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DRAFT DIGITAL COMPETITION BILL

Context

- Recently, the **Committee on Digital Competition Law** (under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**) came to the conclusion that there was a need to supplement the **current ex-post framework** under the **Competition Act, 2002** with an **ex-ante framework** in the draft **Digital Competition Bill**.

About the Draft Digital Competition Bill

- It emerges against the backdrop of the Competition Act, 2002, and subsequent amendments and recommendations aimed at updating India's competition framework to better address the digital economy.

Ex-Post vs. Ex-Ante Framework

- Ex-Post Framework:** The **Competition Act, 2002** currently operates on an ex-post basis, which means that the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** can take enforcement actions **only after anti-competitive conduct** has occurred.
 - In digital markets, this approach can be time-consuming and allows offending actors to escape timely scrutiny.
- Ex-Ante Framework:** The CDCL advocates for an ex-ante competition regulation for digital enterprises. This approach allows the CCI to pre-empt and prevent anti-competitive behavior before it happens.
- Notably, the **European Union** is the only jurisdiction with a comprehensive **ex-ante competition framework (Digital Markets Act)** currently in force.

Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- It is the chief national competition regulator in India, and operates as a **statutory body** within the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs** and is responsible for enforcing the **Competition Act, 2002**.
- Its primary objectives are to promote competition and prevent activities that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India.
- Its vision includes inspiring businesses to be fair, competitive, and innovative, enhancing consumer welfare, and supporting economic growth.

Legal Framework

- The CCI operates under the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002, which **replaced the earlier Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP Act)**.

- The MRTP Act was repealed, and the Competition Act, 2002, came into effect based on the recommendations of the **Raghavan Committee**.

Key Features

- Antitrust Regulation:** The CCI examines cases related to anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position, and cartel behavior.
- Regulation of Combinations:** It reviews mergers, acquisitions, and other combinations to assess their impact on competition.
- Competition Economics:** The CCI analyzes economic aspects of competition and market dynamics.
- Advocacy:** It promotes competition awareness and educates stakeholders.
- International Cooperation: The CCI collaborates with international competition authorities.
- Anti-Profitteering:** The CCI ensures that benefits of reduced taxes are passed on to consumers.
- Market Studies and Research:** The CCI conducts studies to understand market trends and competition issues.

Unique Characteristics of Digital Markets

- Economies of Scale and Scope:** Digital enterprises benefit from economies of scale (reduction in cost per unit as production increases) and economies of scope (reduction in total costs with an increase in services).
 - These factors drive rapid growth compared to traditional markets.
- Network Effects:** The utility of digital services increases with the number of users (network effects).
 - Rapid growth, combined with network effects, can tip markets in favor of incumbents.

Key Features of the Draft Bill

- Quantitative Standards for Dominance:** The draft Bill outlines quantitative criteria for identifying dominance among digital enterprises.
 - It uses the 'significant financial strength' test to assess dominance.
- Preventative Obligations:** To address the unique challenges of digital markets, the CDCL proposes preventative obligations.
 - These obligations supplement the ex-post enforcement framework, allowing timely intervention.

Concerns and Implications

- Data Privacy:** Stakeholders are concerned about the implications for data privacy. Stringent regulations could impact how companies handle user data.
- Competitive Landscape:** The competitive dynamics of digital markets may be affected. Some fear that stringent rules could stifle innovation and hamper business operations.
- Compliance Burdens:** Companies worry about the compliance burdens the bill may place on them.
- Consumer Choice:** There are concerns that overly restrictive regulations could ultimately affect consumer choice and market dynamics.

Balancing Act

- While the bill aims to address anti-competitive practices, stakeholders emphasize the need for a balanced approach — one that fosters innovation while safeguarding consumer interests.

Conclusion

- The Draft Digital Competition Bill aims to enhance competition regulation in digital markets by introducing an ex-ante framework. As India navigates the complexities of the digital economy, this legislation could fundamentally alter the landscape of competition law in India.

Source: TH

22ND INDIA-RUSSIA ANNUAL SUMMIT

Context

- Prime Minister Modi paid an official visit to Russia for the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit.

Key Highlights

- PM Modi was conferred Russia's highest national award "**The Order of St. Andrew the Apostle**" for his contribution to fostering India-Russia ties.
 - The award was announced in **2019**.
- India will set up two new consulates in the Russian cities of **Kazan and Yekaterinburg**.
- Russia agreed to India's demand to ensure early **release and return to home of the Indian nationals working in the Russian military** as support staff.
- India and Russia are working on the **Eastern Maritime Corridor** and the two countries were discovering each other through the **Ganga-Volga dialogue**.

- The Eastern Maritime Corridor is a proposed sea route between Chennai, India, and Vladivostok, Russia, passing through the Sea of Japan, the South China Sea, and the Malacca Strait.
- Both the Leaders agreed to set the bilateral trade target of **USD 100 billion by 2030**.

India- Russia Relations

- Political Relations:** A watershed moment in relations between India and the Soviet Union was the signing of the **Treaty of Peace and Friendship** in 1971.
 - After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India and Russia entered into a new **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1993**.
 - In 2000, during the visit of President Putin to India, the partnership acquired a new qualitative character, that of a **Strategic Partnership**.
 - In **2010** the relationship was elevated to the status of a **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**.
- Defense and Security Cooperation:** BrahMos Missile System as well as the licensed production in India of **SU-30 aircraft and T-90 tanks** are examples of such flagship cooperation.
 - Both sides concluded agreements on the supply of **S-400 air defense systems**, construction of frigates under Project 1135.6 and shareholders agreement on the formation of a joint venture to manufacture **Ka-226T** helicopters in India.
 - The two countries also hold exchanges and training exercises between their armed forces annually termed **INDRA**.
- Trade and Economic Relations:** Both sides revised targets of increasing bilateral investment to US \$50 billion and bilateral trade to **US \$30 billion by 2025**. However, bilateral trade reached an all-time high of \$65.70 billion in FY 2023-24.
 - Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, India has been buying large amounts of Russian oil at a discount to cushion the inflationary impact of rising crude prices.
- Intergovernmental Commissions:** There is regular high-level interaction between the two countries.
 - The IRIGC (India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission):** It is the main body that conducts affairs at the governmental level between both countries. Both countries are members of international bodies including the UN, BRICS, G20 and SCO.

- ♦ **Two Inter-Governmental Commissions:** One on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC), co-chaired by EAM and the Russian DPM, and
- ♦ Another on **Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC- MTC)** co-chaired by Russian and Indian Defence Ministers, meet annually.
- **Nuclear Energy:** Russia recognizes India as a country with advanced nuclear technology with an impeccable non-proliferation record.
- ♦ **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)** is being built in India with Russian cooperation.
- ♦ Applications range from cryptography and materials science to complex simulations and optimization problems.
- **Quantum Sensors:** These devices use quantum principles to achieve unprecedented levels of sensitivity and accuracy.
- ♦ Quantum sensors are poised to enhance fields like healthcare (through precise medical imaging), environmental monitoring (for detecting minute changes), and navigation (with ultra-precise positioning systems).
- **Quantum Communications:** Quantum communication utilizes quantum entanglement to secure data transmission.

Way Ahead

- Over the years, as India has diversified its relationships in a **multi-polar world**, the India-Russia relationship has stagnated in some areas and atrophied in others.
- To further strengthen the relationship between Both the nations there is need for;
 - ♦ Providing a new basis for the existing defense cooperation;
 - ♦ The opportunity for Indian business conglomerates to explore the economic viability of the Siberian and Far East Region of Russia;
 - ♦ Strengthening geo-economic connectivity projects;
 - ♦ Enhancing technological cooperation between India and Russia.

Source: IE

QUANTUM SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

In News

- The United Nations proclaimed 2025 as the **International Year of Quantum Science and Technology (IYQ)** to raise awareness about quantum science and technology).

About

- Quantum science delves into the peculiar and counterintuitive behaviour of particles at the smallest scales.
- Governments and private sectors worldwide are heavily investing in quantum technologies.

Applications

- **Quantum Computing:** Quantum computers leverage quantum bits (qubits), which can exist in multiple states simultaneously, enabling computations at speeds exponentially faster than classical computers.

Significance

- According to an estimate computed by consulting firm McKinsey, four sectors — automotives, chemicals, financial services, and life sciences — are expected to gain about \$1.3 trillion in value by 2035 due to quantum S&T.
- ♦ Among investments by countries, China leads with \$10 billion in 2022, followed by the European Union and the U.S.
- ♦ India's contribution is currently \$730 million (Rs 6,100 crore).
- The value of quantum S&T is in transforming abilities to transmit and make use of information across sectors.

Challenges

- The potential benefits of quantum S&T are immense, so too are the challenges.
- Issues like the dual-use nature of quantum technologies, which can both advance and potentially undermine cybersecurity, necessitate careful ethical and regulatory frameworks.
- Lack of case studies on the impact of responsible innovation frameworks in quantum S&T.
- lack of access to talent and technologies

Related Initiatives

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) was one of the first organisations to discuss quantum computing governance.
 - ♦ It emphasises principles like transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability.
 - ♦ It aims to build trust, manage risks, and foster responsible innovation in quantum computing.
- National strategies, e.g., U.S. National Quantum Strategy, prioritize protecting intellectual property and enabling technologies.

- Various frameworks proposed by researchers emphasize responsible research and innovation (RRI) values such as anticipation, reflection, diversity, and public engagement.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Looking forward, quantum science and technology will be a key cross-cutting scientific field of the 21st century, having a tremendous impact on critical societal challenges highlighted by the U.N.'s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including climate, energy, food safety and security, and clean water
- Continued deliberation and engagement among stakeholders (researchers, governments, private sector) regarding responsible quantum technology development.
- The government must work to safeguard relevant quantum research and development and intellectual property and to protect relevant enabling technologies and materials.

Source:TH

INDIA TO SIGN BIODIVERSITY BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION (BBNJ) AGREEMENT

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved India to sign the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement.

About

- **The Ministry of Earth Sciences** will spearhead the country's implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.
- The Agreement allows India to enhance its strategic presence in areas beyond the **EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone)**.
- It would also contribute to achieving several SDGs, particularly **SDG14 (Life Below Water)**.

What is the BBNJ Agreement?

- The BBNJ Agreement, or the '**High Seas Treaty**', is an international treaty under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
- It sets precise mechanisms for the **sustainable use of marine biological diversity** through international cooperation and coordination.
- Parties cannot claim or exercise sovereign rights over marine resources derived from the high seas and ensure **fair and equitable sharing of benefits**.

- ♦ **High Seas** (areas beyond national jurisdiction) are the global common oceans open to all for internationally lawful purposes such as navigation, overflight, laying submarine cables and pipelines, etc.

Implementation of BBNJ Agreement

- The BBNJ Agreement will be the **third implementation agreement** under **UNCLOS** if and when it enters into force, alongside its sister implementation agreements:
 - ♦ **The 1994 Part XI Implementation Agreement** (which addresses the exploration and extraction of mineral resources in the international seabed area) and
 - ♦ **The 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement** (which addresses the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks).
- The Agreement was agreed upon in March 2023 and is open for signature for two years starting September 2023.
- It will be an **international legally binding treaty** after it enters force 120 days after the 60th ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.
 - ♦ As of June 2024, **91 countries have signed the BBNJ Agreement**, and **eight Parties** have ratified it.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- **UNCLOS** was adopted in **1982**, and came into force in **1994**.
- It lays down a **comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans** and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- It establishes the **International Seabed Authority** to regulate mining and related activities on the ocean floor beyond national jurisdiction.
- As of today, more than **160 countries** have ratified UNCLOS.

Source: PIB

Maternal Healthcare for the Tribal Population

Context

- Recently a study on Gujarat's tribal population analyzed how geographical location and factors such as time and distance determine access to maternal healthcare facilities for the community.

Background

- In 2023, a United Nations report showed that India was among the **10 countries that together accounted for 60% of global maternal deaths**, stillbirths and newborn deaths.

- India accounted for over **17%** of such deaths in 2020, followed by **Nigeria (12%)** and **Pakistan (10%)**.

Marginalization of tribals in accessing maternal healthcare facilities

- Remote Locations:** Many tribal communities live in remote, hard-to-reach areas with poor infrastructure. This makes it difficult for pregnant women to access healthcare facilities in a timely manner.
- Transportation constraints:** Social norms and limited resources often prevent women, especially in rural areas, from using personal vehicles, and there is limited public transportation available.
- Limited healthcare Professionals:** A lack of trained healthcare professionals willing to work in remote and tribal areas severely limit access to quality care.
- Awareness:** Due to geographical isolation, there is lack of awareness about the importance of maternal healthcare, which results in underutilization of available services.
- Discrimination:** Tribal populations often face discrimination and stigma within the healthcare system, leading to feelings of alienation and reluctance to seek care.

Government initiatives

- The ASHA programme** guidelines provide for recruitment of ASHA at habitation level in hilly, tribal and difficult areas.
- Government of India is supporting states in implementation of **National Ambulances Services** under National Health Mission (NHM) for free transportation of sick patients to the health facilities.
- All tribal majority districts whose composite health index is below the State average have been identified as **High Priority Districts (HPDs)** and these districts **receive more resources per capita** under the NHM as compared to the rest of the districts in the State.
- The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**, provides antenatal care free of cost to pregnant women on 9th of every month.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3.1 and 3.2** aim to improve maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes and ensure access to quality healthcare services.

Way Ahead

- Mobile Health Clinics:** Deploying more mobile health clinics to reach remote tribal populations and provide essential maternal healthcare services.

- Community Health Workers:** Training local community health workers who understand the language and culture of tribal populations to provide maternal healthcare services and education.
- Improving Infrastructure:** Developing better transportation and healthcare infrastructure in remote areas to ensure easier access to healthcare facilities.
- Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that specifically address the healthcare needs of tribal populations and ensure their effective implementation.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

KHANDAGIRI & UDAYAGIRI CAVES

Context

- President Droupadi Murmu, visited the Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

About

- The rock cut caves were built around the **2nd century BC** by **King Kharavela** of the **Meghavahana dynasty**.
- These were first discovered by British Officer **Andrew Sterling** in the 19th century AD.
- The caves were built for the **Jain monks** and offered them a place to stay and meditate.
- Originally there were around one hundred and seventeen caves built. However only **thirty-three caves survive** today.
 - Eighteen caves** are located in the Udaygiri hill and **fifteen** in the Khandagiri hill.

Major caves of Udaygiri caves

- Hathigumpha:** or the elephant cave as it is known, bears the inscriptions of King Kharavela.
- Rani Gumpha:** or the Queen cave ; is a double storeyed structure with beautiful carvings.
- Ganesh Gumpha:** the Ganesha Cave known for its carvings of Jain tirthankars and other sculptures.
- Vyaghra Gumpha:** or the Tiger cave is so called because the entrance is shaped like the head of the tiger and the door shaped like a tiger's throat

Major caves of Khandagiri caves

- Barabhuji Gumpha** features the twelve armed Sasana Devi's facing each other along with Tirthankar sculptures.

- Trushula Gumpha:** The twenty-four Jain Teerthankar's carved on the walls of the cave.
- Ambika Gumpha:** The Yaksha and Yakshini of each Tirthankar is carved on the walls of the cave.

Source: DH

WORLD'S OLDEST CAVE PAINTINGS

In News

Recently, Scientists have discovered World's oldest cave paintings.

- Until now, the oldest-known cave painting was one at Leang Tedongnge cave, also in Sulawesi, from at least 45,500 years ago.

About the painting

- The cave painting was found on the ceiling of **Leang Karampuang cave** in the Maros-Pangkep region of South Sulawesi, Indonesia.
- It depicts three human-like figures interacting with a wild pig, painted in dark red pigment.
- Scientists used a **new dating method** involving laser technology to date calcium carbonate crystals that formed over the painting.
 - The painting has been determined to be at least 51,200 years old, making it the oldest confidently dated cave art discovered.
- Narrative Interpretation:** Researchers interpret the painting as a narrative scene, potentially the oldest-known evidence of storytelling through art.

Implications:

- Another Sulawesi cave painting at Leang Bulu' Sipong 4, depicting hunting scenes, was also re-dated to at least 48,000 years old.
- These discoveries predate European cave art, challenging previous assumptions about the birthplace of cave art and human storytelling.
- It underscores the importance of Southeast Asia as a pivotal region in the history of human cultural development.
- It opens new avenues for understanding the cultural and cognitive evolution of early humans through their artistic expressions.

Source:TH

KALLAKKADAL PHENOMENON

Context

- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)**, sounded alert, as the coastal areas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are likely to experience the 'kallakkadal' phenomenon.

Kallakkadal phenomenon

- Kallakkadal is a term used for the flooding events caused by Swell Waves.
- UNESCO formally accepted term "Kallakkadal" for scientific use in **2012**.

Swell Waves

- They are **high sea waves** that are formed by an ocean swell. Ocean swells occur due to distant storms like hurricanes and not due to the local winds.
- During such storms, huge energy transfer takes place from the air into the water, leading to the formation of very high waves.
- Such waves can travel thousands of kilometers from the storm center.

Source: NEWS 18

DEFAMATION CASE AGAINST WIKIPEDIA

Context

- News agency Asian News International (ANI) has filed a defamation suit against Wikipedia in Delhi High Court for allowing allegedly defamatory content on ANI's wiki page.

What is Defamation?

- It is the act of communicating to a third party false statements about a person, place, or thing that results in damage to its reputation.
- It can be spoken (slander) or written (libel).
- Article 19 of the Constitution** grants various freedoms to its citizens. However, Article 19(2) has imposed reasonable exemption to freedom of speech and expression granted under Article 19(1) (a). Contempt of court, defamation and incitement to an **offence** are some exceptions.
- In India, defamation can both be a **civil wrong and a criminal offence**.
- In civil law, defamation is punishable under the **Law of Torts** (area of the law that covers most civil suits) by imposing punishment in the form of damages to be awarded to the claimant. Under the Criminal law, Defamation is a **baileable, non-cognizable offence** and compoundable offence.

Source: Indian Express

ZOMBIE STARTUPS

In News

- Zombie startups have become a common scenario today.

About Zombie startups

- Zombie startups are ventures that have failed to scale or achieve sustainable growth.
- They are characterized by stagnant growth and dwindling resources.
 - ♦ They may struggle to attract new investment or generate revenue, relying heavily on existing funds that diminish over time.
- They can distort market dynamics by occupying space and resources that could be allocated to more viable ventures, potentially slowing overall ecosystem growth.
- They may be a modern challenge, but with proactive measures and collective effort, they can serve as valuable lessons in the ongoing journey of entrepreneurial innovation.

Source:BS

BIRLESTIK-2024

Context

- Recently, Central Asian countries have held 'Birlestik-2024', joint drills with land, naval and air forces, for the first time without regional powers Russia and China.

About the Birlestik-2024 Exercise (aka Union 2024)

- It is a joint military exercise, currently underway in the **Mangistau region of Kazakhstan**, involving the armed forces of **several Central Asian countries**, aiming to **enhance cooperation, interoperability, and readiness**.
- It focuses on joint planning, tactical maneuvers, and coordination among the participating forces.
- **Participating Nations** are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, while **Turkmenistan is absent**.
 - ♦ The Caucasus country of Azerbaijan is also participating, while Russia, traditionally dominant in the area, is fighting in Ukraine.
- These countries regularly take part in drills with the two most influential major powers in this strategic region: with **Russia** as part of the **Collective Security Treaty Organisation** and with **China** as part of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**.

Significance

- The Birlestik-2024 exercise serves as a platform for building stronger regional security partnerships.
- It fosters mutual understanding, promotes peace, and prepares the armed forces to respond effectively to various security challenges.

Source:TH

