

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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Table of Content

India's Application to Explore Nikitin Seamount

Threat of Water Shortage in India

Curbing Black Carbon Emissions

Sickle Cell Anaemia & CRISPR Technology

Employment Scenario in India

SC raises concern over Gagging Media

NEWS IN SHORTS

START Programme

Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC)

India Supported Philippines on SCS

Archaeological Survey of India will 'delist' some 'lost' monuments

INDIA'S APPLICATION TO EXPLORE NIKITIN SEAMOUNT

In Context

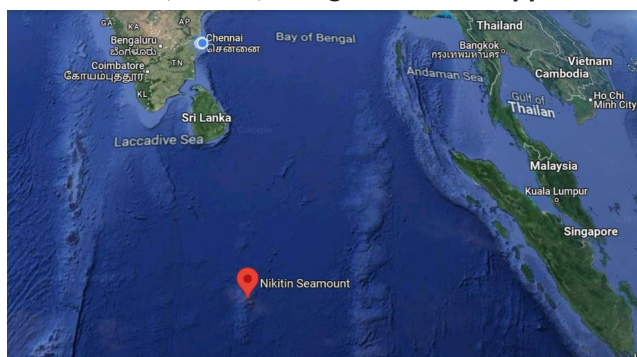
- India applied to the **International Seabed Authority (ISBA), Jamaica**, for **rights to explore two vast tracts** in the **Indian Ocean seabed** that aren't part of its jurisdiction.

About

- India has applied to explore **Nikitin Seamount (AN Seamount)**, which is a **cobalt-rich crust** long known as the **Afanasy**.
- Claims by Sri Lanka:** The area of the application by India lies entirely within an area submitted to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf by Sri Lanka.
- Other Applications:** Along with the application for AN Seamount, India has also applied for permission to explore the **Carlsberg Ridge in the Central Indian Ocean** to investigate for **polymetallic sulphides**, which are large smoking mounds near hydrothermal vents that are reportedly **rich in copper, zinc, gold and silver**.

Afanasy Nikitin Seamount (AN Seamount)

- The AN Seamount is a **structural feature** (400 km-long and 150 km-wide) in the **Central Indian Basin**, located about **3,000 km away from India's coast**.
- From an oceanic depth of about 4,800 m it rises to about 1,200 metre and — as surveys from about two decades establish — **rich in deposits of cobalt, nickel, manganese and copper**.



Why India has Applied for Exploration Rights?

- Potential of Indian Ocean:** The Indian Ocean promises **tremendous potential reserves** and that expanse has motivated the government of India to increase its **scientific exploration of the ocean's depths**.

- Increasing Need for Critical Minerals:** The World Bank has projected that extraction of critical minerals will need to increase **fivefold by 2050** to meet the **demand for clean energy technologies**.
 - India has a short-term target of increasing its renewables capacity to 500 gigawatts by 2030, and meeting 50% of its energy requirements from renewables by then, with the long-term goal of **achieving net zero emissions by 2070**.
 - To meet these targets, India will need to secure **critical minerals from all possible sources including the deep seabed**.
- Geopolitical Concerns about China's Dominance:** China currently controls 100% of the refined supply of natural graphite and dysprosium, 70% of cobalt and almost 60% of all processed lithium and manganese.
 - There are geopolitical concerns about China's dominance in processing these minerals before they enter the supply chain.

Extraction from Open Seas

- Open ocean, meaning ocean — **whose air, surface and sea-bed** — where **no countries can claim sovereignty**.
- Around **60% of the world's seas** are open ocean and though believed to be rich in a variety of mineral wealth, **the costs and challenges of extraction are prohibitive**.
- For any actual extraction to happen in open oceans, **countries must apply first for an exploration licence to the ISBA**.
- Currently **no country has commercially extracted resources from open oceans**.

About International Seabed Authority (ISA)

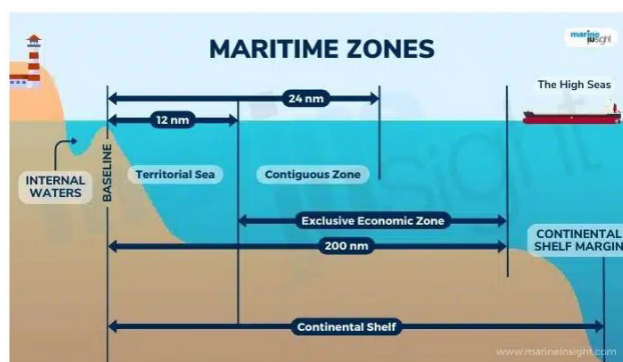
- It is an autonomous international organization established under the **1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** and the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1994 Agreement)**.
- The organisation came into force in **1994** and is **headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica**.
- ISA has 169 Members, including 168 Member States and the European Union.
- It was set up to **regulate the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources** of oceans in international waters.

Rights over Continental Shelf

- India has claimed for its continental shelf up to **350 nautical miles from its border but has yet to be awarded so.**
 - ♦ Some ocean-bound states may have a **natural stretch of land**, connecting their **border and the edge of the deep ocean** that **extends beyond the 200 nautical mile**, as part of their **continental shelf**.
- **Scientific Evidence:** To claim on **continental shelf** a country must give a detailed scientific rationale, complete with underwater maps and surveys to show the unbroken land-connect to a scientific commission appointed by the ISBA.
- **Exploration Rights:** If such a claim is approved, then such a country will have primacy to explore and potentially exploit the living and non-living resources in the region.
 - ♦ Normally, claims to the continental shelf **do not extend beyond 350 nautical miles from the country's coast.**

India's Maritime Zone

- India's maritime zone refers to the **maritime boundaries and areas under its jurisdiction** in the surrounding seas and oceans.
- India has a **coastline of 7,517 Km** including island territories.
- **Territorial Waters (12 Nautical Miles):** The territorial waters of India extend up to **12 nautical miles** from the baseline.
 - ♦ Within this zone, India exercises **full sovereignty**, and it includes the country's coastal areas and ports.
- **Contiguous Zone (24 Nautical Miles):** Beyond the territorial waters, there is a contiguous zone that extends an additional 12 nautical miles.
 - ♦ In this zone, India can take action to prevent or punish infringements on customs, fiscal, immigration, or sanitary laws within its territory or territorial sea.
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** The EEZ extends up to 200 nautical miles from the baseline.
 - ♦ Within this zone, India has the exclusive rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing natural resources, such as fisheries and hydrocarbons.



- **High Seas:** If a region isn't formally classified as being part of a country's continental shelf, then it is considered '**high sea**' and **open to any country to approach the ISBA and ask permission for exploration.**

Source: TH

THREAT OF WATER SHORTAGE IN INDIA

Context

- India is facing a **threat of water shortage** as **water levels in reservoirs** across India have reported **lower storage levels than last year.**
- **About**
 - **Storage Capacity:** The live storage capacity in India's **150 primary reservoirs** stands at just **38% of their total capacity**, which is less than the last decade's average for the same period.
 - ♦ The total live storage capacity of these 150 reservoirs accounts for about **69.35% of the nation's total live storage capacity.**
 - **Southern India:** The Southern region, which includes States like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (two combined projects in both States), Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, **monitors 42 reservoirs.**
 - ♦ The total live storage available in these reservoirs is **23% of their total live storage capacity.**
 - ♦ This marks a **decrease** compared to the storage levels during the corresponding period last year (39%) and the average storage over the past ten years (32%).
 - ♦ **Cities like Bengaluru** are already grappling with a shortfall of around 500 million litres of water per day (MLD), against a demand of 2,600 MLD.

Reasons behind Water Scarcity in India

- **Inefficient agricultural practices** and excessive groundwater extraction have depleted crucial water sources.
- **Climate change** further aggravates the situation, causing irregular rainfall patterns and affecting the recharge of rivers and aquifers.
- **Poor water management** and lack of proper infrastructure also play a significant role in exacerbating the crisis.
- **Deforestation and degradation of watersheds** lead to soil erosion and reduced infiltration capacity, affecting groundwater recharge and overall water availability.
- **Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation** have led to increased pollution of water bodies, making them unfit for consumption.

Consequences

- **Reduced water availability impacts agriculture**, the backbone of the country's economy, leading to lower crop yields and increased food prices.
- Communities suffer from **inadequate sanitation and hygiene**, resulting in waterborne diseases.
- It leads towards the **conflicts over water resources among different sectors and communities**.
- Water scarcity can trigger **migration from rural to urban areas** or from water-stressed regions to areas with better water availability.
 - ♦ This movement of people can **strain urban infrastructure and exacerbate social tensions**.
- Reduced water flow in rivers and reservoirs leads to **decreased power generation capacity**, impacting energy supply and increasing dependence on alternative sources of energy.

Government Initiatives to Tackle Shortage of Water in India

- **National Water Mission (NWM)**: NWM aims to conserve water, minimize wastage, and ensure equitable distribution of water across various sectors.
 - ♦ It focuses on promoting water use efficiency, groundwater recharge, and sustainable development of water resources.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)**: Launched in **2019**, the Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide piped water supply to all rural households by 2024.

- ♦ The mission focuses on decentralized water management, community participation, and leveraging technology to ensure safe and sustainable water supply in rural areas.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)**: Launched in **2019**, the Atal Bhujal Yojana aims to improve groundwater management and promote sustainable groundwater use in identified water-stressed areas across India.
 - ♦ It focuses on community participation, demand-side management, and groundwater recharge measures.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)**: It was launched in 2015-16 to enhance physical access of water on farm and expand cultivable area under assured irrigation, improve on-farm water use efficiency, introduce sustainable water conservation practices, etc.
- **The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)**: It was launched in 2015 in selected 500 cities and focuses on the development of basic urban infrastructure in the Mission cities in the sectors of water supply, sewerage & septage management, storm water drainage, green spaces & parks and non-motorized urban transport.
- **Namami Gange Programme**: Launched in **2014**, it aims to rejuvenate the River Ganga and its tributaries by addressing pollution, promoting sustainable wastewater management, and restoring the ecological health of the river basin.
- **Interlinking of Rivers (ILR)**: The National Water Development Agency (NWDA) has been entrusted with the work of inter-linking of rivers under the National Perspective Plan (NPP).
 - ♦ NPP has two components, viz., Himalayan Rivers Development Component and Peninsular Rivers Development Component.
 - ♦ 30 link projects have been identified under NPP.

Suggestions

- Implementing **efficient water management practices**, such as rainwater harvesting and watershed management, can help replenish water sources.
- Investing in **water treatment systems and improving irrigation techniques** can reduce wastage and pollution.

- **Raising awareness about water conservation** among the public and encouraging responsible water use is vital.
- Additionally, **policies that promote sustainable water allocation and management** are essential for long-term solutions.
- By using **modern technologies, such as IoT, AI,** and remote sensing, water consumption can be measured and managed more effectively.

Source: TH

CURBING BLACK CARBON EMISSIONS

Context:

- There is growing concern about the black carbon emission in India, and it needs to be curbed.

About the Black Carbon:

- It is a dark sooty material emitted alongside other pollutants when **biomass and fossil fuels are not fully combusted**, contributes to global warming and poses severe risks.
 - ♦ It is part of fine **particulate air pollution (PM2.5)**.
- It has been found to have a direct link between exposure to black carbon and a higher risk of heart disease, birth complications, and premature death.

Major Sources of Black Carbon:

- Most black carbon emissions in India arise from burning biomass, such as cow dung or straw, in traditional cookstoves.
- According to a 2016 study, the residential sector contributes 47% of India's total black carbon emissions.
 - ♦ Industries contribute a further 22%, diesel vehicles 17%, open burning 12%, and other sources 2%.

Related Concerns:

- **Health Risks:** Exposure to black carbon has been linked to a higher risk of heart disease, birth complications, and premature death.
 - ♦ Recent estimates have indicated that **more than 6.1 lakh deaths per year** from indoor exposure to air pollution.
- **Environmental Impact:** Black carbon contributes to global warming and poses severe risks to the environment.

- ♦ It absorbs solar energy, warms the atmosphere, and when it falls to earth with precipitation, it darkens the surface of snow and ice, reducing their **albedo (the reflecting power of a surface)**, warming the snow, and hastening melting.

- ♦ Black carbon deposition on snow contributes up to 39% of total glacier melting and **10% of glacier mass loss** due to reduced precipitation as observed over the Tibetan Plateau.

- ♦ It disrupts **hydrological cycles over monsoon systems** and accelerates regional warming, particularly over the cryosphere.

- ♦ It fuels the **feedback loop driving Arctic amplification**, which has broader effects disrupting the **Indian monsoon**.

- **Climate Change:** Black carbon is the second largest contributor to climate change after CO₂.

- ♦ Unlike CO₂, which can stay in the atmosphere for hundreds to thousands of years, **black carbon, because it is a particle, remains in the atmosphere only for days to weeks** before it returns to earth with rain or snow.

- **Air Quality:** Black carbon affects **air quality, visibility, and harms ecosystems**. It also reduces **agricultural productivity**.

- **Socio-Economic Impact:** The health and environmental impacts of black carbon can have significant socio-economic implications, including increased healthcare costs and reduced agricultural yields.

Government Initiatives to Curb Black Carbon:

- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** It provides free liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections to households below the poverty line.

- ♦ The primary objective of PMUY is to make clean cooking fuel available to rural and poor households and reduce their dependence on traditional cooking fuels.

- ♦ It has thus been able to play a vital role in reducing black carbon emissions, as it offers a cleaner alternative to traditional fuel consumption.

- **Introduction of Cleaner/Alternate Fuels:** The government has introduced cleaner/alternate fuels like gaseous fuel (CNG, LPG etc.), ethanol blending.

- **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT):** It has been launched to set up 5000 Compressed Biogas (CBG) production plants and make CBG available in the market for use.
- **Promotion of Agricultural Mechanization:** It is the **Central Sector Scheme** on 'Promotion of Agricultural Mechanization for **in-situ management of Crop Residue in the States of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and NCT of Delhi**', agricultural machines and equipment for in-situ crop residue management are promoted with **50% subsidy** to the individual farmers and **80% subsidy** for the establishment of Custom Hiring Centres.
- **National Clean Air Programme:** The Central Government is implementing the National Clean Air Programme as a long-term, time-bound, national-level strategy to tackle the air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner with targets to achieve 40% reduction in particulate matter concentrations by 2025-26.
- **Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME):** FAME **phase-2 scheme** has been rolled out to promote the adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles in the country.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

- Curbing black carbon emissions in India requires a multi-pronged approach that includes promoting clean cooking fuels, improving industrial processes, and enhancing public awareness about the harmful effects of black carbon.
- One potential solution to this issue is the local production of **compressed biomethane (CBM)** gas by composting biomass. CBM is a much cleaner fuel with lower black-carbon emissions and investment.
 - ♦ Panchayats can take the initiative to produce CBM gas locally at the village level, ensuring every rural household can access clean cooking fuel.
- India pledged to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2070** at the **COP26 in Glasgow**, positioning itself as a frontrunner in the race to carbon neutrality.
 - ♦ According to the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy**, India has installed a **renewable energy capacity of over 180 GW by 2023** and is expected to meet its **target of 500 GW by 2030**.

Source: TH

SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA & CRISPR TECHNOLOGY

In News

- Marginalised tribal communities face difficulties in accessing basic healthcare and diagnostics of **Sickle cell disease (SCD)**.

About Sickle cell disease (SCD)

- It is an **inherited haemoglobin** disorder in which red blood cells (RBCs) become crescent or sickle-shaped due to a genetic mutation.
 - ♦ These RBCs are rigid and impair circulation, often leading to anaemia, organ damage, severe and episodic pain, and premature death.
- India has the **third highest number of SCD births**, after Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional studies suggest approximately 15,000-25,000 babies with SCD are born in India every year, mostly in tribal communities.
- According to the 2023 'Guidelines for National Programme for Prevention and Management of Sickle Cell Disease', of the 1.13 crore persons screened in different states, about 8.75% (9.96 lakh) tested positive.
- It is also one of the **21 "specified" disabilities** listed in the Schedule of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016.

Do You Know?

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- **Unemployed:** Individuals who are seeking or available for work but are currently without employment.

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- **Steps :** In 2023, the Government of India launched the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission, to eliminate SCD by 2047.
- **Challenges:** At present treatment and care for SCD remains grossly inadequate and inaccessible.
 - ♦ Like the **(un)availability of the drug hydroxyurea**
 - ♦ **Blood transfusion** is another important therapy for SCD, but its availability is limited to district-level facilities.

- ◆ **Bone marrow transplantation (BMT)**, until recently the other cure for SCD, is out of reach for most SCD patients due to the difficulty in finding matched donors, the high cost of the treatment at private facilities, and long waiting times in public hospitals.
- **Solution** : the application of the gene-editing technology called CRISPR (short for 'Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats') to treat SCD is important — for its novelty and promise but also for the health disparities it makes apparent.
 - ◆ The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved two gene therapies, Casgevy and Lyfgenia, to treat SCD in people ages 12 and older.
- **CRISPR in India:** In India, CRISPR's possible medical applications also pose ethical and legal quandaries.
 - ◆ The National Guidelines for Stem Cell Research 2017 prohibit the commercialisation of stem cell therapies .
 - ◆ Gene-editing stem cells is allowed only for in-vitro studies.
 - ◆ India has approved a five-year project to develop CRISPR for sickle cell anaemia.
 - ◆ Under its Sickle Cell Anaemia Mission, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research is developing gene-editing therapies for SCD.
 - ◆ Adopting and promoting advanced therapies like CRISPR in India requires a comprehensive approach that accounts for inequities and disparities in the country's overall healthcare access framework.

Source:TH

EMPLOYMENT SCENARIO IN INDIA

Context:

- Recently, the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** and the **Institute of Human Development (IHD)** together released the **India Employment Report for 2024**.

Key Findings of the India Employment Report (2024):

- **Youth Unemployment:** India's youth account for almost 83% of the unemployed workforce.

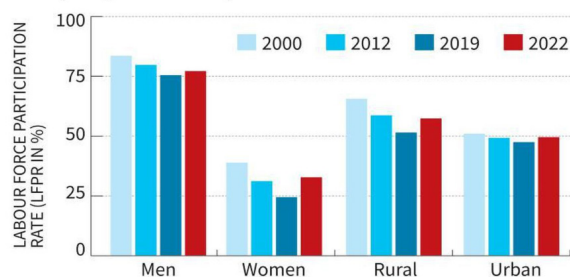
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- ◆ The share of youngsters with secondary or higher education in the total unemployed has almost doubled from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022.
- **Labour Market Indicators:** The key labour market indicators such as the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and the Unemployment Rate (UR) showed a long-term deterioration between 2000 and 2018.

Employment blues

Labour participation for various sections increased slightly in 2022 (compared to 2019) but was still low vis-a-vis 2000



- ◆ However, these indicators witnessed an improvement after 2019.
- **Employment Conditions:** Despite the improvements in labour market indicators, the employment conditions in India remain poor.
 - ◆ The slow transition to non-farm employment has reversed, and women largely account for the increase in self-employment and unpaid family work.
 - ◆ Almost 90% of workers remain engaged in informal work, while the share of regular work, which steadily increased after 2000, declined after 2018.
 - ◆ There are widespread livelihood insecurities, with only a small percentage being covered with social protection measures.
- **Skills Gap:** The report noted that India's large young workforce doesn't appear to have the skills to deliver — with 75% of youth unable to send emails with attachments, 60% unable to copy and paste files, and 90% unable to put a mathematical formula into a spreadsheet.

- **Job Market:** India's job market saw a 2% Month on Month (MoM) decline in Nov 2023, with an overall 10% Year on Year (YoY) drop.
 - ♦ Despite this, the Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) sector is expected to bridge the employment gap.
- **Widening Gender Gap:** The lack of quality employment opportunities is reflected in the high level of joblessness among young people, especially among those who have achieved higher education.
 - ♦ Many highly educated young people are unwilling to take on low-paying, insecure jobs that are currently available and would rather wait in the hopes of securing better employment in the future.

Policy Areas for Action Highlighted in Report:

- **Promoting Job Creation:** The report emphasises the need for policies that foster job creation to absorb the large number of youths joining the labour force annually.
- **Improving Employment Quality:** The quality of employment in India remains poor, with a large proportion of workers engaged in informal work.
 - ♦ The report calls for measures to improve employment conditions and provide workers with better job security and benefits.
- **Addressing Labour Market Inequalities:** The report highlights the need to address persistent inequalities in the labour market, such as those based on gender, caste, and region.
- **Strengthening Skills and Active Labour Market Policies:** The report notes that a large proportion of India's youth lack the necessary skills for employment.
 - ♦ It calls for stronger skills development initiatives and active labour market policies to enhance the employability of the youth.
- **Bridging the Knowledge Deficits on Labour Market Patterns and Youth Employment:** The report underscores the need for more research and data to understand labour market trends and the specific challenges faced by young people in the labour market.

International Labour Organisation (ILO):

- It is a specialised agency of the United Nations.
- It was established in 1919 by the **Treaty of Versailles** as an affiliated agency of the **League of Nations**, and became the first affiliated specialised agency of the **United Nations in 1946**.

- **Headquarter:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **India is a founder member of the ILO.**
- **Aim:** To promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.
 - ♦ It is the only tripartite UN Agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- **Recognition:**
 - ♦ **Nobel Peace Prize (1969):** For improving peace among classes, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and for providing technical assistance to other developing nations.
- **Flagship Reports of ILO:**
 - ♦ Global Wage Report;
 - ♦ World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO);
 - ♦ World Social Protection Report;
 - ♦ World of Work Report;

Related Government Initiatives To Boost Employment in India:

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY):** Launched as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package 3.0, this scheme incentivizes employers for creating new employment along with social security benefits and restoration of loss of employment during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY):** This scheme was launched to incentivize employers for the creation of new employment.
- **National Career Service (NCS) Project:** This project provides a variety of career-related services like job matching, career counselling, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, apprenticeships, internships, etc.
- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** This act provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (PMGKRA):** This initiative was launched to boost employment and livelihood opportunities for returnee migrant workers and similarly affected persons in rural areas.
- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** This scheme facilitates self-employment by providing collateral-free loans up to Rs. 10 lakh to micro/small business enterprises and individuals.
- **Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (GKRA):** This initiative was launched to provide immediate employment and livelihood opportunities to the distressed and to saturate the villages with public infrastructure and creation of livelihood assets.
- **PM GatiShakti:** This is a transformative approach for economic growth and sustainable development, driven by seven engines, namely, Roads, Railways, Airports, Ports, Mass Transport, Waterways, and Logistics Infrastructure.

Conclusion:

- The employment situation in India is grim, with high unemployment rates, lack of skills, and gender disparities. The government initiatives such as Make in India, Start-up India, Digital India, Smart City Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, Housing for All, Infrastructure Development and Industrial Corridors are also oriented towards generating employment opportunities.
- However, there is a need for more robust policies and initiatives to improve the employment situation in the country.

Source: TH

SC RAISES CONCERN OVER GAGGING MEDIA

In News

The Supreme Court has highlighted the problem of the **affluent getting pre-trial injunctions from courts against** the media and civil society, gagging free speech and the public's right to information about important affairs.

Background

- The order is based on an appeal filed by Bloomberg Television Production Services challenging an ex-parte ad interim order passed by a District Court in Delhi in March 2024 directing

it to take down an article published on their online platform.

Key Highlights of SC's Order

- The constitutional mandate of protecting journalistic expression cannot be understated, and courts must tread cautiously while granting pre-trial interim injunctions.
- The Bench drew the spotlight on the phenomenon of '**SLAPP suits**' or '**Strategic Litigation against Public Participation**' gaining attention across jurisdictions.
 - ♦ It is an umbrella term used to refer to litigation predominantly initiated by entities that wield immense economic power against members of the media or civil society, to prevent the public from knowing about or participating in important affairs in the public interest.
- It cautioned judges about how ad-interim injunctions in defamation suits, followed by prolonged litigation, harm free speech and public participation.
- The Bench said courts should grant pre-trial injunctions only in exceptional cases.
 - ♦ For others, an injunction against the publication of material should be granted only after the conduct of a full-fledged trial.

Freedom of Press in India

- The Constitution of India does not expressly mention in Article 19 about freedom of the press but it has been held to flow from the general freedom of speech and expression guaranteed to all citizens.
 - ♦ Freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) includes the right to express one's views through any medium, which can be by way of writing, speaking, and gesture or in any other form.
 - ♦ It also includes the rights of communication and the right to propagate or publish one's opinion
- It also gives the State the power to impose "reasonable restrictions" on the exercise of this right in the interests of "public order, decency or morality".

Importance of Media

- The media have played an important role in educating and developing the people.

- From the conservative society to the open-minded one, the role of the media has been immensely important.
- As the fourth pillar of the State, it is an educator of the people.
- The ability of journalists to report freely on matters of public interest is a crucial indicator of democracy.
- A free press can inform citizens of their leaders' successes or failures, convey the people's needs and desires to government bodies, and provide a platform for the open exchange of information and ideas.

Issues and Challenges

- It is condemned stringently these days for their publications, news stuffs and allegations for favoring any particular individual or party for creating a sensation or for achieving their own TRP and Consumer Targets.
- The freedom of the press in India requires critical analysis, as it faces a myriad of challenges that can impact its effectiveness.
 - ♦ Journalists in India often face threats, intimidation, and violence, particularly when reporting on sensitive issues such as corruption, communal tensions, or government policies.
 - ♦ Additionally, there is a worryingly high level of media ownership concentration, leading to potential biases and self-censorship.
- The influence of political parties and powerful corporations on media organizations further raises questions about the independence and objectivity of reporting.
- Furthermore, the use of defamation laws and sedition charges against journalists can be seen as attempts to stifle dissent and investigative journalism.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- India has made significant progress in developing a free press, but some challenges underscore the need for continuous efforts to safeguard and strengthen the freedom of the press, ensuring that it can operate without fear or favor, and serve as a robust watchdog in a democratic society.
- The government must introduce laws and regulations that limit control of multiple news organisations by a single business or political entity, thereby encouraging an independent and robust press in the country.

Source:TH

NEWS IN SHORT

START PROGRAMME

Context

- **The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is conducting the **Space science and Technology Awareness Training (START) 2024 programme**.

About

- **Objective:** To attract the youngsters to the fields of space science and technology.
- **Feature:** The training modules will comprise **introductory level topics** on various verticals of space science and technology.
 - ♦ There will be **sessions on Indian space exploration programmes and research opportunities**.
- **Eligibility:** Post-graduate students and final year undergraduate students of physical sciences and technology studying in educational institutes, universities and colleges within India are eligible to be considered for the training.

Source: TH

KRISHI INTEGRATED COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTRE (ICCC)

Context:

- Recently, the Union Agriculture Minister inaugurated a **Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC)** at Krishi Bhavan in New Delhi.

About the ICCC:

- It is a significant technological advancement in the field of agriculture in India involving multiple IT applications and platforms.
 - ♦ It is designed to help in making informed decisions.
- It uses **state-of-the-art technologies** such as **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **Remote Sensing**, and **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** to collect and process large amounts of granular data — on temperatures, rainfall, wind speed, crop yields and production estimations — and **presents it in graphical format**.

Objective of the ICCC:

- It aims to enable comprehensive monitoring of the farm sector by making available at one place geospatial information received from multiple sources, including:
 - ♦ Remote sensing;
 - ♦ Plot-level data received through soil survey;
 - ♦ Weather data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD);
 - ♦ Sowing data from Digital Crop Survey;
 - ♦ Farmer and farm related data from **Krishi Mapper** (an application for geo-fencing and geo-tagging of land);
 - ♦ Market intelligence information from the **Unified Portal for Agricultural Statistics (UPAg)**; and
 - ♦ Yield estimation data from the General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

Significances:

- There is **visual information** on crop yields, production, drought situation, cropping patterns (geographic region-wise and year-wise) in map, timeline, and drill-down views.
- The relevant trends (periodic and non-periodic), outliers, and **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**, and receive insights, alerts, and feedback on agriculture schemes, programmes, projects, and initiatives.

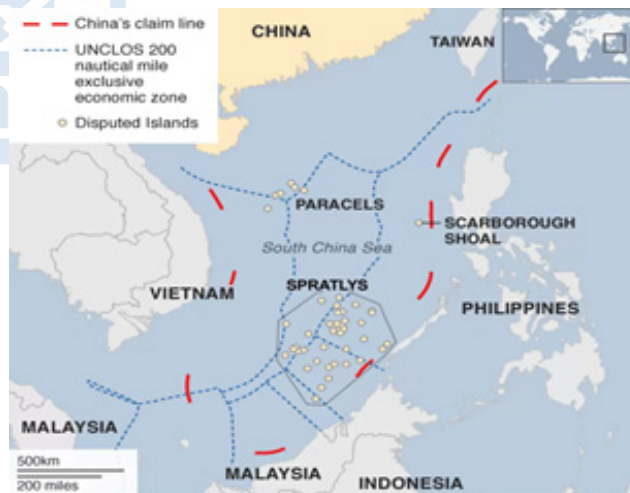
Source: IE

INDIA SUPPORTED PHILIPPINES ON SCS**Context:**

- Recently, India's External Affairs Minister firmly supported the Philippines in upholding its national sovereignty during his visit to Manila.

About:

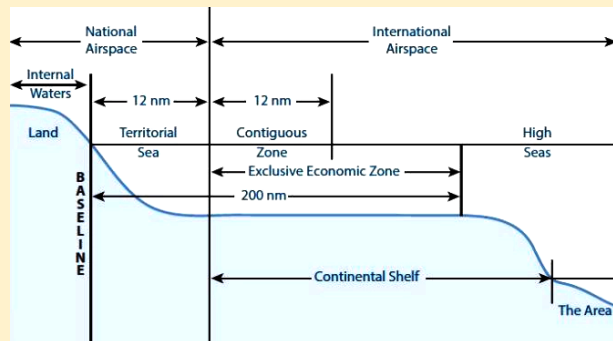
- Historically, Indian influences reached the Philippines through the **Srivijaya and Majapahit empires**, contributing to the early Philippine **culture, religion, and language**.
 - ♦ The presence of numerous words with Sanskrit roots in **Tagalog (the local language)** and objects such as the **Laguna Copper Plate inscription**, the oldest artefact discovered in the Philippines derived from Pallava script; the golden statue of **Agusan Tara**; and the localised version of **Indian epic Ramayana (Maharadia Lawana)** testify to the historical links between the two countries.
- The bilateral relations between India and the Philippines have diversified into **political-security, trade and industry, and people-to-people realms**.
- The two countries have agreed to expand their ties in sectors like **civil aviation, fintech, education, defence, and security**.
- **Common Interest in the Indo-Pacific:** India and the Philippines share a common interest in the **Indo-Pacific**, envisioning it as **free, open, and inclusive**.

Philippine and South China Sea:

- The **South China Sea** dispute is a long-standing territorial conflict involving several countries, including the Philippines and China.
- China claims sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea, including the **disputed Second Thomas Shoal**, based on historical records dating back nearly 4,000 years.
 - ♦ However, the **Philippines**, along with other countries such as **Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Brunei**, disputed China's claims, and accused China of encroaching upon its territorial waters in the South China Sea.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- It is also known as the '**Law of the Sea Treaty**' that was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over ocean areas.



- **India** has been a signatory to the UNCLOS since 1982.
- **Institutions** attached to UNCLOS:
 - ♦ International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea;
 - ♦ International Seabed Authority;
 - ♦ Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf;

Source: TH

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA WILL 'DELIST' SOME 'LOST' MONUMENTS

In News

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has decided to delist 18 "**centrally protected monuments**" because it has assessed that they do not have national importance.

Meaning of the "delisting" of monuments

- The ASI, which works under the Union Ministry of Culture, is responsible for protecting and maintaining certain specific monuments and archaeological sites that have been declared to be of national importance under the relevant provisions of **The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 and The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act)**.
- Delisting of a monument effectively means it will no longer be conserved, protected, and maintained by the ASI.

- ♦ Section 35 of the AMASR Act says that "If the Central Government is of opinion that any ancient and historical monument or archaeological site and remains declared to be of national importance...has ceased to be of national importance, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare that the ancient and historical monument or archaeological site and remains, as the case may be, has ceased to be of national importance for the purposes of [the AMASR] Act.
- Under the AMASR Act, any kind of construction-related activity is not allowed around a protected site.
 - ♦ Once the monument is delisted, activities related to construction and urbanisation in the area can be carried out in a regular manner.
- ASI currently has 3,693 monuments under its purview, which will fall to 3,675 once the current delisting exercise is completed in the next few weeks.

Do you Know?

- The **AMASR Act protects** monuments and sites that are more than 100 years old, including temples, cemeteries, inscriptions, tombs, forts, palaces, step-wells, rock-cut caves, and even objects like cannons and mile pillars ("kos minars") that may be of historical significance.
- These sites are scattered across the length and breadth of the country and, over the decades, some, especially the smaller or lesser known ones, have been lost to activities such as urbanisation, encroachments, the construction of dams and reservoirs, or sheer neglect, which has resulted in their falling apart.
- In some cases, there is no surviving public memory of these monuments, making it difficult to ascertain their physical location.
- **Under the AMASR Act**, the ASI should regularly inspect protected monuments to assess their condition, and to conserve and preserve them. In cases of encroachment, the ASI can file a police complaint, issue a show-cause notice for the removal of the encroachment, and communicate to the local administration the need for demolition of encroachments.

Source:IE

