

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## KATABATIC WINDS

### Context

- In a report published on Nature Geoscience, researchers have found downslope winds have been helping **cool the Himalayan glaciers**.

### What are Katabatic winds?

- Katabatic winds are **downhill winds** that are generated when the surface of a mountain is cooler than the adjacent atmosphere.
- When a temperature gap is created between the air flowing above the mountains and the cooler air directly in contact with ice masses, it creates a pressure gradient.
- This leads to an increase in turbulent heat exchange at the glacier's surface and stronger cooling of the surface air mass.
- As the warm air gets cooler and denser, it sinks, triggering the katabatic winds in neighboring areas down the slope.

### Role of katabatic winds

- Winds from the monsoon season are drawn upwards in the daytime and are met with the katabatic winds.
- The convergence between the upward monsoonal winds and the downhill winds causes the monsoonal moisture to be lifted, generating a decent amount of rain, snow, sleet or hail over the glaciers.

### Implication of katabatic winds

- The enhanced katabatic winds are to drive the **convergence line between upslope and downslope** winds further down the mountain.
- This means that **precipitation has increased at lower elevations**, but decreased at the higher elevations where glaciers are situated.
- The decrease in precipitation over the glaciers has caused them to lose mass over the past few decades.

Source: **Nature Geoscience**

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS BILL, 2023

### Context

- Recently, the Telecommunications Bill, 2023 introduced in the Lok Sabha.

### About

- The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 proposes the first comprehensive rewrite of telecommunications law, **consolidating spectrum rules, right of way, dispute resolution between service providers and the Department of Telecommunications or local governments**, and other aspects of telecom regulation into one fresh statute.
- It seeks to **repeal the Indian Telegraph Act (1885), Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933) and The Telegraph Wire (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950**.
  - It also amends the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act, 1997**.

### Key Provisions of the Bill

- Legal and Regulatory Framework:** It seeks to create a legal and regulatory framework for a safe telecom network.
  - It seeks to **remove Over The Top (OTT) apps** like WhatsApp, Telegram etc., from the definition of telecommunication.
- On National Security:** It seeks to give the power to the **Government (Union or a State) or any officer** authorised by the Government to **suspend, take control of, or manage any telecommunication service or network** in case of a public emergency including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety or over **matters of national security**.
- Spectrum Allocation:** It proposed that the government should be given the right to **administratively allocate satellite spectrum**.
  - Till now, telecom companies have taken part in auctions and have presented bids to win the spectrum.

#### National Frequency Allocation Plan

- It is an **administrative document** that sets aside airwaves for different purposes, and **has now been given statutory force**.
- Auctions will be the **'preferred' mode of allotment of spectrum**, while administrative allotment will be used in cases such as satellite TV and broadband.

- Promoting Competition:** The bill proposes that the government be given power to take steps such as entry fee waiver, licence fee, penalty etc., in order to ensure there is competition in the telecom sector.

- **Appointments to TRAI:** Bill seeks to allow appointment of **private sector corporate executives** for the role of TRAI chairperson.
  - ♦ Individuals with **at least 30 years of professional experience** to serve as the **Chairperson**;
  - ♦ Individuals with **at least 25 years of professional experience** to serve as **members**.
- **Right of way:** Facility providers may seek a right of way over public or private property to establish telecom infrastructure. It must be provided on a non-discriminatory and non-exclusive basis to the extent possible.
- **Digital Bharat Nidhi:** The Bill renamed the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**, established under the **1885 Act** to provide for telecom services in underserved areas, as **Digital Bharat Nidhi** and allows its use for research and development.
- **Offences and Penalties:** Providing telecom services without authorisation, or gaining unauthorised access to a telecom network or data, are punishable with **imprisonment up to three years, a fine up to two crore rupees, or both**.
  - ♦ Breaching terms and conditions of authorisation is punishable with a civil penalty up to five crore rupees.
- **Adjudication process:** The Union government will appoint an **adjudicating officer** (must be of the rank of joint secretary and above) to conduct inquiries and pass orders against civil offences under the Bill.
  - ♦ Orders of the adjudicating officer **may be appealed before the Designated Appeals Committee** (members will be officers of the rank of **at least Additional Secretary**) **within 30 days**.
  - ♦ Appeals against the orders of the Committee, in connection to breach of terms and conditions, may be filed with the **Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)** within 30 days.
- ♦ Governments have previously taken steps such as suspending internet services in areas marred by violence till peaceful conditions prevail.
- **Weakening TRAI:** The Bill may result in TRAI becoming just a rubber stamp, as it **considerably dilutes the regulator's powers**.
- **Privacy:** The Bill fails to articulate the spirit and essence of **judicial pronouncements on privacy (the K.S. Puttaswamy judgement)** and data protection.
  - ♦ There are **threats against encryption**, especially end-to-end encryption after **removing Over The Top (OTT) apps** like WhatsApp, Telegram etc., from the definition of telecommunication.

### Conclusion

- Telecommunication sector is a key driver of economic and social development. It is the gateway to digital services.
- The nature of telecommunication, its usage and underlying technologies have undergone massive changes, especially in the past decade.
- Security of our country is vitally dependent on the safety of telecommunication networks.
- Therefore, there is a need to create a legal and regulatory framework that focuses on a safe and secure telecommunication network that provides for digitally inclusive growth.

**Source: TH**

## POST OFFICE BILL, 2023

### Context

- Parliament of India passed the Post Office Bill, 2023 to replace the Indian Post Office Act, 1898.

#### Brief History of Post Office regulations in India:

- India saw the opening of the first post office by East India Company in 1727 at Kolkata.
- **Governor General Lord Dalhousie** appointed a **Post Office Commission in 1850** for a proper regulation.
  - ♦ Lord Dalhousie recognised the **Indian Post Offices** as a **separate organisation of national importance**.
- The **Post Office Act XVII, 1854** was framed after recommendations of the **Post Office Commission**.

### What are the concerns?

- **Suspension of Internet Services:** The Telecom Bill (2023) proposes to empower the government to **'take temporary possession'** of the network, **without clarifying the 'temporary possession'**.

- **Post Office Act XVII, 1854** was replaced by the **Post Office Act 1866**, which was amended a number of times because of the defects and omissions.
- A new **Bill was introduced in 1898** to amend the **Act of 1866** that became the **Indian Post Office Act, 1898** after enactment.
  - ♦ It included within its scope postal insurance, the value payable in post, and the Post Office money order system, and declared and limited the government liability in respect of these matters.

### Need to Amend the Post Office Regulations

- Post Office Bill, 2023 was introduced to repeal the **Indian Post Office Act, 1898** and to consolidate and amend the law relating to the Post Offices in India.
- A colonial era law is not relevant in today's world where services have massively expanded.
  - ♦ Post offices are now **not just an office to distribute letters**, but they are hubs of various **financial and other services**.
  - ♦ Postal network has more than **1.5 lakh post offices, with over 1.29 lakh in rural areas**.
- There is a need to provide a simple legislative framework to facilitate the evolution of the post office into a **network for delivery of citizen-centric services**.

### Postal Services:

- These come under the **Union List** (Schedule VII) of the Constitution of India.
- The Indian Post Office Act, 1898 regulates the postal services offered by the Union government through India Post, a departmental undertaking.
  - ♦ It grants the Union government exclusive privilege over conveying letters.

### Key Features of the Bill:

- **Exclusive privileges of the Union government:** It provides that wherever the central government establishes posts, it will have the exclusive privilege of conveying letters by post, as well as incidental services such as receiving, collecting, sending, and delivering letters.
  - ♦ It provides for the issuance of postage stamps as per the prescribed Rules.

- **Director General to make regulations regarding services:** It provides for the appointment of the **Director General of Postal Services**.
  - ♦ It has powers to decide the time and manner of delivery of postal services, and may make regulations regarding any activity necessary to provide postal services.
- **Powers to intercept postal articles:** It allows interception of an article being transmitted through post on **certain grounds** like *occurrence of any public emergency, or in the interest of public safety or tranquillity, and or the security of the state*.
  - ♦ An intercepted shipment can be detained or disposed of or destroy shipments carrying items prohibited under the Act or any other law by the officer in charge.
  - ♦ The Union government may empower an officer of India Post to deliver the postal article to the customs authority or any other specified authority.
- **Exemptions from liability:** It exempts the government from any liability related to the loss, mis-delivery, delay, or damage to a postal article.
  - ♦ Officers are also exempt from such liability unless they have acted fraudulently or wilfully.
- **Removal of offences and penalties:** It specified various offences and penalties, all of which were **removed by the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023**.
  - ♦ The Bill does not provide for any offences or consequences, except one. Amounts not paid by a **user will be recoverable as arrears of land revenue**.

### Concerns:

- The amendment relating to interception of articles being transmitted through post offices could be a concern.
  - ♦ It does not specify procedural safeguards. This **'may violate freedom of speech and expression, and the right to privacy of individuals'**.
- The grounds for interception include 'emergency' may be beyond reasonable restrictions under the Constitution of India.
- The Bill does not specify any offences and penalties.

- ♦ For instance, there are **no consequences for unauthorised opening** of postal articles by a postal officer. This may have adverse implications for the **right to privacy of consumers**.

### Conclusion:

- The Post Office Bill (2023) emphasises digital addressing by opening up avenues for efficient mail and parcel delivery, and streamlining the sorting processes.
- Despite few concerns raised in the Bill, it still marks a significant step in clarifying and modernising the Indian Post and related infrastructure.

Source: **BL**

## HIGH FAT SUGAR SALT (HFSS) FOODS

### Context

- The consumption of **High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS)** foods is **one of the major risk factors to a host of health issues** that include obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

### About the High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) Foods

- HFSS foods are **processed or packaged products that are high in unhealthy fats, added sugars, and sodium**.
- These elements **contribute to various health problems** like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers.
- **HFSS foods are:**
  - ♦ **High in saturated and trans fats**, which raise bad cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.
  - ♦ **High in added sugars** which contributes to weight gain, diabetes, and tooth decay.
  - ♦ **High in sodium** which leads to high blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke.
  - ♦ **Low in fiber, vitamins, and minerals**, leading to nutritional deficiencies.

### Current Scenario

- According to a **World Bank report of 2019**, worldwide, **70% of all overweight and obese people live in Low- and Middle-Income Countries**, with a **55% rise in rural areas** across the globe.
  - ♦ It **dispels the perception** that obesity is only a problem in high-income countries and urban and affluent communities.

- The Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) burden in India has skyrocketed from **38% in 1990 to 65% in 2019**.

- ♦ **India logged 31 million new diabetes patients in 2019-21 alone**, as per a recent study.
- The global burden of diseases study shows that annually, **1.2 million deaths in India can be attributed to dietary risks alone**.
- The economic impact of overweight and obesity in India was estimated at **\$23 billion in 2017**. If unattended, this is likely to rise to **\$480 billion by 2060**.

### Case for high HFSS Tax

- Taxation is considered to be an **effective means to reduce the consumption of these products** as most consumers are price responsive towards them.

#### Do you know?

- In India, **Kerala had also introduced a 'fat tax'** way back in 2016, which later got **subsumed into India's Goods and Services Tax in 2017**.
  - ♦ **Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)** are taxed with a **28% GST rate** and 12% compensation cess.
  - ♦ **Salty snacks** are taxed at **12%**.
- The imperative for taxing HFSS arises from **significant market failures** associated with their consumption, **contributing to negative externalities and internalities**.
  - ♦ Negative externalities manifest as **societal costs in the form of increased health-care expenditures**.
    - For example, the escalation of diabetes and obesity, necessitates substantial health-care expenditures, borne through **elevated taxes** to finance public health insurance such as the **Ayushman Bharat Yojana**.
    - Also, internalities **stemming from consumers' limited understanding**, influenced by aggressive marketing, result in **inadvertent harm to themselves**.
- Taxes can offer a **targeted and effective means to curb detrimental consumption habits**, thereby reducing societal burdens.

- ◆ A recent study on South Africa's Health Promotion Levy showed that there were larger relative reductions in purchases of taxable beverages.
- **Effectively designed taxes can reap multiple benefits** —
  - ◆ they can act as a deterrent to consuming HFSS;
  - ◆ promote healthier food choices;
  - ◆ prompt manufacturers to reformulate foods; and
  - ◆ foster the nation's well-being.

### Conclusion

- HFSS taxation in India **should not be merely seen as an economic or fiscal policy concern** but it deserves to be considered a **public health imperative**.
- When combined with other measures such as **promotion of nutrition literacy and effective food labelling**, it can be a more potent tool **to combat the rising epidemic of overweight and obesity**.

Source: *TH*

## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS REPORT 2023

### In Context

- **The World Bank** has released the **Migration and Development Briefs Report 2023**.
  - ◆ **India** saw the **highest amount of remittance** inflows in the world in 2023.

### About

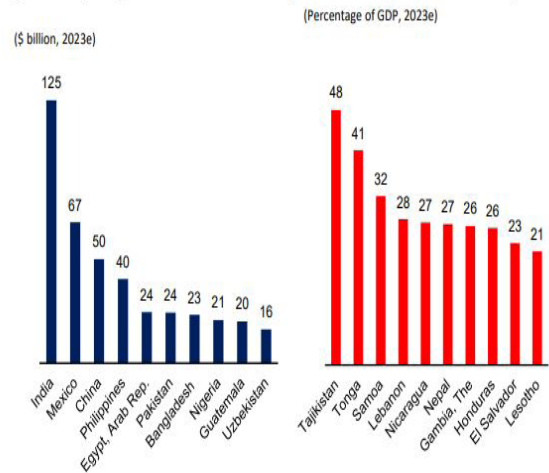
- The report updates on **migration and remittance flows** as well as **salient policy developments** in the area of international migration and development.
- **Remittance refers** to the funds migrants send to their relatives in their home country while working and living abroad. These are also referred to as **worker or migrant transfers**.
  - ◆ Most families living in slow-growing economies and developing nations rely heavily on these remittances as their main source of income.

### Major Highlights of the Report

- **Trends:** The growth of remittances to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) **slowed to 3.8 percent in 2023** after averaging about **9 percent** over the previous two years.

- **Largest Source of Remittances: The United States** continued to be the largest source of remittances.
- **Top Receipt:** The top five remittance recipient countries in 2023 are **India** (\$125 billion), **Mexico** (\$67 billion), **China** (\$50 billion), the **Philippines** (\$40 billion), and **Egypt** (\$24 billion).
  - ◆ For India, the main contributing factors are **declining inflation and strong labour markets** in high-income source countries, which boosted remittances from highly skilled Indians in the US, the UK, and Singapore, which collectively account for **36 percent** of the total remittance flows.

Figure 1.2 Top Recipients of Remittances among Low- and Middle-Income Countries, 2023



- **Remittance as share of GDP:** Economies where remittance inflows represent substantial shares of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) -- are Tajikistan (48 percent), Tonga (41 percent), Samoa (32 percent), Lebanon (28 percent), and Nicaragua (27 percent).
- **India:** Growth in remittances in India is expected **to halve to 12.4 percent** in 2023 from a historic peak of **24.4 percent in 2022**.
  - ◆ **The United Arab Emirates** accounts for **18 percent** of India's total remittances and is the second-largest source after the United States.
  - ◆ Remittance flows to India benefited particularly from its 2023 agreement with the United Arab Emirates for establishing a framework to promote the use of **local currencies for cross-border transactions**.
  - ◆ In addition to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar account for **11 percent** of India's total remittances.

- **Remittances Outlook for 2024:** The growth of remittance flows to LMICs is expected to **slow to 2.4 percent in 2024**, mostly reflecting a **slowing of economic growth** in several high-income countries.

**Migration:** The number of new, permanent immigrants to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries rose by **26 percent** in 2022, with substantial increases in temporary migration as well (OECD 2023).

**Mobilization of Finances:** The special section describes how diaspora finances can be mobilized for development and strengthening a country's debt position.

- ♦ Diaspora bonds are generally in small denominations and typically at a lower interest rate than issued to international investors.
- **Importance of Remittances:** Future inflows of remittances can be used as **collateral** to lower the costs of international borrowing for national banks in developing countries.
  - ♦ Remittances also can play an important role in **improving a country's ability to repay debt**, due to their large size relative to other sources of foreign exchange.
  - ♦ The contribution of remittances to debt sustainability in low-income countries was recognized in the 2017 revision to the International Monetary Fund/World Bank debt sustainability analysis framework.

#### About World Bank

- It is an **international financial institution** that provides loans and grants to the governments of developing countries for the purpose of pursuing capital projects.
- It was established along with the **International Monetary Fund at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference**.
- **It comprises two institutions:** the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and the International Development Association (IDA).
- **Mandate:** The World Bank Group has a mandate to reduce poverty and support sustainable development.
  - ♦ The institution focuses on a wide range of areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

- **Reports:** World Development Report (WDR), Global Economic Prospects (GEP), Doing Business Report, Global Financial Inclusion (Findex) Database, Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report.

**Source:** *IE*

## NORMS FOR LENDERS INVESTING IN AIFS

### Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has tightened norms for Regulated Entities (RE) to prevent evergreening of loans via investments in **Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)**.

### About

- **AIF** means any fund established or incorporated in India which is a privately pooled investment vehicle, and which collects funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign, for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy for the benefit of its investors.
- **Regulated entities** make investments in units of AIFs as part of their regular investment operations.
  - ♦ **REs** include all banks, all India Financial Institutions and Non-Banking Financial Companies (including Housing Finance Companies).

### How is the AIF route used to evergreen loans?

- The RE creates an AIF structure to provide funding to its borrower which is likely to become a non-performing asset (NPA).
- The AIF, created by the RE along with other investors, invests in the stressed company, which uses the same money to repay to the lender.

### RBI's norms for Regulated entities

- The regulated entities should not make investments in any scheme of AIFs which has downstream investments either directly or indirectly in a debtor company of the RE.
  - ♦ **Downstream investments mean** the actual investment by the AIF in a debtor company using the funds they have raised from AIF investors.
  - ♦ The debtor company of the RE, for this purpose, means any company to which the RE currently has or had a loan or investment exposure anytime during the preceding **12 months**.

- If an AIF scheme, in which RE is already an investor, makes a downstream investment in any such debtor company, then RE should liquidate its investment in the scheme within **30 days** from the date of such downstream investment by the AIF.
- In case the REs are not able to liquidate their investments within the prescribed time limit, they will have to make a 100 percent provision on such investments.

### What is Evergreening of Loans?

- Evergreening of loans is a process whereby a lender tries to revive a loan that is on the verge of default or in default by extending more loans to the same borrower. The process of evergreening of loans is typically a temporary fix for a bank.

### Reason for Evergreening of loans

- If an account turns into a non-performing asset (NPA), banks are required to make higher provisions which will impact their profitability. To avoid this, banks adopt the evergreening of loans.
- Some banks have even extended such loans to wilful defaulters to keep them out of the defaulters books.
- Many undercapitalized banks are engaged in lending to poor quality firms to protect their already depleted capital.

### Methods of evergreening of loans

- **Bringing two lenders together** to evergreen each other's loans by sale and buyback of loans or debt instruments.
- Good borrowers being persuaded to enter into structured **deals with a stressed borrower** to conceal the stress.
- **Use of internal or office accounts** to adjust borrower's repayment obligations.
- **Renewal of loans** or disbursement of new/ additional loans to the stressed borrower or related entities closer to the repayment date of the earlier loans.

### Concerns

- **Crowd out good borrowers:** Credit being diverted to weak entities – which is ultimately diverted for other purposes or it becomes a bad loan – depriving the genuine credit needs of good borrowers.

- **Accumulation of huge NPAs:** Affecting the commercial operations of banks and increasing the chance of its default.

Source: *TH*

## ONE YEAR OF KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

### Context

- The ambitious **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)**, recently completed one year of its adoption.

### About the KMGBF

- It was adopted at the **Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15)**.
- The framework has **23 targets** that the world needs to achieve by 2030.
  - ♦ It has set a target of **protecting 30% of the world's land and seas by the decade's end, a goal known as "30-by-30"**.

### 'Peace pact with nature'

The Kunming-Montreal pact is hailed as a landmark to protect biodiversity.

#### '30 by 30'

The cornerstone of the agreement is the so-called 30 by 30 goal – a pledge to protect 30% of the world's land and seas by 2030

#### Indigenous rights

Indigenous rights were addressed throughout the text, including in areas covered by the 30 by 30 pledge – safeguarding Indigenous peoples' right to remain stewards of land they use and ensuring they are not subject to mass evictions

#### Finance

The text approves the objective for rich countries to provide "at least \$20 billion per year by 2025, and ... at least \$30 billion per year by 2030", approximately double and then triple the current international aid for biodiversity. Also it creates a "trust fund" within an existing financial mechanism called the Global Environment Facility, as a stepping stone to a new fund in the future

- The deal also directs countries **to allocate \$200 billion per year for biodiversity initiatives** from both the public and private sectors.
- The **Global Environment Facility** has been requested to establish a **Special Trust Fund (GBF Fund)** to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework .



### About the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

- **Adopted in:** 1992, at the **Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro**, and entered into force in December 1993.
- **Mandate:** It is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources.
- **Members:** With 196 Parties, the CBD has near universal participation among countries.
- **Supplementary agreements:**
  - ♦ **The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 2003:** It seeks to protect biodiversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.
  - ♦ **The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing, 2010:** It addresses traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources with provisions on access, benefit-sharing and compliance.

### Recent developments

- In November 2023, CBD's 12th Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-Sessional Working Group agreed **the languages of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC) need to be preserved** to ensure intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices.

#### Do you know?

- **Article 8 (j) of Convention on Biological Diversity(CBD)** mandates that each country respects, preserves and maintains the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities(ILC).
- **The Global Environment Facility (GEF)** has earmarked as much as **20 percent of the funds** available under the newly established **Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) to be available to IPLCs.**
- The first meeting on Benefit-sharing from the **Use of Digital Sequence Information on Genetic Resources**, also took place in November, 2023.
  - ♦ The aim was to **develop and put in place a multilateral mechanism for the sharing of benefits** from the use of digital sequence information.

#### Do you know?

- **Digital sequence information** includes components of the biological resource such as its **nucleic acid sequence data or its protein sequence data.**
- **In July, 2023, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA),** decided to follow discussions under the **CBD on digital sequence information (DSI).**

#### Do you know?

- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was adopted by the **Thirty-First Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization(FAO)** of the United Nations on **3 November 2001.**
- The Treaty aims at:
  - ♦ recognizing the enormous contribution of farmers to the diversity of crops that feed the world;
  - ♦ ensuring that recipients share benefits they derive from the use of these genetic materials, etc.

- ♦ **The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)** discussed a proposal that instead of simple binary indicators, categorical indicators could be created so that countries could provide a more nuanced report on progress.

#### Do you know?

- SBSTTA, **established under CBD Article 25,** convenes regularly to fulfill its mandate, which includes providing expert advice and recommendations related to the scientific, technical, and technological aspects of biodiversity conservation.

- **The 'Nationally Determined Contributions – National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) Ministerial'** held on December 9, 2023 highlighted the **revised NBSAPs to be submitted in 2024 as part of the KMGBG.**
- In June 2023, UN members formally adopted the **Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty** which would **enhance the work on Target 3 of KMGBF,** which proposes actions to **protect at least 30 percent of land and seas by 2030.**

### Do you know?

- The BBNJ Agreement is an international agreement on the **conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity** of areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- This new agreement was developed within the framework of **UNCLOS**.

- On December 6, 2023, The WHO at the seventh meeting of the **Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB)** also looked into the question of access to pathogens and sharing of benefits derived from their use in its **pandemic agreement**.

### What Lies Ahead?

- **The first global review of progress in the implementation of the KMGBF is scheduled during COP17**, sometime in 2026.
- With all decisions deferred to 2024 and later, it is **not clear how the deadlines on targets and goals of KMGBF will be met**.

Source: *DTE*

- **Variant of Concern (VOC):** When there is evidence for increased transmissions through field and clinical investigations, a variant becomes a VOC. Variants of Concern have one or more of the following characteristics.

### About World Health Organization

- It is a **specialized agency of the United Nations** responsible for international public health.
- It was established in **1948**, and is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- It is an **intergovernmental organization** and works in collaboration with its member states usually through the **Ministries of Health**.
- The WHO operates as a coordinating authority on international public health issues, providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, providing technical support to countries, and monitoring health trends.

Source: *IE*

## NEWS IN SHORT

### COVID STRAIN JN.1 TERMED 'VARIANT OF INTEREST'

#### In Context

- **The World Health Organisation (WHO)** has tagged **JN.1 strain** as '**variant of interest (VOI)**' as Covid cases rise across several countries.

#### About

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** and other public health agencies use a system to categorize variants based on their potential impact, such as **Variants of Interest (VOIs) and Variants of Concern (VOCs)**.
- **Variant of Interest (VOI):** A VOI typically refers to **specific genetic markers** that have been associated with changes to **receptor binding**. This implies that variants of interest may be more difficult to treat, be at risk for more severe symptoms, or have a heightened rate of transmission.

## OPERATION PROSPERITY GUARDIAN

#### Context

- Recently, the United States has announced the creation of a new multinational task force, named **Operation Prosperity Guardian** to counter the Houthi **threat** in the **Red Sea**.

#### About

- The Task Force will include the Navies of Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

#### Red Sea

- It is a critical waterway that is anchored by two strategic waterways – the **Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb**.
- A total of 6 countries of Asia and Africa border the Red Sea-which includes Yemen and Saudi Arabia to the east, Egypt to the north and west, and Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti to the west.

#### Houthis

- They are a rebel group based in Yemen and the roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to "Believing Youth" (Muntada al-Shahabal-Mu'min), a Zaydi revivalist group founded by Hussein al-Houthi and his father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, in the early 1990s.

Source: *TH*

## LUMPY SKIN DISEASE

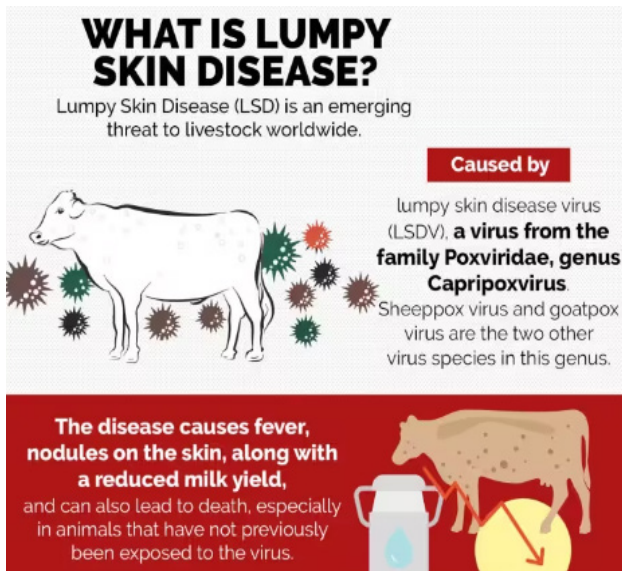
### Context

- As per the data available with the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, **more than two lakh cattle and buffaloes had died** by lumpy skin disease in 2022 and 2023.

### About the Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD)

- LSD is caused by infection of cattle or water buffalo with the **poxvirus Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV)**.
  - Lumpy skin disease was **first** seen as an epidemic in **Zambia in 1929**.

### Transmission:



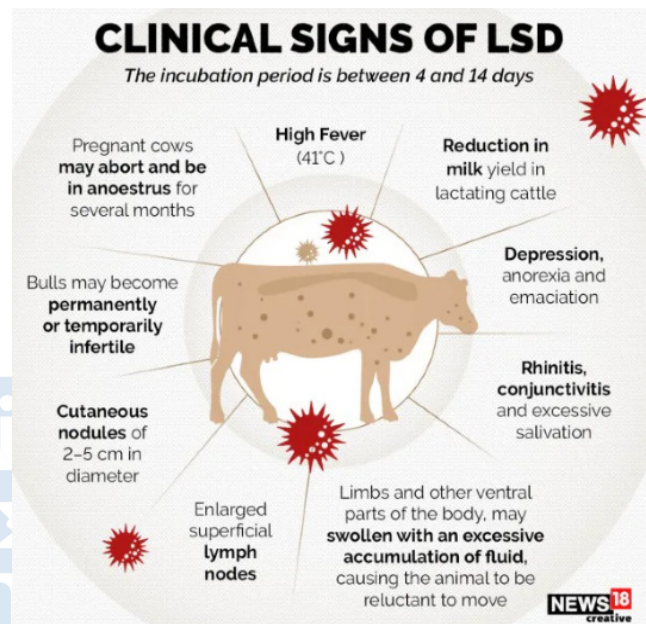
- The disease spreads among cattle through **mosquitoes, flies, lice, and wasps by direct contact**, and also through **contaminated food and water**.

### Concerns:

- The disease has raised concerns over its impact on the dairy business.
  - India is the world's largest milk producer at about 210 million tonnes annually.

### Treatment & Vaccine:

- Lumpi-ProVacInd** – Jointly developed by ICAR's **National Research Centre on Equines (NRCE)** and the **Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI)**.



- It is a live attenuated vaccine, similar to those used against tuberculosis, measles, mumps and rubella.
- Anti-inflammatory painkillers can be used to keep up the appetite of affected animals.

Source: [TH](#)