

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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POTENTIAL OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Context

- Union Minister Smriti Irani said that spiritual tourism has a high potential for tourist footfall and future investment in India.

About

- **Religious/Spiritual tourism**, a subset of cultural tourism, holds vast unrealized potential for destinations worldwide.
- As an intricate interplay between **spirituality, history, and culture**, it offers a unique opportunity to attract a diverse range of travelers seeking meaningful experiences.

Prospects of Spiritual Tourism in India

- **Diverse Religious Heritage:** India is home to a multitude of religions, each with its own sacred sites, rituals, and traditions. This diversity attracts tourists from around the world.
- **Wellness Tourism Integration:** India's spiritual traditions are closely linked with practices promoting health and wellness, such as yoga, Ayurveda, and meditation.
- **Historical Significance:** Many of India's religious sites have deep historical significance, dating back centuries. These sites offer visitors a glimpse into the country's rich past.
- **Pilgrimage Circuits:** India is home to numerous pilgrimage circuits that connect multiple religious sites within a region. Examples include the Char Dham Yatra in the Himalayas, the Golden Temple circuit in Punjab, and the Buddhist circuit in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Benefits of Promoting religious tourism

- **Economic Growth:** The popular religious centers in India attract annual tourist traffic of **10-30 million**.
 - ♦ Creation of a new religious tourist center with improved infrastructure can create a large economic impact.
- **Job Creation:** Growth in religious tourism leads to the creation of employment opportunities in various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, tour guiding, and handicrafts.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Religious tourism promotes cultural exchange and understanding between visitors and local communities.

- **Enhanced Connectivity:** Development of new religious tourist centers with improved connectivity and infrastructure, like Ayodhya, can have a significant economic impact.
- **Preservation of Heritage:** Promoting religious tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage at religious sites.

Challenges in Spiritual Tourism

- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many religious sites lack adequate infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and sanitation facilities, hindering the tourist experience.
- **Maintenance and Conservation:** Historical religious sites require extensive maintenance and conservation efforts due to their significance, putting a strain on local resources and posing challenges for their preservation.
- **Misconceptions about Religious Tourism:** Many people perceive religious tourism as solely for believers, overlooking its appeal to those interested in cultural and historical exploration.
- **Waste Management:** Increased tourist activity at religious sites can lead to environmental degradation and waste management challenges. Proper waste management systems need to be implemented to preserve the sanctity of these sites and protect the surrounding environment.
- **Problem of Carrying Capacity:** Certain religious centers experience short but intense tourist seasons, leading to overcrowding and straining local infrastructure.
 - ♦ The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand causes pressure on transport infrastructure and leads to safety hazards like landslides during the monsoon season.
- **Commercialization Concerns:** There is a risk of over-commercialization of religious sites, which can detract from their spiritual essence and alienate both local religious communities and tourists seeking authentic experiences.

Government Steps

- **Spiritual projects** across India such as the Kashi Corridor, the Mahakal Corridor and the Ram Temple in Ayodhya are attracting a high volume of tourists and have been helping boost the local economy.
- **Swadesh Darshan scheme:** The objective of the scheme is to develop sustainable and responsible destinations following a tourist & destination-centric approach.

- ◆ Under the scheme thematic circuits are identified including **Buddhist Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Tirthankar Circuit.**
- **National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD):** It was launched in 2015 to identify and develop pilgrim sites across the country to promote religious tourism.
 - ◆ Under the scheme religious cities/sites in different States are identified like **Kedarnath (Uttarakhand), Dwaraka (Gujarat), Amritsar (Punjab), Kamakhya (Assam), Varanasi and Mathura (Uttar Pradesh)** etc.

Way ahead

- The unrealized potential of religious tourism is a compelling prospect for destinations seeking to diversify their offerings and boost local economies.
- By addressing infrastructure, preservation, marketing, and education, governments and local communities can transform religious sites into thriving hubs of cultural and spiritual exploration.
- Collaborative efforts between travel agencies, religious organizations, and cultural bodies can create comprehensive packages that cater to different interests, including heritage tours, art exhibitions, and culinary experiences.

Source: AIR

INDIA FACES WTO PRESSURE ON FARM SUBSIDIES

The government acceding to the **protesting farmers demand for a legal guarantee of MSP** is somewhat limited given **India is under pressure on its farm subsidies at the WTO.**

About:

- The **Cairns Group** – comprising Australia, Brazil and Canada among others members — have claimed that **India's public stockholding (PSH) programme is highly subsidised** and the **farm support that India gives is "distorting"** global food prices and "hurting" food security of other countries.

WTOs Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)

- It was designed to **remove trade barriers and to encourage transparent market access** and integration of global markets.

- AoA stands on **3 pillars:**

(1) **Domestic Support:** Subsidies such as guaranteed minimum price or input subsidies which are direct and specific to a product.

This can be divided into:

- a) **Green Box:** Subsidies which are **not or least market distorting**. It includes measures such as **income-support payments, safety-net programs, payments under environmental programs and agricultural research and development subsidies.**
- b) **Blue Box:** These **production-limiting subsidies** cover payments based on acreage, yield or number of livestock in a base year. The government is given the room to fix 'targets price' if the 'market prices' are lower than the farm prices.
- c) **Amber Box:** Those are **trade distorting subsidies** which need to be curbed. These reduction commitments are expressed in terms of a **"Total Aggregate Measurement of Support" (Total AMS)** which includes all supports.
 - These supports are subject to limits- **"De minimis"**. This threshold is generally **5% of the value of agricultural production for developed countries, 10% for most developing countries.**
 - **Peace Clause is a product of the Bali Summit, 2013.** Article 13 of AoA contains a **"due restraint" or "peace clause"** which controls the application of other WTO agreements to subsidies.

(2) **Market Access requires that tariffs, which have been fixed** (like custom duties) by individual countries, should be cut progressively to facilitate free trade.

- **It also encompasses removal of non-tariff barriers** (e.g. quotas on import).

(3) **Export subsidies are limited to four situations:**

- (i) product-specific reduction commitments within the limits;
- (ii) any excess of budgetary outlays for export subsidies;
- (iii) export subsidies consistent with the special and differential treatment provision; and
- (iv) export subsidies other than those subject to reduction commitments provided that they are in conformity with the anti-circumvention disciplines of Article 10 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

- **A Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM)** was designed as a safety valve, allowing developing countries to impose additional (temporary) safeguard duties in the event of an abnormal surge in imports or the entry of unusually cheap imports.

Challenges for India at WTO regarding subsidies

- **Agriculture:** India's extensive agricultural subsidies are often deemed WTO-noncompliant, exceeding allowed limits and distorting global markets.
 - ♦ Examples include **minimum support prices, input subsidies, and export subsidies.** Developed countries like the US and EU challenge these at the WTO, arguing they harm global farmers.
- **Industrial subsidies:** Some Indian industrial subsidies may also be challenged, particularly those deemed to have specific export promotion or trade-distorting effects.
 - ♦ Examples include the **Production Linked Incentive(PLI) scheme** for electronic goods.
- **Developed vs. developing country distinctions:** India advocates for fairer treatment based on development levels, arguing that the subsidy rules need to consider the needs of developing countries like India to promote economic growth and support vulnerable sectors.
- **Complexities of subsidy rules:** WTO rules around subsidies are complex and open to interpretation, leading to disputes and protracted litigation.
- **Negotiation difficulties:** Achieving consensus-based solutions at the WTO is often challenging, with developed and developing countries having differing priorities and interests.
- **Geopolitical dynamics:** The broader geopolitical context can influence the willingness of countries to engage constructively in subsidy negotiations.

Ongoing efforts by India:

- To attain **greater flexibility to offer farm support**, India is in the process of pushing for a **permanent solution** at the upcoming inter-ministerial summit at Abu Dhabi from February 26 to 29.
- India is not only pushing for **measures to amend the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap** but also to include programmes implemented after 2013 under the ambit of '**Peace Clause**'.

Way Ahead:

- **Addressing subsidy concerns** will be crucial for India to participate effectively in the global trading system and ensure a level playing field for its exports.
- **India needs to actively engage in WTO negotiations**, seeking reforms that address its concerns about developed country subsidies while also working towards greater transparency and compliance with its own subsidy obligations.
- **Exploring alternative frameworks like plurilateral agreements** or sectoral negotiations might be needed to find workable solutions.

Source:IE

SURROGACY (REGULATION) ACT, 2021

- The Delhi High Court sought the Union Government response on a petition by a couple challenging the **Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021**.

About

- The couple approached the court after the **State medical board refused** to issue them the required certificate for the procedure on the ground that the woman had "**crossed the upper age limit**" under the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021.
 - ♦ The law allows only women aged between **23 and 50 to go for surrogacy**.
- The court asked the Central appellate authority to decide the couple's appeal against the rejection in four weeks.

Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021

- **What is surrogacy?:** The Act defines surrogacy as a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intention to hand it over to them after the birth.
 - ♦ It is permitted only for altruistic purposes or for couples who suffer proven infertility or disease.
 - ♦ Surrogacy is prohibited for commercial purposes including for sale, prostitution or any other forms of exploitation.
- **Abortion:** Abortion of such a fetus is allowed only with the consent of the surrogate mother and the authorities and must adhere to the provisions of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act.

- **Eligibility and Conditions for Couples:** A couple should procure certificates of eligibility and essentiality in order to have a child via surrogacy.
 - ♦ The couple is deemed 'eligible' if they have been married for five years, the wife is aged between 23-50 years and the husband is between 26-55 years.
 - ♦ The couple must not have any living child (biological, adopted or surrogate.)
 - ♦ A child with mental or physical disabilities, or one suffering from a life-threatening disorder has been exempted from the above criterion.
 - ♦ The couple can get an 'essential' certificate if suffering from proven infertility of either partner certified by a District Medical Board.
 - ♦ They must also have insurance coverage for 16 months for the surrogate mother, covering any postpartum complications .
- **Eligibility to be a surrogate:** A surrogate mother has to be a close relative of the couple, a married woman with a child of her own, aged between 25-35 years, who has been a surrogate only once in her life.
 - ♦ She must also possess a certificate of medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy.
- **Regulation:** The Centre and State governments will constitute a National Surrogacy Board (NSB) and State Surrogacy Boards (SSB) respectively.
 - ♦ This body is tasked with enforcing standards for surrogacy clinics, investigating breaches and recommending modifications.
- **Offences:** Offences under the Act include commercial surrogacy, selling of embryos, exploiting, abandoning a surrogate child etc.
 - ♦ These may invite up to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs. 10 lakh.
- **Importance :** The Act expands access to reproductive options for individuals and couples who are unable to conceive or carry a pregnancy due to medical reasons.
 - ♦ The Act promotes reproductive autonomy, protects the rights and well-being of all parties involved, and facilitates access to assisted reproduction for individuals and couples seeking to start or expand their families.
- **Challenges :** Being **discriminatory and violative** of reproductive autonomy and choice by denying access to ARTs to single persons and people in live-in and same-sex relationships.
 - ♦ The petitions also oppose the ban on commercial surrogacy and some chose to

engage in commercial surrogacy because other livelihood options such as domestic or garment factory work were more exploitative, and surrogacy provided them with enough remuneration to positively benefit their families

- **Conclusion :** There is a need to assess the Act through the framework of reproductive rights and justice while keeping in mind the concerns of stakeholders .

Source: TH

TEXTILE WASTE MANAGEMENT

- According to the European Environment Agency (EEA) nearly **half of the textile waste collected in Europe** ends up in **African second-hand markets**.

What is Textile Waste?

- Textile waste refers to any material that is **discarded** during the **production, manufacturing, use, or disposal** of textiles and clothing.
- This waste can include scraps generated during the production process, unsold or excess inventory, damaged or defective products, as well as clothing and textiles that are discarded by consumers.
- Globally, **92 million tonnes** of textile waste is produced each year.

How Does It Impact the Environment?

- **Landfill pollution:** Textiles can take a long time to decompose, especially synthetic fibers, which may never fully break down.
- **Pollution from production processes:** The production of textiles involves various processes, such as dyeing, finishing, and chemical treatments, which can release pollutants into the air, water, and soil.
- **Microplastics Pollution:** Many textiles, especially those made from synthetic fibers like polyester and nylon, shed microplastics when washed.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The textile industry is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, primarily due to energy-intensive production processes and transportation.

Textile Recycling

- Textile recycling refers to the **process of reusing, repurposing, or transforming** discarded textiles and clothing into new products or materials.

- Instead of being sent to landfills or incinerators, textiles are collected, sorted, and processed to recover valuable materials, such as fibers, yarns, and fabrics, which can then be used to **create new textiles**, insulation, padding, carpeting, and other products.

Why is Textile Recycling Important?

- **Environmental Conservation:** Textile recycling helps reduce the burden on landfills, conserving valuable landfill space and reducing the amount of waste that ends up polluting the environment.
- **Conservation of Resources:** Recycling textiles allows for the recovery and reuse of valuable materials such as cotton, wool, and polyester.
- **Energy Savings:** Processing recycled textiles into new products often consumes less energy than manufacturing textiles from scratch, leading to lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduced reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Economic Benefits:** Textile recycling can create economic opportunities by supporting industries involved in recycling, upcycling, and manufacturing recycled products.
- **Social impact:** Promoting textile recycling raises awareness about sustainable consumption

practices and encourages individuals to take action to reduce waste and protect the environment.

Indian Scenario

- India is amongst the **world's largest producers and exporters** of textiles.
- The Textile and Apparel (T&A) industry is one of the largest contributors to India's economy constituting **2% of the country's GDP**, 7% of industry output in value terms and 11.4% of the total exports.
- Both the production and consumption patterns **lead to a significant amount of waste generation.**
- Estimates suggest that India **manages ~7793 kilotons** of textile waste annually from three sources- domestic manufacturers, domestic consumers and imported waste coming from other countries.

Textile Waste Management in India

- India established its recycling industry back in the 1990s and today has a stronghold in mechanical recycling with a well networked value chain for the management of textile waste.



Figure 3: Value chain of textile waste in India⁶

- However, the industry is a mix of **micro, small and large stakeholders** and approximately **41% of the waste** is currently known to be moving out for usage in other allied industries.
- Research indicates challenges around **unorganised waste value chain** and **inefficient waste management** as the major hindrance in

realising the potential of the Indian textile waste management industry.

Government Initiatives

- **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016:** These rules, formulated under the Environment Protection Act, provide a comprehensive framework for the

management of solid waste in India, including textile waste.

- **Project SU.RE:** The Government launched a Sustainable Resolution in 2019.
 - ♦ It is a commitment by India's apparel industry to establish a sustainable pathway for the fashion industry.
 - ♦ This project will support the sector achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and long-term environmental, social, and corporate governance goals.
- **Promotion of Sustainable Practices:** The government promotes awareness and adoption of sustainable practices in the textile industry through various initiatives, including workshops, seminars, and training programs.
- **Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (TUFS):** TUFS is a scheme by the Ministry of Textiles aimed at providing financial assistance for the modernization and upgradation of textile machinery to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact.
- **Integrated Processing Development Scheme (IPDS):** IPDS is another scheme under the Ministry of Textiles that focuses on promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly processing technologies in textile manufacturing units, which includes initiatives for water conservation, waste management, and recycling.

Recommendations

- **Waste Management:** The industry can reduce waste by improving its product design, using more sustainable materials, and recycling more waste.
- **Infrastructure:** The industry must invest in infrastructure supporting circularity, such as recycling facilities and collection centres.
- **Value Chain Education and Awareness:** The industry needs to educate its stakeholders about the benefits of circularity and how they can contribute to it.
- **Government Policy:** The Government can support circularity by providing incentives for sustainable practices and regulating the industry to reduce its environmental impact.
- **Consumer Engagement:** The industry needs to engage consumers in circularity by making it easy for them to recycle their clothes and buy sustainable products.
- **End-of-life Management:** Recycling, upcycling, donation, and other practices should be explored

to manage post-consumer waste properly.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, sustainable textile products play a critical role in a circular economy.
- As the fashion industry continues to grow, the need for sustainable, recycling and ethical practices is becoming the current need of society to sustain the environment.
- By embracing sustainable textile production and recycling practices, we can reduce waste, conserve resources, create job opportunities and preserve cultural traditions etc.

Source: TH

CHINA'S MODEL VILLAGES ALONG LAC

Chinese nationals have started occupying several of their model "Xiaokang" border defence villages across India's north-eastern borders which the country has been building along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) since 2019.

About:

- The Chinese have started occupying a couple of these villages built on its side of the LAC across from **Lohit Valley and the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh.**
- China has been constructing **628 such "well-off villages" along India's borders** with the Tibet Autonomous Region, including **Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh** for over five years now.
- While the exact nature of these villages is unclear, **the dwellings are understood to be "dual-use infrastructure" — for both civil and military purposes.**

India's response:

- **Border infrastructure:** In the last three to four years, India has also stepped up work on its border infrastructure — this includes **improving forward connectivity, constructing alternate routes** to the LAC as well as **connecting them.**
 - ♦ Work is also underway to improve **connectivity to the passes**, establish laterals for **inter-valley connectivity** and on **construction of helipads** and **advanced landing grounds** at various locations.
- **Vibrant Villages programme:** India plans to develop 663 border villages into modern villages with all amenities in the first phase.

- ♦ Of them, at least **17 such villages along the borders with China** in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, have been selected for development as a pilot project under the programme.
- **Highways:** In Arunachal Pradesh, **three major highways are at different stages of construction:** the Trans-Arunachal Highway; the Frontier Highway; and the East-West Industrial Corridor Highway.

Line of Actual Control (LAC)

- LAC refers to the **disputed border between India and China**, spanning approximately **3,488 kilometers**.



India records **around 300 "transgressions"** by PLA troops every year. Number **shot up to 426 in 2017**, the year of the Doklam face-off

History:

- The precise alignment of the LAC is **undefined and contested** in several sectors, particularly in **eastern Ladakh (Aksai Chin), Arunachal Pradesh, and western Uttarakhand**.
- Historical treaties and agreements, like the **McMahon Line**, are disputed by China, leading to border clashes and standoffs.
- Territorial disputes escalated into major conflicts like the **1962 war**, highlighting the historical complexities.

Current Status:

- Since 2020, **tensions have risen in eastern Ladakh** with standoffs and military deployments by both sides.
 - ♦ **The 2020 Galwan Valley clash** has resulted in casualties on both sides and heightened tensions.
- Efforts are ongoing through **diplomatic channels and military meetings** to disengage and de-escalate the situation.
 - ♦ **Infrastructure development by both sides near the LAC** further complicates the situation.

Challenges:

- **Lack of a clearly defined LAC** makes territorial claims ambiguous and prone to misinterpretations.
- **Historical mistrust and differing geopolitical perspectives** hinder reaching a mutually agreeable solution.
- **Increased military presence and infrastructure development** near the LAC raise concerns about potential escalation.
- **Measures/Suggestions:**
- **Diplomacy and dialogue:** Prioritize peaceful resolution through sustained diplomatic engagement and dialogue with China.
- **Military preparedness:** Maintain strong military presence along the LAC to deter any misadventures.
- **Infrastructure development:** Enhance infrastructure in border areas for better connectivity and logistical support.
- **International support:** Build consensus and seek international support for India's position on the LAC issue.
- **Domestic consensus:** Maintain a united national perspective and build domestic consensus on border issues.
- **Way Ahead:**
- India-China border dispute requires **sustained efforts from both sides** to address the challenges and build mutual trust and understanding.
- The LAC issue is **complex and multifaceted**, with historical, political, economic, and strategic dimensions. There is **no easy solution**, and a **multi-pronged approach** is necessary to address the challenges.

Source:IE

GUIDELINES ON USE OF GREEN HYDROGEN

- The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) has issued guidelines for the implementation of the Scheme for Pilot Projects for use of Green Hydrogen in the Transport Sector.

About





- Under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission**, the MNRE will implement pilot projects for replacing fossil fuels in the transport sector with Green Hydrogen and its derivatives.
- The Scheme will be implemented with a total budgetary outlay of **Rs. 496 Crores** till the **financial year 2025-26**.

Scheme Guidelines for Pilot Project

- The scheme will support development of technologies for use of Green Hydrogen as a fuel in Buses, Trucks and 4-wheelers, based on **fuel cell/internal combustion engine**-based propulsion technology.
- The other thrust area for the scheme is to support development of infrastructure such as **hydrogen refueling stations**.
- The scheme will also seek to support any other innovative use of hydrogen for reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector, such as blending of methanol/ethanol, based on green hydrogen and other synthetic fuels derived from green hydrogen in automobile fuels.

What is Green Hydrogen?

- **Green Hydrogen:** The hydrogen produced via **electrolysis**, the splitting of water into hydrogen and oxygen with electricity generated from renewable energy sources such as solar or wind, is known as Green hydrogen.
- **MNRE defines** Green Hydrogen as having a well-to-gate emission (i.e., including water treatment, electrolysis, gas purification, drying and compression of hydrogen) of **not more than 2 kg CO₂ equivalent / kg H₂**.
- Green hydrogen currently accounts for less than 1% of global hydrogen production due to it being expensive to produce.

Color	GREY HYDROGEN	BLUE HYDROGEN	TURQUOISE HYDROGEN*	GREEN HYDROGEN
Process	SMR or gasification	SMR or gasification with carbon capture (85-95%)	Pyrolysis	Electrolysis
Source	Methane or coal 	Methane or coal 	Methane 	Renewable electricity 

Note: SMR = steam methane reforming.
* Turquoise hydrogen is an emerging decarbonisation option.

National Green Hydrogen Mission

- The mission was launched in **2023** with an outlay of **Rs. 19,744 crores**.
- It aims to make India a Global Hub for production, utilization and export of Green Hydrogen and its derivatives.
- The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** will be responsible for overall coordination and implementation of the Mission.
- Under the **Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme (SIGHT)**, two distinct financial incentive mechanisms – targeting domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers and production of Green Hydrogen – will be provided under the Mission.
- The Mission will result in the following likely outcomes by 2030;
 - ♦ Development of green hydrogen production capacity of at least **5 MMT** (Million Metric Tonne) per annum with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about **125 GW** in the country
 - ♦ Over Rs. Eight lakh crore in total investments
 - ♦ Cumulative reduction in fossil fuel imports over Rs. One lakh crore
 - ♦ Abatement of nearly 50 MMT of annual greenhouse gas emissions

Challenges

- **Risks associated with the transportation:** Hydrogen in gaseous form is highly inflammable and difficult to transport, thereby making safety a primary concern.
- **Higher Cost:** Cost: Green hydrogen production is currently more expensive than conventional methods, primarily due to the high cost of renewable energy sources and electrolysis technology.
- **Lack of fuel station infrastructure:** India will need to compete with around 500 operational hydrogen stations in the world today which are mostly in Europe, followed by Japan and South Korea.

Way Ahead

- Green hydrogen, produced through a clean process, is rightly seen as the most dependable source of energy of the future.
- For India to realize ambitions, it must strengthen its small manufacturing and allied enterprises infrastructure along with large industries.
- Increasing renewable energy use across all economic spheres is central to India's Energy Transition.
- Green Hydrogen is considered a promising alternative for enabling this transition that can be utilized for long-duration storage of renewable energy, replacement of fossil fuels in industry, clean transportation, and potentially also for decentralized power generation, aviation, and marine transport

Source: PIB

FACTS IN NEWS

INSAT-3DS

INSAT-3DS will be launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

About INSAT-3DS

- INSAT-3DS Satellite is a **follow-on mission** of Third Generation Meteorological Satellite from Geostationary Orbit.
- **Launch vehicle** :The GSLV aims at deploying the INSAT-3DS meteorological satellite into the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).
 - ♦ Subsequent orbit-raising maneuvers will ensure that the satellite is positioned in a Geostationary Orbit.
- It is fully funded by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**.
- It is designed for **enhanced meteorological observations** and **monitoring of land and ocean surfaces** for **weather forecasting and disaster warning**.
 - ♦ The satellite will augment the Meteorological services along with the presently operational INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites.
- **Objectives of the mission**
 - ♦ To monitor Earth's surface, carry out Oceanic observations and its environment in various spectral channels of meteorological importance.

- ♦ To provide the vertical profile of various meteorological parameters of the Atmosphere.
- ♦ To provide the Data Collection and Data Dissemination capabilities from the Data Collection Platforms (DCPs).
- ♦ To provide Satellite Aided Search and Rescue services.

Source:IE

MILAN 2024

In News

MILAN 2024 is the 12th edition of the Multilateral Naval Exercise scheduled from 19-27 Feb 24 at Visakhapatnam, 'the City of Destiny'.

About MILAN

- It is hosted by **India**, and made a modest beginning in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1995.
 - ♦ The navies of Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated in this edition.
- It is a biennial congregation of friendly navies.
 - ♦ **Previous Edition:** The previous edition, MILAN 2022 was held in Visakhapatnam, **the City of Destiny** under the aegis of **Eastern Naval Command**.
 - ♦ MILAN 2022 observed participation of 39 friendly foreign countries across continents.
- **MILAN 2024 : It** is scheduled under the aegis of Eastern Naval Command with invitation **extended to 58 countries**.
 - ♦ The central aim of MILAN 2024 is to enhance professional interaction between friendly navies and gain experience in multilateral large force operations at sea.

Source:IE

CANNABIS BAN IN THAILAND

Two years after Thailand made cannabis legal, the country appears set to crack down on its freewheeling drug market with a **ban on "recreational" use of Marijuana**.

About:

- Thailand was the **first country in Asia to legalise cannabis in June 2022**.
- The government introduced regulations that made cannabis a **"controlled herb"** that requires **a license for planting or selling**, as well as

banning online sales, sales to pregnant women and people under 20, and public smoking.

- ♦ But cannabis **can be purchased easily by practically anyone** at many unlicensed establishments or online.
- Legal cannabis has fuelled Thailand's tourism and farming trades but it is facing public backlash over perceptions that under-regulation has made the drug available to kids and caused crime.

Cannabis/Marijuana

- It is a generic term used to denote the **several psychoactive preparations of the plant *Cannabis sativa***.
- **The Mexican term 'marijuana'** is frequently used in referring to cannabis leaves or other crude plant material in many countries.
- The major psychoactive constituent in cannabis is **tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** and compounds structurally similar to THC are referred to as **cannabinoids**.

Side-effects Cannabis use

- Its immediate effects include **impairments in memory and in mental processes**, including ones that are critical for driving.
- Long-term use of cannabis may lead to the **development of addiction of the substance**, persistent cognitive deficits, and of mental health problems like schizophrenia, depression and anxiety.
- Exposure to cannabis in adolescence can **alter brain development**.

Legal Status in India:

- **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act) of 1985:** Classifies cannabis as a Schedule I drug, meaning it has high potential for abuse.
 - ♦ **Possession and consumption:** Punishable with imprisonment for up to 6 months or a fine of ₹10,000 or both.
 - ♦ **Cultivation and sale:** More severe penalties, including imprisonment for up to 10 years and fines.
 - ♦ **Exclusions:** Bhang, which is made with the leaves of the plant, is not mentioned in the NDPS Act.
- **Recent changes:**
 - ♦ **2020:** CBD (cannabidiol) extracted from hemp plants legalized for medical purposes.

- ♦ **2023:** Uttarakhand High Court ruled that the NDPS Act does not prohibit the cultivation of cannabis for research purposes.

Source:TH

SEA OF JAPAN

- South Korea is on high Alert as North Korea has launched Multiple Cruise Missiles into the Sea of Japan.

Sea of Japan



- Sea of Japan, marginal sea of the western Pacific Ocean
- It is bounded by the **Japanese archipelago, Sakhalin, the Korean Peninsula, and the mainland of the Russian Far East.**
- The sea is separated from the East China Sea to the south by the **Tsushima and Korea straits** and from the Sea of Okhotsk to the north by the **La Perouse and Tatar straits.**

Source: AIR

WESTERN DISTURBANCES

Indian Meteorological Department(IMD) has predicted a **fresh western disturbance** is likely to cause isolated to scattered **rainfall and snowfall over the Western Himalayan Region** on the 17th and 18th February 2024.

About:

- It also predicts a **gradual rise in minimum temperatures by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius** over Northwest India during the next 5 days.

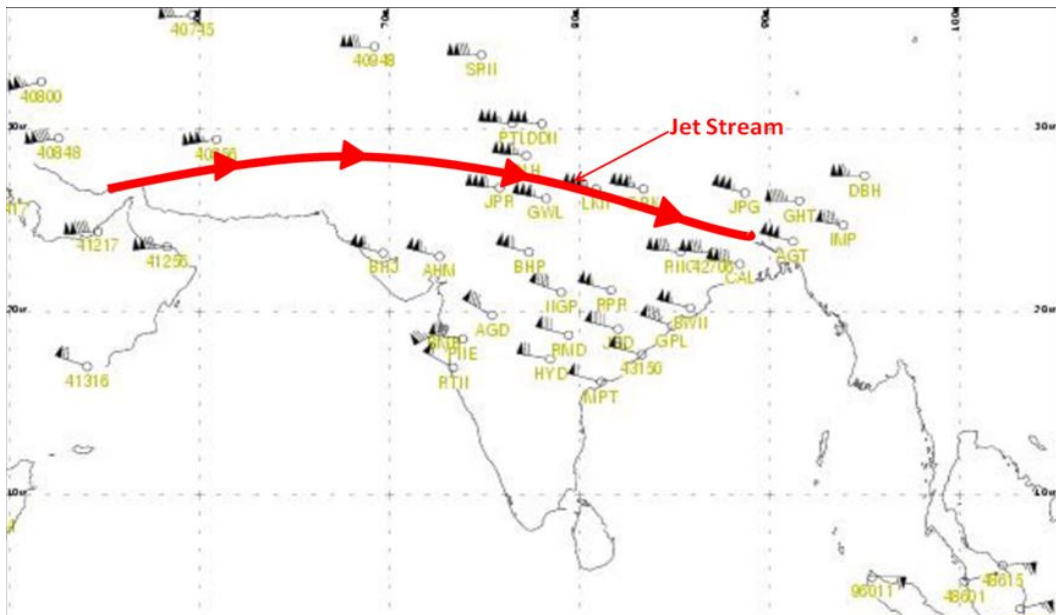
Western disturbances

- Western disturbances are the weather systems which are seen as **extra tropical upper air trough (extended low pressure area)** or/and **cyclonic circulations (CCs)** in **mid-latitude westerlies** that move from **west to east** across Himalayan region.
- They originate in the **Mediterranean region or Caspian Sea**.

- It brings **crucial winter rainfall to northwest India**, encompassing areas like Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, and parts of Rajasthan.

Formation:

- Embedded in the **mid-latitude westerly jet stream**, a fast-moving ribbon of air high in the atmosphere.



- Gain moisture as they travel** over the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, or Caspian Sea.
- Move eastward towards the Indian subcontinent**, bringing clouds, rain, and sometimes snow.
- renewable energy source.
- Maintain ecological balance:** Support healthy ecosystems in the Himalayas and contribute to water availability in downstream regions.

Source: Air

Impacts:

- Precipitation:** Responsible for a significant portion of winter rainfall in the northwest region, crucial for agriculture, water availability, and replenishing snow reserves in the Himalayas.
- Temperature:** Can cause temporary dips in temperature, providing respite from harsh winters.
- Other Impacts:** Can sometimes bring strong winds, thunderstorms, and fog, requiring weather preparedness measures.

Significance:

- Lifeblood for agriculture:** Winter rainfall from Western disturbances is vital for crops like wheat, barley, and oilseeds, impacting millions of farmers.
- Hydropower generation:** Contribute to hydroelectricity generation, a clean and

COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

- Recently, an Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting released **revised policy guidelines** for setting up **Community Radio Stations (CRS)** in India on the occasion of **World Radio Day**.

Community Radio Stations (CRS):

- These are an important **third tier in Radio Broadcasting**, distinct from Public Service Radio broadcasting and Commercial Radio.
- They are **low power Radio Stations**, which are meant to be **set-up and operated by local communities**.
- In December 2002, the Government of India approved a policy for the grant of license, for setting up of Community Radio Stations, to well established educational institutions.

- They have a lot of potential to weave together a community into a stronghold and can help give impetus to rural development-related issues such as **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), social audit, water harvesting and solar panel installation** etc.

Key Points in the recent Guideline:

- A single institution can set up a maximum of six stations in different districts of operation.
- It increased advertising time from 7 to 12 minutes per hour.
- It increased the rate of advertisement from ₹52 to ₹ 74 per 10 seconds of advertisements.
- It provides that 50% of the Advisory and Content Committee members will be women.

Source: TH

RENAMING OF NATIONAL FILM AWARDS

- Recently, there were some changes suggested by a committee set up by the Information and Broadcasting ministry to rationalise the honours given in different categories.
 - ♦ Accordingly, changes have been incorporated in the 70th National Film Awards (2022) Regulations.

Key Changes:

- The '**Indira Gandhi award for best debut film of a director**' has been renamed '**Best debut film of a director**'.
 - ♦ The prize money, which was earlier split between the Producer and the Director, will now only go to the Director.
- The '**Nargis Dutt Award for best feature film on national integration**' will now be called the '**Best feature film promoting national, social and environmental values**'.
 - ♦ This category also merges award sections for social issues and environment conservation into one.
- The **Monetary Reward for the Dadasaheb Phalke Award**, which is presented every year to an Indian film personality for their outstanding contribution to Indian cinema, has been increased from **Rs 10 lakh to Rs 15 lakh**.
- The award for 'Best Feature Film in each of the language specified in the **Schedule VIII of the Constitution**' has been renamed as 'Best (name

of the language) Feature Film', and the award money doubled to ₹ 2 lakh each.

The National Film Awards:

- It was established in 1954.
- It has been administered, along with the International Film Festival of India and the Indian Panorama, by the Indian government's Directorate of Film Festivals.
- The awards honour the best of Indian cinema across languages in a calendar year (i.e. January 1 and December 31 of a year).
- It included **feature and non-feature films** certified by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

Source: IE

ALASKAPOX

- Recently, Alaskapox, a rare virus causing mild illnesses, has been reported from Alaska.

About the Alaskapox:

- Alaskapox Virus (AKPV) is an **orthopoxvirus** that was first identified in 2015.
- It mainly has been found in small mammals, including red-backed voles and shrews. But pets, such as dogs and cats, may also carry the virus
 - ♦ All recorded cases have been reported from the **Fairbanks North Star Borough area**, located a few hundreds kilometres from the **Kenai Peninsula in Alaska**.

Transmission:

- It is believed that the virus is **transmitted from animals to humans**.
 - ♦ It is transmitted from small mammals and is related to smallpox and cowpox.
- However, **no human-to-human transmission** has occurred so far.

Symptoms:

- The symptoms of Alaskapox include **rash, swollen lymph nodes, and joint or muscle pain**.

Prevention

- The best way to keep pets and family members safe is to keep a safe distance and wash hands after being outdoors.
 - ♦ Also, do not try to keep wildlife as pets.

Source: LM

ABU DHABI'S FIRST HINDU STONE TEMPLE

- The Prime Minister inaugurated **Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple**.
 - ♦ The UAE has three other Hindu temples that are located in Dubai.

About the temple

- It is built by the **Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)**.
- It is built on a **27-acre site in Abu Mreikhah**, near Al Rahba, at a cost of around 700 crore.
- The temple has been constructed **without the use of any metal**, and fly ash has been employed to fill the foundation, substituting **55% of cement in the concrete mixture reducing its carbon footprint**.
- It has been built as per an **ancient style of construction** and creation mentioned in the **Shilpa and Sthapathya Shastras**.
 - ♦ These are Hindu scriptures which describe the **art for mandir design** and construction.
 - ♦ The BAPS temple, spread over a large area with stone architecture, will be the **largest of all in the Gulf region**.

Source: TH

BUSINESS PAYMENT SOLUTION PROVIDERS (BPSP)

- RBI has asked card networks such as Visa and Mastercard to stop commercial card transactions under the Business Payment Solution Providers (BPSP) business, citing concerns about the legitimacy and inadequacy of merchant KYC and the end use of funds.

Business Payment Solution Providers (BPSP)

- Payments are often made by corporates through RTGS and NEFT account transfers.
- BPSP allows businesses to accept card payments without having the required mechanisms.
 - ♦ For instance, a business can make payments to its smaller suppliers using this mechanism, even though the latter do not have the infrastructure for accepting credit payments.
- The **BPSP facility allows** corporate credit card players to enable large payments directly to vendors or merchants' bank accounts while also providing a credit window of 15-45 days to the debtor.

- BPSPs are regulated and licensed by RBI under the **PA-PG (Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways)** guidelines.

Source: TH

ADJOURNMENT

- The **Supreme Court** mentioned that it **would not entertain letters of adjournment** from lawyers in **bail and anticipatory bail cases** for which notice had been earlier issued by the court.

What is Adjournment?

- Letters of adjournment are **last-minute requests** by parties for **postponement of cases** listed before a Bench of the court.
- The letters are filed in the **Registry** and **circulated to the opposing parties**.
 - ♦ The case, when called for hearing in the day, is usually **adjourned if all the parties agree**.

New Guidelines As per the SC

- Adjournment letters would not be entertained in cases in which exemption from surrendering has already been granted; cases in which an interim order favouring the party seeking the adjournment is already in operation; and in matters in which suspension of sentence has been sought.
 - ♦ This would mean that the parties **must necessarily appear in court** in these categories and the Bench would take a decision, in its own discretion, on **whether to grant an adjournment**.
- In other cases, request for adjournment of a case could be circulated **till a day prior** to the publication of the main list of cases.
 - ♦ However, the request should contain the **specific reason** for seeking adjournment and the **number of postponements sought earlier** in the case.
- A party or counsel can only circulate an adjournment letter **once in a case**.
 - ♦ The court would not allow consecutive adjournments, irrespective of which party in the case is making the request.
- The SC made it clear that **no letter would be permitted** for adjourning **fresh cases or regular hearing matters**.

Source: TH