

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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Table of Content

El Nino and Drought in Southern African Nations

Kerala govt moves SC against President withholding Assent to its Bills

EU Digital Markets Act

India's fight against TB

Drop in Fertility Rate in India

Income and Wealth Inequality in India

Scope of semiconductors industry

Can CM of the State continue to occupy a public office: Lessons from the Senthil Balaji case

NEWS IN SHORTS

Section 123(3) of the RPA 1951

Gaza & Haiti

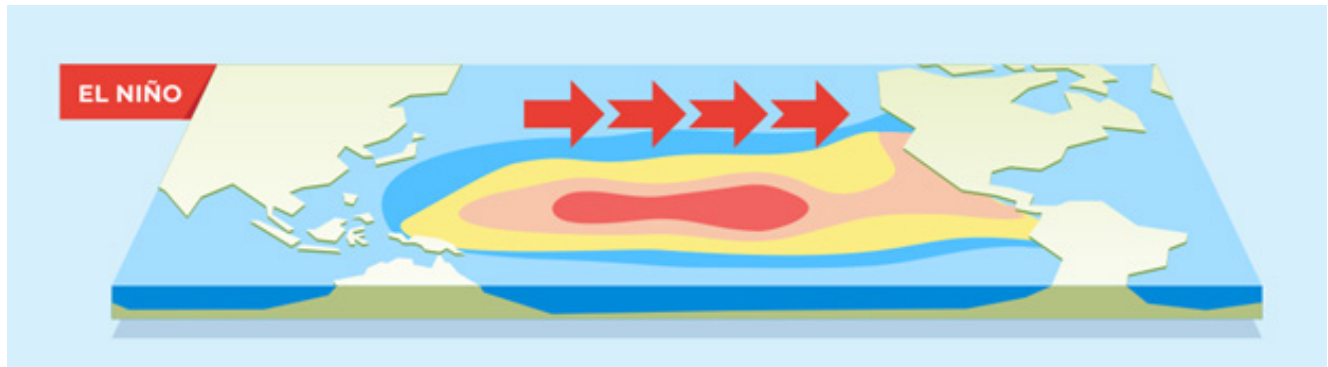
District Election Management Plan

Rise of Robusta Coffee Prices

EL NINO AND DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN NATIONS

Context

- Recently, the **southern African nations like Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe** declared a state of disaster due to severe drought conditions because of the impact of the ongoing El Nino weather phenomenon.



Current Crisis:

- According to the **United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)**, February 2024 was the **driest month in 40 years** for Zambia and Zimbabwe, and raised concerns late last year that **numerous nations in southern Africa** were on the brink of a **hunger crisis** because of the **impact of El Niño**.
 - Malawi, Mozambique, and parts of Angola had 'severe rainfall deficits'.
 - Millions in southern Africa rely on the food they grow to survive.
 - Corn, the region's staple food**, has been badly affected by the drought.
- The WFP stated that there were already **nearly 50 million people in southern and parts of central Africa** facing **food insecurity** even before one of the driest spells in decades hit.

Impact of El Nino on Global Weather:

- It can significantly influence weather patterns, ocean conditions, and marine fisheries worldwide.
- In 2016, the world saw its hottest year on record due to a strong El Nino.
- It brought a severe drought for southern Africa, the region's worst in 35 years in 2015-16.
- Meteorologists expect that this El Niño, coupled with excess warming from climate change, will see the world grapple with record-high temperatures.
 - According to a study published in the journal Science, El Niño could lead to **global economic losses of \$3 trillion in 2024**.

About the El Nino:

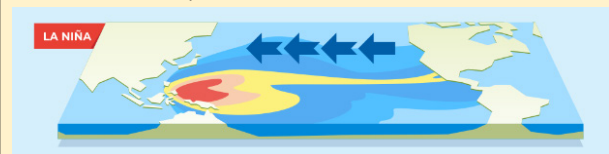
- It is a naturally occurring climate pattern associated with the **warming of the ocean surface** temperatures in the **central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean**.
 - It occurs irregularly at **two to seven year intervals**.

Impact on India:

- In India, El Niño is often associated with **weak monsoons and drought-like conditions**.
- It can lead to **reduced rainfall, dry spells, and heatwaves**, resulting in crop failures and water scarcity.
- It is due to extreme weather decimating agricultural production, manufacturing, and helping spread disease.

About La Nina:

- It is a climate pattern that is part of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle.
 - The combination of El Niño, La Niña, and the Neutral state between the two opposite effects is called the ENSO.
- It is characterised by cooler than average ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.



- During La Niña events, trade winds are even stronger than usual, pushing more warm water toward Asia.
- Off the west coast of the Americas, upwelling increases, bringing cold, nutrient-rich water to the surface.
- These deviations from the normal surface temperatures can potentially have a large-scale impact on global weather conditions.

Impact on Global Weather:

- La Niña has the opposite effect of El Niño.
- It can cause drought in the South American countries of Peru and Ecuador, heavy floods in Australia, high temperatures in the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, off the Somalian coast.
- It also influences the weather patterns over the Indian peninsula.

Impact on India:

- In India, La Niña is often associated with better monsoon rains that can lead to a good agricultural yield, benefiting the economy.
- However, the heavy floods in Australia can lead to loss of life and property, negatively impacting the economy.

Source: TH

KERALA GOVT MOVES SC AGAINST PRESIDENT WITHHOLDING ASSENT TO ITS BILLS

In News

- Kerala is challenging the legality of President Droupadi Murmu withholding her assent for the Bills that were passed by the Kerala Legislature before the Supreme Court.
 - ◆ This will open debate for a Constitutional debate on the scope of a judicial review of the decisions of the President of India.

Arguments of state government

- The act of the President in withholding the assent for the four Bills without giving any reason was highly arbitrary and in **violation of Articles 14, 200 and 201 of the Constitution.**
- Kerala government argued that the Governor should not have referred the Bills to the President as its subject matters were confined to the **State List of the Constitution** where the State has powers to legislate.
- The actions of the Governor subverted the delicate balance envisaged by the Constitution between the three organs of State.

Constitutional Provisions on withholding Bills

- Article 200 of the Constitution lays down that when a Bill, passed by a State Legislature, is presented to the Governor for their assent, they have four alternatives —

- ◆ **may give assent to the Bill;**
- ◆ **may withhold assent to the Bill**, that is, reject the Bill in which case the Bill fails to become law;
- ◆ **may return the Bill (if it is not a Money Bill)** for **reconsideration** of the State Legislature; or
- ◆ **may reserve the Bill** for the consideration of the President.
- **According to Article 111 in Constitution of India** :When a Bill has been passed by the Houses of Parliament, it shall be presented to the President and the President shall declare either that he assents to the Bill, or that he withholds assent therefrom.
 - ◆ Provided that the President may, as soon as possible after the presentation to him of a Bill for assent, return the Bill if it is not a Money Bill to the Houses with a message requesting that they will reconsider the Bill

Commissions recommendations

- The **Sarkaria Commission (1987)** has submitted that it is only the reservation of Bills for consideration of the President, that too under rare cases of unconstitutionality, that can be implied as a discretionary power of the Governor.
 - ◆ Save in such exceptional cases, the Governor must discharge his functions under Article 200 as per the advice of ministers.
 - ◆ It further recommended that the President should dispose of such Bills within a maximum period of six months.
 - ◆ In the event of the President 'withholding assent', the reasons should be communicated to the State Government wherever possible.
- The **Punchhi Commission (2010)**: It had recommended that the Governor should take a decision with respect to a Bill presented for their assent within a period of six months.
 - ◆ However, these recommendations have not been implemented till date.

Supreme Court's Observations

- As held by the Supreme Court in various cases including the **Shamsher Singh case (1974)**, the Governor does not exercise their discretionary powers while withholding assent or returning a Bill to the State Legislature.
- They are required to act as per the advice of the Council of Ministers.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- The Governor acts as an appointee of the Centre who may be required for maintaining the unity and integrity of the nation in critical times.
- However, federalism is a basic feature of our Constitution and the Governor's office should not undermine the powers of elected governments in the States.
- As the Supreme Court observed, it is necessary for the Governors and Chief Ministers to do 'a little bit of soul-searching'.
- The Constitution may be amended to provide that the Chief Ministers shall be consulted before appointment of the Governors.
- The recommendation of the Punchhi Commission that Governors may be removed through an impeachment by the State Legislature can also be considered.

Source:TH

EU DIGITAL MARKETS ACT

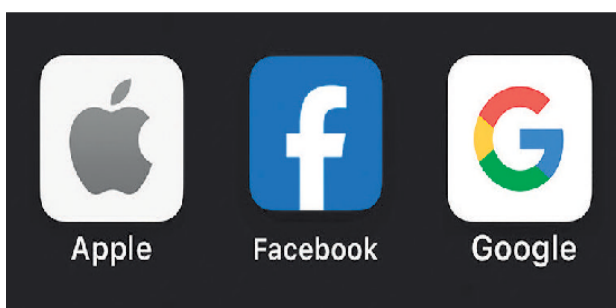
In Context

- **Apple, Alphabet's Google and Meta Platforms** will be investigated for **potential breaches of the European Union's new Digital Markets Act.**

About

Under lens

What do the EU probes mean for Alphabet, Apple and Meta



■ The probes will examine whether the companies violated the Digital Markets Act

■ If found so, they could be fined up to 10% of their global revenue

■ The investigations, which are likely to conclude in a year, will also look at issues around user choice, stifling competition, use of targeted advertising etc

- **Came into Force:** The DMA fully came into effect on March 7 and seeks to regulate **large online companies called 'gatekeepers'**, whose products and services are used by some 450 million EU users.

- ♦ **The DMA had designated six 'gatekeepers':** Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, ByteDance (owners of TikTok), Meta and Microsoft.
- **Aim:** It aims to challenge the power of the tech giants by making it easier for people to move between competing online services like social media platforms, internet browsers and app stores.
 - ♦ That should in turn **open up space for smaller companies to compete.**
- **Fines:** Violations could result in fines of as much as **10% of the companies' global annual turnover.**

Laws in India Related to Fair Competition

Competition Act, 2002

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, follows the philosophy of modern competition laws.
- **Aim:** Promoting and sustaining competition in markets, preventing anti-competitive practices, and protecting the interests of consumers.
- The Act replaced the erstwhile **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act.**
- **Abuse of Dominant Position:** The Act prohibits entities with a dominant position in a market from abusing their dominance, such as imposing unfair or discriminatory prices, limiting production or supply to the detriment of consumers, or engaging in practices that restrict competition.
- **Penalties and Enforcement:** The Act provides for penalties for violations, including fines and orders to cease anti-competitive practices.
 - ♦ It empowers the CCI to conduct inquiries, investigations, and impose penalties on entities found to be violating the provisions of the Act.

About Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- The Competition Commission of India has been established to enforce the **competition law under the Competition Act, 2002.**
- It comes under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs.** It is a quasi-judicial body.
- The primary objective of the CCI is to ensure that there is no abuse of dominance by firms, prevent anti-competitive agreements, and regulate combinations (mergers and acquisitions) that could have adverse effects on competition in India.

- The Commission consists of a **Chairperson** and not more than 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.

Source: TH

INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST TB

Context

- Globally, and in India, **tuberculosis (TB)** continues to loom large as a **public health challenge impacting millions.**

What is Tuberculosis?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is an **infectious disease** that most often affects the lungs and is caused by the **bacteria Mycobacterium tuberculosis.**
- It spreads through the air when infected people **cough, sneeze or spit.**
- **TB can manifest in two forms:** latent TB infection and active TB disease.
 - ♦ In latent TB infection, the bacteria are present in the body, but the immune system keeps them in check, and the person does not exhibit symptoms.
 - ♦ However, the bacteria can become active later, leading to active TB disease.
- **Symptoms:** Prolonged cough (sometimes with blood), chest pain, weakness, fatigue, weight loss, fever, night sweats.
 - ♦ While TB usually affects the lungs, it also affects the kidneys, brain, spine and skin.
- **Treatment:** Tuberculosis is **preventable and curable.**
 - ♦ Tuberculosis disease is treated with antibiotics.
 - ♦ **The Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine** remains the only licensed vaccine against TB; it provides moderate protection against severe forms of TB (TB meningitis) in infants and young children.

India's Burden of TB

- India accounts for around **27% of TB cases** worldwide – which is the world's highest country-wise TB burden.
- India's aim to **eliminate TB by 2025.**
- The theme for World Tuberculosis Day (March 24) in 2024 was the same as 2023 **"Yes, we can end TB"**, which reflects the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to **eliminate TB by 2030.**

Challenges Faced by India in Eliminating TB

- **Drug-resistant TB cases:** India has a significant burden of drug-resistant TB, including multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).
 - ♦ This type of TB is much harder to treat and requires more expensive, specialised drugs and a longer duration of treatment.
- **Diagnostics and Case Detection:** The accurate and timely diagnosis of TB remains a challenge.
 - ♦ Some areas lack access to modern diagnostic tools, leading to reliance on older methods with limitations.
- **Poor primary health-care and infrastructure:** In many parts of India, especially in rural and remote areas, there is limited access to healthcare facilities.
 - ♦ This can result in delayed diagnosis and treatment, allowing TB to spread within communities.
- **Stigma and Awareness:** Stigma associated with TB can lead to delays in seeking healthcare, and lack of awareness about the disease may contribute to its persistence.
- **Private Sector Engagement:** A significant portion of healthcare services in India is provided by the private sector.
 - ♦ Coordinating efforts between the public and private sectors and ensuring standardized treatment protocols are crucial for effective TB control.
- **Treatment Adherence:** TB treatment requires a prolonged course of antibiotics, and ensuring patient adherence to the full course is challenging.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Certain populations, such as migrant workers, urban slum dwellers, and those living in crowded conditions, are at higher risk of TB.

Steps Taken by Government of India to Eliminate TB

- **Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP):** The RNTCP, launched in **1997**, was the flagship program to control TB in India.
 - ♦ The program has been continuously revised and strengthened over the years.
- **National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP):** The Government of India has developed a National Strategic Plan (2017-25) for Ending TB in the country by 2025.

- **Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (PMTBMBA):** Launched in **2022** for community support to TB patients with the objective to provide nutritional, diagnostic and vocational support.
- **Universal Drug Susceptibility Testing (DST):** The government has scaled up efforts to provide universal access to drug susceptibility testing, helping to identify drug-resistant strains of TB early and tailor treatment accordingly.
 - ◆ Earlier, the patients were started on first line treatment and were tested for drug resistance only if the therapy did not work.
- **Ni-kshay portal:** An online Ni-kshay portal has been set up to track the notified TB cases.
- **New Drugs:** Newer drugs such as Bedaquiline and Delamanid for the treatment of drug-resistant TB have been included in the government's basket of drugs provided free TB patients.
- **R&D for Treatment:** Researchers have been studying shorter three- and four-month courses of anti-tubercular drugs, instead of the existing six-month therapy.
- **Vaccine Development:** Trials are underway to test the effectiveness of a vaccine called Immuvac, which was initially developed to prevent leprosy, in preventing TB.
 - ◆ Researchers are also testing VPM1002, which is a recombinant form of the BCG vaccine modified to express the TB antigens better.

Suggestions

- Setting norms and standards on TB prevention and care and promoting and facilitating their implementation;
- Developing and promoting ethical and evidence-based policy options for TB prevention and care;
- Monitoring and reporting on the status of the TB epidemic and progress in financing and implementation of the response at global, regional and country levels.

Source: TH

DROP IN FERTILITY RATE IN INDIA

Context

- Recently, a research paper from Lancet has released the **forecast of fertility rate in India**.

Major Findings

- **Drop in Fertility Rate:** India's fertility rate has

dropped from nearly **6.2 in 1950** to just **under 2 in 2021**. It is projected to dip further to **1.29 in 2050 and 1.04 in 2100**.

- **Depleting Working Population:** India's total fertility rate (TFR) — the average number of children born per woman — is dipping irreversibly to 1.29, far lower than the replacement rate of 2.1.
 - ◆ This means a rapidly depleting working age population.
- **Increase in Senior Citizens:** By 2050, one in five Indians will be a senior citizen while there will be fewer younger people to take care of them.

Reasons for Decline in Fertility Rate in India

- **Government Policy:** Post-independence, there was a need to restrict the population. So the Family Welfare Programme were intended to convince people to have no more than two children.
 - ◆ Slowly that behaviour change started showing up.
- **Decline in Infant Mortality:** Due to various maternal and child health-related programmes and successful immunisation infant mortality declined in India substantially and small families became the norm.
- **Rise in Female Literacy:** Due to the rise of female literacy and women's participation in the workforce the career consciousness, financial returns and economic independence have increased in India which means that women are reconsidering their options of having a second child.
- **Economic Factors:** Economic factors such as rising living costs, the need for dual incomes to support households, and the desire for better standards of living have contributed to smaller family sizes.

Consequences

- **Rise in Elderly Population:** The consequences of fertility decline will be that the share of the elderly in the population will increase sharply.
 - ◆ By 2050 the share of senior citizens in India will be more than 20 percent, that is one five people.
- **Labor Force Decline:** With fewer young people entering the workforce due to a declining fertility rate, this can impact economic growth and industries may face challenges in finding skilled workers.

- **Healthcare Challenges:** As the population ages, there is likely to be increased demand for healthcare services, this can strain healthcare systems and require adjustments in healthcare policies and infrastructure.
- **Challenges for Social Security Systems:** Declining fertility rates can pose challenges for social security systems, including pensions and retirement funds.

Government Initiatives

- **National Health Mission (NHM):** It is aimed at strengthening healthcare systems, including maternal and child health services.
 - ♦ NHM provides essential healthcare services, including antenatal care, postnatal care, family planning services, and child immunization, which indirectly influence fertility rates by promoting maternal and child health.
- **Family Planning Program:** India has a long-standing family planning program aimed at promoting contraceptive use and reproductive health awareness.
 - ♦ The program provides various contraceptive methods free of cost or at subsidized rates, conducts family planning counseling, and promotes awareness about the importance of family planning.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Under the scheme financial assistance is provided to pregnant and lactating mothers for their first live birth.
 - ♦ The scheme aims to improve maternal and child health outcomes and indirectly supports fertility by promoting safe motherhood.

Way Ahead

- The challenges are still a few decades away for India but the country needs to start acting now with a comprehensive approach for the future.
- **Models from Scandinavian countries** like Sweden and Denmark, which are dealing with these challenges by supporting new families can be replicated.
 - ♦ They are providing affordable childcare, investing in healthcare and taking on large-scale male-engagement initiatives to build gender equity.
- **Distribution of Household chores:** For women to be able to manage careers with motherhood, it would be crucial for men to take greater responsibility for household and care work.

- **Economic policies that stimulate growth and job creation,** alongside social security and pension reforms, will also be essential in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of declining fertility rates.

Source: IE

INCOME AND WEALTH INEQUALITY IN INDIA

In News

- A new working paper, titled “**Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj**” released by World Inequality Lab

About the report

- The World Inequality Lab is a Paris based global research center focused on the study of inequality and public policies that promote social, economic and environmental justice.
- It combines data from national income accounts, wealth aggregates, tax tabulations, rich lists, and surveys on income, consumption, and wealth to arrive at the results.

Key findings

- **Growth in average incomes:** Between 1960 and 2022, India's average income grew at 2.6% per year in real terms (that is, after removing the effect of inflation).
- **Emergence of very high net worth individuals:** The period between 1990 to 2022 witnessed a rise in national wealth and the emergence of very high net worth individuals (those with net wealth exceeding \$1 billion at market exchange rate; this number increased from 1 to 52 to 162 in 1991, 2011 and 2022 respectively).
- **Rise in the percentage of income tax payers:** The share of the adult population that filed an income tax return — which had remained under 1% till the 1990s — also grew significantly with the economic reforms of 1991.
 - ♦ By 2011, the share had crossed 5% and the last decade too saw sustained growth with around 9% of adults filing a return in the years 2017-2020.
- **Extreme levels of inequality in India:** in 2022-23, **22.6% of India's national income went to just the top 1%**, the highest level recorded in the data series since 1922 — this is higher than even during the inter-war colonial period.

- ◆ India's top one percent income share is among the very highest in the world, higher than even South Africa, Brazil, and the US.
- ◆ The **top 1% wealth share stood at 40.1% in 2022-23** — also at its highest level since 1961 when the data series on wealth began.
 - In 2022-23, India's top 1% wealth share was higher than the US and China and closing in fast on Brazil.
- **Poor data leading to likely underestimation of inequality:** the quality of economic data in India is notably poor and has seen a decline recently.
 - ◆ It is therefore likely that results represent a lower bound to actual inequality levels.

Factors

- The Indian income tax system might be regressive when viewed from the lens of net wealth.
- factors, including a **lack of education**, have trapped some people in **low-paid jobs** and **depressed the growth** of the bottom 50 percent and middle 40 percent of Indians.
- Since India, which won its Independence in 1947, opened its markets to foreign investment in 1992, its number of billionaires has surged

Suggestions and Way Ahead

- Implementing a super tax on Indian billionaires and multimillionaires, along with restructuring the tax schedule to include both income and wealth, so as to finance major investments in education, health and other public infrastructure, could be effective measures," to address the rising inequalities.

Source: TH

SCOPE OF SEMICONDUCTORS INDUSTRY

In News

- It has been argued that India will become a semiconductor manufacturing hub providing vast employment opportunities.

About Semiconductors

- A semiconductor is a material product usually composed of **silicon**.
- It represents a distinct class of materials that possess some of the **electrical properties of both conductors and insulators**.

- It can be used to control the flow of electric currents, and with exquisite precision.
- Each step in **semiconductor fabrication** demands ultra-high precision and harnesses a blend of diverse scientific principles.
 - ◆ For example, to make the most advanced transistors, the **photolithography process requires** a light source emitting electromagnetic radiation at a wavelength of 13.5 nm.

Major players

- **Dutch company ASML** is the sole provider of **photolithography machines** for cutting-edge semiconductor technology worldwide.
- The **American firms** dominate the software tools the engineers use to design circuits, while the silicon wafer sector is led by **Japan's Shin Etsu**.
- The market for the **actual task of fabrication is led by Taiwan's TSMC**, with fabrication tools provided by Applied Materials and Lam Research, both headquartered in the U.S.
- The majority of **intellectual property rights** are held by **British company Arm**.
- The U.S. also imposed sanctions on Chinese tech companies, including bans on the acquisition of cutting-edge ASML equipment and high-end design software, for the same reason.
 - ◆ In response, China has intensified efforts to bolster its domestic semiconductor production capabilities to meet local demand.

Status of India

- India boasts a leading role in chip design centred in Bengaluru.
- However, most of the intellectual property rights required to execute these designs are retained either by parent companies or by Arm, relegating India to being a mere user of their products.

Benefits

- **Computing:** The semiconductor industry produces microprocessors and memory chips, which are the primary components in computers, servers, and data centers. These devices are used in various industries, from finance and healthcare to manufacturing and logistics.
- **Communications:** Semiconductors are used to produce cell phones, satellite systems, and other communication devices. They are also used to create wireless communication systems, network equipment, and other hardware for data transmission.

- **Energy:** Semiconductors are used in the production of solar cells and other renewable energy systems. Power management applications also use semiconductors, including voltage regulators and power supplies.
- **Automotive:** Automotive electronics also use semiconductors, including engine control units, sensors, and safety systems. They are also used in electric vehicles and autonomous vehicles.
- **Healthcare:** Medical imaging, monitoring, and diagnostic equipment, as well as medical implants and devices, use semiconductors.
- Owing to their role in sectors like **defence and automotives**, semiconductors have also emerged as a focal point of geopolitical interest, with nations vying to establish semiconductor fabrication facilities within their borders and drawing industry leaders in with a plethora of incentives.
- Several initiatives have been launched to promote semiconductor production, including the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** scheme for the electronics sector.
- Additionally, the government has introduced the **Design Linked Incentive (DLI) and other schemes such as Chips to Startup (C2S)** and Scheme for Promotion of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS) to support the industry.
- the government has launched the “**Semicon India program**” to address the global chip shortage by encouraging manufacturers to establish their semiconductor industry setups

Challenge and Issues

- The semiconductor industry faces the challenges and opportunities of increased product demand in the immediate future.
- The growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) and the ongoing demands from the smartphone sector and other high-tech industries will place stress on the **semiconductor supply chain**.
- The challenge will be further complicated by **ongoing international trade disputes**, which may drive up the cost of semiconductor materials and interfere with global collaboration within the industry.
- **India also currently lacks in original research** in semiconductor design, where the future of the chip is decided.
- India's talent pool is unparalleled, and the country is currently at a crucial point where manufacturing can grow rapidly and efficiently.
- India has the intellectual capacity, determination, and capability to emerge as a leading global research and development hub.
- It remains focused on its objective of strengthening the semiconductor industry, which, in turn, will stimulate the growth of the country's expanding electronics manufacturing and innovation ecosystem.

Conclusion

Source : TH

CAN CM OF THE STATE CONTINUE TO OCCUPY A PUBLIC OFFICE: LESSONS FROM THE SENTHIL BALAJI CASE

Context

- Questions are being asked about whether the Delhi Chief Minister can continue to occupy a public office as the Rouse Avenue Magistrate remanded him to the custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Do you know ?

- At the State level, the executive comprises the Governor and the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers
- The Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor.

Recent steps of Government

- The Government of India has launched the India **Semiconductor Mission** to develop a comprehensive semiconductor ecosystem, aiming to position India at the forefront of the global semiconductor industry and bolster youth employment prospects.
- The Union Cabinet recently approved setting up **three semiconductor-making units**, entailing an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore, as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet the requirements of chips

- ◆ The person who commands the majority support in the State Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) is appointed as the Chief Minister by the Governor.
- ◆ The other Ministers are appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.
- ◆ The ministers included in the Council of Minister's must belong to either House of the State legislature.
- ◆ A person who is not a member of the State legislature may be appointed a minister, but he/she ceases to hold office if he/she is not elected to the State legislature within six months of his appointment.
- ◆ The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to legislative assembly of the State.

Senthil Balaji case

- Judgments in the Supreme Court and High Courts have previously concluded that constitutional morality, good governance, and constitutional trust are the basic norms for holding a public office.
 - ◆ A judgment by the Madras High Court in **S. Ramachandran versus V. Senthil Balaji** referred to arguments made in court on whether a Minister must forfeit his right to occupy a public office that demands a high degree of morality if he is accused of a "financial scandal".
 - ◆ Mr. Balaji, a former Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister, was arrested by the ED on money-laundering charges last year.
 - ◆ He continued to be a State Minister without portfolio while he was in judicial custody.
- The arguments referred to a 2014 Constitution Bench judgment of the **Supreme Court in Manoj Narula versus Union of India**, which had held that the basic norm for holding a public office was constitutional morality, that is, to avoid acting in a manner contradictory to the rule of law.
 - ◆ The second norm was good governance.
 - It was argued in the Madras High Court that "the government has to rise above narrow private interests or parochial political outlook and aim at doing good for the larger public interest".
 - ◆ The third was constitutional trust, that is, to uphold the high degree of morality attached to a public office.

Source:TH

NEWS IN SHORT

SECTION 123(3) OF THE RPA 1951

Context:

- It has been found that the various parties and their leaders have been accused of violating Section 123(3) of the RP Act.

About the Section 123(3) of RPA 1951:

- It provides that appeals by a candidate, or any other person with the consent of a candidate, to vote or refrain from voting on the ground of his **religion, race, caste, community, or language is a corrupt electoral practice**.
- It **denounces** any attempt by a candidate to promote feelings of enmity or hatred among citizens on these grounds during elections.
 - ◆ It aims to ensure that elections are conducted in a **free and fair** manner, **without appealing to the communal or sectarian sentiments** of the voters.
- It underscores the principle that the appeal for votes should be based on policies, performance, and public welfare, rather than on narrow communal or sectarian lines.

Key Provisions of the RP Act 1951:

- Conducting of Elections and By-Elections;
- Registration of Political Parties;
- Qualifications and Disqualifications for membership of the Houses;
- Corrupt Practices and Electoral Offences;
 - ◆ It provides that anyone found guilty of corrupt electoral practice can be debarred from contesting elections for a maximum period of up to six years.
- Dispute Redressal in matters connected to elections;

Source: TH

GAZA & HAITI

In News

- Famine is imminent in northern Gaza and approaching in Haiti, with hundreds of thousands of people in both places struggling to avoid starvation.

About Haiti

- **Haiti** : It is second largest Caribbean Island,

- It is situated 77 km southeast of Cuba.
- Haiti occupies the western third of the island it shares with the Dominican Republic and has 1530 km of coast line.
- It is Mountainous land between the Atlantic Ocean in the North and the Caribbean Sea in the South,
- It also comprises several islands surrounding the main territory: La Gonâve, la Tortue, l'Île-à-Vache, la Navase, etc.
- **The Gaza Strip:** It is a small sliver of land to the northeast of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula— which connects Asia and Africa— in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea.
 - Surrounded by Egypt to the southwest, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and Israel to the north and east, the Strip is mostly flat coastal plain.
 - It is a primarily agricultural zone, with three-fourths of its area under cultivation.
 - The population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, with a Christian minority.
- Executing the DEMP requires a **collaborative effort** involving election officials, administrative authorities, law enforcement agencies etc. Regular interactions with political parties and media are also planned to brief them on electoral rules.
- Material management is a crucial component of the DEMP involving procuring 61 essential items, including indelible ink, seals, stamps, stationary and statutory forms.
 - These items are categorised based on the level at which they are to be procured (State/ U.T. or district level), with timelines ranging from two-to-three weeks to four months before the election.

Source: TH

RISE OF ROBUSTA COFFEE PRICES

Context:

- Recently, it was found that the **Price of Robusta coffee** has spiked due to drastic fall in **traditional growing regions like Vietnam and Indonesia.**

About the Coffee Production in India:

DISTRICT ELECTION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Context

- As per the **Election Commission of India**, the district election management plan (DEMP) is to be **prepared at least six months before the tentative poll day.**

About

- DEMP is a **comprehensive document** that uses **statistics and analysis** to ensure the **smooth conduct of elections.**

- **Production:** India is among the top 10 coffee-producing countries, with about 3% of the global output in 2020.

Types: Arabica and Robusta.

- **Arabica** has higher market value than Robusta coffee due to its mild aromatic flavour.
- **Robusta** is the majorly manufactured coffee with a share of 72% of the total production.

Agro-Climatic Conditions for Coffee Production in India:

Factors	Arabica	Robusta
Soils	Deep, fertile, rich in organic matter, well drained and slightly acidic (Ph 6.0 - 6.5)	Same as Arabica
Slopes	Gentle to moderate slopes	Gentle slopes to fairly level fields
Elevation	1000 - 1500 m	500 - 1000 m
Temperature	15°C – 25°C ; cool, equable	20°C – 30°C; hot, humid
Relative Humidity	70-80%	80-90%
Annual Rainfall	1600-2500 mm	1000-2000 mm

- **Major Producers:** South Indian states like **Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu** contribute 80% of the country's total coffee production.
 - **Orissa and the northeastern** areas also have a smaller proportion of production.

Coffee Board of India

- It was established through **Coffee Act VII of 1942.**
- Administrative Control: The **Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**

Role of the Board:

- enhancement of production, productivity & quality;
- export promotion for achieving higher value returns for Indian Coffee and
- supporting the development of Domestic market.

- **Headquarter: Bangalore**, Karnataka
- The Board has a **Market Intelligence Unit (MIU)** functioning from its head office at Bangalore.
 - ♦ It undertakes various activities related to market information & intelligence, market research studies, crop forecasting and coffee economics aspects.

Source: TH

