

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## SWATI PORTAL

### In Context

- The Government has launched the **SWATI Portal** on the occasion of the International Day For Girls and Women in Science (11th February).

### About

- Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI) Portal is aimed at creating a **single online portal** representing Indian Women and Girls in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine).
- The database of SWATI Portal will serve in **policy making** to address the challenges of Gender-gap.
- The Portal is a **complete interactive database**; and the first-of-its-kind in India which is developed, hosted and maintained by the **National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR)**.

#### International Day For Girls and Women in Science

- On 22 December 2015, the General Assembly decided to establish an annual International Day to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology.
- It is celebrated on 11 February, and is implemented by UNESCO and UN-Women, in collaboration with institutions and civil society partners that aim to promote women and girls in science.

### Gender Disparity in Science

- Women are typically given **smaller research grants** than their male colleagues and, while they represent **33.3%** of all researchers, only **12%** of members of **national science academies are women**.
- In cutting edge fields such as **artificial intelligence**, only **one in five** professionals (22%) is a woman.
- Despite a shortage of skills in most of the technological fields driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution, women still account for only **28%** of engineering graduates and **40%** of graduates in computer science and informatics.
- **Scenario in India:** As per latest "Research and Development Statistics, 2019-20" of DST, India has **16.6% women researchers** directly engaged in R&D activities.
- **Reasons for Low Participation:** This includes familial issues like marriage, family responsibility, relocation due to transferable job of spouse etc.

- ♦ These reasons are attributed to dropout from higher studies, career break, overage for scientific jobs and prolonged absence from place of work or even resignation from the job.

### Government Initiatives to counter Gender Disparity in Science

- **KIRAN (Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing) Scheme:** Launched by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), KIRAN aims to provide various career opportunities to women scientists and technologists, including fellowships, grants, and training programs.
- **Women Scientists Scheme (WOS):** Under DST, the WOS provides opportunities for women scientists to pursue research in emerging areas of science and technology, allowing them to re-enter the workforce after a career break.
- **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA):** This program focuses on improving the quality of education in secondary schools, including promoting the participation of girls in STEM subjects and providing them with relevant skills and opportunities.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** AIM, under the NITI Aayog, aims to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in India.
- **Biotechnology Career Advancement and Re-orientation (BioCARE) Program:** Under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), this program aims to support women scientists by providing career development opportunities, mentoring, and financial assistance for research projects.
- **Women Start-up Program (WSP):** It was launched by DST in partnership with Goldman Sachs and aims to support ambitious and innovative women entrepreneurs by enabling them to transform their idea into a business venture.
  - ♦ WSP reached out to 6200 women across the country through the Massive Open Online Course program.
- **Vigyan Jyoti program** aims to provide exposure and mentorship to girls in STEM.
- **SERB-POWER:** DST has launched the Scheme titled "SERB-POWER (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Exploratory Research)".
  - ♦ It provides structured support in research to ensure equal access and weighted opportunities for Indian women scientists engaged in R&D activities.
  - ♦ The R&D support to women scientists is provided through two components, namely: SERB POWER Fellowships & SERB POWER Research Grants.



**Conclusion**

- These initiatives reflect the Government of India's commitment to addressing gender disparities in science and promoting the participation and leadership of women in STEM fields, thereby contributing to the overall advancement of science and technology in the country.

Source: **PIB**

## INDIANS WHO FACED DEATH ROW IN QATAR RETURN HOME

**Context**

- The release of eight **Indian Navy veterans from Qatari custody** marks a **significant diplomatic achievement** and is a good achievement of India's foreign policy.

- ♦ The episode shows how **deep and broad bilateral ties** have become.

**Background**

- The Indian nationals were arrested by the **Qatar intelligence agency in August 2022**, on allegations of **espionage**.
- **Qatar's Court of First Instance** handed over death sentences to them on October 26, 2023 which came as a surprise for the Indian government.
- As the Ministry of External Affairs launched extensive diplomatic efforts, the **Court of Appeal on December 28, 2023 reduced the capital punishment to jail terms** for varying durations to each of eight Navy veterans.

# Tracking the legal battle in Qatar



**2022**

**August:** Qatar authorities detain eight former Indian Navy personnel on undeclared charges; reports suggested they were accused of espionage

**2023**

**October 26:** Qatar's Court of First Instance awards them death sentence

**October 30:** External affairs minister S Jaishankar meets families of the eight men and assures to secure their release

**November 9:** External affairs ministry says an appeal has been filed in Qatar's Court of Appeal

**December 3:** Indian ambassador gets consular access to meet the former Navy personnel

**December 28:** Qatar's Court of Appeal commutes death penalties to prison terms for varying durations ranging from three years to 25 years; gives the eight men 60 days to appeal against prison terms

**2024**

**February 12:** External affairs ministry announces the release of the navy men; says all but one have returned to India



Image Courtesy: HT

**India-Qatar Relations**

- India and Qatar share a long and multifaceted relationship characterized by **strong economic, political, cultural, and social ties**.

**Historical ties:**

- India was among the few countries which recognized Qatar soon after its independence in 1971 and also established **diplomatic relations in 1973**.

- **Year 2023, marks the 50 years** of bilateral diplomatic relations.
- **Regular high-level visits and exchanges** between leaders strengthen engagement.

#### Economic relations:

- **Largest trading partner:** Qatar is India's largest trading partner in the Middle East.
- **Energy trade:** India imports a significant portion of its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Qatar.
- **Investments:** Both countries have significant investments in each other's economies.
- **Joint ventures:** Collaboration in various sectors like infrastructure, healthcare, and IT.

#### Political relations:

- **Strategic partnership based on shared interests** in regional security and stability.
- **Support for each other's candidatures/policies** in international organizations.
  - ♦ Qatar was a **co-sponsor of India's resolution** for declaration of **June 21 as International Yoga Day**.

#### Defence relations:

- Cooperation on **counter-terrorism and maritime security**.
- India and Qatar have signed a **Defence Cooperation Agreement** and also hold **Exercise Zair-Al-Bahr**.

#### Cultural relations:

- **Large Indian expatriate community in Qatar** (around 8 lakh sending remittances worth \$ 750 million) contributes to cultural vibrancy.
  - ♦ Cultural events organised by community organizations affiliated to the **Indian Cultural Centre (ICC)**.
- Growing **popularity of yoga and Indian cinema** in Qatar.

#### Challenges

- **Trade imbalance in favor of Qatar** due to energy imports.
- Need for **diversification of trade** beyond energy.
- **Geopolitical complexities in the region** can impact relations.
- **Religious issue:** The remarks made by the Indian politicians about the Prophet led to adverse reactions from Qatar in the past.

#### Way Ahead

- Both countries see **immense potential for further strengthening** their strategic partnership.

- Focus on expanding cooperation in areas like **renewable energy, education, and technology**.
- **Regular dialogue and collaboration** are crucial to address challenges and navigate regional complexities.

Source: [BL](#)

## SUPREME COURT'S OBSERVATIONS ON DEPUTY CM'S POST

#### In News

- The Supreme Court dismissed a petition challenging the appointment of **Deputy Chief Ministers in States** on the ground that no such position exists in the Constitution.

#### The post of Deputy CM

- **Article 163(1) of the Constitution** says "there shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions"
  - ♦ Neither **Article 163 nor Article 164** mentions a **Deputy Chief Minister**.
- The post of Deputy CM is understood as being equivalent in **rank to that of Cabinet Minister (in the state)**.
  - ♦ The Deputy CM enjoys the same pay and perks as a Cabinet Minister.
- **Brief history:** Perhaps the first Deputy CM in India was Anugrah Narayan Sinha
  - ♦ Deputy CMs were seen in more states, especially after the reduction of the Congress's near-total dominance on national politics after 1967.

#### Supreme Court's Observations

- It found no harm in the appointment of **Deputy Chief Ministers**, reasoning that they were after all **Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs)** of the States and Ministers of State governments.
- Deputy Chief Ministers are first and foremost Ministers in the government of the State.
- A person who holds the office of the Deputy Chief Minister must at any event, within a **stipulated period, be an MLA**.
- These persons appointed did not draw a higher salary and were like any other Minister in the government, and may just be more senior than the others.

#### Petition

- The appointments of Deputy Chief Ministers were motivated by religion and sectarian considerations.

- Such appointments were against Article 14 (right to equality) and the tenet of Article 15 which holds that the State ought not to discriminate on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
  - ♦ However, the court dismissed the petition, saying it lacked substance.

Source:TH

## FUNCTIONS AND POWERS OF GOVERNOR

### In Context

- Amid tussle with Tamil Nadu Govt, the **Governor of the State omitted certain parts of govt-approved speech**, citing disagreement on 'moral and factual grounds'.

### Office of Governor

- **Under Article 153** there shall be a Governor for each State.
- **Eligibility: Only Indian citizens above 35 years of age** are eligible for appointment to this office.
- **Appointment:** The Governor of a State is appointed by the **President** for a term of **five years**.
- **Conditions of Governor's office:** The Governor shall not be a member of either House of Parliament or of a House of the Legislature.
  - ♦ The Governor shall not hold any other office of profit.

### Functions and Powers of Governor

- **Executive Powers:** The Governor is the head of the state executive and exercises executive powers vested in them by the Constitution or by law.
  - ♦ Appoints the Chief Minister and other members of the Council of Ministers.
  - ♦ The Governor is responsible for the appointment and removal of various state officials.
- **Legislative Powers:** The Governor summons and prorogues sessions of the state legislature (Vidhan Sabha).
  - ♦ He addresses the state legislature at the beginning of each legislative year and on other occasions.
  - ♦ The Governor may also dissolve the state legislative assembly in certain situations.
- **Administrative Powers:** The Governor has control over the state administration, including the power to issue ordinances when the state legislature is not in session.

- **Judicial Powers:** The Governor appoints the Advocate General of the state.
  - ♦ He has the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites, or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit, or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offense against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extends.
- **Discretionary Powers:** The Governor has certain discretionary powers, including the power to reserve certain bills passed by the state legislature for the consideration of the President.
  - ♦ He can use discretion in various situations, such as recommending the President's rule in the state under certain circumstances.
- **Upholding Constitution:** The Governor acts as a guardian of the Constitution and ensures that the state government functions within the constitutional framework.
  - ♦ He is expected to act impartially and without bias, serving as a check on the state government's actions.

### Debate on the Role and Power of Governor

- **Federal Structure vs. Unitary Tendencies:** Governor acts as a vital link between the Union government and the states, ensuring uniformity and stability in governance across the nation.
  - ♦ Critics raise concerns that the office of the Governor can sometimes tilt the balance towards a more unitary form of government, eroding the autonomy of states and centralizing power in the hands of the Union government.
- **Discretionary Powers:** The discretionary powers vested in the Governor, such as the power to recommend President's rule, dissolve state assemblies, or reserve bills for the President's consideration, have been contentious.
  - ♦ While some argue that these powers are necessary to maintain constitutional balance and ensure proper governance in exceptional circumstances, others contend that they can be misused for political ends, undermining democratic principles.
- **Conflict with State Governments:** The relationship between Governors and state governments, particularly those led by opposition parties, often leads to conflicts and controversies.
- **Role in Upholding Constitutional Values:** Proponents argue that the Governor serves as a guardian of the Constitution, ensuring that state governments adhere to constitutional principles and norms.



- ◆ However, critics question whether Governors always uphold constitutional values or if their actions are influenced by political considerations.
- **Need for Reforms:** Many experts advocate for reforms in the appointment process and powers of Governors to enhance their impartiality and effectiveness.
  - ◆ Suggestions include making the appointment process more transparent and bipartisan, limiting discretionary powers, and strengthening mechanisms for accountability.

### How has the Supreme Court Interpreted the Role of the Governor?

- **SR Bommai Case (1994):** This landmark case established principles regarding the discretionary powers of the Governor in dismissing a state government and imposing President's rule.
  - ◆ The Supreme Court held that the Governor's decision to recommend the President's rule should be based on **objective material** and that it could be subject to judicial review.
  - ◆ The court emphasized that the Governor should **not act arbitrarily** or on the basis of extraneous considerations.
- **Political Crisis in Arunachal Pradesh 2016:** In late 2015, multiple Congress MLAs rebelled against the Chief Minister and then Governor acted without the advice of Chief Minister.
  - ◆ The SC held that the Governor can summon, prorogue and dissolve the House **only on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers** with the Chief Minister as the head and not at his own will.
  - ◆ The Governor should act impartially and within the bounds of the Constitution, and should not interfere in the internal affairs of the state legislature.
- **Karnataka Coalition Case (2019):** In a case arising from the political crisis in Karnataka, the Supreme Court emphasized the Governor's obligation to act fairly and transparently in the exercise of discretion.
- **Shiv Sena vs. Union of India (2019):** This case arose from the political turmoil in Maharashtra following the assembly elections.
  - ◆ The Supreme Court emphasized the Governor's duty to follow constitutional norms and uphold democratic principles, especially in situations where there is a possibility of government formation by political parties.

### Way Ahead

- In essence, the debate over the power of Governors in India reflects broader discussions

about the nature of federalism, the distribution of powers between the center and the states, and the role of constitutional institutions in safeguarding democratic principles.

- The Supreme Court has clarified and reaffirmed the role of the Governor as outlined in the Constitution, emphasizing the importance of impartiality, adherence to constitutional principles, and avoidance of arbitrary exercise of power.

**Source:** TH

## REVIVAL OF WEIMAR TRIANGLE

### Context

- The Foreign Ministers of Poland, France and Germany have discussed reviving the Weimar Triangle in a meeting in Paris.

### About

- France, Germany and Poland would unveil a new cooperation agreement to combat foreign disinformation operations.
- The ministers discussed creating a joint mechanism to detect and respond to potential Russian internet attacks.
- The Statements came after Former U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to invite Russia to invade NATO members that do not meet their defense spending obligations.

### Weimar Triangle

- The "Weimar Triangle" is a regional alliance of **France, Germany, and Poland** created in **1991** in the German city of Weimar.
- The group is intended to promote cooperation between the three countries in cross-border and European issues.
- It also aimed at assisting Poland's emergence from Communist rule.

### North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

- **NATO**, also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance.
- **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium
- **Background:** It was established by 12 countries from Europe and North America with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (also known as Washington Treaty) in 1949 in Washington, D.C.
  - ◆ The objective was to provide collective security against the Soviet Union attack in the aftermath of World War II.

- **Collective Defense:** According to Article 5, NATO works on the principle of collective defense, where an attack on any NATO member is considered an attack on all NATO members.
  - ♦ So far, Article 5 has been invoked once - in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001.
- **Members:** It comprises 31 member states – two North American countries (USA and Canada) and 28 European countries and one eurasian country (Turkey).
  - ♦ Finland became the 31st member in 2023.
- **Criteria for Membership of NATO:**
  - ♦ Under NATO's "open door policy" based on **Article 10**, membership at present is open to only European nations.
  - ♦ These countries must fulfill certain criterias such as "a functioning democracy based on a market economy; fair treatment of minorities; a commitment to resolve conflicts peacefully; and making military contribution to NATO operations.
  - ♦ New members are admitted with the unanimous **consent of all members**.

Source: TH

## REVIEW OF THE EPIDEMIC DISEASES ACT, 1897 : LAW COMMISSION

### In News

- The 22nd [Law Commission of India](#) has submitted its Report No. 286 titled "A Comprehensive Review of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897" to the Government of India.

### About the Epidemic Diseases Act(EDA), 1897

- It was formulated pre-independence mainly to control plague
- It provides for prevention of the spread of "dangerous epidemic diseases."
- **Section 2** includes special measures to be taken by the Centre to "prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease."
  - ♦ It also includes the detention of people or any vessel that come from international shores and are seen potent to spread the epidemic in the country.
- **Section 3 of the Act states:** "Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

- **According to Section 4** of the act, no suit or other legal proceedings shall lie against any person for anything done in good faith under the act

### Highlights of Law Commission report

- The **existing legislation does not comprehensively address** the concerns pertaining to the **containment and management** of future epidemics in the country as new infectious diseases or novel strains of existing pathogens may emerge.
- **Recommendations :**It recommended **creation of an Epidemic Plan and Standard Operation Procedure** to address future epidemics
  - ♦ **The Epidemic Plan** should include provisions on quarantine, isolation, and lockdowns, while ensuring that the measures are implemented fairly, without violating the fundamental rights of citizens.
  - ♦ **SOP :** To enforce this Epidemic Plan without resulting in conflicts between states and the Central government, the report suggests the **creation of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** which will "ensure proper and coordinated response to any epidemic with pre-defined powers and roles in case of a public health emergency".
    - The SOP defines three stages of the spread of infectious diseases as well as the responses at each stage.
    - **At the first stage**, "Outbreaks in the State", the report recommends giving states the power to take "sufficient measures" that are in line with the Epidemic Plan.
    - **At the second stage**, "Inter-State Spread of Epidemic Diseases/Pandemic", the report suggests that the Central government should have the power to frame regulations on the basis of the Epidemic Plan, and states should act in accordance with these regulations.
    - **For the third stage**, "Extreme Threat from Infectious Diseases", the recommendations are similar to those provided for the second stage.

Source:IE

## HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS

### Context

- A radio-collared wild elephant trampled a man to death in Wayanad in Kerala.

### Background

- Wayanad has become a human-wildlife conflict hotspot in the State, distressing settler farmers and stoking unrest.

- The year 2022-23 has recorded 8,873 wild animal attacks in Wayanad. It has lost 41 lives to elephant attacks and seven to tiger attacks over the last decade.

### Reasons for the increase in human-wildlife conflict

- **Habitat fragmentation:** Human activities such as increased area under cultivation, changing cropping patterns, and movement of livestock and humans in wildlife habitats have led to habitat loss and fragmentation.
- **Changing agricultural practices:** Changes in agricultural practices, such as leaving farmland unattended due to poor returns and high wage costs, have made agricultural areas attractive targets for wildlife seeking food.
- **Decline in habitat quality:** The cultivation of invasive alien plant species like **acacia, mangium, and eucalyptus** in forest tracts for commercial purposes has degraded the quality of forest habitats.
  - ◆ These water-guzzling species strain natural water resources, adversely affecting plant biodiversity and making it difficult for native species to thrive.
  - ◆ Invasive species planted by the forest department have also hindered the growth of natural vegetation in forests.
  - ◆ **Conservation Efforts:** It has led to significant increases in the populations of wildlife species such as elephants and tigers, competing for limited resources in shrinking habitats, increasing the likelihood of encounters with humans.

### Why is Wayanad worst-affected?

- Wayanad has a forest cover of **36.48** percent.
- The district's forests are a part of a greater forested area comprising
  - ◆ **Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, Bandipur National Park, and BR Tiger Reserve** in Karnataka, and
  - ◆ **Mudumalai Tiger Reserve** and **Sathyamangalam Forest** in Tamil Nadu.

### Solutions

- **Early warning systems:** There is a need to install systems that can track the movement of elephants and other dangerous animals using drones and watchers.
- **Plantation of indigenous plants:** Plants like wild mango, wild gooseberry, and wild jackfruit should be planted in the forest to ensure wild animals food security and dissuade them from entering agricultural lands.

- **Eco-restoration programmes:** The state is running a scheme to acquire land from farmers, to convert them into forestland.
- **Rapid Response Teams:** In areas which see the highest incidence of human-animal conflict, 15 Rapid Response Teams have been established — eight permanent, and seven temporary.
- The state is running schemes for the construction of **elephant-proof trenches, elephant-proof stone walls, and solar powered electric fencing.**

**Solution: IE**

## M87\* BLACK HOLE

### Context

- **The Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)** Collaboration has released new images of **M87\***, the supermassive black hole at the center of the galaxy Messier 87.

### What is a Black Hole?

- A black hole is an extremely dense object whose gravity is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape it.
- A black hole does not have a surface, like a planet or star. Instead, it is a region of space where matter has collapsed in on itself.
  - ◆ This catastrophic collapse results in a huge amount of mass being concentrated in an incredibly small area.
- **Formation:** A black hole is formed when a really massive star runs out of fuel to fuse, blows up, leaving its core to implode under its weight to form a black hole.
  - ◆ The center of a black hole is a gravitational singularity, a point where the general theory of relativity breaks down, i.e. where its predictions don't apply.
  - ◆ A black hole's great gravitational pull emerges as if from the singularity.

### Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)

- The EHT is **not a single telescope but a worldwide network** of radio telescopes that work together to study a common object in space.
- **Very-long baseline interferometry:** It is the technique, where the data each telescope collects about the object is correlated with data from the others using extremely precise clocks.
- In this setup, the maximum distance between the telescopes defines the network's resolution.
- The **Greenland Telescope** has been commissioned to the array, which has improved the resolution of the EHT in the north-south direction.



### Gravitational lensing

- The diameter of the asymmetric ring had not changed much between observations in 2017 and 2018 – meaning the black hole’s gravity bent light consistently over time to form the observed ring.
- This is in line with a prediction from the **General theory of relativity**, that light around a black hole is strongly lensed.
- Objects with a lot of mass bend spacetime more around them. When light travels in this region, its path is bent in the same way a magnifying glass does. Images carried by the light thus appear to be larger than they really are, and this **phenomenon is called lensing**.
- The black hole is rotating, dragging the spacetime around it along the direction of its rotation and rendering more light in some areas. Hence the ring’s southwest corner appears brighter than other parts.

Source: TH

## NEWS IN SHORT

### DR. MS SWAMINATHAN

#### Context

- Recently, MS Swaminathan, an agricultural scientist who helped India achieve food security, was conferred Bharat Ratna posthumously.

#### Contributions made by MS Swaminathan (1925-2023):

- **Green Revolution:** Swaminathan played a pivotal role in the Green Revolution in India during the 1960s and 70s.
  - ♦ He **introduced and developed high-yielding varieties (HYVs)** of wheat and rice, which transformed India from a food-deficient nation to one of the world’s leading agricultural producers.
  - ♦ His collaborative scientific efforts **with Norman Borlaug**, spearheading a mass movement with farmers and other scientists, saved India from certain famine-like conditions in the 1960s.
- **Self-Reliance in Agriculture:** He helped India achieve self-reliance in agriculture during challenging times and made outstanding efforts towards modernising Indian agriculture.
- **Conservation and Environmental Protection:** Swaminathan made significant contributions in the fields of conservation and environmental

protection. He worked extensively on **four aspects of conservation: mangrove ecosystem, biodiversity conservation, genetic conservation, and Keystone Dialogues**.

- ♦ The **United Nations Environment Programme** has called him ‘**the Father of Economic Ecology**’.
- **Development of Frost-Resistant Potato Varieties:** He made significant contributions to the understanding of potato genetics and the development of frost-resistant potato varieties.
- **Awards and Recognition:** Swaminathan was awarded the first World Food Prize in 1987, following which he set up the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in Taramani, Chennai.
- **Innovation and Mentorship:** Recognized for his invaluable work as an innovator and mentor, Swaminathan encouraged learning and research among several students.

Source: IE

### SWACHHATA GREEN LEAF RATING

#### Context:

- A **rating system for the hospitality sector** has become a **non-starter** with no State opting for it as of now.

#### Swachhata Green Leaf Rating

- The **ranking scheme** was launched in **November 2023** by the **Union Tourism Ministry** in collaboration with the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation**.
  - ♦ The rating will be based on **compliance with the safe sanitation practices** outlined in the guidelines.
- **Aim:** To ensure world-class hygiene and sanitation in all hospitality facilities of the country with or without restaurants.
- **Objective:** The objective is to prevent pollution in water bodies and keep the environment clean.
- **Target groups:** Hotels, resorts, lodges, homestays, ‘Dharamshalas’ and camps which have portable toilets.

Source: TH

### RUPAY, UPI ROLLED OUT IN MAURITIUS, SRI LANKA

#### Context:

- **RuPay cards and UPI connectivity** between **India and Mauritius**, as well as **UPI connectivity** between **India and Sri Lanka** were established recently.

### About

- These projects had been developed and executed by **NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL)** along with partner banks / non-banks from Mauritius and Sri Lanka, under the guidance and support of the RBI.
- It is to **deepen financial integration and to facilitate digital payments** among citizens of the three countries, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

### Implications

- An Indian traveller to Mauritius will now be **able to pay a merchant in Mauritius using UPI**.
  - ♦ Similarly, a Mauritian traveller will be able to pay a merchant in India using the **Instant Payment System (IPS) app of Mauritius**.
- Further, with the adoption of RuPay technology, **the MauCAS card scheme of Mauritius will enable banks in Mauritius to issue RuPay cards domestically**.
  - ♦ Such cards can be used at ATMs and PoS terminals locally in Mauritius as well as in India.
- With this, **Mauritius becomes the first country outside Asia to issue cards using RuPay technology**.
  - ♦ Indian RuPay cards would also be accepted at ATMs and PoS terminals in Mauritius.
- The digital payments connectivity with Sri Lanka will **enable Indian travelers to make QR code-based payments** at merchant locations in Sri Lanka using their UPI apps.

### About RuPay

- RuPay is the first-of-its-kind **global Card payment network of India**, with wide acceptance at **ATMs**,

**POS devices and e-commerce websites** across India.

- The name, derived from the words **‘Rupee and ‘Payment’**, emphasizes that it is India’s very own initiative for Card payments.
- RuPay fulfils RBI’s vision of initiating a **‘less cash’ economy** and **NPCI recognises the need for tech-driven innovations in the retail payments system** to drive operational efficiencies among a larger Indian audience.
- RuPay is a **product of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**, the umbrella organisation that powers retail payments in the country.
  - ♦ The provision under the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**, empowered the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks’ Association (IBA)** to create a secure electronic payment and settlement system in India.
  - ♦ NPCI is an initiative of **RBI and the Indian Banks’ Association (IBA)** under the provisions of the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**. It has been incorporated as a **“Not for Profit” Company** under the provisions of Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 (now Section 8 of Companies Act 2013).

### About Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

- UPI is a system that **powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application** (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- It also caters to the **“Peer to Peer” collect request** which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience.

#### UPI - Benefits to the Ecosystem participants

##### Banks:

- ▶ Single click Two Factor authentication
- ▶ Universal Application for transaction
- ▶ Leveraging existing infrastructure
- ▶ Safer, Secured and Innovative
- ▶ Payment basis Single/ Unique Identifier
- ▶ Enable seamless merchant transactions

##### Customers:

- ▶ Round the clock availability
- ▶ Single Application for accessing different bank accounts
- ▶ Use of Virtual ID is more secure, no credential sharing
- ▶ Single click authentication
- ▶ Raise Complaint from Mobile App directly

##### Merchants:

- ▶ Seamless fund collection from customers - single identifiers
- ▶ No risk of storing customer's virtual address like in Cards
- ▶ Tap customers not having credit/debit cards
- ▶ Suitable for e-Com & m-Com transaction
- ▶ Resolves the COD collection problem
- ▶ Single click 2FA facility to the customer - seamless Pull

## GREENING AND RESTORATION OF WASTELAND WITH AGROFORESTRY (GROW)

### Context:

- Recently, the **NITI Aayog** unveiled the '*Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)*' report and portal, aiming to bolster efforts in environmental conservation and sustainable land use across India.

### About the GROW

- It is a multi-institutional effort **led by NITI Aayog**, which utilised remote sensing and GIS to assess agroforestry suitability across all districts in India.
- It provides **state-wise and district-wise analysis**, supporting government departments and industries for greening and restoration projects.
- It underscores the potential benefits of converting underutilised areas, especially **wastelands, for agroforestry**.

### Key Highlights:

- An **Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI)** was developed for national-level prioritisation.
- The **GROW-Suitability Mapping portal** Bhuvan allows universal access to state and district-level data.
  - Currently, agroforestry covers 8.65% of India's total geographical area, totalling about 28.42 million hectares.
- The GROW initiative **aligns with national commitments**, aiming to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.
- Promotion of agroforestry:** There is a need for promotion of agroforestry especially for reducing import of wood and wood products, carbon sequestration to combat climate change at global and national level and addressing sub-optimal use of arable land.
  - Fallow land and culturable wastelands can be converted to productive use through agroforestry.

### Do you know?

- Approximately **16.96% of the total Geographical Area (TGA)** is wasteland in India. It requires transformation for productive use.
  - The Union Budget of Government of India (FY-2022-23) has underlined the promotion of agroforestry and private forestry as a priority.

- Approximately 50% of the wastelands are non-forest lands, which can be made fertile again if treated properly.
- Geospatial technologies and GIS are employed to map and prioritise these wastelands for agroforestry interventions.

### Utilising wastelands in India

- Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWDP):** It aims to develop wastelands mainly in non-forest areas by involving local people at every stage of development.
  - The programme focuses on improving the productivity of waste & degraded lands.
- Wasteland Reclamation:** This approach aims to restore desolate landscapes, revive biodiversity, improve the lives of affected communities, and enhance economic and ecological value.
  - It combines ecological restoration, sustainable agriculture, and community engagement.
  - Technologies** such as *mulching, greenhouse, net house, and high-density plantation* can make the wastelands fertile.
- State-wise Utilisation:** States like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh have a high scope for using wasteland due to their large wasteland areas.

Source: DD News

## NATIONAL CREATORS AWARD

### In Context

- The Government announced the **Inaugural Edition of the National Creators Award 2024**.

### About

- Categories:** The National Creators Award features a **wide array of categories (20)** recognizing excellence and impact across various domains, including storytelling, social change advocacy, environmental sustainability, education, gaming, and more.
- Selection Process Overview:** The selection process includes a nomination phase, screening of the nominations, followed by a combination of public voting and review of a jury.
  - Winners will be announced based on a combination of jury and public votes.
- Expected Outcomes:** The National Creators Award aims to inspire, recognize, and celebrate the transformative potential of digital media in building a more inclusive, participatory, and empowered society.
  - It seeks to provide recognition and visibility for digital creators driving positive change, foster collaboration and networking opportunities, and encourage new creators to leverage their platforms for greater good.

Source: PIB