

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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AMARAVATHI: THE RISE AND FALL OF ONE OF THE GREATEST BUDDHIST SITES

In News

- Union Finance announced the facilitation of financial support of Rs.15,000 crore through multilateral development agencies for the development of Amaravati .

About Amaravathi

- **Discovery and Initial Use (Late 1700s): Raja Vessareddy Nayudu** discovered ruins in Dhanyakatakam village, Andhra Pradesh, and used the limestone pillars and panels for building materials, unknowingly destroying parts of the ancient Amaravathi site.
 - ♦ Others in the region followed suit, leading to further destruction until 1816.
- **Colonial Survey** : Colonel Colin Mackenzie, first surveyor general of India, began surveying the site in 1816 after an earlier visit in 1798.
 - ♦ This led to the rediscovery of the Amaravathi stupa but also resulted in further destruction.
- **Modern Capital Named Amaravati** : In 2015, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister named the new capital Amaravati, derived from the ancient Buddhist site, for numerological reasons.
 - ♦ The capital is about 20 km from the original Amaravathi.
 - ♦ Amaravati, famous for the Amareswara temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva, dates back to the 2nd century BCE and was once the capital of the Satavahanas and also the Pallava kings.

Introduction and Spread of Buddhism in Andhra:

- Buddhism, emerging in the 5th century BCE in Magadh, reached Andhra through trade.
 - ♦ **Amaravati was a seat of Buddhism** prior to the rise of Satavahanas, and a stupa and monastery were built there during the reign of **Emperor Ashoka** (269-232 BC) under Mauryan Empire.
 - Emperor Ashoka's 3rd-century BCE inscription boosted its spread
 - ♦ Andhra's first urbanization was linked to Buddhism's growth. Merchants played a key role in supporting Buddhism.
 - ♦ Local practices like megalithic burials influenced the design of stupas.

Significance of Amaravathi in Buddhism:

- Amaravathi was a major center for Mahayana Buddhism, with Acharya Nagarjuna's teachings spreading it across South Asia and beyond. It is considered sacred by figures like the Dalai Lama.
- The Amaravathi stupa led to the development of the Amaravathi school of art, a major style of ancient Indian art known for its aesthetic sculptures and influence on later Buddhist art across South and Southeast Asia.

Decline of Buddhism in Andhra:

- The decline of Buddhism in Andhra was linked to the rise of Shaivism and socio-economic changes. By the 4th century CE, Buddhism faced reduced patronage and competition from other religions.
 - ♦ **Destruction and Looting (19th Century):** Following Mackenzie's survey, many sculptures were removed and sent to various locations, including London, where they experienced further deterioration.

Recent Repatriation Efforts:

- Australia returned a stolen Amaravathi-style sculpture under the 1970 UNESCO Convention. However, there is a lack of systematic provenance research and proactive repatriation efforts in India.
 - ♦ Many Amaravathi sculptures are dispersed globally. There is a lack of dedicated academic programs in India at the Amaravathi School of Art, with the Art Institute of Chicago being an exception.

Source: IE

UNITED NATION ON GLOBAL HUNGER CRISIS

Context

- Recently, the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report was published by five United Nations specialised agencies, showing chronic hunger remained high and healthy food was out of reach of many people.

Key Findings of the Report

- **Global Hunger Figures:** Approximately **733 million people faced hunger in 2023**. To put that in perspective, it's equivalent to one in eleven people globally.
 - ♦ **Future Projection:** The report warned that with ongoing trends, **about 582 million**

people are projected to suffer chronic undernourishment by the end of the decade, with half of this population in Africa.

- **Regional Variations**
 - ♦ **Africa:** The percentage of the population facing hunger continues to rise, reaching 20.4%. In **Africa**, the situation is even more critical, where one in five people experienced hunger during the same period.
 - ♦ **Asia:** While hunger levels remain stable at 8.1%, this still represents a significant challenge because Asia is home to more than half of the world's undernourished population.
 - ♦ **Latin America:** Encouragingly, progress is visible here, with hunger levels at 6.2%.
- **Impact of Urbanization:** Urbanisation, which was once thought to blur the lines between rural and urban food accessibility, is now drastically reshaping food systems. It affects the availability and affordability of healthy diets.
- **Setback in Progress:** Unfortunately, progress in the fight against global hunger has suffered a **setback of 15 years**, with levels of undernourishment comparable to those **seen in 2008-2009**. It means that despite our efforts, millions of people still go hungry.
- **COVID-19 and Ongoing Effects:** The enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to complicate the hunger scenario. The report hints at what hunger might look like by 2030, considering these ongoing challenges.
 - ♦ Countries are falling significantly short of achieving **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger by 2030**.
- **Beyond Hunger (Food Insecurity):** Access to adequate food remains elusive for billions. In 2023, 2.33 billion people globally faced moderate or severe food insecurity.
 - ♦ Among them, over 864 million experienced severe food insecurity—going without food for an entire day or more.
 - ♦ These numbers have stubbornly persisted since 2020, especially in Africa, where 58% of the population faces moderate or severe food insecurity.
- **According to UNICEF**, almost **8 million children** under the **age of 5 in 15** crisis-hit countries are at risk of death due to severe wasting—a condition

where children become dangerously thin for their height. This crisis is exacerbated by factors such as **conflict, climate change, and economic instability**.

Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger

- It aims to achieve Zero Hunger by ensuring that all people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Unfortunately, the world is currently far off track in achieving this goal.
- The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity globally remained unchanged in 2022, affecting an estimated 2.4 billion people. This number is still 391 million more than in 2019.

Positive Trends

- Amidst these challenges, there is some positive news. Child stunting has declined steadily over the years, from 204.2 million in 2000 to 148.1 million in 2022. However, sustained efforts are needed to accelerate progress and address hunger comprehensively.

Dimensions of Food Security

- **Availability:** This dimension encompasses food production within the country, food imports, and existing stockpiles. India's self-sufficiency in food grains has been a priority since Independence, with efforts like the Green Revolution contributing significantly.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring that food is within reach of every person is crucial. It involves factors like distribution networks, affordability, and transportation.
- **Affordability:** Having enough resources to buy sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is essential. Poverty eradication plays a vital role in improving access to food.

India's Hunger Situation

- India, unfortunately, bears a significant burden. **Persistent droughts, economic challenges**, and other factors have led to catastrophic levels of malnutrition among its children.
- Within the country, millions of children suffer from severe nutrition insecurity, meaning they lack access to a diverse diet necessary for healthy growth and development.

Global Hunger Index 2023

- India faces significant challenges in ensuring food security for its population.
- According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI), which measures hunger levels in countries, India's score has been a cause for concern. As of the most recent data available (2023) **India has ranked India 111 among 125 nations**, categorising India's severity of hunger as 'serious'.
- **Indicators For GHI** are **Undernourishment, Child Stunting, Child Wasting, and Child Mortality**.

Related Government Steps

- **India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS)** data shows positive trends in child stunting, wasting, and underweight percentages. These improvements reflect the impact of programs like the **Integrated Child Development Services** and the mid-day meal program.
- **Natural Calamities and Food Security:** During calamities like droughts, food production decreases, leading to shortages and price hikes. Some individuals may struggle to afford food, potentially resulting in starvation.
 - ♦ Historical examples, such as the devastating Bengal Famine of 1943, highlight the severity of food crises during widespread disasters.
- The government has also taken critical steps to enhance food security, including through an India-wide **Targeted Public Distribution System**, a National Nutrition Mission and the National Food Security Act, and **emergency assistance during the pandemic** demonstrate the government's commitment to food security.

Way Forward

- **Nutrition Education:** Raising awareness about balanced diets, micronutrients, and breastfeeding practices is crucial.
- **Agricultural Reforms:** Enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable farming practices, and improving supply chains are essential.
- **Social Safety Nets:** Strengthening safety nets like the Public Distribution System (PDS) ensures that vulnerable populations receive adequate food.

- **Waste Reduction:** Reducing food wastage at various stages—production, distribution, and consumption—can make a significant impact.
- **Community Participation:** Engaging local communities, NGOs, and civil society in hunger eradication efforts is vital.

Conclusion

- Achieving Zero Hunger requires concerted efforts at the global, national, and local levels. It isn't just about food availability; it's also about equitable access, nutrition, and overall well-being.
- India, with its vast population and diverse challenges, must prioritise food security as a fundamental right for all its citizens.

Source: News On AIR

AGING POPULATION AND DEMENTIA IN INDIA

Context

- **Dementia**, a major cause of cognitive disability and dependency among the elderly, is expected to **affect millions of Indian families over the next two decades**.

Aging Population in India

- As of 2019, India is home to over 139 million people aged 60 and above, accounting for **more than 10%** of the nation's entire population.
- By 2050, the percentage of elderly people is projected to **nearly double to 19.5%**, with 319 million individuals over the age of 60.
- Consequently, it is anticipated that **one in every five Indians will be a senior citizen**.
- **Reason:** The **steady decline** in India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** over the past several decades has led to an increase in the proportion of older adults in the population.
 - ♦ TFR has dropped from **5.2 in 1971 to 2.0 in 2020**, and it is now **lower than 2.1**, the replacement level.
- This shift has contributed to an **aging population**, as people are living longer and having fewer children.

Dementia

- Dementia is an umbrella term for a range of conditions that impair cognitive functions such as memory, thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving.

- These impairments are severe enough to interfere with daily life and activities.
- Dementia is caused by damage to brain cells, which disrupts their ability to communicate with each other.
- There are several types of dementia, each with different underlying causes and symptoms.

Need for Policy Reforms

- The country is confronting a growing challenge to **manage age-related diseases** such as **Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, vascular dementia, and other neurodegenerative disorders**.
- The **demographic shift** stands to exacerbate several risk factors for dementia, including **hypertension, obesity, smoking, depression, social isolation, and physical inactivity**.
- With an aging population, the number of individuals at risk of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia **will increase substantially in India**.
- A failure to address this growing health concern could **result in significant social and economic consequences**.

Addressing risk factors

- **Air Pollution:** Research suggests that long-term exposure to air pollution can lead to chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, and neuroinflammation, contributing to **cognitive decline and an increased risk of dementia**.
 - ♦ Essential to managing these risks will be the adoption of stringent air quality regulations and sustainable urban planning strategies to reduce air pollution levels.
- **Addressing hypertension and obesity** is critical.
 - ♦ Governments must develop and implement nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, emphasising regular exercise, a balanced diet, and weight management.
 - ♦ Strengthening primary healthcare services to facilitate early detection and treatment of hypertension, obesity, and related health issues is recommended.
- **Traumatic brain injury (TBI):** The state must implement public safety measures and regulations to reduce the incidence of TBI, focusing on road safety, occupational safety, and sports safety.

Way Ahead

- One of the key strategies to address the dementia challenge is to **invest in early detection and timely intervention**.
 - ♦ The Lancet Commission report suggests that up to **40% of dementia cases may be preventable by addressing modifiable risk factors**.
- **Investment:** The government must establish **specialised dementia care facilities** and train healthcare professionals with a focus on early detection, intervention, and management of dementia and associated risk factors.
- **Research:** Investments in research to understand the **links between risk factors and dementia**, paving the way for development of effective interventions and treatments are also important.
- **Awareness:** It is necessary to raise public awareness, and to increase public understanding of dementia and its risk factors.
- **Infrastructure:** The Government must prioritise the **development of a robust and comprehensive healthcare infrastructure** to cater to its aging population.

Source: TH

BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR NATIONAL MISSION ON NATURAL FARMING

Context

- The Finance Ministry has allocated **Rs 365.64 crore for the National Mission on Natural Farming** for 2024-25.

What is Natural Farming?

- This farming approach was introduced by **Masanobu Fukuoka**, a Japanese farmer and philosopher, in his **1975 book The One-Straw Revolution**.
- Natural Farming is a sustainable agricultural practice that **emphasizes chemical-free farming**, relying on indigenous cows and locally available resources.
- It avoids chemical fertilizers and pesticides, promoting traditional methods that free farmers from the need for external inputs. This approach focuses on:

- ♦ **Biomass Mulching:** Covering soil with organic matter to retain moisture, improve soil health, and suppress weeds.
- ♦ **Desi Cow Dung-Urine Formulations:** Using formulations made from the dung and urine of indigenous cows to fertilize the soil and manage pests.
- ♦ **Natural Nutrient Cycling:** Enhancing the natural processes that recycle nutrients within the soil.

National Mission on Natural Farming

- The Government has formulated National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) as a separate and independent scheme by up-scaling the **Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP) from 2023-24.**
- To motivate farmers to adopt natural farming and to enhance the reach of natural farming, **1 crore farmers** across the country will be initiated into natural farming supported by certification and branding.
- Implementation will be through scientific institutions and willing gram panchayats. **10,000 need-based bio-input resource centers** will be established.

Challenges to Natural Farming

- **Yields drop:** India's first organic state, Sikkim, has started seeing decline in its yields after a few years.
- **Conviction among Policy Makers:** As of now, policy makers fear for the food security of the nation and are non-committal on any major changes in the agriculture sector.
- **Resistance by the Chemical inputs-based industry:** The chemical-based farming has a strong backing in the form of multi-million-dollar agro-chemical industry, which has fought tooth and nail to sustain the application of chemicals in agriculture.
- **Knowledge and Training:** Farmers need specialized knowledge and training to implement natural farming techniques effectively. This includes understanding soil health, crop rotation, companion planting, and natural pest management strategies.
- **Economic Viability:** The economic viability of natural farming can be uncertain. Higher labor costs, lower yields, and the potential for crop failures impacts profitability.

Way Ahead

- Now is the time when India moves forward on the path of natural farming and takes full advantage of the global opportunities that are emerging.
- Natural farming will **reduce dependency on purchased inputs** and will help to ease smallholder farmers from credit burden.

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)

- It means raising **crops without using any fertilizers and pesticides** or any other external materials. The word Zero Budget refers to the **zero cost of production** of all crops.
- The concept was promoted by **Subhash Palekar**, in the **mid-1990s** as an alternative to the Green Revolution's methods.
- ZBNF helps in **retaining soil fertility, to ensure a chemical free agriculture and ensure low cost of production (zero cost)** and thereby enhancing the farmers income.
- **Four main elements and models of ZBNF:**
 - ♦ **Bijamrita:** The seeds are treated with formulations prepared using cow dung and cow urine from native cow species.
 - ♦ **Jiwamrita/Jeevamrutha:** It is a fermented microbial culture obtained from cow dung, urine, jaggery, pulse flour and uncontaminated soil. When applied to soil, it adds nutrients to it, besides acting as a **catalytic agent** to promote the activity of microorganisms and earthworms in the soil.
 - ♦ **Acchadana/Mulching:** Mulching is the process of covering the top soil with crop wastes/organic waste or with cover crops.
 - ♦ **Waaphasa/Moisture (Soil Aeration):** Good aeration is required in the soil for plant growth and development.

Source: IE

INDIA'S ILLEGAL COAL MINING PROBLEM

Context

- Recently three workers died of asphyxiation inside an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district.

About

- **Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel** in India, accounting for **55%** of the country's energy needs.

- **According to the Ministry of Coal**, illegal mining in India is mostly carried out in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams in remote or isolated places.
- Illegal mining is often carried out using **rudimentary techniques like surface mining and rat-hole mining**, rather than the scientific methods required for legal operations on a larger scale.

Nationalization of Coal mines

- **Coal in India was nationalized in two phases:** first with the coking coal (used for the production of coke in the steel industry) in **1971-72**; and then with the non-coking coal mines in **1973**.
- **The Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973** is the central legislation that determines eligibility for coal mining in India.
- **Illegal mining constitutes a law and order problem**, which is a **State list subject**. Hence, the onus of dealing with it falls on State governments rather than the Union government.

Issues faced by workers in illegal coal mining

- **The lack of safety equipment and protocols** is the primary reason for deaths during illegal coal mining. Miners face increased respiratory risks due to inhaling coal dust, and the lack of safety equipment significantly increases this risk.
- **Illegal mines lack proper structural support** to carry out the extraction of coal, making working conditions hazardous and vulnerable to cave-ins, landslides, and explosions.
- Workers are **exposed to high levels of toxic substances** like lead and mercury, which can cause acute poisoning or long-term chronic medical conditions.
- Several people working in illegal coal mines are untrained for the job and for the risks it poses. There is a **lack of proper training, quick response facilities, and knowledge** in case of emergencies.

Challenges to cut down illegal coal mining

- **Economic Dependence:** Many local economies rely heavily on coal mining. When official mining operations cease, illegal mining often becomes a primary source of income for local communities.

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** In regions where there are limited employment opportunities, illegal mining provides a means of livelihood for many people, making it difficult to eradicate without addressing underlying economic issues.
- **High Demand for Coal:** Coal is a major source of energy in India, which drives the demand and makes illegal mining lucrative.
- **Weak Law Enforcement:** Limited resources and capacity of law enforcement agencies can result in ineffective policing of illegal mining activities.
- **Technological Challenges:** Monitoring and detecting illegal mining activities, especially in remote areas, are technologically challenging.
- **Support from political leaders:** It is alleged that illegal rat-hole coal mining has continued in Assam, as well as in Meghalaya and other north-eastern States, with the patronage of political leaders and in collusion with officials.

Steps taken by government to curb illegal coal mining

- The Government of India has launched one mobile app namely **"Khanan Prahari"** and one web app **Coal Mine Surveillance and Management System (CMSMS)** for **reporting unauthorized coal mining activities** so that monitoring and taking suitable action on it can be done by concerned Law & Order enforcing authority.
- **The National Green Tribunal (NGT)** banned the practice of rat-hole coal mining in **2014** as it causes environmental degradation and is a threat to the life of miners.
- **Committee/task force has been constituted** at different levels (block level, sub-divisional level, district level, state level) in some subsidiaries of **Coal India Limited** to monitor different aspects of illegal mining.

Way Ahead

- **Economic Development:** Providing alternative livelihood opportunities and economic development initiatives in mining-dependent regions to reduce reliance on illegal mining.
- **Improved Monitoring:** Utilize advanced technologies for monitoring mining activities and ensuring compliance with regulations.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with local communities to raise awareness about the risks

and consequences of illegal mining and to gain their support in combating it.

Source: TH

GOVERNMENT APPROVED VARIOUS DISASTER MITIGATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS

Context

- A high-level committee headed by the Union Home Minister approved several **disaster mitigation and capacity building projects** for various states that include combating urban flooding and checking glacial lake outburst floods.

About

- The committee approved **nine proposals for funding** from National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) and National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).
- It include **six projects** in Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal and Maharashtra for **urban flood management**.
 - Project for **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood risk mitigation** for the states of **Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The committee also considered a proposal to implement **Yuva Aapda Mitra Scheme (YAMS) in all the 28 states**.
 - It will be implemented in **315 most disaster-prone districts** of the country for training of **1300 trained Aapda Mitra Volunteers** as Master Trainers and 2.37 lakh volunteers exclusively from NCC, NSS, NYKS and BS&G (Bharat Scouts & Guides) **in disaster preparedness and response**.

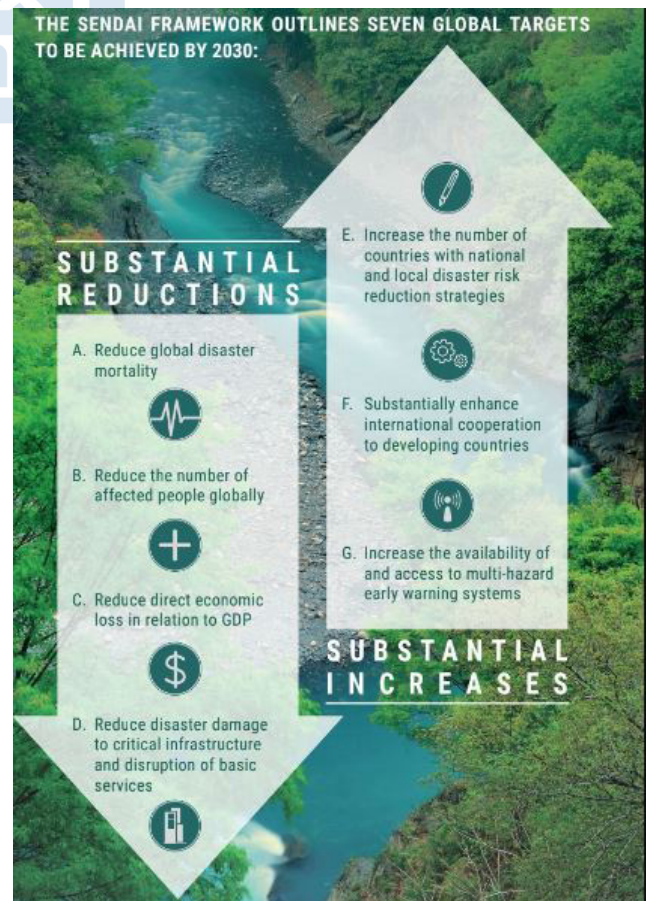
Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

- It is aimed at **preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk** and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to **strengthening resilience** and therefore to the achievement of **sustainable development**.
- DRR strategies and policies **define goals and objectives** across different timescales and with concrete targets, indicators and time frames.
- Need of DRR:** It is vital for safeguarding lives, reducing economic losses, promoting sustainable development, protecting the environment,

enhancing community resilience, facilitating effective emergency response, addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, and supporting broader security objectives.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

- It is a **global agreement adopted by UN member states** to guide efforts in reducing disaster risk and building resilience to disasters.
- It was adopted at the **Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, in 2015**.
- The framework represents a significant step forward from its predecessor, the **Hyogo Framework for Action**, focusing on a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to disaster risk management.
- The primary goal of the Sendai Framework is to substantially reduce disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods, and health **by 2030**.
- It recognizes that the **State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk** but that responsibility should be **shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders**.



- **Four Priority Actions:**

- ♦ **Understanding Disaster Risk:** Improving knowledge of disaster risk through comprehensive risk assessments, data collection, and research.
- ♦ **Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance:** Developing effective and inclusive governance structures that integrate disaster risk reduction into policies and practices.
- ♦ **Investing in Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience:** Increasing investments in DRR measures and incorporating risk reduction into development planning, infrastructure, and community resilience efforts.
- ♦ **Enhancing Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response:** Improving preparedness and response mechanisms to ensure a swift and efficient response to disasters.

Framework for DRR in India

- **National Disaster Management Act, 2005:** This act established the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** and provided a legal framework for disaster management in India.
 - ♦ It created a **three-tier system of disaster management** involving the National, State, and District Authorities, each with specific roles and responsibilities.
 - ♦ The NDMA is **headed by the Prime Minister**, emphasizing the importance of disaster management at the highest level of government.
- **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) 2016:** It outlines the strategic approach to disaster management in India, focusing on a holistic and integrated approach.
- **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF):** Established under the National Disaster Management Act, NDRF is a specialized force trained to respond to natural and man-made disasters.
- **National Policy on Disaster Management (2009):** This policy provides a comprehensive framework for disaster management, emphasizing a proactive approach to risk reduction, preparedness, and mitigation.
- **National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF):** This fund supports disaster relief operations and recovery efforts.
- **State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):** Each state has its own fund for disaster response and management at the state level.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

CLIMATE FINANCE ACTION FUND

In News

- Azerbaijan, which will host the 29th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, announced the Climate Finance Action Fund to help developing countries fight climate change.

About Climate Finance Action Fund

- The fund will receive annual contributions from fossil fuel-producing countries and companies. Initial fundraising aims for \$1 billion.
- The fund will target climate projects in developing countries, meeting the next generation of national climate plans to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and addressing the consequences of climate change-fuelled disasters.

Source: BS

METHANE

In Context

- Tree bark in the world's forests absorbs the greenhouse gas methane and this discovery could have big implications for tackling climate change.

About

- The methane traps much more heat in the atmosphere than the equivalent amount of CO₂. But while CO₂ can last in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, methane has a lifetime of around ten years.
- This short atmospheric lifetime means that any changes to sources of methane or processes that remove methane from the atmosphere (known as methane sinks) can have rapid effects.

Methane

- Methane is a colorless, odorless, and highly flammable gas, and the main component in natural gas.
- Agriculture is the largest single source of global anthropogenic methane (CH₄) emissions, with ruminants the dominant contributor.
- It has contributed about a third of the observed climate warming since preindustrial times.

Source: TH

REVAMPED MODEL SKILL LOAN SCHEME

In News

- The Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched the New Model Skill Loan Scheme in New Delhi.

About the Scheme

- It had been mentioned by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2024-25.
- The Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) initially launched the Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Skill Development (CCFSSD) in July 2015.
 - ♦ The new Model Skill Loan Scheme is the revised version of the same.
- **Key Features** : Under the scheme, education and upskilling opportunities will be provided to 25 thousand youth across the country.
 - ♦ The loan amount limit has been increased to 7.5 lakh rupees which was 1.5 lakh rupees earlier.
 - ♦ Several Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC), scheduled banks, and rural banks also have been added to the scheme which will provide hassle-free loans to students.
- **Purpose** : It is tailored to support advanced-level skill courses, which often come with higher fees, creating a significant financial barrier for many deserving students.
 - ♦ This initiative aims to bridge that gap, ensuring that aspiring candidates receive the necessary financial support to pursue their skill training.

Source: TH

RULE 267 OF RAJYA SABHA

Context

- Recently, the Rajya Sabha Chairman informed that the introspection among parliamentarians regarding the frequent use of Rule 267, terming it an 'indiscriminate resort' to the provision.

About the Rule 267 of Rajya Sabha

- It is nestled within the **broader category of 'suspension of rules'**, empowers **any member**

of the Rajya Sabha **to propose the suspension of a specific rule.**

- ♦ It gives special power to a Rajya Sabha member to suspend the pre-decided agenda of the House, **with the approval of the Chairman.**
- It allows for the **suspension of a day's business** to debate the issue suggested by a Member.
- By suspending a rule, the Rajya Sabha can fast-track discussions or decisions on specific issues.
- This suspension isn't forever. Once the day's business concludes, the **suspended rule reclaims its rightful place.**

Source: DD News

WHITE CATEGORY SECTORS

Context

- The industries categorized under the '**white category**' by the **Central Pollution Control Board** will not require prior permission of the state pollution control boards to establish and operate under the **Air Act, 1981** and **Water Act, 1974.**

White category sectors

- In 2016, the **Central Pollution Control Board** reclassified industries based on their pollution potential.
- This involved assessing pollution index scores based on emissions, effluent discharge, hazardous waste generation, and natural resource consumption.
- The "**white category**" was introduced during this reclassification, alongside updated scores for the previously existing categories — **red, orange, and green.**
 - ♦ The PI of any industrial sector is a number from **0-100.**
 - ♦ Industrial sectors with a **Pollution Index (PI)** score **including and up to 20** come under the category.
- **Wind and solar power projects, assembly of air coolers, bicycle assembly** are some of the projects and activities that come under the white category.

Source: IE

DARK OXYGEN

Context

- Scientists have discovered “dark oxygen” being produced in the deep ocean.

About

- A study found that oxygen is being produced in complete darkness nearly **4,000 meters** below the ocean surface.
- According to the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**, around half of the Earth’s oxygen comes from the ocean.

Production of dark oxygen

- The production of oxygen at such depths is thought to be impossible because there isn’t enough sunlight for plants to do photosynthesis.
- The study explains that in this case oxygen is not produced by the plants, instead it comes out of metallic “nodules” that are similar in resemblance to lumps of coal.
 - They are **splitting H₂O molecules** into hydrogen and oxygen.

Source: HT

LISTERIA OUTBREAKS

Context

- Recently, two separate outbreaks of **listeria, a bacteria** which can contaminate food, have been reported in the United States and Canada.

About the Listeria (Scientifically Listeria Monocytogenes)

- It is a **bacterium** that can **contaminate food** and cause a serious infection called **listeriosis**. It spreads easily among **deli equipment** (a store where ready-to-eat food products), surfaces, hands and food.
- Symptoms of listeriosis include vomiting, nausea, cramps, severe headache, constipation, and fever.
- Foods that often harbour listeria include milk, raw sprouts, deli meats, hot dogs, soft cheeses, and smoked seafood.
- People with compromised immune systems, pregnant individuals, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.
- Antibiotics are given in the treatment.

Source: IE

EX KHAAN QUEST 2024

Context

- Indian Army contingent departed for the Multinational Military Exercise ‘**Khaan Quest**’ at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

About

- The exercise first started as a bilateral event between **USA and Mongolian** Armed Forces in the year **2003**.
- Subsequently, from the year **2006** onwards the exercise graduated to a **Multinational Peacekeeping Exercise** with the current year being the **21st iteration**.
- Exercise KHAAN QUEST will enable the participating countries to share their best practices in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for conduct of joint operations.
- The exercise will also facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between soldiers of the participating countries.

Source: PIB

KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS

Context

- 25 years ago** on July 26 1999, Indian armed forces successfully outed Pakistani Forces from their occupied positions on the mountain tops of Northern Kargil District in Ladakh.
- Since then this day is celebrated as **Kargil Vijay Diwas**.

History

- In 1999, the Pakistani soldiers and militants infiltrated the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) in the northern Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir, occupying strategic positions at high altitudes, to sever the link between Kashmir and Ladakh and to create unrest in the region.
- In response to this the Indian Army launched **Operation Vijay** which lasted for more than two months.
- The war, fought in the challenging high-altitude terrain of Kargil, presented numerous logistical and environmental difficulties.
- Despite these, the Indian Army not just managed to drive out Pakistani intruders but also successfully recaptured the **Tiger Hill** and other strategic positions.

Source: Indian Express

RWANDA

In News

Rwanda held its fourth presidential election since the 1994 Tutsi genocide.

- President Paul Kagame won overwhelmingly with over 99% of the votes.

Rwanda

- It is a landlocked country situated in central Africa. Also known as 'The Land of a Thousand Hills', Rwanda has five volcanoes, 23 lakes and numerous rivers, some forming the source of the River Nile.



- It is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west.
- **Capital City:** Kigali
- The **Main water bodies** are Lake Kivu, Lake Muhazi, Lake Ihema, Lake Bulera, Lake Ruhondo, and Lake Mugesera.
- **Vegetation:** ranges from dense equatorial forest in the north-west of the country to tropical savanna in the east.
- **Highest point:** Karisimbi volcano (4,507m)

Source:TH

