NEXT IAS

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Time: 45 Min

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IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF TRADE AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT(TEPA)

In News

Shri Sunil Barthwal, Secretary of the Department of Commerce, visited Norway to advance the goals of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA).

About TEPA

- **It was signed in March 2024 between India and four EFTA countries:** Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.
  - EFTA offers 92.2% tariff lines, covering 99.6% of India's exports, with market access for 100% non-agri products and tariff concessions on processed agricultural products (PAP).
  - India offers 82.7% tariff lines, covering 95.3% of EFTA exports.

Focus Areas of TEPA:

- **Service Sectors:** TEPA will stimulate India's service exports in IT, business, education, cultural, and audio-visual sectors.
  - EFTA offers better access for digital delivery of services, commercial presence, and mobility for key personnel.
- **Impacts on Manufacturing:** TEPA supports India's domestic manufacturing in sectors such as infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, food processing, logistics, and banking.
- **Technology and R&D Collaboration:** TEPA facilitates technology collaboration and access to cutting-edge technologies in fields like renewable energy, health sciences, and innovation.

Expected Benefits for India:

- Creation of direct jobs, particularly for India's young workforce.
- Enhanced vocational and technical training opportunities.
- Facilitates technology collaboration in precision engineering, renewable energy, health sciences, and R&D.
- It will boost 99.6% of Indian exports with Market Access to EFTA countries and drive $100 billion investment

Future Outlook

- TEPA is expected to enhance India's integration into European markets, creating opportunities for both goods and services exports, while also providing access to advanced technologies and boosting India's economic growth.

Do you know ?

- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is the intergovernmental organisation of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
- It was set up in 1960 by its then seven Member States for the promotion of free trade and economic integration between its members.
- Features

Source: TH

NBFCS: AN IMPORTANT PILLAR OF THE FINANCIAL ECOSYSTEM

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been encouraging Non-Banking Financial Corporation (NBFCs) to adopt prudent growth strategies and focus on long-term sustainability.

Non-Banking Financial Corporation (NBFCs)?

- NBFCs are companies registered under the Companies Act, 1956, engaged in financial activities such as;
  - Offering loans and advances,
  - Acquiring shares, stocks, bonds, debentures, or other marketable securities,
  - Operating deposit schemes in various formats.
- It does not include any institution whose principal business is that of agriculture activity, industrial activity, purchase or sale of any goods (other than securities) or providing any services and sale/ purchase/construction of immovable property.
- The functions of the NBFCs are managed by both the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and the Reserve Bank of India.

What is the difference between banks & NBFCs?

- **NBFCs lend and make investments and hence their activities are akin to that of banks; however there are a few differences as given below:**
  - **Demand Deposits:** NBFC cannot accept demand deposits;
  - **Payment System:** NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself;
  - **Deposit Insurance:** Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

Importance of NBFCs

- NBFCs are critical to India's financial ecosystem, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where banks have limited reach. Their importance lies in;
  - **Financial Inclusion:** By providing credit to underserved regions.
  - **Faster Services:** With simplified processes and doorstep delivery.
  - **Priority Sector Lending (PSL):** Addressing credit needs in agriculture, microfinance, and other unorganized sectors.
  - **Economic Growth:** Supporting sectors like housing, infrastructure, and small enterprises through financing.

Challenges faced by NBFCs

- **Higher Risk Weights:** In 2023, RBI increased risk weights for loans to NBFCs, making bank borrowing more expensive.
  - Bank funding to NBFCs dropped from 22% to 15% year-on-year by April 2024.
- **Funding Constraints:** Smaller NBFCs with lower credit ratings face a fund crunch due to rising borrowing costs and limited financing options.
- **Shallow Bond Market:** India's debt market lacks depth and liquidity, limiting access to diversified domestic funding.
- **Regulatory Constraints:** SEBI's cap on the issuance of International Securities Identification Number (ISIN) and absence of active market makers hinder bond market growth.
- **Cost Pressures:** Rising credit costs, projected to increase from 2.6% in 2024 to 4% by 2025, affect NBFCs' profitability.
- **Overseas Borrowing Challenges:** While attractive due to reduced hedging costs, overseas funding is still at a nascent stage for many NBFCs.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthening Bond Market:** Developing a vibrant and liquid bond market will reduce reliance on bank funding and support NBFCs in raising long-term capital.
- **Co-Lending Model:** Encouraging co-lending arrangements between banks and NBFCs can lower borrowing costs and ensure better credit distribution.
- **Focus on Compliance:** NBFCs must adhere to RBI's guidelines on risk mitigation and grievance redressal to build credibility.
- **Diversified Funding Sources:** Exploring securitization, commercial papers, and equity markets while balancing domestic and overseas funding options.

Concluding remark

- NBFCs remain a cornerstone of India's financial system, particularly for promoting financial inclusion and economic growth.
- However, funding challenges, regulatory pressures, and market inefficiencies must be addressed to ensure their sustainability.

Source: TH

INDIAN SEAFOOD EXPORTS

Context

- The Embassy of India in Brussels hosted the second edition of the Indian Seafood and Wine Tasting Event showcasing India's finest culinary offerings.

Seafood Industry of India

- India is the third-largest fish and aquaculture-producing country and the industry employs more than 28 million people in India.
  - It accounts for 7.96% of the total global fish production.
- India's seafood exports have increased from Rs. 46,662.85 Crore in 2019-20 to Rs. 61043.68 Crore in 2023-24 registering a growth of 30.81%.
- India mainly exports frozen shrimps, fish, cuttlefish, squids, dried items, and live and chilled items.
  - The frozen shrimp is the largest exported marine product contributing to more than 40% of the total quantity and about 67.22% of the total export value.

Major Export Markets

- USA, China, and the European Union (EU) are the largest importers of Indian seafood.
- With 500 EU-approved firms, the EU has become India's second-largest seafood market, with annual purchases of USD 0.95 billion.
- Emerging markets like Japan, Vietnam, and the Middle East are gaining traction.

Government initiatives

- **Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA):** It facilitates technology upgradation, market development, and quality certification.
- **RoDTEP:** The Government has also increased the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) from 2.5% to 3.1% for various seafood products.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY):** It was implemented to bring the Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector in India from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.
- The reduction in import duties on various ingredients /inputs for manufacture of prawn and shrimp feed/fish feed announced in Budget 2024-25, will make Indian seafood-based value-added products more competitive in international markets.
- **Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF):** it was implemented to create a fund to address the infrastructure requirement for the fisheries sector.
- Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was extended in the 2018-19 to fisheries and animal husbandry farmers to help them meet their working capital requirements.

Challenges faced by India

- **Stringent Regulatory Norms:** Major markets, including the EU and USA, impose rigorous quality checks, leading to frequent rejections.
- **Technology Adoption:** Limited access to modern technology and practices for sustainable aquaculture.
- **Climate Change:** Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and changing weather patterns affecting fish habitats and breeding.
- **Pollution:** Water pollution from industrial, agricultural, and plastic waste harms aquatic life and ecosystems.
- **Infrastructure:** Inadequate cold storage, processing facilities, and transportation affecting fish quality and market access.

Way Ahead

- **Market Diversification:** Expanding exports to Africa, South America, and ASEAN countries to reduce dependency on traditional markets.
- **R&D and Innovation:** Encouraging research in species diversification, disease management, and climate-resilient aquaculture practices.
- **Sustainability:** Promoting eco-friendly fishing and aquaculture practices to ensure long-term viability of resources.

Concluding remarks

- Indian seafood exports hold immense potential for driving economic growth, and promoting sustainable development.
- Strategic interventions in quality enhancement, market diversification, and infrastructure modernization can position India as a global leader in seafood exports.

Source: PIB

SPACE JUNK

Context

- As the number of satellites goes up, there is an increased concern about the Space Junk.

About

- More than 10,000 active satellites are in orbit around the planet. This number is estimated to shoot up to more than 100,000 by the 2030s.
- As the number of satellites goes up, so will the space junk pollution.

Space Debris

- Junk from space objects falling to the earth involve relatively small fragments from rockets that survive the friction of the atmosphere.
- Space junk can vary in size, from tiny bits like paint chips, to larger pieces like old satellites or rocket stages.
- In recent times, a large chunk of a 25-tonne Chinese rocket fell into the Indian Ocean in 2021.

Space junk is caused by the following factors:

- **Defunct Satellites:** Satellites that no longer function are left in orbit, contributing to debris.

- **Rocket Stages:** Spent rocket stages and other launch vehicle parts that are abandoned after use remain in orbit.
- **Collisions:** Objects in orbit often collide at high speeds, creating smaller debris fragments that increase the overall junk in space.
- **Spacecraft and Mission Debris:** Parts of spacecraft or equipment released during missions (e.g., screws, paint flecks) contribute to the debris field.

Concerns

- **Collision Risks:** High-speed debris collisions can create more fragments, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle that threatens satellites, spacecraft, and the space environment.
- **Threats to Operational Satellites:** Debris can damage or destroy active satellites, increasing the risk to communication, weather, and navigation systems.
- **Atmospheric Pollution:** Larger debris re-entering Earth's atmosphere can burn up or fall into oceans, potentially releasing toxic materials.
- **Space Accessibility:** The growing debris field limits the safe use of Earth's orbital space, making future missions more difficult and costly.
- **Long-term Sustainability:** The accumulation of debris could hinder space exploration for future generations, making space less accessible.

Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects

- This convention is one of the several international agreements that complement the Outer Space Treaty, the overarching framework guiding the behaviour of countries in space.
- The Liability Convention came into force in 1972 and deals mainly with damage caused by space objects to other space assets, but it also applies to damage caused by falling objects on earth.
- The Convention makes the launching country "absolutely liable" to pay compensation for any damage caused by its space object on the earth or to a flight in air.
  - The country where the junk falls can stake a claim for compensation if it has been damaged by the falling object.
  - The amount of compensation is to be decided "in accordance with international law and the principles of justice and equity".
- This provision of the Convention has resulted in compensation payment only once so far — when Canada sought damages from the then Soviet Union, for a satellite with radioactive substance that fell into an uninhabited region in its northern territory in 1978.

Suggestions

- **Active Debris Removal (ADR):** Develop and deploy robotic systems or spacecraft designed to capture and remove large debris from orbit, such as the ClearSpace-1 mission by the European Space Agency.
- **Improved Satellite Design:** Use lightweight materials and create satellites that minimize debris generation during collisions or failures.
- **Increased Tracking and Monitoring:** Enhance space situational awareness with better tracking systems to monitor debris and avoid collisions.
- **Collision Avoidance:** Implement collision-avoidance maneuvers for operational satellites and space stations to prevent debris generation from accidental impacts.

Source: IE

A NEED FOR GLOBAL PLASTIC TREATY

Context

- More than 170 countries will converge in the Republic of Korea, to negotiate a new legally binding global treaty to end plastic pollution, including marine pollution.

About

- **Background:** In 2022, the UN Environmental Assembly convened in Nairobi, to debate the global plastic crisis.
  - 175 nations voted to adopt a global treaty for plastic pollution—agreeing on an accelerated timeline so that the treaty could be implemented as soon as 2025.
- The negotiations are whether to agree to binding limits on certain classes of chemicals and on plastic production, or to settle on a package of funding aimed at improving trash collection and recycling.
  - Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Egypt, Kuwait, Malaysia, and India have expressed resistance to stricter mandates and have instead proposed measures such as innovative waste management and sustainable plastic use.

- On the other hand, Rwanda, Peru and the European Union have proposed ambitious targets for curbing plastic pollution.

Need for the Treaty

- Plastic production has skyrocketed across the world in recent decades.
  - The annual global production of plastic doubled from 234 million tonnes (mt) in 2000 to 460 mt in 2019.
  - Nearly half of this was produced in Asia, followed by North America (19%) and Europe (15%).
  - Plastic production is expected to touch 700 mt by 2040, as per the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- **Slow Decomposition:** Plastic takes anywhere from 20 to 500 years to decompose, and less than 10% has been recycled till now, according to a 2023 study by The Lancet.
- **Environmental Impact:** Much of the plastic waste leaks into the environment, especially into rivers and oceans, where it breaks down into smaller particles (microplastic or nanoplastic).
  - This has severely impacted the environment and health of living beings.
- **Impact on Humans:** Exposure to chemicals in plastic can cause endocrine disruption and a range of human diseases including cancer, diabetes, reproductive disorders, and neurodevelopmental impairment.
- **Climate Impact:** In 2020, it generated 3.6% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with 90% of those quantifiable emissions coming from plastic production, which uses fossil fuels as raw material.

India's Position

- India does not support any restrictions on the production of polymers.
  - Any restrictions are beyond the mandate of the UNEA's resolution adopted at Nairobi in 2022.
  - The resolution also includes a principle of national circumstances and capability to allow developing countries to follow their development trajectories.
- India has also sought the inclusion of financial and technical assistance, and technology transfer in the substantive provisions of any final treaty.
- On the exclusion of harmful chemicals used for plastic production, India has said that any decision should be based on scientific studies, and the regulation of such chemicals should be regulated domestically.
- There must also be an assessment of the financial resources needed for waste management as well as the availability of adequate, timely, and predictable financial resources.

What is Plastic and Microplastics?

- The word plastic is derived from the Greek word plastikos, meaning "capable of being shaped or moulded."
- Plastic refers to a wide range of synthetic or semi-synthetic materials that use polymers as a main ingredient with their defining quality being their plasticity – the ability of a solid material to undergo permanent deformation in response to applied forces.
  - This makes them extremely adaptable, capable of being shaped as per requirement.
- The basic building blocks of plastics are monomers, which are small molecules that can join together to form long chains called polymers through a process called polymerization.
- Microplastics: Plastics break down into their smaller units called microplastics – officially defined as plastics less than five millimetres in diameter.
  - These microplastics find their way across the planet, from the depths of the Pacific Ocean to the heights of the Himalayas.
  - According to the most recent global estimates, an average human consumes at least 50,000 microplastic particles annually due to contamination of the food chain, potable water, and air.

Plastic Waste by India

- India is presently the biggest contributor to plastic pollution in the world, and releases 9.3 million tonnes of plastic waste every year which is almost 20 per cent of the global generation of plastic waste.

India's Efforts In Tackling Plastic Waste

- **Ban on single-use plastics:** India has banned the production, use, and sale of single-use plastics such as bags, cups, plates, cutlery, and straws in many states.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** The Indian government has implemented EPR, making plastic manufacturers responsible for

managing and disposing of the waste generated by their products.

- **Plastic Waste Management Rules:** India introduced the Plastic Waste Management Rules in 2016, which provide a framework for managing plastic waste through various measures, including recycling and waste-to-energy initiatives.
- **Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2022:** The guidelines on EPR(Extended Producer Responsibility) coupled with the prohibition of identified single-use plastic items.
  - It banned the manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of carry bags made of virgin or recycled plastic less than seventy-five micrometers.
- **India's Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2024:** It defines biodegradable plastics as not only capable of degradation by biological processes in specific environments but also as materials that do not leave any microplastics.
  - Rules specify that the makers of disposable plastic ware can label them as biodegradable only when they do not leave any microplastics behind.
- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:** The Indian government launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, a national cleanliness campaign, which includes the collection and disposal of plastic waste.
- **Plastic Parks:** The government has set up Plastic Parks, which are specialized industrial zones for recycling and processing plastic waste.
- **Beach clean-up drives:** The Indian government and various non-governmental organizations have organized beach clean-up drives to collect and dispose of plastic waste from beaches.
- India is a signatory to MARPOL (International Convention on Prevention of Marine Pollution).
- The "India Plastic Challenge – Hackathon 2021
  - It is a unique competition calling upon start-ups /entrepreneurs and students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop innovative solutions to mitigate plastic pollution and develop alternatives to single-use plastics.

Source: IE

INDIA'S 6GHZ SPECTRUM DILEMMA

Context

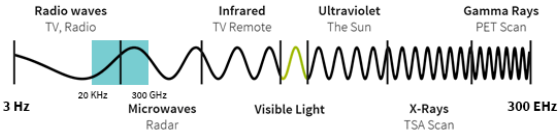
- India is currently grappling with a significant decision regarding the allocation and use of the 6GHz spectrum band that has far-reaching implications for the country's technological advancement, economic growth, and global competitiveness.

Spectrum Management

- Spectrum is a finite resource that is essential for wireless communication. Effective spectrum management is crucial to ensure that this resource is used efficiently and equitably.
- In India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) are responsible for spectrum allocation and regulation.

Spectrum

- It refers to the invisible radio frequencies that wireless signals travel over. These are only a portion of what is called the electromagnetic spectrum.
- These are grouped in 'bands' depending on their wavelengths, the distance over which the wave's shape repeats, ranges from 3 Hz (extremely low frequency) to 300 EHz (gamma rays).
- The portion used for wireless communication lies within that space and ranges from about 20 KHz to 300 GHz.



Key Spectrum Bands

- **2.4 GHz and 5 GHz:** These bands are widely used for WiFi and other wireless communication technologies in India and throughout the world.
  - 2.4GHz has limited data bandwidth, but has a larger area with coverage.
  - 5GHz is significantly faster, but covers a shorter distance.
- This state of WiFi technology remained the same well into the introduction of WiFi 6 that uses both 2.4GHz and 5GHz frequencies simultaneously, with greater efficiency, resulting in better speeds.
- **6 GHz (WiFi 6E):** It allows and brings up theoretical maximum speeds to 9.6Gbps.
  - It relied on the band of spectrum between 5,925MHz and 7,125MHz, known as 6GHz spectrum.

- Globally, In many countries, including Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, the U.K., and the U.S., the 6GHz spectrum has been de-licensed for Wi-Fi use, allowing for enhanced WiFi capabilities and faster internet speeds.
- India and China have not yet approved the use of this spectrum for Wi-Fi, leading to a regulatory impasse.

Current Status in India

- In India, the 6GHz band is currently allocated to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for satellite communications.
  - This allocation has created a bottleneck for telecom operators and technology firms eager to leverage this spectrum for WiFi and 5G services.
- The Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) has emphasised the importance of this spectrum for meeting the targets of the National Broadband Mission and ensuring cost-efficient deployment of 5G networks.
- The World Radiocommunications Conference has extended the deadline for countries to decide on the use of the 6GHz spectrum until 2027.

Debate Over the 6GHz Spectrum

- **Telecom Operators vs. Technology Firms:** Telecom operators argue that the 6GHz band is essential for expanding 5G services and meeting future data demands.
  - On the other hand, technology firms advocate for its use in WiFi to support the growing number of connected devices and high-speed internet requirements.
- **Economic Implications:** Allocating the 6GHz band for unlicensed use could significantly reduce the costs associated with 5G deployment.
  - However, retaining it for satellite communications might limit the potential for technological innovation and economic growth.
- **Global Standards and Competitiveness:** Many countries, including the U.S., U.K., and South Korea, have already adopted policies to delist the 6GHz band for unlicensed use.
  - India's delay in making a decision could impact its global competitiveness and ability to attract investments in the tech sector.

Potential Solutions

- **Partial Delisting:** Allowing a portion of the 6GHz band for unlicensed use while retaining some for satellite communications.
- **Phased Implementation:** Gradually transitioning the 6GHz band for unlicensed use, providing time for stakeholders to adapt.
- **International Collaboration:** Engaging with global regulatory bodies to align India's policies with international standards and best practices.

Conclusion

- India's decision on the 6GHz spectrum will have a profound impact on its technological landscape.
- Striking the right balance between the needs of telecom operators, technology firms, and satellite communications is crucial for fostering innovation, economic growth, and global competitiveness.

Source: TH

FACTS IN NEWS

RAJA RAJA CHOLA I

Context

- The birth anniversary of the legendary Chola emperor Raja Raja Chola I is celebrated with unparalleled fervour and devotion every year during the Sadhaya Vizha in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu.

About: Raja Raja Chola I

- **Birth:** Born as Arulmozhi Varman in 947 CE, he rose to become one of history's most illustrious and visionary rulers.
  - Rajaraja is regarded as Ulakalanda Perumel (the great one who measured the earth like Trivikrama) and as Shiva who established control over the land of Bhargava Rama.
- **Reign:** Raja Raja's reign, from 985 to 1014 CE, encompassed the whole of southern India, part of Ceylon and the Maldive and Laccadive archipelagos.
  - The Cholas undertook military expeditions to Sri Lanka (during the time of Rajaraja I) and SriVijaya (during the time of Rajendra I).
- **Titles:** He decorated himself with high-sounding titles of Jayangonda, Pandya-kulasani, Singalantaka, Colamartanda, and Telingakulakala.
- **Stone records:** He started prefacing stone records (official prasasti) with a set description of the major events of his reign.
- Sri Brahadeeswarar Temple (Big Temple) also called Rajarajesvaram was built during his reign,

and is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the Great Living Chola Temples.

Do you know?

- The Sadhaya Vizha is a festival typically observed in the Tamil month of Aippasi (mid-October to mid-November) to commemorate the birth anniversary of the great Chola King Raja Raja Cholan.
- The Brihadeeswarar Temple hosts this celebration every year.

Source: TH

KURRAM

Context

- The Kurram district of Pakistan is witnessing a surge in sectarian violence between Shia vs Sunni sects.

About Kurram

- It is a district located in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.
- Kurram is adjacent to the Afghan provinces of Logar and Nangarhar.
- Its strategic location includes border crossings along the Durand Line, including the historic Peiwar Kotal Pass, a critical route to Kabul.

Durand Line

- It is the international boundary line between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- The Durand Line was drawn up by Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, to safeguard the interests of the British Empire from Tsarist Russia.

Source: IE

INDIA-EU ENERGY PANEL 10TH MEETING IN BRUSSELS

In News

The 10th meeting of the India-EU Energy Panel was held in Brussels

About India-EU Energy Panel Meeting

- It focused on energy transition priorities and reviewed the progress of the 2nd Phase of the India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (2021-2024), which included 51 joint initiatives across nine sectors.
- Key outcomes included the development of a framework for cooperation on green hydrogen, with both India and the EU collaborating on green hydrogen policies.
- India participated as an exclusive partner at the European Hydrogen Week 2024, while EU and member states joined the International Conference on Green Hydrogen 2024 in India.
- Additionally, the two sides committed to long-term research collaborations in clean energy through the India-EU Trade and Technology Council's Working Group on Clean and Green Technologies.

Source : Air

MINKE WHALES

In News

Scientists have for the first time directly measured the hearing range of minke whales, revealing that they can detect high-frequency sounds up to 90 kilohertz (kHz), much higher than previously believed.

About Minke whales

- This discovery suggests that baleen whales, the planet's largest mammals, may be more affected by anthropogenic ocean noise than previously recognized, as their hearing sensitivity has been underestimated.

Minke whales

- Minke whales are the smallest baleen whales and members of the rorqual family.
- They are abundant and have a stable population worldwide, though commercial whaling has impacted some populations.
- Minke whales received their name from a Norwegian whaling spotter, Meincke, who mistakenly identified them as blue whales.

- **Appearance:** Small, sleek bodies: Up to 35 feet long and 20,000 pounds.
  - Black, dark grayish/brown with a pale chevron and white underside.
- **Behavior and Diet:** Minke whales are often seen alone or in small groups; larger groups can occur at feeding grounds.
  - They feed on plankton, small fish, and crustaceans.
  - Minke whales can live up to 50 years.
- **Habitat and Distribution:** Found in polar, temperate, and tropical waters worldwide.
  - Minke whales migrate seasonally, moving to colder regions in summer and warmer waters in winter.
- **Threats:** Historically exploited, especially in the Northern Hemisphere. Currently still hunted by countries like Greenland, Japan, and Norway.
  - Fishing Gear Entanglement
  - Ocean Noise
  - Vessel Strikes
  - Climate Change
- **IUCN Status :**

Antarctic Minke Whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis* Global <NT>

Common Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* Global <LC>

Common Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* Europe <LC>

Source: TH

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ALLIANCE (ICA)

Context

- PM Modi inaugurated the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Global Cooperative Conference 2024 in New Delhi.

International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)

- **History:** It was founded in London, England in 1895 during the 1st Cooperative Congress.
  - Delegates from countries like Argentina, India, the USA, and others convened to promote cooperative principles and encourage international trade.
- The ICA provides a platform for cooperatives to collaborate, exchange ideas, and foster global trade while safeguarding cooperative principles.
- **Membership :** It unites over 1 billion cooperative members through 3 million cooperatives in various sectors, including agriculture, banking, health, and housing. With 306 member organizations across 105 countries, ICA serves as the leading voice for cooperatives, advocating for their interests and facilitating global collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- **Expansion :** The ICA expanded into the Asia-Pacific region in 1960 with the establishment of a Regional Office & Education Centre for South-East Asia, aiming to connect developing countries to the global cooperative network.

Global Cooperative Conference 2024

- It is a historic event as India hosts the ICA General Assembly for the first time.
- The Conference will also mark the official launch of the UN International Year of Cooperatives – 2025.
- **Theme:** "Cooperatives Build Prosperity for All."

What are Cooperatives?

- Cooperatives are people-centered enterprises jointly owned and democratically controlled by and for their members to realize their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations.
- They are run according to the 'one member, one vote' rule, allowing people to create sustainable enterprises that generate long-term jobs and prosperity.

Source: PIB

LACHIT BORPHUKAN

Context

- The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal paid obeisance to the great Ahom military commander Lachit Borphukan on his 402nd Birth anniversary.

About: Lachit Borphukan

- Born on 24 November 1622 in Charaideo, Assam, he excelled in the art of Guerrilla Warfare.
- He is known for his exemplary leadership in the Battle of Saraighat (1671), where the Ahoms defeated the Mughal forces led by Raja Ramsingh under Aurangzeb.
  - The battle was fought on the Brahmaputra river near Saraighat and was the last major attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam.

- He died on 25th April 1672 at the age of 49 in Jorhat, Assam.
- He was the inspiration behind strengthening India's naval force and revitalizing inland water transport and creating infrastructure associated with it due to his great naval strategies.

Award and Honour

- Since 1999 the Lachit Barphukan Gold Medal has been given to the best cadet at the National Defence Academy (NDA).
- On November 24 each year, Lachit Divas (Lachit Day) is celebrated state-wide in Assam to commemorate the heroism of Lachit Borphukan and the victory of the Assamese army at the Battle of Saraighat.

The Ahom Kingdom

- It was established by Chaolung Sukapha in the 13th century.
- It endured for six centuries as the ruling power in Assam.
- The Ahoms governed the region until it was annexed to British India in 1826 through the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo.

Source: PIB

PROBA-3 MISSION

Context

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) is set to launch world's first parallel satellite to study the solar corona under the Proba-3 mission.

About

- Proba-3 is the European Space Agency's (ESA) mission to study the Sun's corona - the outer layer of the Sun's atmosphere.
- It will see two satellites in a formation parallel to each other for long durations creating an artificial eclipse in space.
- **Significance:**
  - The mission's success could pave the way for future multi-satellite missions, enhancing understanding of space weather and its impact on Earth.
  - The mission exemplifies international cooperation, with contributions from ESA member states including France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, alongside ISRO.
  - The data collected will enhance solar research and improve forecasting models for space weather events, crucial for protecting both civilian and military satellite operations.

Launch Vehicles

- Launchers or Launch Vehicles are used to carry spacecraft to space.
- **India has three active operational launch vehicles:** Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk-III (LVM3).
- **PSLV:** PSLV has been a versatile launch vehicle deployed for launching all the three types of payloads viz. Earth Observation, Geo-stationary and Navigation.
- GSLV with indigenous Cryogenic Upper Stage has enabled the launching up to 2 tonne class of communication satellites.
- The LVM3 is the next generation launch vehicle capable of launching 4 tonne class of communication satellites and 10 tonne class of payloads to LEOs.
  - The vehicle was developed with completely indigenized technologies.
  - The Human rated LVM3 is identified as the launch vehicle for Gaganyaan mission, which is named as HRLV.
- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is being developed with complete indigenous technologies to meet the small satellite launch market on a demand driven basis.

Source: IE

HOUSE COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE LATERAL ENTRY IN CIVIL SERVICES

Context

- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice has decided to examine "lateral entry in civil services".

About

- Lateral entry is when executives from the private sector, public sector undertakings and academia are appointed to senior and middle management positions in the government.
- This mechanism allows skilled individuals to bypass the traditional Civil Services Examination (CSE) process.

- **Aim:** To enhance efficiency and bring innovation into the functioning of the government by leveraging the skills of professionals from various sectors.
- There have been technocrats being appointed at secretary level posts since independence.
    - Notable examples include former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia, agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan etc.
- So far, over 60 appointments have been made through lateral entry, nearly half from the private sector.

Source: IE

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