is safeguarded, and the socio-economic well-being of the people is secured

> **Do you know ?**
> - The **World Restoration Flagship awards** are part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration – led by **UNEP and FAO.**
> - It aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.
> - The awards track notable initiatives that support global commitments to restore one billion hectares – an area larger than China.

Source: TH

OPENAI'S SORA

In News

- OpenAI, the creator of the revolutionary chatbot ChatGPT, has launched a new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) model "**Sora**"

About Sora

- Sora is an AI model that can create realistic and imaginative scenes from text instructions.

- Sora can generate **videos up to a minut**e long while maintaining visual quality and adherence to the user's prompt.

- Sora is able to generate complex scenes with multiple characters, specific types of motion, and accurate details of the subject and background.

- **Concerns** : The current model has weaknesses. It may struggle with accurately simulating the physics of a complex scene, and may not understand specific instances of cause and effect.

- **Future Outlook :** Open AI is building tools to help detect misleading content such as a detection classifier that can tell when a video was generated by Sora.

  - Open AI will be engaging policy makers, educators and artists around the world to understand their concerns and to identify positive use cases for this new technology.

Source: IE

BROOM GRASS

Context:

- Recently, the Tribal people have been carrying broom grass at a village in **Karbi Anglong** district of Assam.

About Broom Grass:

- It is also known as **Thysanolaena maxima**, is a type of grass that is **native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia**.

- Karbi Anglong, in Assam, is the largest producer of brooms in India.

Cultivation:

- The cultivation of broom grass is comparatively easy and requires small financial inputs.

- It can be grown on **marginal lands, wasteland, and in Jhum fallow land**.

- The planting can be done by **seeds or rhizomes**.

Significance:

- It is a cash crop, and its cultivation is **a significant source of income** for many farmers, and has the **potential to generate local employment** and can be used to **enhance rural income**.

Source: TH

PROCUREMENTS FOR THE ARMED FORCES

In Context

- **The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** cleared a series of procurements worth Rs 84,560 crore for the armed forces.

About

- It includes **15 maritime reconnaissance** and **multi-mission maritime aircraft** for the Navy and the Coast Guard as well as **six flight refueller aircraft** for the IAF and **new generation anti-tank mines** for the Army.

- It also includes some long-pending deals such as for **heavyweight torpedoes (HWT)** for the Navy's Scorpene-class submarines.
- The DAC, headed by **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh,** is among the top bodies for clearing major capital acquisitions for defence.
- **The Acceptance of Necessity (AoN)** is the first step in the long Defence procurement process.
  - The grant of AoN does not always lead to a final order.

Source: TH

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