

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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INDIA-US HOMELAND SECURITY DIALOGUE

Context

- Recently, **India and the US** discussed bilateral cooperation on various issues during **Homeland Security Dialogue** at New Delhi.

The Homeland Security Dialogue

- It is a high-level discussion between **India (led by the Union Home Secretary)** and the **United States (led by Acting Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security)** that focuses on various security-related issues.
- Both countries discussed steps that can be taken **to bolster bilateral efforts** to combat terrorism and violent extremism, drug trafficking (particularly of the drug Fentanyl, that the U.S. has been grappling with), organised crime, and ensure transportation security.
- They reviewed ongoing cooperation in **counter-terrorism and security domains**, which has been **a key pillar of the India-U.S. strategic partnership**.
- India's counter demand** from the U.S. to curb separatist groups operating in the U.S., including those responsible for recent attacks on Indian missions, did come up during the talks.
- The dialogue concluded with the signing of a **Memorandum of Cooperation** on law enforcement training between the **US Federal Law Enforcement Training Centre** and **India's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy**.

About India and US Relations

- The US - India strategic partnership is founded on shared values including a commitment to democracy and upholding the **rules-based international system**.
- They have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity.
- Bilateral Trade:** It has risen by 72% between 2017-18 and 2022-23. The US accounted for **18% of the Gross FDI inflows into India** during 2021-22, ranking second behind Singapore.
 - The United States is India's largest trading partner and most important export market.
- Defence and Security:** Both have established a strong defence industrial cooperation that looks at opportunities for **co-development and co-production** of important military capabilities for both our countries.

- Earlier this year, the United States approved a path breaking manufacturing licence for the co-production of **GE F414 engines** in India.
- They signed a troika of '**foundational pacts**' for deep military cooperation, beginning with the **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** in 2016, followed by the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** after the first **2+2 dialogue in 2018**, and then the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** in 2020.
- Strategic Security and Technology Cooperation:** In 2023, both took steps aimed at establishing a trusted partnership between the two countries.
 - The launch of the **Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) initiative** marked a major milestone in the U.S.-India partnership, which is increasingly defined by strategic security and technology cooperation.
- Nuclear Cooperation:** Civil Nuclear Deal was signed in 2005, under the agreement, India agreed to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and place all its civil resources under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.
 - In exchange, the United States agrees to work toward full civil nuclear cooperation with India.
- Space Cooperation:** With India's signing of the **Artemis Accords**, both countries have established a common vision for the future of space exploration for the benefit of all humankind.
 - They prioritise furthering cooperation on human spaceflight, commercial collaboration, and space exploration, and cooperate through the bilateral Civil Space Joint Working Group.
- Addressing Regional Security Challenges:** They increasingly find themselves in agreement on strategic issues, including countering **China's aggression**, promoting a **free and open Indo-Pacific**, and addressing regional security challenges.

Challenges in India and US Relations

- Unequal Bargains and Rigid Approaches:** Both countries have had to learn to talk to each other as equal partners, which has been a learning experience for both.
 - Indians often become wary of the U.S.'s attempts to drive unequal bargains, while Americans find the Indian approach rigid and sanctimonious.

- **Trade and Economic Issues:** India has expressed concerns over several trade-related issues. These include the withdrawal of trade preferences given to India under the **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) program**, removal of India from the U.S.'s list of 'developing countries', high import tariffs on steel and aluminium, and visa restrictions that particularly hamper the exports of services, especially the IT-BPO services.
- **Infrastructure and Regulatory Systems:** Realigning U.S. supply chains to India presents challenges. Infrastructure, logistics, and regulatory systems in India are not as well developed as those in China.
 - ♦ India also has a complex legal and bureaucratic system.
- **India's preference to its strategic autonomy:** While its embrace with the U.S. is getting stronger, deeper and more comprehensive, India is also cognisant of the need to maintain its strategic autonomy.
- **Conflicting Positions:** India's muted criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 expectedly led to some frustration in the West, raising questions over India's credibility as a security partner.
- **Defence Relations with Russia:** The United States has expressed particular concern regarding new streams of arms like the S-400 air defence system, because they fuel Russian power, diminish prospects for interoperability of and secure communications between U.S. and Indian forces, and preclude sharing of existing sensitive weapons technologies.

Way Forward and Conclusion

- India and the US cooperate closely in **multilateral organisations** including the United Nations, G20, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-related fora, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.
- They share a **common vision** to deploy **clean energy** at scale, as reflected in both countries' ambitious 2030 targets for climate action and clean energy.
 - ♦ They are also exploring avenues to increase our **minerals security cooperation** to ensure we can advance our clean energy goals.
- The evolving relationship between India and the United States holds significant importance in shaping the global order of the 21st century.
- To fully unlock the potential of this partnership, both governments must focus on reducing bilateral and multilateral bottlenecks and charting a course for a comprehensive and strategic global alliance.

Source: **IE**

WORLD RARE DISEASES DAY

In Context

- **Rare Diseases Day** is observed on the **last day of February**. The theme for Rare Disease Day 2024 is **"Share your colours."**

What are Rare Diseases?

- A rare disease is often a lifelong disease or disorder with a **prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 population**.
- Considering the population of India the suggested threshold **for India for a disease to be defined as rare is 1 in 10,000**.
- About half of the rare diseases **affect children** while the remaining manifest in adulthood.
- Rare diseases include **rare cancers, autoimmune diseases, congenital malformations, and infectious diseases amongst others**.
- **Global Burden:** It is estimated that globally around **6000 to 8000 rare diseases** exist with new rare diseases being reported in the medical literature regularly.
 - ♦ **Barely 5% of the known diseases worldwide are treatable.**

Do You Know?

- The first Rare Disease Day was celebrated in **2008 on 29 February**, a 'rare' date that happens only **once every four years**.
- Ever since then, Rare Disease Day has taken place on the **last day of February**, a month known for having a 'rare' number of days.

Rare Diseases in India

- India accounts for **one-third** of the global rare disease incidence, with over **450 identified diseases**.
- These range from widely known ones such as Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Gaucher's disease to lesser-known ones such as Mucopolysaccharidosis type 1 and Whipple's disease.
- Though India lacks a standard definition for rare diseases, a rough estimate suggests that about **8 crore-10 crore Indians** suffer from one rare disease or another; **over 75% are children**.

Challenges in Diagnosis and Treatment

- **Late Diagnosis:** For rare disease patients, it takes an average of seven years for their conditions to be diagnosed.
 - ♦ Physicians are generally unaware of how to interpret the signs and symptoms.

- **Treatment Available:** Less than 50% of the 450-odd rare diseases identified in India are treatable.
 - ♦ Treatments approved by the Drugs Controller General of India are available for just about 20 rare diseases and can be availed only from Centres of Excellence (CoEs).
- **Limited Funding:** The Budget's allocation for rare diseases, although increasing over the years but remains low.
 - ♦ Under the guidelines, up to 50 lakh is allowed per patient, which will be disbursed to the concerned CoE.
 - ♦ As chronic rare diseases usually require lifelong management and therapy, this amount is inadequate.
- **Lack of Knowledge:** The field of rare diseases is complex, heterogeneous, continuously evolving and suffers from a deficit of medical and scientific knowledge.
- **Economic Burden:** Rare diseases constitute a significant economic burden independent of a country's size and demographics, arising from increased healthcare spending.
- **Dilemma in funding:** As resources are limited, here is a macroeconomic allocation dilemma due to opportunity cost of funding rare disease treatment: on one hand and health problems of a much larger number of persons on the other.

Policy Initiatives in India

- **National Policy for Rare Diseases (2017):** India formulated its first-ever National Policy for Rare Diseases in 2017.
 - ♦ The policy aimed to provide financial support for the treatment of rare diseases, including funding for diagnosis and treatment under the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi scheme.
 - ♦ However, this policy has seen delays in implementation.
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has formulated a **National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021** in India to progressively build India's capacity to respond comprehensively to rare diseases covering areas of: prevention, awareness generation, training of doctors, funding support for treatment, promotion of research and development for drugs for treatment of rare diseases and diagnostics at affordable prices.
- **Centre of Excellence:** In order to provide facilities for treatment and care of patients suffering from rare diseases, nine (09) Centres of Excellence have been notified, which are premier Government tertiary hospitals with facilities for diagnosis, prevention and treatment of rare diseases.

Way Ahead

- Frame a standard definition of rare diseases, increase budgetary outlays, dedicate funding for drug development and therapy, and increase the number of CoEs.
- Public and private companies could be co-opted for funding; CSR initiatives and partnerships can be leveraged to meet shortfalls.
- The government must incentivise domestic manufacturers under the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme, reduce clinical trial requirements in appropriate cases, and look into options such as repurposed drugs and bulk-import.

Source: TH

MEDICINAL CANNABIS

Context

- Recently, researchers in Canada floated a new clinical trial to examine whether cannabidiol could be used to treat bipolar depression.

About

- The **cannabis plant (Cannabis sativa)** has long been of interest to psychiatrists for its perceived effects on mood and cognition.
- There is currently significant research interest in using cannabis-based compounds **to manage and/or treat schizophrenia**, cannabis-use and heroin-use disorders.

The Cannabis Plant and Its Compounds:

- The major psychotomimetic agent in **C. sativa** is a compound called **delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)**.
- There is growing interest in another **cannabinoid, cannabidiol (CBD)**, which may have **antipsychotic, anti-inflammatory, and neuroprotective properties**.
 - ♦ The plant's flowering parts are more potent than its leaves.

The Human Cannabinoid System:

- It has two **cannabinoid receptors, called CB1 and CB2**.
- The naturally occurring substrate of the CB1 receptor is **anandamide**, a compound whose name comes from the **Sanskrit word 'ananda', meaning bliss**.
 - ♦ **CB2** is found in the spleen and testes and to a lesser extent in the **central nervous system (CNS)**.
 - ♦ **CB1** is found diffusely throughout the CNS.

The Endocannabinoid System (ECS):

- It comprises a dense network of chemical signals and cellular receptors. The cannabis plant works its effect by hijacking this machinery.
- The cannabinoid system modulates a host of bodily functions, including pain, memory, psychomotor control, sleep, and appetite.

Arguments Legalising Cannabis

- **Economic Benefits:** Legalising it can create new economic opportunities and can generate tax revenue for the government through the sale and regulation of cannabis products.
- **Reduced Crime and Black Market:** Legalisation can undermine the illegal market for marijuana by providing a legal and regulated avenue for obtaining the substance.
 - ♦ It can potentially lead to a decrease in related criminal activities and violence associated with the illegal drug trade.
- **Medical Benefits:** Many argue that marijuana has medicinal properties and can be used to alleviate symptoms for various medical conditions, such as chronic pain, epilepsy, and nausea related to chemotherapy.
- **Less Health Risk when compared to Alcohol:** WHO study concluded that the public health risks from cannabis use were likely less severe than those posed by alcohol and tobacco, which are legal.

Arguments against the use of Cannabis

- **Health Concerns:** Some experts have warned that cannabis use among young people can affect the development of the central nervous system, leading to an increased risk of developing psychosis and schizophrenia.
 - ♦ Sustained use has also been linked to **respiratory diseases and testicular cancer.**
- **Gateway to drug abuse:** Cannabis has undergone genetic modifications to significantly enhance its potency and addictive properties. Growers have intentionally reduced the levels of CBD (cannabidiol) while increasing the levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol).
 - ♦ This altered composition raises concerns about its potential to serve as a gateway drug, particularly for vulnerable individuals who may be prone to substance abuse.

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

Conclusion

- The exploration of medicinal cannabis is a rapidly evolving field with significant potential for therapeutic applications.
- However, it is also a field fraught with challenges, requiring careful navigation to ensure the safety and well-being of patients.

Source: *TH*

LAW PANEL READIES REPORT ON SIMULTANEOUS POLLS

Context:

- The **Law Commission of India** has worked out **three major Constitutional amendments** to set the ground for the **'One Nation, One Election' project in 2029.**

About

- The **22nd Law Commission, headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi**, is set to recommend the addition of a **new chapter on simultaneous polls in the Constitution.**
- Currently, **Part XV of the Constitution deals with elections.** It prescribes the role of the Election Commission and for elections to be based on adult suffrage among other aspects.
 - ♦ The Commission is likely to recommend **insertion of a new chapter, Part XVA**, that would make provisions for simultaneous polls.

Recommendations: Three major Constitutional Amendments

- While the law panel has not submitted its report to the government, it has made detailed presentations of its **likely recommendations before the high-level committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind.**

1. **Synchronization of Assembly elections:** The Commission's report is likely to suggest **synchronising assembly elections in two stages in the next five years before all states can go to polls simultaneously** with the next Lok Sabha elections in 2029.

- ◆ Then **2029 can be the third election cycle** where the Centre, all states, municipal and panchayat elections can be held together."

2. **Sustainability of simultaneous polls:** One of the key concerns on simultaneous polls was tackling situations where the mandate results in a hung assembly or when a government falls midway when a no-confidence vote is instituted.

- Sources said that a **second Constitutional amendment would deal with "sustainability of simultaneous polls"** which would address these concerns.
- It is learnt that the Law Commission's prescription is to first attempt setting up an **all-party "unity" government if a government falls during its five-year tenure.**
 - ◆ "If that is not possible, then the alternative would be holding elections only for the term remaining before another cycle of simultaneous polls can be held".
 - ◆ Contesting elections only to form a government for a short term **could be a disincentive for political parties to bring down a government.**

3. **Common voter list:** The third Constitutional amendment to be recommended by the law panel would specifically deal with a **common voter list.**

- Currently in many states, **the voter list for the panchayat and municipal elections is different from the one used for Parliament and assembly elections.**
- It said a common voter list will ensure **every citizen gets the right to exercise his/her franchise for all public bodies.**

Idea of Simultaneous Elections in India (One Nation One Election)

- Simultaneous Elections refer to the **idea of holding Lok Sabha and State legislative assembly elections together**, with the aim of reducing the frequency of elections and their associated costs.
- Simultaneous elections in India to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were held in the **years 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967.**
 - ◆ Thereafter, the schedule could not be maintained and the elections to the Lok Sabha and the State legislative assembly have still not been realigned.

- **The Election Commission in its annual report (1983)** had recommended that a system should be evolved so that elections could be held simultaneously.
- **The Law Commission (170th Report- 1999)** stated that we must go back to the past where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the Vidhan Sabha were held simultaneously.
- **The 79th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015)** also favored the idea of the simultaneous elections which was reiterated by a NITI Aayog paper in 2017.

Arguments In Favour of One Nation One Election

- It will **reduce the huge expenditure** incurred for conducting separate elections every year.
- The problem of frequent elections leads to **imposition of MCC over prolonged periods of time which affects the normal governance.** Simultaneous elections can overcome such issues.
- Simultaneous elections **will free the crucial manpower** which is often deployed for prolonged periods on election duties
- The **focus on governance will increase**, instead of being constantly in election mode.

Arguments Against One Nation One Election:

- **Logistical Challenges:** All states and the central government face massive logistical challenges including coordinating the schedules, resources etc.
- **Disadvantage for regional parties:** It may help the dominant national party or the incumbent at the Centre at the cost of regional parties and regions issues can be overshadowed by the national issues.
- **Financial Implications:** Conducting elections is expensive and requires significant resources like manpower.
- **Issue of dissolution:** Prematurely dissolution on account of a **vote of no-confidence** becomes difficult to deal with in case simultaneous elections are there.

Way Ahead

- Considering the fact that **frequent elections led to a huge burden on human resources and affected the development process, a sustained debate is required** on the subject.
- All political parties need to arrive at a consensus on the issue of simultaneous elections before taking any step towards it.

Source: *IE*

'JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI JAMMU KASHMIR': AN 'UNLAWFUL ASSOCIATION'

Context

- The Government of India has declared 'Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir' as an 'Unlawful Association'.

About

- The outfit was first declared an 'Unlawful Association' in **2019**.
- Now it has been declared unlawful for a further period of 5 years under **Section 3(1)** of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967.

What is Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)?

- The UAPA gives powers to the government to probe and prosecute people for acts of terrorism, and to designate an organization as an "unlawful association" or a "**terrorist organization**", or an individual as a "**terrorist**".
- It was enacted on the recommendation of the National Integration Council, set up in **1961** to find ways to counter problems that were dividing the country.
 - However, in its original form, the Act largely dealt with secessionist activities, with no explicit mention of terrorism.

Amendments of the Act

- In **2004**, the Act was amended for the first time, with "and for dealing with terrorist activities" added to its title.
- In the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in **2008**, another set of amendments broadened the definition of terrorism in the Act, and introduced longer incarceration and more stringent bail conditions.
- In **2012**, the UAPA was further amended to include "**economic security**" of the country in the ambit of terrorism. Under this, the statute went on to designate production, smuggling and distribution of counterfeit Indian currency as a terrorist act.
- The **2019** amendment gave the government the powers to designate an individual as a terrorist. Until then, only organizations could be designated as "terrorist".
 - This was criticized as overturning the founding principle of the criminal justice system that presumes innocence until proven guilty for every suspect.

Issues with UAPA

- Low conviction:** According to NCRB, between 2018 and 2020, as many as 4,690 people were arrested under the UAPA but only 3% were convicted.
- Sharp Rise in Use:** There is a sharp surge in the state's use of UAPA – against tribals in Chhattisgarh, those using social media through proxy servers in Jammu and Kashmir; and journalists in Manipur among others.
- Stringent Provision of bail:** The standard for bail under the UAPA is that it cannot be granted unless the court is of the view that the accused is innocent of the alleged offense.
- Highly Discretionary:** It confers upon the government broad discretionary powers and also authorizes the creation of special courts with the ability to use secret witnesses and to hold closed-door hearings.
- Ignoring Fundamental Rights:** It can simply be used to bypass fundamental rights.
 - For instance, those arrested under UAPA can be incarcerated up to 180 days without a charge sheet being filed, thus directly violating Article 21 of the constitution.

India's policy on tackling Terrorism

- Policy of Zero-Tolerance Against Terrorism:** India calls for zero-tolerance against terrorism and focuses on developing a common strategy to curb it.
- National Investigation Agency:** It is India's counter-terrorist task force and is empowered to deal with terror-related crimes across states without special permission from the states.
 - It was established after the **2008 Mumbai terror attack**.
- Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System:** It improves the capability of Border Security Force (BSF) in detecting and controlling the cross border crimes like illegal infiltration, smuggling of contraband goods, human trafficking and cross border terrorism, etc.
- India's action plan at UNSC:** In 2021, at the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council (UNSC) **Resolution 1373**, India presented an eight-point action plan to deal with the scourge of terrorism.

Source: TH

PROVIDE PERMANENT COMMISSION OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN COAST GUARD: SC

Context

- The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to ensure that women are granted permanent commission in the Indian Coast Guard.

Background

- In **2021** the Supreme Court in **Lt. Col. Nitisha vs. Union of India** held that the Army's selective evaluation process discriminated against and disproportionately affected women officers seeking permanent commission.
- In a landmark judgment in the **Babita Puniya case in 2020**, the Supreme Court directed that women officers in the Army be granted permanent commission (PC) as well as command postings in all services other than combat.

Short Service Commission

- It provides an option to women for joining the Army and serving as a Commissioned Officer for **10/14 years**.
- After 10 years, a woman officer can either opt for a PC or opt-out or have the option of a **4 years extension**, during which they can resign any time.
- Short Service Commission officers are **not eligible for a pension** after completing their commissioned service.

Permanent Commission (PC) for Women

- It means a career in the services till the retirement age.
- The Ministry of Defence has taken steps to ensure the implementation of the grant of PC to women officers in the Armed Forces.
- Indian Air Force:** All Branches, including Fighter Pilots, are open for female officers.
- Indian Navy:** All non-sea going Branches/Cadre/ Specialisation has been opened for induction of women officers through SSC.
- Indian Army:** Women officers are granted PC in the Indian Army in all the ten branches where women are inducted for SSC.

Indian Coast Guard (ICG)

- ICG is a maritime law enforcement and search and rescue agency of India with jurisdiction over its territorial waters including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.

- Established** in 1977 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 of the Parliament of India.
- Parent Agency:** Ministry of Defence
- Headquarters:** New Delhi
- Head:** Director General Indian Coast Guard (DGICG)

Missions of Indian Coast Guard

- Safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations.
- Protection and assistance to fishermen and mariners at sea.
- Preservation and protection of marine ecology and environment including pollution control.
- Assistance to the Department of Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations.

Importance of women in defense Forces

- Increased diversity:** Women bring a different perspective and set of skills to the military, which can enhance overall military effectiveness and decision-making.
- Role Models and Inspiration:** Female soldiers serve as role models and inspiration for future generations of women who aspire to pursue careers in the military.
- Enhanced Operational Effectiveness:** Women contribute to a broader talent pool, which can lead to improved decision-making, problem-solving, and operational effectiveness.
- Gender Mainstreaming and Equality:** Integrating women into defense forces promotes gender mainstreaming and equality within military institutions. It helps challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable society both within and beyond the armed forces.

Challenges

- Limited facilities:** Women in the Indian army face limited facilities in terms of women-only barracks, toilets and other amenities.
- Harassment and discrimination:** Women in the Indian Army have reported experiencing harassment and discrimination on the basis of their gender.
- Physical demands:** The physical demands of military service can be challenging for women, and there have been concerns about whether women can meet the same physical standards as men.
- Cultural and Societal Norms:** Traditional gender roles and expectations often discourage women from pursuing careers in the military or limit their opportunities for advancement.

Source: TH

GREEN CREDIT RULES

Context:

- The recently published **Green Credit Rules** have received criticism from experts for being **detrimental to ecological aspects of forests**.

About the Green Credit Rules, 2023:

- Notified on:** October 12, 2023
- Aim:** To incentivise **individuals, organisations, and industries** to undertake positive environmental measures, extending beyond carbon emissions reduction to encompass improvements in air and water quality, increased biodiversity, and more.
- Key objectives:**
 - The rules objective is to **launch a Green Credit (GC) programme on a national level** to leverage a competitive market-based approach for GC and incentivise voluntary environmental actions by stakeholders.
 - The GC programme is meant to **complement the proposed Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)** introduced by the **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022**.
- Eligibility criteria for Green Credit:** Several activities are eligible for Green Credits, categorised into eight key areas:
 - Tree plantation:** Planting trees to combat deforestation and increase green cover.
 - Water management:** Implementing water conservation techniques like rainwater harvesting.
 - Sustainable agriculture:** Adopting eco-friendly farming practices.
 - Waste management:** Promoting waste reduction, recycling, and composting.
 - Air pollution reduction:** Initiatives that improve air quality.
 - Mangrove conservation and restoration: Protecting and reviving mangrove ecosystems.
 - Eco-mark labelling:** Obtaining the eco-mark certification for products that meet stringent environmental standards.
 - Sustainable building and infrastructure:** Constructing green buildings and infrastructure that minimise environmental impact.

Challenges/Issues

- Vagueness:** Using terms such as 'degraded' for scrubland, open forests and catchment areas is vague and in a way, incentivises industrial scale

plantation in such areas which will irreversibly alter soil quality and replace local biodiversity.

- Overlapping Schemes:** The Green Credit program may overlap with existing environmental regulations and carbon credit trading schemes, leading to potential confusion and redundancy.
- Voluntary Participation:** The program is currently voluntary for businesses, raising concerns about the level of participation and its potential impact.
- Issue with Afforestation:**
 - A study titled **Divergent responses of soil organic carbon to afforestation (2020)**, had noted that large-scale afforestation — considered as an effective natural climate remedy — **can, in turn, do more harm than good**.
 - The research stated that afforestation increased the density of organic carbon in areas having carbon-poor soils. However, **soils rich in carbon lost their density**.
 - Forest's ecology consists of the forest floor made up of soil and small herbs, and shrubs**, offering resilience to the forest from surface runoff, maintaining soil moisture, preserving seeds for forest regeneration and providing habitats for many animals. **These benefits may not be there in afforestation drives**.
- Grasslands, often referred to as 'wastelands'** but play an important ecological role to protect and conserve rare and unique biodiversity and also have more capacity to sequester carbon, compared to forests.
 - For example, patches considered as wastelands such as the **Kaas plateau in Western Ghats** are home to endemic and ecologically important species.
- The allocation of green credits for tree plantation is challenging.** The Green Credits Programme, which was announced last year, included various activities beyond just tree planting.
- Measurement:** The scientific rationale behind assigning 'credits' based on the quantity of trees is unclear. **Tree species vary greatly in their ecological impact and functionality**, raising questions about the effectiveness of such a metric, he said.

Measures/Suggestion:

- Developing clear and objective measurement methodologies.
- Exploring ways to incentivize broader participation
- Fostering market development and awareness
- Ensuring coordination with existing schemes.

- Investing in necessary resources and capacity building.

Way Ahead:

- The Green Credit Rules are a **bold step towards a greener future**. Challenges remain, but the potential is immense.
- It's a future where every individual, **every organization, can contribute**, building a sustainable tomorrow not just for India but for the world.

Source: *DTE*

NEWS IN SHORT

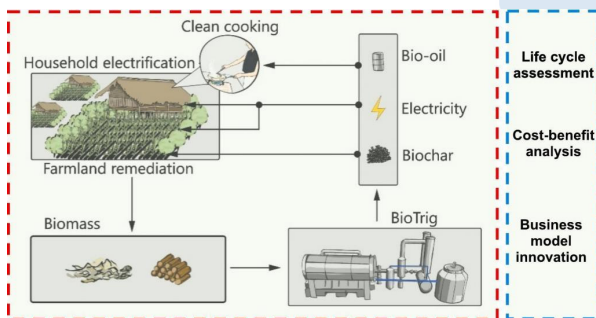
BIOTRIG

Context:

- Researchers claimed that the **BioTRIG**, a new waste management technology could improve life in rural India.

About the BioTRIG

- It is a **new waste management technology**, based on the process of pyrolysis, could help rural Indians cut indoor air pollution, improve soil health, and generate clean power.



- It is a **community-level pyrolysis system** designed to run on the waste generated by villagers.
 - It produces **three products — bio-oil, syngas, and biochar fertiliser** — that could help rural Indians live healthier and greener lives
- The **syngas and bio-oil** can heat and power the pyrolysis system in future cycles, with surplus electricity used to power local homes and businesses.
- The clean-burning bio-oil could replace dirty cooking fuels in homes, and biochar could be used to store carbon while improving soil fertility.

Pyrolysis (A Chemical Recycling Process)

- It is a kind of chemical recycling that transforms leftover organic materials into their component molecules.
- It works by sealing the waste inside an **oxygen-free chamber** and heating it above 400 degrees Celsius.

Importance

- Computer simulations showed that the BioTRIG system could **help reduce greenhouse gas emissions** from communities by nearly 350 kg of CO₂-eq per capita per annum.
- It indicates a substantial **positive impact on climate emissions and public health**.
- It has the potential to **revolutionise waste management and energy production** in rural India.

Source: *DTE*

NATURAL RESTORATION LAW

Context:

- Recently, the European Parliament adopted the Nature Restoration Law that sets a target to restore the EU's land and sea areas.

About the Nature Restoration Law

- It is seen as a significant step towards restoring **Europe's natural habitats, 81%** of which are classed as being in **poor health**.
- It sets a precedent for other regions and countries to follow, highlighting the importance of preserving and restoring our natural world for future generations.

Objectives and Targets:

- The law aims to restore ecosystems, habitats, and species across the EU's land and sea areas to enable the long-term recovery of biodiverse and resilient nature.
- It also seeks to contribute to achieving the **EU's climate mitigation and adaptation objectives** and meet international commitments.
- These measures aim to cover **at least 20%** of the EU's land and sea areas **by 2030**, and ultimately **all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050**.

Specific Targets:

- Wetlands, forests, grasslands, rivers, lakes, heath & scrub, rocky habitats, and dunes:** The goal is to improve and re-establish biodiverse habitats on a large scale and bring back species populations by improving and enlarging their habitats.

- **Pollinating Insects:** The aim is to reverse the decline of pollinator populations by 2030, and achieve an increasing trend for pollinator populations.
- **Forest Ecosystems:** The objective is to achieve an increasing trend for standing and lying deadwood, uneven aged forests, forest connectivity, abundance of common forest birds, and stock of organic carbon.
- **Urban Ecosystems:** The goal is to ensure no net loss of green urban space by 2030, and an increase in the total area covered by green urban space by 2040 and 2050.
- **Agricultural ecosystems:** The aim is to increase grassland butterflies and farmland birds, the stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils, and the share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features.

Source: *DTE*

ARTICLE 371A

In Context

- **Article 371A** of the Constitution of India has been the major hurdle in the Nagaland government's efforts to **regulate small-scale illegal coal mining activities in the State.**

About

- **Article 371 A** was inserted into the Constitution in **1962** following the 16-point agreement between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention.
- **Article 371A: Special provisions for Nagaland**
 - ♦ The state can have its **own administrative and legal mechanisms** based on the Naga customary laws, and the right to carry on religious and local social practices.
 - ♦ Special powers to the governor to overrule the decision of the chief minister on a law and order situation.
 - ♦ It empowers the Nagaland Legislative Assembly to enact laws on matters like ownership and transfer of land and its resources, which otherwise would have required the assent of the President of India.
- Numerous illegal and unscientific coal mining operations were posing a serious threat to human and environmental health in Nagaland.
- The unique land rights conferred under Article 371A have made regulating illegal coal mining activities more challenging.

Source: *TH*

PERU

In News

- Peru Declared Health Emergency Amidst Dengue Surge.
 - ♦ Peru has been experiencing high temperatures and heavy rains since 2023 due to the El Nino weather pattern, which has warmed the seas off the country's coast and helped mosquito populations grow

About Peru

- The capital-**Lima**



- Peru is located on the western side of **South America**
- It shares its borders with five countries:
 - ♦ **Ecuador** and **Colombia** to the north, **Brazil** to the east, **Bolivia** to the southeast, and **Chile** to the south.
 - ♦ Its western border lies along the **Pacific Ocean.**
- It includes the towering peaks of the Andes Mountains, among them Huascarán, the highest peak in Peru,
- This region is also home to Lake Titicaca, which Peru shares with Bolivia. Known as the world's highest navigable lake,

Source: *Air*

WEALTH REPORT 2024

Context

- According to 'The Wealth Report 2024', the number of ultra high networth individuals (UHNWIs) in India grew 6.1% in 2023 as against the previous year.

About

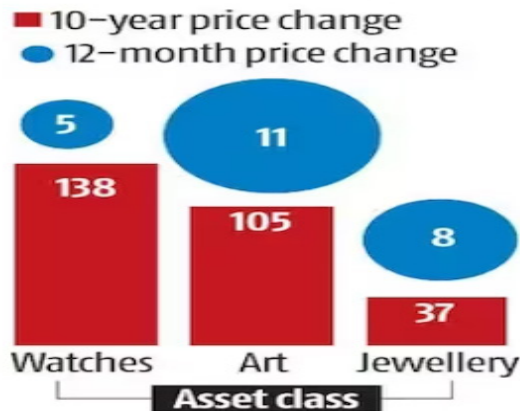
- Ultra-high Net Worth Individuals (UHNWIs) are defined as individuals having a net worth of **\$30 million** and above.
- According to the report the number of ultra-rich Indians will rise by **50.1 percent** to 19,908 in 2028

from 13,263 in 2023.

- India will be followed by **China (47 per cent)**, **Türkiye (42.9 per cent)**, and **Malaysia (35 per cent)**.

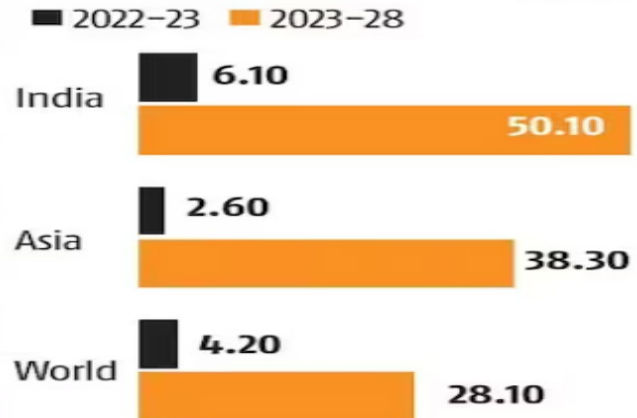
- In Asia, the number of ultra-rich is expected to rise by **38.3 per cent** in the next five years.
- Globally, the number of ultra-rich is likely to rise by **28.1 per cent**.

Top investments by ultra-rich (in %)



Source: Knight Frank's *The Wealth Report 2024*

Rise in number of ultra-rich (in %)



Source: *BS*

AFRICAN CLUB

In News

- Recently, in the **37th African Union Summit, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the leaders announced the launch of Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions 'Africa Club'**.

About

- The Africa Club aims to amplify Africa's influence in the global financial system by aligning its functions with the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
- It seeks to introduce innovative financial instruments, provide a venue for debt management discussions and foster collaborative effort to address the specific needs of African countries.

Do you know?

- The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).
- The AU is the most recent recipient of 'full member status' to the Group of 20 (G20), pointing to the continent's growing voice on the global stage.

Source: *DTE*

MEKONG DELTA REGION

Context

- Southern Vietnam, including its "rice bowl" Mekong Delta region, suffered an unusually long heatwave** in February, 2024.

Mekong Delta Region

- The Mekong Delta is **one of the largest and most fertile deltas** in Asia and in the world, **located in Southern Vietnam**.
- It covers about **four million hectares and supports a population of about 18 million people** who depend on it for agriculture and aquaculture.
- It is also considered among the **world's five most vulnerable deltas**.
- Threats:** Urbanization and construction now pushing the delta beyond its capacity.

Mekong River

- The Mekong River is a **trans-boundary river in Southeast Asia**.
- It is one of the **world's twelfth-longest rivers and the third-longest in Asia and longest river in Southeast Asia** with an estimated length of 4,909 kilometers and a drainage area of 795,000 square kilometers.
- Countries:** It flows from the Tibetan Plateau in China through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.



- **Source:** Tibetan Plateau, China.
- **Mouth:** The South China Sea.
- The Mekong River is a vital waterway for transportation, irrigation, and fishing, and it supports the livelihoods of millions of people.

Source: TH

EXERCISE 'DHARMA GUARDIAN'

In News

The 5th edition of Exercise 'DHARMA GUARDIAN' commenced at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan.

- The Exercise is scheduled to be conducted from 25th February to 9th March 2024.

About Exercise 'DHARMA GUARDIAN'

- It is an annual Joint Military Exercise between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force .
- It is conducted alternatively in India and Japan.
- The contingent of both sides comprises 40 personnel each.
 - ♦ The Japanese contingent is being represented by troops from the 34th Infantry Regiment and the Indian Army contingent is being represented by a Battalion from the **Rajputana Rifles**.
- **Importance:** It will enable the two sides to share their best practices in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures of conducting tactical operations.
 - ♦ It will also facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops of both sides.
 - ♦ This will enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations.

Source: HT

