

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

Time: 45 Min

Date: 03-05-2024

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HYDROPOWER CONCERNS OVER CLIMATE CHANGE

Context

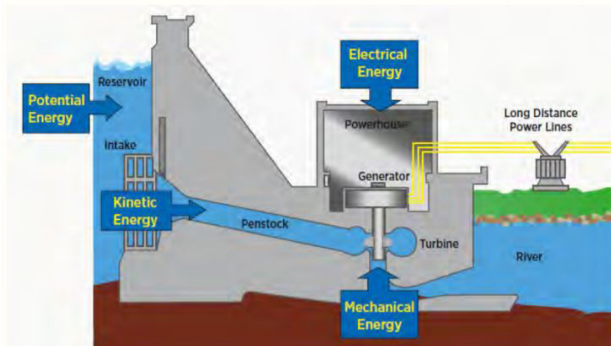
- **Droughts — and sudden floods** which can **damage hydropower dams** — made more frequent and severe by **climate change** are an “**increasing concern**” for hydropower.

About

- Recent **droughts in Colombia and Ecuador** have severely **hampered energy supplied by hydropower**.
- This has led Ecuador to **declare a state of emergency** and institute power cuts.
- Hydropower accounts for **over 80% of electricity generation** in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia — many of which are also struggling with severe droughts.

What is Hydropower?

- Hydropower, or hydroelectric power, is one of the oldest and largest sources of renewable energy, which uses the **natural flow of moving water to generate electricity**.



- Hydropower currently generates more electricity than all other renewable technologies combined and is expected to remain the **world's largest source of renewable electricity generation into the 2030s**.
- **Classification of Hydro Projects based on Installed Capacity:**
 - ♦ **Micro:** upto 100 KW
 - ♦ **Mini:** 101KW to 2 MW
 - ♦ **Small:** 2 MW to 25 MW
 - ♦ **Mega:** Hydro projects with installed capacity ≥ 500 MW
- **India:** In 2022-23, hydropower accounted for **12.5 percent** of power generation in India. India had about 4745.6 MW pumped storage capacity in operation in 2023.

- ♦ The **hilly States of India** mainly Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand constitute around half of this potential.
- ♦ Other potential States are **Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Kerala**.

Do you Know?

- **Three Gorges Dam in China on Yangtze River** is the largest hydro power station in the world.
- In India, the oldest Hydropower power plant is in **Darjeeling District in West Bengal**. Its installed capacity is 130KW and was commissioned in the year **1897**.

Significance of Hydro Power:

- **Renewable Energy Source:** Hydropower is a renewable energy source because it relies on the water cycle, which is continuously replenished by rainfall and snowmelt.
 - ♦ This makes it a sustainable alternative to fossil fuels, which are finite and contribute to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Clean Energy:** Hydropower produces minimal greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil fuels, making it an environmentally friendly option for generating electricity.
- **Reliable and Predictable:** Unlike solar and wind energy, which are intermittent and dependent on weather conditions, hydropower provides a consistent and reliable source of electricity.
- **Flexible and Controllable:** Hydropower plants can quickly adjust their output to match changes in electricity demand.
- **Multipurpose Use:** Hydropower projects often serve multiple purposes beyond electricity generation.
 - ♦ They can provide flood control by regulating water flow, irrigation for agriculture, water supply for communities, and recreational opportunities such as boating and fishing.
- **Long Lifespan:** Hydropower infrastructure, such as dams and turbines, can have long lifespans, often exceeding 50 years with proper maintenance. This longevity ensures a stable and enduring source of energy for a longer period of time.

Challenges

- **Environmental Impact:** Large-scale hydropower projects often require damming rivers, which alter ecosystems, disrupt fish habitats, and impact local biodiversity.
 - ◆ It also leads to issues like sediment buildup and water temperature changes downstream, affecting aquatic life.
- **Social Impacts:** Building dams and reservoirs displace communities and disrupt livelihoods, especially those relying on the affected rivers for fishing or agriculture.
- **High Initial Costs:** Constructing hydropower facilities involves significant upfront investment costs.
- **Climate Change Vulnerability:** Hydropower generation relies on consistent water flow, which can be affected by climate change-induced variations in **precipitation patterns and glacial melt**.
 - ◆ A UK based thinktank found that the drought — likely exacerbated by climate change — **drove an 8.5% drop in hydroelectricity** around the world over the last two decades.
- **Sedimentation:** Dams trap sediment flowing downstream, leading to reservoirs gradually filling up with sediment over time.
 - ◆ This reduces the reservoir's capacity and impacts the efficiency and lifespan of the hydropower facility.
- **Maintenance Challenges:** Hydropower infrastructure requires regular maintenance to ensure safe and efficient operation.

Way Ahead

- The solution for the countries is to **diversify their power sources** by incorporating other renewable technologies — such as wind and solar — into their energy mix.
- **Innovations around placing floating solar panels** on the water's surface in hydropower plants — as countries such **China and Brazil** are exploring — have significant potential.
- **Building more medium scale plants**, rather than the mega dams of the past, would help mitigate the climate-risks associated with **overdependence on one big piece of infrastructure**.
- **Without major policy changes**, global hydropower expansion is expected to slow down this decade.

Source: IE

SC RESERVES 33% SEATS FOR WOMEN IN BAR ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

Context

- The Supreme Court **reserved one-third of the seats** in the **executive committee** of the **Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA)** for women.

About

- The court directed that a **minimum of three out of nine seats** in the executive committee and at least **two out of six senior executive members** be reserved for women members of the Bar.
- The bench clarified that this reservation will **not bar eligible women members** from contesting for other posts as well, and directed that one post of the office-bearers of SCBA shall be exclusively reserved for women by turn and on a rotation basis.
- The reservation is only to guarantee **a minimum and women members of the SCBA**, subject to their eligibility, shall be entitled to contest the election for all the posts in the Executive Committee.

Supreme Court Bar Association

- The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) in India is an organization **comprising lawyers** who are **enrolled as members of the Supreme Court of India**.
- It represents the **interests of lawyers practicing in the Supreme Court** and aims to uphold the standards of the legal profession and promote the administration of justice.
- It also engages in activities aimed at enhancing the legal system and protecting the **independence of the judiciary**.
- The association is governed by its own set of rules and regulations and **elects office bearers to represent its members and manage its affairs**.

Representation of Women in Judiciary

- **Justice Bevi** became the first Muslim woman judge of the Supreme Court, as well as the **first woman Supreme Court Justice in Asia in 1989**.
- Since 1989, only **11 women** have made it to the Supreme Court. Currently, there are **only three female judges** of the 33 Supreme Court judges.

- **Only 4.1%** of all Supreme Court judges have been women, while the **remaining 96% are men.**
- There are **more women judges at the district court level** than at the High Court level.
- **Justice Nagarathna** is in line to become the **first-ever female Chief Justice of India** in 2027.
- The appointment of Justices Kohli, Nagarathna, and Trivedi to the top court in 2021 created history, as this marked the **first time that so many females were appointed to the SC** in one go.
- Earlier this year, the Supreme Court elevated **56 advocates as senior advocates**, and out of those, **20 percent were women advocates.**
 - ♦ It was the first time in judicial history when **11 women advocates were given senior designation in one go.**
- ♦ That's perhaps because entry to the lower judiciary is through an examination, while the High Court and Supreme Court are decided by the collegium.

Importance of Representation of Women in Judiciary

- **Gender Equality:** A diverse judiciary ensures a more inclusive and representative legal system.
 - **Fairness and Impartiality:** Having a judiciary that reflects the diversity of the population helps in dispelling biases and promoting impartial decision-making.
 - **Inspiration and Role Modeling:** Women judges can act as role models, encouraging more women to pursue careers in law.
 - **Access to Justice for Women:** Women may feel more comfortable and understood when their cases are heard by judges who share similar life experiences and perspectives.
 - **Legal Interpretation and Legislation:** Women judges can provide unique insights into legal interpretation and the development of legislation, particularly in areas related to gender-based issues, family law, and women's rights.
 - ♦ Their presence can influence legal discourse and contribute to the evolution of more gender-sensitive laws.
 - **Global Norms and Commitments:** Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the importance of gender diversity in all sectors, including the judiciary.
- ### Reasons for the Lack of Representation of Women
- **Historical Reasons:** Historically, legal and judicial systems worldwide have been male-dominated, and India is no exception. The legal profession has traditionally been perceived as a male domain, and this mindset has persisted over the years.
 - **Societal Expectations and Stereotypes:** Societal expectations often dictate traditional gender roles, and there are stereotypes that cast women in roles that are seen as less compatible with the demands of a judicial career.
 - **Educational Barriers:** Limited educational opportunities for women result in fewer female candidates entering law schools and subsequently pursuing a career in the judiciary.
 - **Family and Cultural Expectations:** Cultural norms and expectations regarding women's responsibilities within the family dissuade them from pursuing demanding and time-consuming careers, such as a judicial career.
 - **Gender Bias and Discrimination:** Stereotypes about women's capabilities lead to their exclusion from consideration for higher judicial positions.
 - **Networking and Mentorship Opportunities:** Male-dominated networks and mentorship structures within the legal profession make it challenging for women to access the same opportunities for career advancement.
 - **Appointment Procedure:** The lower judiciary has a better representation of women than the High Court and Supreme Court.
- ### Conclusion
- The lack of representation of women in the judiciary, combined with the traditional exclusionary attitude towards women, has led to a lack of diversity within the judicial system.
 - Therefore, it is essential that efforts to increase diversity in the judiciary are made to ensure a more equitable court system.
 - There is a requirement to enhance transparency in the judicial system. This will create more opportunities for women to prove their mettle and create a level playing field.
- Source: IE**

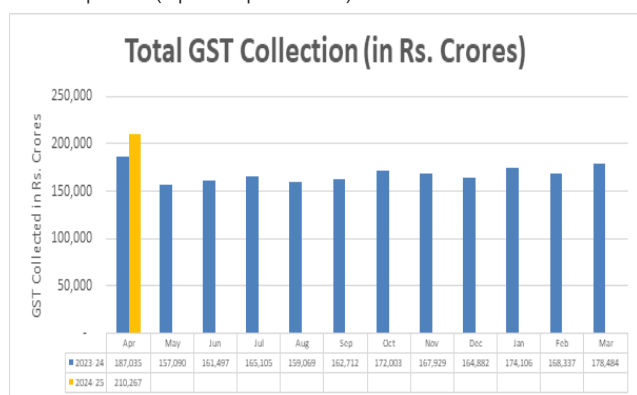
INCREASE IN GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST) REVENUES

In News

- Revenues from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) crossed the ₹2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April. It stood at Rs 1.87 lakh crore in April 2023.

About

- This represents a significant 12.4 per cent year-on-year growth, driven by a strong increase in domestic transactions (up 13.4 per cent) and imports (up 8.3 per cent).



Goods and Services Tax (GST)

- Goods and Services Tax is an **indirect tax** used in India on the **supply of goods and services**.
- It is a **value-added tax** levied on most goods and services sold for domestic consumption.
- It was **launched in India in 2017** as a comprehensive indirect tax for the entire country.
- It is a **comprehensive, multistage, destination-based tax**-
 - Comprehensive because it has subsumed almost all the indirect taxes except a few state taxes.
- It is **paid by the consumers** and is **remitted to the government** by the businesses selling the goods and services.
- It is of three types i.e.**
 - CGST** to be levied by the Centre,
 - SGST** to be levied by the States and
 - IGST** a tax levied on all Inter-State supplies of goods and/or services.
 - All these taxes are levied at rates mutually agreed upon by the Centre and the States.

- The GST Council headed by the Union Finance Minister is the governing and key decision-making body for GST.
- Recently, the **GST compensation Act** has been enacted which provides a detailed mechanism for compensation to the states for loss on account of implementation of GST.
- For the purpose of GST compensation to states, a cess known as **Compensation Cess** is being levied on luxury and demerit goods and proceeds of such cess is being credited to a separate Public Account fund known as Compensation Fund.

GST Council

- Goods and Services Tax Council is a constitutional body for making recommendations to the Union and state government on issues related to GST. The GST Council is **chaired by the Union Finance Minister**.
- As per **Article 279A of the amended Constitution**, the GST Council, which will be a joint forum of the Centre and the states, shall consist of the following members:
 - The Union finance minister (chairperson).
 - The Union minister of state in charge of revenue or finance.
 - The minister in charge of finance or taxation or any other minister nominated by each state government.
- As per **Article 279A(4)**, the Council will make recommendations to the Union and the states on important issues related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST Laws, principles that govern Place of Supply

Achievements of GST

- Better Compliance:** GST helped in achieving better tax compliance by subsuming multiple taxation and reduction in taxation burden in the last four years.
- Automated tax ecosystem:** It helped the country in transitioning to an automated indirect tax ecosystem. From electronic compliances, generation of e-invoices to tracking movement of goods through e-waybill - everything is now online

- **E-invoice & More Revenue:** The E-invoicing system helped reduce fake invoicing. Use of technology with online bill generation has resulted in smoother consignment movement and much fewer disputes with officials. After the introduction of E-invoice, GST collections have risen steadily since November 2020, surpassing the Rs. 1 lakh crore mark on several occasions.
 - **Logistical efficiency, production cost cut:** Another major achievement of this regime is the fact that over 50% of logistics effort and time is saved since GST has ensured the removal of multiple checkpoints and permits at state border checkpoints.
 - **Lesser transaction costs:** After the introduction of GST, there has been a significant reduction in transaction costs. This reduction has been a huge breakthrough in the interstate movement of products, allowing the country to boast of a single national unified market for businesses.
 - **Cooperative Federalism:** The customs portals are linked with the GST portal for credit availing on imports constitution of the GST Council and ensuring Centre-State partnership in the decision-making process. It ensured cooperative federalism to be its major part.
 - **Ease of doing business:** India's ease of doing business ranking has improved significantly in the last four years. Before GST was implemented, India's Ease of Doing Business ranking was 130 in 2016. In 2020, India was ranked 63rd on the list.
 - **More Freedom:** Since the GST rate is the same across the country for a particular supply, traders and manufacturers in the organised sectors have gained more freedom to choose the best vendors, suppliers, and other stakeholders with better pricing, regardless of their location.
 - **Improved Competitiveness:** GST has improved the competitiveness of domestic industries in the international market by removing hidden and embedded taxes.
 - **Boosting Make in India Initiative:** GST will give a major boost to the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government of India by making goods and services produced in India competitive in the National as well as International market.
- ### Shortcomings of GST
- **Increased compliance burden:** GST involves multiple tax returns and can be complex for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to navigate. This can be especially challenging for businesses that operate in multiple states.
 - **Higher tax burden for some SMEs:** Previously, some small businesses were exempt from certain taxes. Under GST, the registration threshold is lower, bringing more businesses into the tax net, which can strain their resources.
 - **Software costs:** Migrating to a new tax system often requires upgrading accounting software to be GST-compliant. This can be an additional expense for businesses.
 - **Impact on the unorganized sector:** The unorganized sector, a large part of the Indian economy, has faced challenges adapting to GST. Formalizing these businesses can take time.
 - **GST rates and complexities:** The current multi-tier GST structure with various tax rates can be intricate for businesses to deal with.
 - **Adoption & Technical Issues:** Small and medium businesses are still grappling to adapt to the tech-enabled regime. The fundamental principles on which the GST law was built viz. seamless flow of input credits and ease of compliance has been impaired by IT glitches,
 - **Other Concerns:** Further, the 15th Finance Commission, in its report, has also highlighted several areas of concern in the GST regime relating to:
 - ◆ multiplicity of tax rates,
 - ◆ shortfall in GST collections vis-à-vis the forecast,
 - ◆ high volatility in GST collections,
 - ◆ inconsistency in filing of returns,
 - ◆ dependence of States on the compensation from Centre
- ### Reforms Needed
- **Simplification of GST compliance:** This could involve reducing the number of tax return filings, streamlining the return format, and making the process more user-friendly for small businesses.
 - **Reviewing the GST rate structure:** There's discussion about potentially:
 - ◆ **Reducing the number of tax slabs:** This would make the system less complex for businesses to manage.

- ◆ **Raising the threshold for GST registration:** This could exempt some small businesses from GST altogether, reducing their compliance burden.
- ◆ **Rationalizing tax rates:** This might involve merging some tax slabs or adjusting rates to ensure a balance between revenue collection and affordability for consumers.
- **Technological solutions:** Investing in user-friendly technology platforms can simplify GST filing and compliance for businesses.
- **Addressing the challenges of the unorganized sector:** Initiatives to help informal businesses transition smoothly into the GST system could be beneficial. This might involve providing training and support.
- **Improving coordination between Central and State authorities:** Streamlined communication and data sharing between federal and state GST authorities can enhance efficiency and reduce compliance hassles for businesses operating across states.
- **Private domestic investments depend on** - macroeconomic stability, high household savings, productivity, access to credit, resolution of non-performing assets, clearing up of balance sheets, etc.
- **Public investment** remains an **important driver for India**, making it the **world's fastest growing major economy**.

Public Investment

Source: TH

IMF'S REGIONAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Context

- In its latest Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has emphasised the crucial role **played by public investment in driving India's economic growth**, making it the world's fastest-growing major economy.

About

- The IMF had earlier this month raised India's growth forecast for the financial year 2024-25 to 6.8 per cent, up from the previous estimate of 6.5 per cent.
- The IMF attributed this upward revision to the resilience of domestic demand, propelled by factors such as public investment.

Domestic Investments in India

- Domestic investments in India are divided into two parts - **public investments and private investments**.
- Private investments are further divided into two parts, which are **household investments and corporate investments**.

- **Infrastructure:** India has been focusing on bolstering its infrastructure across various domains such as transportation (roads, railways, airports, ports), energy (power generation, transmission, renewable energy), water supply, and urban development (smart cities, affordable housing).

- ◆ Public investments in these sectors aim to **enhance connectivity, reduce logistics costs, and improve the overall quality of life**.

- **Healthcare:** The government has been increasing investments in healthcare infrastructure, including building new hospitals, upgrading existing facilities, and expanding access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas.

- ◆ Initiatives like **Ayushman Bharat** aim to provide health insurance coverage to millions of people.

- **Education:** Investments in education focus on improving the quality of schools and universities, expanding access to education in remote areas, and enhancing skill development programs to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market.

- **Agriculture:** Public investments target areas such as irrigation, crop diversification, agricultural research, and rural infrastructure to enhance productivity and farmers' incomes.

- **Manufacturing:** The government's **"Make in India"** initiative aims to boost domestic manufacturing by attracting investment, improving infrastructure, and streamlining regulations.

- **Technology and Innovation:** Government is focusing on building a robust digital infrastructure, promoting research and development, and fostering entrepreneurship in emerging technologies like **artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and clean energy**.

- **Social Welfare:** Public investments in social welfare programs target poverty alleviation, social inclusion, and empowerment of marginalized communities.
 - ♦ Initiatives like the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA)**, rural electrification programs, and subsidized food distribution aim to **improve living standards and reduce inequality**.

Significance of Public Investment

Public investment plays a crucial role in **driving economic growth in India**, primarily **due to the following reasons:**

- **Infrastructure Development.**
- **Human Capital Development** by investment in education, healthcare, and skill development programs.
- **Stimulating Private Investment** by creating an enabling environment.
- **Regional Development** by reducing regional disparities and promoting inclusive growth.
- **Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship** by setting up technology parks, incubators, and R&D institutions.
- During economic downturns or recessions, public investment can serve as an important tool for **stimulating aggregate demand** and stabilizing the economy.
- Investments in renewable energy, clean technology, and sustainable infrastructure not only contribute to economic growth but also **mitigate environmental risks**.

Way Ahead

- India's ongoing economic reforms have created investment opportunities in various sectors like renewable energy, health, ports, shipping, circular economy and water management, and invited other foreign countries to invest in these sectors.
- Initiatives like **Vibrant Gujarat Summit and Production-Linked Incentive (PLI)** schemes have demonstrated good results.
- Various government initiatives, such as ease of doing business reforms, infrastructure development, and policy support are further **aiding in driving domestic investments**.

About the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- It is an **international financial institution and major financial agency of the United Nations** established in **1944** with the primary goal of promoting global monetary cooperation, exchange rate stability, balanced trade growth, and financial stability.
- The IMF is headquartered in **Washington, D.C.**, and it currently has **190 member countries**.
- It is regarded as the **global lender** of last resort to national governments, and a leading supporter of exchange-rate stability.
- **Publications:** World Economic Outlook, Global Financial Stability Report, Fiscal Monitor, Global Policy Agenda.

Source: **IE**

NEWS IN SHORT

WATER ICE FOUND IN POLAR CRATERS OF THE MOON

In News

- ISRO study has revealed evidence for enhanced possibility of water ice occurrence in the polar craters of the Moon.

Key Findings of the Study

- **Source of Ice:** The primary source of sub-surface water ice in the lunar poles is outgassing during volcanism in the Imbrian period.
- **Presence of Water Ice:** There is twice as much water ice in the northern polar region compared to the southern polar region.

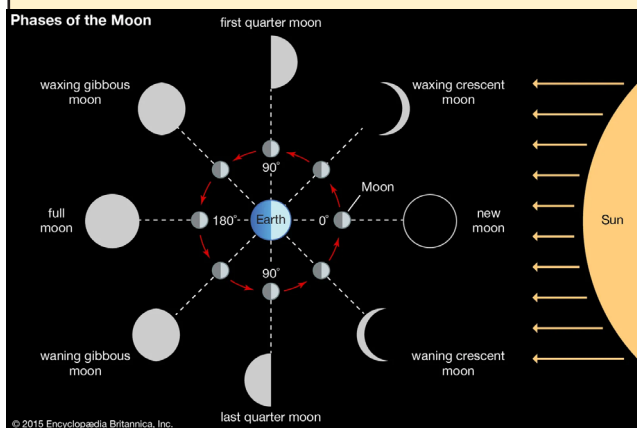
Significance

- This study is crucial for supporting ISRO's future in-situ volatile exploration plans on the Moon and long-term human presence.
- The findings of this study also supports the earlier study of Chandrayaan-2 related to presence of water on the moon.

Related Facts on the Moon

- The Moon is the **only natural satellite** orbiting Earth.
- The Moon has a diameter of approximately 3,474 kilometers, which is about **one-quarter the size of Earth**.

- The **Moon's gravity is about one-sixth of Earth's gravity**. However, it plays a significant role in creating tides on Earth due to the differential gravitational pull on different parts of the planet.
- The Moon exhibits **different phases** throughout the month due to its relative positions with Earth and the Sun.



- India has undertaken **three lunar missions, Chandrayaan-1 (2008), Chandrayaan-2 (2019) & Chandrayaan-3 (2023)**. These missions have contributed to our understanding of the Moon's composition, mineralogy, potential resources & soft landing on the moon's South pole.

Source: TH

QUARK PARTICLES

In News

- Scientists have reported that the insides of most massive neutron stars are most likely made of an unusual state of matter called quark matter.
 - ♦ A neutron star is a super-dense leftover of a massive star that went supernova (collapsing of star).

About Quark

- Quarks are the fundamental building blocks of matter. They are classified as elementary particles, meaning they aren't made up of any smaller known particles.
- Quarks **never exist alone**. They bind together in groups of two or three, through the force mediated by gluons (another fundamental particle), to form composite particles called hadrons. Protons and neutrons are the most stable hadrons.

- Unlike electrons with their negative whole number charge, quarks have fractional electric charges.
- There are **six types of quarks**: up, down, charm, strange, top, and bottom.

Source: TH

ARAVALLI RANGE

Context

- The Supreme Court recently said that illegal mining in the **Aravalli range in Rajasthan must stop**.

About

- The Aravalli Range, stretching over approximately 692 kilometres (430 miles) in a **northeastern direction**, traverses the Indian states of **Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana** before culminating in Delhi, is the **oldest mountain range in India**.
- The mountain range is characterised by **rugged hills, rocky outcrops, and sparse vegetation**, and it plays a crucial role in the region's ecology and hydrology.
- The Aravallis serve as a **natural barrier against desertification**, and helps regulate the climate, supports diverse ecosystems, and acts as a watershed for several rivers, including the **Sabarmati, Luni, and Banas**.
- Rich in biodiversity, the Aravallis are home to a variety of flora and fauna, including **dry deciduous forests, scrublands, and grasslands**, as well as numerous species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects.

Source: TH

LIQUID NITROGEN

Context

- The Tamil Nadu government issued an advisory banning the use of liquid nitrogen in food.

Liquid Nitrogen

- It is inert, colorless, odorless, non-flammable, non-corrosive and extremely cold.
- It has a very low boiling point of -196°C , and is present as a gas at room temperatures.
- **Health Impacts:** It can cause health complications including tissue damage, internal injuries from swallowing, and asphyxiation due to oxygen displacement.

- ♦ Children, the elderly, and those with respiratory conditions are particularly vulnerable to liquid nitrogen's dangers.
- **Applications:** Liquid nitrogen is employed in culinary settings primarily for its rapid freezing capabilities and dramatic visual effect.
 - ♦ At -196 degrees Celsius, it instantly freezes food, creating a smooth texture especially beneficial in high-end desserts like ice cream.
 - ♦ Athletes and wellness seekers are turning to cryotherapy chambers with liquid nitrogen vapor for a recovery boost.

Source: IE

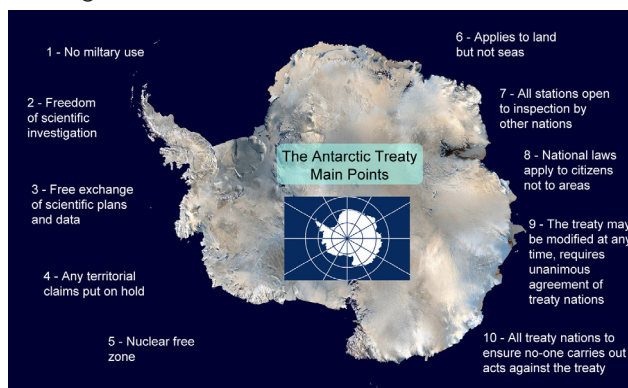
ANTARCTIC TREATY

In News

- India to host 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative meeting in Kochi, Kerala.
 - ♦ The meeting reflects India's growing role as a responsible global stakeholder in efforts to preserve Antarctica.

About Antarctic Treaty

- **Signed:** In 1959 by 12 countries and came into effect in the mid-1960s.
- **Objective:** Demilitarization and peaceful use of Antarctica, Freedom of scientific cooperation and environmental protection.
- **Member Nations:** Initially treaty signed by twelve countries, currently have 56 parties.
- India became a party to the Treaty in 1983. Recently, India enacted **Indian Antarctic Act, 2022** reaffirming its commitment to Antarctic Treaty.
- **Secretariat headquarter:** Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty

- The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty was signed in **Madrid** on October 4, 1991 and entered into force in 1998. It designates Antarctica as a “natural reserve, devoted to peace and science”.
- The Environmental Protocol is best known for its ban on commercial mining in Antarctica.
- To mark its 25th anniversary in 2016, all Parties underlined their commitment to the mining ban at the **Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting** in May 2016

Source: TOI

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA ON HINDU MARRIAGE

Context:

- The Supreme Court of India has recently made a significant ruling regarding the validity of Hindu marriages.

About the Hindu Marriage Act (1955)

- It was enacted as a part of the **Hindu Code Bills** to govern the institution of marriage among Hindus in India.
- It included the **Hindu Succession Act (1956)**, the **Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956)**, and the **Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956)**.
- It was passed to safeguard the rights of Hindu couples who get married.

Key Provisions

- The Act lays down the **conditions, ceremonies and registration for a Hindu marriage**, and provisions for judicial separation and restitution of conjugal rights.
- One of the **key ceremonies** mentioned in the Act is **‘Saptapadi’** (taking seven steps by the groom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire), which is considered **an essential part of a Hindu marriage**.

Recent Supreme Court Ruling

- The Supreme Court of India emphasised that a Hindu marriage is a ‘samskara’ and a sacrament, which has to be accorded its status as an institution of great value in Indian society.

- The court stated that a **Hindu marriage is a 'samskara' or sacrament** and cannot be recognized under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, 'unless performed with ceremonies in the proper form'.
 - ♦ It highlighted the importance of the 'saptapadi' ceremony in Hindu marriages.
- The court urged young men and women to 'think deeply about the institution of marriage even before they enter upon it and as to how sacred the said institution is, in Indian society'.

Source: Times of India

SHAKSGAM VALLEY

Context

- India has registered its **protest against China's "illegal attempts" to build a road into the lower Shaksgam valley in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).**

About

- The Shaksgam Valley or the Trans Karakoram Tract is part of **Hunza-Gilgit region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK)**, and is a disputed territory claimed by India but controlled by Pakistan.
 - ♦ It borders Xinjiang Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the north, the Northern Areas of POK to the south and west, and the Siachen Glacier region to the east.



- The Shaksgam valley was **ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963**, a year after the India-China war.
 - ♦ India has never accepted the so-called China Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963 and India has **consistently conveyed its rejection of the same.**

Source: TH

ARTICLE 361 OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Context:

- Recently, Article 361 of Indian Constitution was in news amid sexual harassment complaint against a Governor of a State.

About the Article 361

- It states that the **President, or the Governor of a State**, shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties of his office or for any act done or purporting to be done by him in the exercise and performance of those powers and duties.
- It **essentially** grants the President and the Governors **immunity from legal proceedings** during their term of office.
- It has two crucial **sub-clauses**:
 - ♦ **No criminal proceedings** whatsoever shall be initiated or continued against the President, or the Governor of a State, in any court during the term of his office.
 - ♦ **No process for the arrest or imprisonment** of the President, or the Governor of a State, shall be issued from any court during his term of office.

Related Supreme Court Judgement

- **Rameshwar Prasad v Union of India (2006)**: The Supreme Court outlined the immunity enjoyed by the Governor 'even on allegation of personal malafides', and held that 'the position in law is that the **Governor enjoys complete immunity**'.

Recent Interpretations

- The interpretation of Article 361 has been a **subject of legal scrutiny.**
- The Supreme Court of India has emphasised that the **immunity provided under Article 361 is not absolute.**
- The conduct of the President may be brought under review by any court, tribunal, or body appointed or designated by either House of Parliament for the investigation of a charge.

Source: IE

SURGE IN TOBACCO PRICES

Context:

- The global tobacco market has recently witnessed a significant surge in tobacco prices.

Reasons for Surge in Tobacco Price

- Unfavorable weather conditions**, including drought and unseasonable rain, have severely affected the production levels in tobacco producing states like Brazil, Zimbabwe, and Indonesia.
- Restrictions imposed by China** on Tobacco exports to help its domestic cigarette industry.

About the Tobacco Cultivation in India

- Tobacco is one of the important **commercial crops** growing under **diverse agro-ecological conditions**.
- It is a **drought tolerant, hardy and short duration crop** which can be grown on soils where other crops cannot be cultivated profitably.
- It occupies a meagre 0.24% to 0.3% of India's total arable land.
 - Despite this small percentage, tobacco farming is **highly labour-intensive** and remunerative compared to food crops.
- The major tobacco-growing states in India are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and West Bengal.
- Types of Tobacco:** Flue-cured Virginia (FCV), Bidi, Cigar Filler, and Hookah and Chewing.
- Production and Distribution:** India is the **2nd largest producer and exporter** after China and Brazil respectively.

Source: ET

MPOX

In News

- Scientists have raised concerns about the genetic mutations in Mpox which has grappled the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

About Mpox

- Also known as monkeypox, is a zoonotic disease caused by the monkeypox virus.
- It was first identified in 1971 in central Africa.

- Infected people break out in a rash that looks a lot like chicken pox.
- It is spread through direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, or cutaneous or mucosal lesions of an infected animal.
- There is no specific cure for mpox, but antiviral medications may be used to reduce the severity.

Source: IE

BLACKBUCKS

In News

- Forest officials in Bihar have been directed to ensure availability of water for Blackbucks during summer months.

About Blackbucks(Antelope cervicapra)

- It is also called Indian Antelope and is found only in the Indian subcontinent.
- It is considered to be the fastest animal in the world next to Cheetah
- Habitat** : The species inhabits open grassland, dry thorn scrub, scrubland and lightly-wooded country as well as agricultural margins.
- Distribution** : It is native to India and Nepal.



- In India the species is widespread in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other areas throughout peninsular India.
- Protection status** : Blackbuck is included in the Schedule-I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
 - They are categorised as **least concern** in the Red List of Threatened Species maintained by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.