DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Time: 45 min   **Date: 02-11-2023**

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Supreme Court Observation on Electoral Bonds Scheme

Syllabus: GS2/Polity and Governance

Context

- The Supreme Court of India observed the **Electoral Bond is selectively anonymous.**

About:

- The Supreme Court said that the Electoral Bonds Scheme (2018) suffers from **'selective anonymity/confidentiality'** leading to an **'information hole'**.
- The Apex court observed the scheme leaves **scope for misuse** because donors may aggregate

66% OF PARTY FUNDING 'UNKNOWN'

Total income of 8 national parties in 2021-22: **₹3,289cr**

Known Sources	Other Known Sources*	Unknown Sources**
781cr	336cr	2,172cr

(*Other known sources include sale of assets, membership fees, bank interest, sale of publications, party levy etc)

** Unknown sources include electoral bonds (EBs) & anonymous donors who gave below ₹20,000. Currently, mostly EBs

bonds for smaller amounts from different buyers, instead of investing a big sum to purchase the bond.
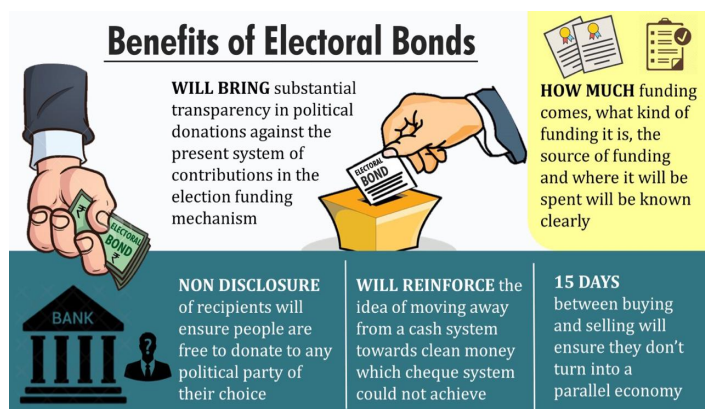
What are Electoral Bonds?
- Electoral bonds are **interest-free** bearer bonds or money instruments that can be **purchased by companies and individuals** in India from authorised branches of the **State Bank of India (SBI).**
- These bonds are sold in multiples of *Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore*. They can be purchased through a KYC- compliant account to make donations to a political party.
- There is **no cap on the number of electoral bonds** that a person or company can purchase.
- The political parties **have to encash them within a stipulated time**.
- The name and other information of the donor are not entered on the instrument and thus electoral bonds are said to be anonymous.

Electoral Bond Scheme:
- The government brought in amendments to four Acts to introduce the Electoral Bond Scheme via the **Finance Act of 2016 and 2017 (a Money Bill)**. These acts are:
  - *Representation of the People Act, 1951, (RPA);*
  - *The Companies Act, 2013;*
  - *The Income Tax Act, 1961, and;*
  - *The Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, 2010 (FCRA).*
- The electoral bonds system was **introduced by way of a money bill** introducing amendments to the Finance Act and the Representation of Peoples Act.
  - The Rajya Sabha has no power to reject or amend as it was introduced as a 'Money bill.

Who can receive funding via electoral bonds?
- Political parties that secured at least 1% of the votes polled in the recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly elections and are registered under the RPA can get a verified account from the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- The bond amounts are deposited in this account within 15 days of their purchase.
- The political party has to encash the amount within those 15 days, the amount received as a donation gets deposited into the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

Benefits of Electoral Bonds

WILL BRING substantial transparency in political donations against the present system of contributions in the election funding mechanism

HOW MUCH funding comes, what kind of funding it is, the source of funding and where it will be spent will be known clearly

NON DISCLOSURE of recipients will ensure people are free to donate to any political party of their choice

WILL REINFORCE the idea of moving away from a cash system towards clean money which cheque system could not achieve

15 DAYS between buying and selling will ensure they don't turn into a parallel economy

Challenges to the Electoral Bond Scheme in the Supreme Court:

- **Violates Right to Information:** It seems that the Electoral Bond scheme violates the Citizen's *Fundamental Right to Information under Article 19 (1) (a)* about political parties.
  - It is argued that if citizens have the right to know about candidates then they certainly have the right to know about who is funding the political party.
- **Enables backdoor lobbying and quid pro quo:** There is circumstantial evidence to prove that there were kickbacks being paid by corporations via electoral bonds to political parties in power to get favours for the corporations.
- **Transparency in Political Funding:** In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court in 2019, the ECI said that electoral bonds would wreck transparency in political funding and invite foreign corporate powers to impact Indian politics.
- **Opens doors to shell companies:** Government allowed Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies to make donations by removing the limit of 7.5% of the annual profit for companies to make donations to political parties.
- **Not entirely anonymous:** As nobody can come to know **other than the government** who contributed to whom.
- **Usage for any other purpose than Elections:** Scheme is **a misnomer** as the money can be used for any purpose after it is withdrawn since no one is asking how the parties spent the money.
- **Promotes Corruption:** It is a scheme to protect criminals from being prosecuted under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) and Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- **Eliminates level playing field for political parties in Opposition**: It is argued that the scheme destroys and disturbs democracy in the country, by not allowing a level playing field between political parties which are ruling versus opposition parties; or between political parties and independent candidates.
  - According to an analysis by the **Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, between 2016-17 and 2021-22, the seven national and 24 regional parties in the country received a total donation of ₹9,188.35 crore from electoral bonds out of which the BJP's share was ₹5,271.9751 crore, while all other national parties together amassed ₹1,783.9331 crore.
- **Does not reduce black money:** Scheme did not primarily aim to reduce black money but rather aimed to reroute non-anonymous funding from normal banking channels to anonymous Electoral Bonds.
  - It is like an 'alternative white money channel' created by the government to replace the already existing disclosure-based channels, such as RTGS, bank drafts, and cheques with added anonymity.

Do you know?
- Before the scheme was introduced the political parties had to make public all donations above Rs 20,000.
  - No corporate company was allowed to make donations amounting to more than 7.5% of their total profit or 10% of revenue.
- The income of national parties from unknown sources increased by 313% from Rs 274.13 crore during FY 2004-2005 to Rs 1130 crore during FY 2014-15.

Conclusion:
- While the Electoral Bond Scheme was introduced with the aim of bringing transparency in political funding, its implementation has raised concerns regarding anonymous donations.
- The Supreme Court's approval of the scheme indicates its legality, but debates on its implications for transparency in political funding continue.

Source: IE

Draft National Pharmaceuticals Policy 2023

Syllabus: GS2/ Government Policies & Interventions, Health

In Context
- The Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) has recently come out with a draft National Pharmaceuticals Policy (NPP) 2023, emphasising on a holistic policy approach.

Draft National Pharmaceutical Policy, 2023
- **About:** The National Pharmaceutical Policy (2023) serves as a **comprehensive framework** to address the challenges faced by Indian Pharmaceutical industries and provide definitive policy interventions to enhance the collective ecosystem.
- Vision for National Pharma Policy encompasses **five key pillars:**
  - Fostering Global Pharmaceutical Leadership,
  - Promoting Self Reliance,
  - Advancing Health Equity and accessibility,
  - Enhancing Regulatory Efficiency in Indian Pharmaceutical Sector and
  - Attracting investments.
- **Alignment with 'Atmanirbhar Bharat':**
  - Objective of the Policy extends to fostering self-reliance in alignment with the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (and Make In India initiative), rekindling the imperative of prioritizing domestic innovation that is not only sustainable but also aligns with global standards.
- **Policy implementation:**
  - A High-level Task Force will be set up in the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers to guide and review the implementation of the Policy.
  - The Task Force will draw upon **resource persons from Departments** and **Organizations** related to the implementation as the success of the policy **requires coordinated action** by several agencies.
- **Strategy and action plans:**
  - The Policy will be supported by a **ten-year strategy and action plans** that will spell out the policy and programmatic interventions required from time to time within the Policy.

Indian pharmaceutical industry
- **About:** Indian pharmaceutical industry is the **3rd largest pharmaceutical industry** in the world by volume with a **current market size of around approx. USD 50 Billion**.
  - It is widely known as **'Pharmacy of the World'**.
- **Significance & potential:**

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry has played a **key role in driving better health outcomes** across the world by being a **large and reliable supplier** of **affordable** and **high-quality** generics drugs.
- The vaccine industry in India has proven its capacity for manufacturing at scale, catering to **more than 60% of global vaccine demand**.
- With a potential to grow up to USD 120-130 billion dollars over the next decade.
- **Export:**
  - The country **exports pharmaceuticals** to around 200 countries and territories in the world, including highly regulated markets such as USA, UK, European Union, Canada etc.
  - India exported pharmaceuticals worth Rs 175,040 crore in the financial year 2021-22, including Bulk Drugs/Drug Intermediates. Also, India is one of the major producers of Active Pharma Ingredients (API) or bulk drugs in the world.
  - India exported Bulk Drugs/Drug Intermediates worth Rs 33,320 crore in the financial year 2021-22.
- **Imports:**
  - However, the country also imports various Bulk Drugs/ APIs for producing medicines from various countries.
    - Most of the imports of the Bulk Drug/APIs being done in the country are because of economic considerations.
- **Research inistitutions:**
  - Besides largest number of US FDA approved manufacturing plants outside of the US, India also has several renowned pharmaceutical educational and research institutes and a robust support of allied industries.
- **Government initiatives in the sector:**
  - Government of India has taken significant measures to address the challenges in last few years, it includes the
    - Implementation of initiatives such as Production Linked Incentives,
    - Setting up Bulk Drug Parks,
    - Pharmaceutical Technology Upgradation Assistance (PTUAS) Scheme,
    - The National R&D Policy, and
    - The Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech (PRIP) Scheme among others.

Challenges
- **Safety of drugs:**
  - Except for some customary inspections, the Indian drug regulator has so far failed to institute measures to make sure drugs produced in India for export and domestic use are safe.
- **Failing the quality tests:**
  - According to a **the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) survey in 2014-2016**, about five per cent of Indian drugs, several of them manufactured by large pharma companies, failed the quality test.
  - Independent studies suggest that this figure could be much higher.

- - The country's pharma industry has largely been in denial over quality-related concerns expressed by national and international observers.
  - **Costs of production:**
    - The cost of production in India is 50 percent less than in developed nations, but it is still around 18 percent higher than China.
    - This is attributable to raw materials being 25-30 percent costlier, electricity being 20 percent more expensive, and other costs such as financing, logistics, transportation, etc., being 30 percent more expensive.
  - **Indian Pharmaceutical Industry also faces various other challenges like:**
    - High degree of import dependence on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) and Key Starting Materials (KSMs);
    - Relatively low pace of development of biologics,
    - Biosimilars and other emerging products/ trends;
    - Regulation inefficiencies,
    - Lack of skilled human resource and
    - Access to funding for innovation in the Pharma-MedTech domain among others.

Way ahead
- With changing global trends, heavy reliance on imports and demand for better therapeutic outcomes, the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry must venture beyond its comfort zone and embrace innovation as an essential element of its vision for global leadership, making it a central pillar of its business strategies.
- The pursuit of Vision 2047 for AmritKaal necessitates a reinvigorated, concentrated, and results-driven holistic approach.

Source: TH

Road accidents in India — 2022

Syllabus: GS2/Government Policies & Interventions; GS3/Infrastructure;

Context:
- As per the report of Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, nearly 1.68 lakh people died in 4.61 lakh road accidents in 2022.
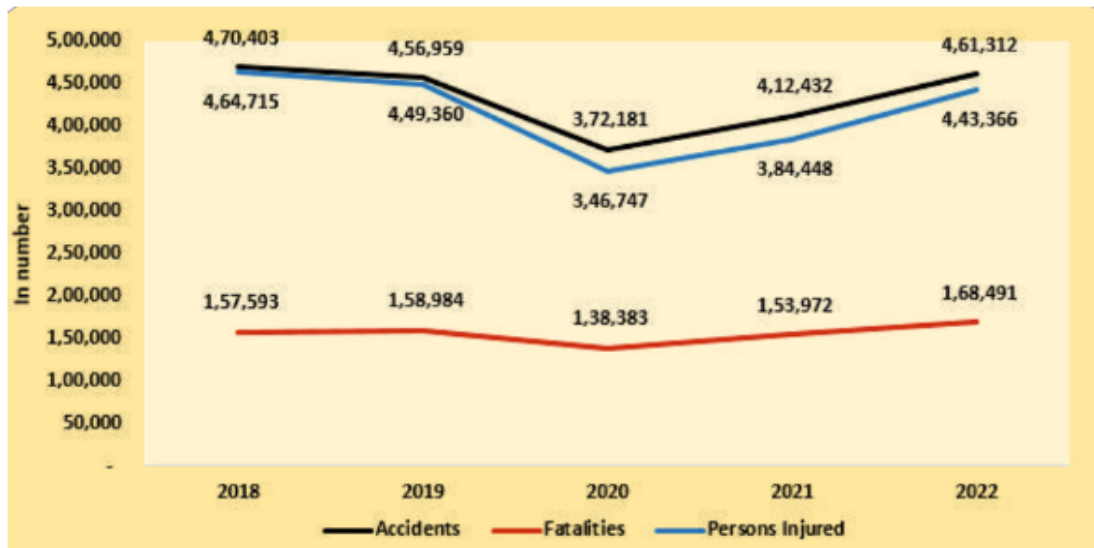
About:
- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) released an annual report titled as **'Road accidents in India — 2022'**.
- This report is based on the **data/information received from Police Departments of States/UTs** on a calendar year basis in standardised formats as provided by the **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)** under the *Asia Pacific Road Accident Data (APRAD)* base project.

Highlights of the Report:
- It marks an 11.9% year-on-year rise in accidents and a 9.4% increase in fatalities. There was a 15.3% surge in the number of people getting injured in 2022.

- A total of 4,61,312 road accidents occurred in 2022, which claimed 1,68,491 lives, while 4,43,366 people were injured.
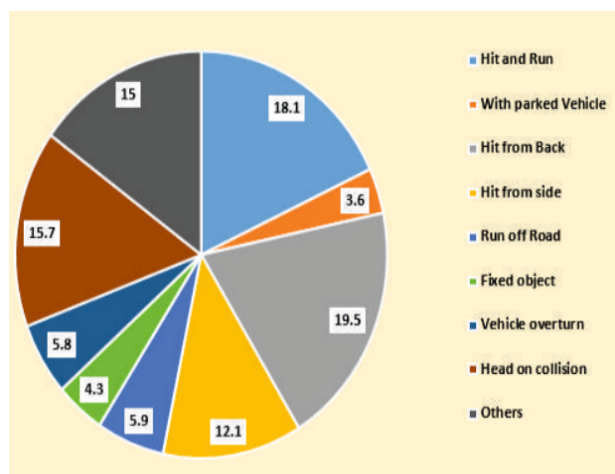

(Fig: Trends in number of Accidents, Fatalities and Persons Injured: 2018 to 2022)
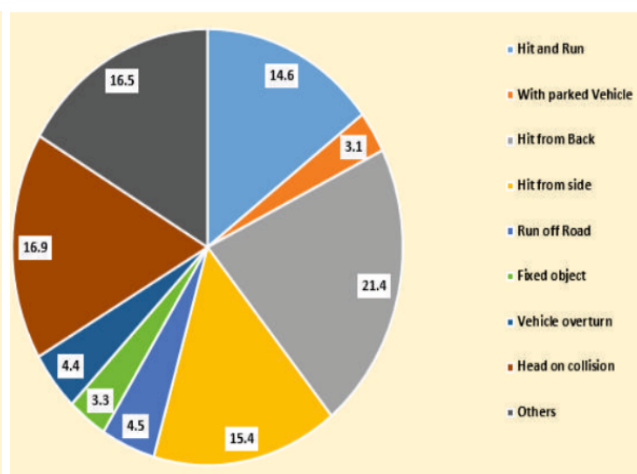
- As per the report, during 2022, a total of 4,61,312 accidents were recorded in the country, of which, *1,51,997 (32.9%) took place on the National Highways (NH), including expressways, 1,06,682 (23.1%) on State Highways (SH) and the remaining 2,02,633 (43.9%) on other roads.*

Key Takeaways:
- **Overspeeding is the biggest killer:** In 2022, over speeding accounted for 72.3% of the total road accidents, 71.2% of total deaths and 72.8% of total injuries, up 12.8%, 11.8% and 15.2% respectively when compared to the previous year.
    - Driving on the wrong side was the second highest cause of the total road accidents in 2022, accounting for 4.9% of all accidents.
- **Most accidents occurred on straight roads:** As per the data, 67% of all accidents occurred on straight roads.
    - This is over four times the total number of accidents that took place on curved roads, roads with potholes, and roads having a steep gradient, combined (13.8%).
- **'Hit From Back' collisions were most common:** Most collisions in 2022 were 'hit from back'. These accounted for over 21% of all collisions, followed by 'head on collisions' which accounted for 16.9%.

Percentage share of different 'Type of Collision' in total fatalities in 2022   % share of different 'Type of Collision' in total Accidents in 2022

- **Most road accidents occurred on a clear day:** Almost three fourth of all accidents and fatalities took place under 'sunny/clear' weather.
  - Accidents under adverse weather conditions such as rain, fog and hail accounted for just about 16.6% of total road accidents during 2022.
- **Two-wheelers accounted for the highest number of accidents and deaths:** A total of 63,115 accidents involving two wheelers took place in 2022. These led to 25,228 deaths.
  - Cars and pedestrians saw the next highest number of accidents, at 29,005 (10,174 deaths) and 20,513 (10,160 deaths) respectively.
- **Highest fatality rate in Sikkim, lowest in Ladakh, Daman & Diu:** Sikkim reported the highest fatality rate, standing at 17. UTs Ladakh and Daman & Diu had the lowest fatality rate at 0. The all India rate stood at 5.2.
  - **Fatality rate** is used to explain road accidents relative to vehicular population in a given location, which is measured by the number of road accident **fatalities per 10,000 vehicles.**
- **Tamil Nadu reported the highest number of accidents:** Tamil Nadu reported 64,105 total accidents, 15.1% up from the previous year. This accounted for over 13% of total accidents reported in India.
  - At the next spot was Madhya Pradesh, which reported 54,432 accidents

Road Safety Measures:
- **National Road Safety Policy:** The Union Government of India constituted a **committee** under the Chairmanship of **Shri S. Sundar, Former Secretary (MoST) in 2005** that came with a **draft National Road Safety Policy**.
  - It outlines various measures such as promoting awareness, establishing a road safety information database, encouraging safer road infrastructure, and enforcing safety laws.
- **Road Safety Information Database:** The Government provides assistance to local bodies, Union Territories, and States to improve the quality of crash investigation and data collection, transmission, and analysis.
  - **A National Road Safety Information System** has been established for providing continuity and policy guidelines to this activity.
  - **Sukhad Yatra 1033 App:** It enables users to report potholes and other safety hazards on National Highways, including accidents.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** MoRT&H has entrusted the Indian Road Safety Campaign (a non-profit organisation) to lead road safety activities aimed at upping grassroot level citizen involvement in road safety measures across the nation.
- **Road Safety Audits:** These audits are carried out at all stages of highway development, i.e., design, construction, and operation stages.
- **Vehicle Safety Standards:** The safety standards for vehicles have been tightened, like Seat Belts, anti-lock braking systems etc.

4Es Strategies:
- MoRT&H, along with various other related organisations as well as stakeholders has formulated a multi-pronged strategy to address the issue of road safety focusing on all **4Es** including ***Education, Engineering (both roads and vehicles), Enforcement and Emergency Care.***
- **Education**: Setting up model driving training institutes in States and providing refresher training to drivers of Heavy Motor Vehicles in the unorganised sector.
- **Enforcement: Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act, 2019:** The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways introduced the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act, 2019 which covers the **entire gamut of road safety.**
  - **The National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2002**: It provides powers to Highway Administration for control of land within the National highways, Right of Way and traffic moving on the National Highways also for removal of unauthorised occupation of land within the national highways.
- **Engineering:** The Government takes measures to review standards pertaining to safety in the design of rural and urban roads and bring them in consonance with international best practices keeping in view Indian traffic conditions.
- **Emergency Care:** N**ational Highway Accident Relief Service Scheme (NHARSS)** to provide nearest medical aid centre and for clearing the accident site.
  - **Establishment of an integrated network of Trauma Centers** along the *Golden Quadrilateral, North-South and East-West Corridors of the National Highways* by upgrading the trauma care facilities by MoRT&H with the help of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Conclusion:
- The report underscores the urgency of adopting a comprehensive approach to address the contributing factors to these accidents, including speeding, reckless driving, drunken driving, and non-compliance with traffic regulations. It is crucial that we strengthen enforcement mechanisms, enhance driver education and training programs, and invest in improving the condition of roads and vehicles.
- As the road accidents are multi-causal in nature, requiring a multi-pronged approach to mitigate the problems through concerted efforts of all agencies at both Central Government and State Governments.

Source: TH

Guidelines for appointment of State DGPs

Syllabus: GS2/Governance

Context:
- Several States have appointed acting DGPs, instead of regular DGPs, to avoid the UPSC process. Many States have appointed 'in-charge' DGPs, or DGPs with 'full additional charge'.

What do the guidelines say?
- It says officers with **25 years experience** to be appointed as a DGP, against the *earlier requirement of a minimum 30 years of service.*
- The **number of shortlisted officers cannot exceed three**, but may consist of less than three officers in 'exceptional circumstances'.
- These officers are to be of the rank of ADG or the rank of police chief (and one below) stipulated for that state. The list is supposed to be given to UPSC six months before the incumbent DGP is to retire.
- An empanelment committee headed by the UPSC chairman, and with the union home secretary, state chief secretary, state DGP, and the chief of a central police organisation in it, is supposed to select a panel of three officers "based on merit".
- **Defining experience:**
  - The revised guidelines indicate the relevant areas to **assess the range of experience of an IPS officer** to head a State police department.
  - It requires ten years of experience in areas such as *law and order, crime branch, economic offences wing, or intelligence wing, and deputation to central bodies such as the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, or Central Bureau of Investigation, among others.*

Background:
- The UPSC had **first** framed guidelines for the preparation of **a panel for appointment** to the post of State DGPs in 2009, after the **Supreme Court judgement** on police reforms in **Prakash Singh vs Union of India was followed.**
- The **panel to appoint the State DGP is headed by the UPSC Chairman** and includes the **Union Home Secretary, the State's Chief Secretary and DGP**, and **one of the heads of the Central Armed Police Forces** nominated by the MHA who is not from the same State cadre.
- In 2021, the Union government had proposed to amend the **Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules, 1954 to depute IAS, IPS, and IFoS (Indian Forest Service) officers** to the Centre without necessarily taking the State government's nod.
  - The proposal has been **put on hold** after concerns of several states.

Issues with Appointments
- **Interim Status:** The appointed DGP officer spent their entire tenure in interim status which is against the supreme court order where the SC has said there must be no temporary or ad hoc appointments of police chiefs.
- **Seniority vs Merit issue:** The senior officers challenge the appointment of Junior officers as DGP on grounds of seniority. The UPSC defended its decision in court on the grounds of merit over seniority.
- **Extension of Tenure:** Sometimes the officers are given an extension of tenure beyond the stipulated term of 2 years.
- **State-Centre friction:** The centre has the power to not release the officer for posting in the state which the state recommends in the list, leading to friction.

Source: TH

Bletchley Declaration on AI

Syllabus: GS3/Science and Technology

In News
- The United Kingdom (U.K.) hosted the **first Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit.**

About
- The UK's AI Safety Summit, brought together tech experts, world leaders, and representatives from **27 countries and the EU.**
- **Aim:** The summit sought to build a **framework** to mitigate the risks of AI while maximising its potential.
- It is taking place at **Bletchley Park**, a renowned location that served as the home to codebreakers during the **Second World War.**
- It resulted in the **'Bletchley Declaration'.**
- The next AI Safety Summit will be hosted by **South Korea** in six months and a second one, six months later by **France.**

Bletchley Declaration
- Over 27 countries including **India and China** along with the **US, UK and EU,** signed the Bletchley Declaration, vowing **to develop AI in a human-centric manner.**
- The Bletchley Declaration represents a **"world-first" accord,** designed to tackle the myriad of **safety concerns** associated with **advanced AI models**, particularly those developed by major entities like **OpenAI, Google and Microsoft.**

What is AI?
- Artificial intelligence (AI) is a **wide-ranging branch of computer science** concerned with **building smart machines** capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence.
- Artificial intelligence allows machines to model, or even improve upon, the **capabilities of the human mind.**

- And from the development of self-driving cars to the proliferation of generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Google's Bard, AI is increasingly becoming part of everyday life — and an area every industry are investing in.

Need for the Regulation
- **Lack of transparency of AI tools:** AI and deep learning models can be difficult to understand, even for those that work directly with the technology.
- **AI is not neutral:** AI-based decisions are susceptible to inaccuracies, discriminatory outcomes, embedded or inserted bias.
- **Manipulation through Algorithm:** Online media and news have become even murkier in light of AI-generated images and videos, AI voice changers as well as deep fakes infiltrating political and social spheres.
- **Lack of Data Privacy:** AI systems often collect personal data to customize user experiences or to help train the AI models.
- **Uncontrollable Self AI:** There also comes a worry that AI will progress in intelligence so rapidly that it will act beyond humans' control — possibly in a malicious manner.

Way Ahead
- AI still has numerous benefits, AI regulation has been a main focus for dozens of countries, and now the U.S. and European Union are creating more clear-cut measures to manage the rising sophistication of artificial intelligence.
- AI has the potential to be dangerous, but these dangers may be mitigated by implementing legal regulations and by guiding AI development with human-centered thinking.

Source: TH

15th India-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue
Syllabus:GS3/Defence
News
- The 15th India-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue was held in New Delhi.

About
- During the meeting, both sides reviewed the existing defense cooperation between the two countries and agreed to enhance collaboration in Service-to-Service interactions and bilateral exercises.
- Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the **'Strategic Partnership'** based on mutual trust and understanding, common interests and shared values of democracy and rule of law.

India-Singapore Defense Relation
- India and Singapore signed a **Defence Cooperation Agreement** (2003, enhanced Agreement signed in 2015), allowing the Singapore army and air force to conduct training on Indian soil.
- On the issue of deepening defense technology collaboration, India and Singapore have set up a bilateral **Defense Technology Steering Committee** as well as the **India-Singapore Defense Industry Working Group**.
- India-Singapore Bilateral Agreement for Navy Cooperation was signed which gave Indian Navy ships access to **Singapore's Changi Naval Base** near the

disputed South China Sea, mutual logistical support and refueling rights at the port.

Important Exercises
- **The Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX)** has been undertaken since **1994** and is "the longest continuous naval exercise that the Indian Navy has with any other country."
- The Singapore Army and Indian Army conduct a bilateral armor exercise, **Bold Kurukshetra.**

Source:PIB

Facts In News
Privileges Committee

Syllabus:GS2/Polity
News
- The Privileges Committee of Rajya Sabha has called for a meeting to review the pending complaints against House members.

About
- The Committee examines the cases of breach of privileges of the House and its members and recommends appropriate action. The functions of this committee are **semi-judicial in nature.**
- The mandate of the Privileges Committee is to safeguard the "freedom, authority, and dignity of Parliament". These privileges are enjoyed by individual Members as well as the House as a whole.
- The Lok Sabha committee has **15 members**, while the Rajya Sabha committee has **10 members.**

Source:TH

PM GatiShakti

Syllabus: GS3/Economy
News
- 58th Network Planning Group (NPG) Meeting under PM GatiShakti discussed Four Infrastructure Projects.

About
- **Road and Railway projects for multimodal connectivity** with project cost of more than Rs. **23,500 Crore** were discussed in the 58th NPG.
- **Greenfield rail connectivity projects** in the State of Odisha with the total cost of more than Rs 4,000 Crores, were discussed.
  - These projects are likely to benefit traffic to/from the ports in Odisha, iron ore traffic from local mines and expected to boost the industrial development in the project region by supporting multimodal connectivity in the area.
- **Road projects** in States of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh & Kerala were also discussed in the meeting. These projects are expected to promote economic growth in economically backward regions.

PM GatiShakti Plan

- PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan was **launched in 2021** for providing multimodal connectivity infrastructure to various economic zones.
- **The project aims** to break the inter-ministerial tangles and silos and foster cooperation and integration in the fasttrack implementation of projects.
- This master plan is a transformative approach to enhance economic growth, infrastructure development and the completion of projects in a time-bound manner.

PM Gati Shakti Plan
Source: PIB

State Food Safety Index (SFSI) 2023

Syllabus: GS2/Health

In News
- **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI**) published the **State Food Safety Index (SFSI) 2023.**

About the Index
- Since 2019, FSSAI has released the State Food Safety Index (SFSI) each year **on June 7** on the occasion of **World Food Safety Day.**
- FSSAI has developed the State Food Safety Index **to measure the performance of states on various parameters of Food Safety.**
- It is based on **five parameters:** Human Resources and Institutional Data, Compliance, Food Testing – Infrastructure and Surveillance, Training & Capacity Building and Consumer Empowerment.
  - In the 2023 index, a new parameter called **'Improvement in SFSI Rank'** was added, which assesses improvement in each state's rank from the year before.
- Based on the fact that similar States should be compared to ensure comparability among similar entities they are classified into 3 categories namely **Large States, Small States and UTs.**

Findings
- **Top States: Kerala** has topped the index followed by **Punjab and Tamil Nadu**. Among smaller states, **Goa stood first** for the fourth time in a row, followed by Manipur and Sikkim.
  - Among Union territories, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, and Chandigarh secured first, second, and third ranks.
- **Drop in Scores:** 19 out of 20 large states — including Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh — recorded a drop in their 2023 scores from 2019.
  - The worst drop has been recorded in the **'Food Testing Infrastructure'** parameter, where the average score for all large states dropped.
- The declining average scores on the SFSI raise grave concerns, given the importance of nutrition for the sustainable growth of any country.

About FSSAI
- It has been established under **Food Safety and Standards , 2006** which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- **The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare,** Government of India is the **Administrative Ministry** for the implementation of FSSAI.

- FSSAI has been created for **laying down science based standards** for articles of food and **to regulate** their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
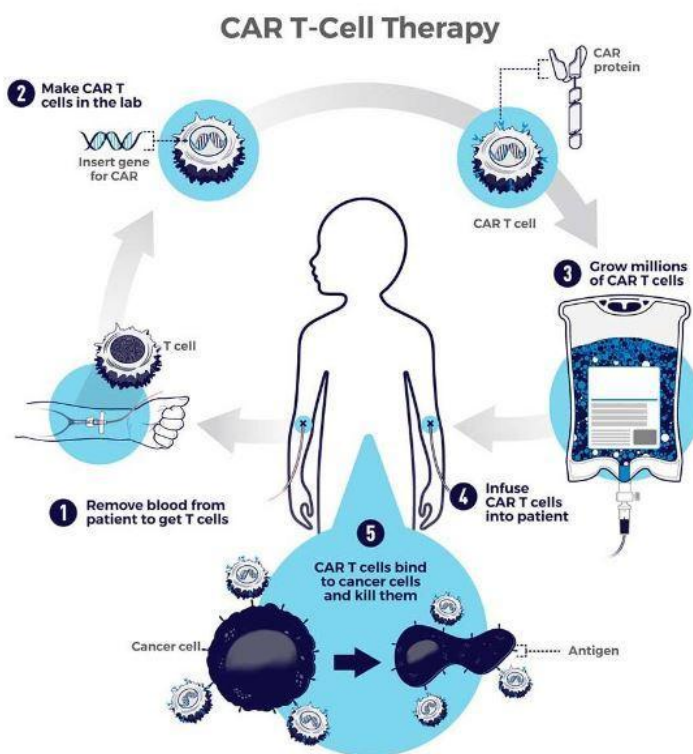
Source: IE

CAR-T Cell Therapy

Syllabus: GS3/ Science & Technology

In News

- The drugs regulator has granted market authorisation to **CAR-T cell therapy** for cancer patients with **B-cell lymphomas** who didn't respond to standard treatments like chemotherapy.

About

- CAR-T is a revolutionary therapy that modifies **immune cells (specifically T-cells)** by turning them into strong cancer fighters known as CAR-T cells.
- T-cells are special cells (white blood cells that find and fight illness and infection) whose primary function is cytotoxic, meaning it can kill other cells.
- In CAR-T therapy, we genetically modify them into cancer-fighting cells. These supercharged cells are then put back into the body which fights with cancer cells — especially in blood cancers like leukaemia and lymphomas.
- NexCAR19 is an indigenously developed CD19-targeted CAR-T cell therapy.
- ImmunoACT – an IIT Bombay incubated company – developed the treatment.
- CD-19 is a biomarker for B lymphocytes and can be utilized as a target for leukemia immunotherapies.

CAR T-Cell Therapy

Significance

- Now patients in India and countries with limited resources will have access to this life-saving drug at an affordable cost.
- Abroad, the CAR-T cell therapy costs around ₹3-4 crore per patient. The NexCAR19 will be ₹30-40 lakh per patient, which is 10% of the cost abroad.
- In terms of technical achievement, it puts India on the elite list of select countries that have access to CAR-T therapy.
  - India is now one of the first developing countries to have its indigenous CAR-T and gene therapy platform.

Source: IE

Blue Flag Certification

Syllabus: GS3/ Environment, Conservation

In News

- Blue flags awarded to eight Cape Town beaches

About

- Blue Flag is one of the world's most recognised voluntary awards for beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats.
- **Certification** by: Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), non-profit organization based in Denmark.
- In order to qualify for the Blue Flag, a series of 33 stringent criteria divided into 4 major heads namely
  - Environmental education and information
  - Bathing water quality
  - Environmental management
  - Conservation and safety services in the beaches

Significance

- Blue Flag certification serves as a **symbol of high environmental** and safety standards for beaches and marinas.
- It **attracts tourists and visitors** who are environmentally conscious and prefer cleaner and safer destinations.
- Blue Flag beaches and marinas are more likely to **have excellent water quality, making them safe for swimming** and other recreational activities.
- **Local communities and businesses** often benefit from increased tourism and economic opportunities associated with Blue Flag certification.
- The program also raises awareness about environmental issues and encourages community involvement in conservation efforts.
- Blue Flag helps in preserving the natural beauty of coastal areas and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Source: N24

National Level Monitors (NLM) to Oversee Livestock Schemes

Syllabus: GS3/Indian Economy

In News

- The Centre has decided to deploy **National Level Monitors (NLM)** to oversee the implementation of its **livestock schemes.**

About

- The NLMs will be **third-party independent monitors** — individuals and institutions deployed by the government.
  - Individual NLMs will be selected from among retired Civil/Defence Services Officers, and academia.
- **Two types of monitoring** will be conducted by them — regular and special.
- **Objective:** Ascertaining whether the programmes of the Ministry are implemented according to guidelines prescribed.
- **Functioning:** It will determine villagers' views on the programmes, consider their suggestions for improvement and whether the selection of beneficiaries under a programme has been transparent, unbiased and fair.
  - It will determine if incentives to paravets/technicians/ farmers have been distributed as envisaged under the scheme and whether data generated on vaccination, disease monitoring and artificial insemination has been uploaded on the National Digital Livestock Mission on a real time basis.

Livestock Sector in India
- Livestock plays an important role in the Indian economy. Livestock sector c Livestock sector contributed **4.90 percent of total GVA.**
- The contribution of livestock sector **in agriculture** in **terms of output,** has increased from 24.32 per cent (2014-2015) to 30.87 per cent (2020-21).
- **Dairy** is the single largest agricultural commodity contributing **5 percent of the national economy**. India is **ranked 1st in milk production** contributing **23 percent of global milk production.**
- India ranks **3rd in Egg Production** and **8th in meat production** in the world.
- Value of output of milk is the highest of the agriculture produce and even **more than the combined value of Paddy and Wheat.**

Livestock Schemes by Government
- Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)
- National Livestock Mission
- Livestock Health and Disease Control
- National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD)
- National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP)

Source: IE