

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO UKRAINE

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi **paid a State Visit to Ukraine**.

About

- The "landmark" visit is the **first by an Indian Prime Minister** since Ukraine became independent in 1991.
- Both Leaders expressed mutual interest in working towards elevating bilateral relations from a **comprehensive partnership to a strategic partnership** in the future.
- The visit saw the **signing of four agreements**.
 - ♦ The four agreements include humanitarian assistance by India for high-capacity development projects, cooperation in agriculture and food industry, cultural cooperation and an agreement on drug quality and regulation.
- The fact that the PM visited Russia on July 8-9 to meet the Russian President and followed it up with a visit to Ukraine puts him in a **unique position of developing direct contact between the leaders**.

India's Position on Russia-Ukraine War

- India chose to distance itself from the **US-led Western bloc's position** of imposing sanctions on Russia, but it also expressed "heartbreaking" concern at the killing of innocent children.
- India has conveyed to Russia that **"this is not the era of war"**.
 - ♦ This signalled that India doesn't turn a blind eye to Russian actions and that didn't go unnoticed by the Western bloc.
- India firmly believes **Russia and Ukraine need to talk to each other**, and not talk at each other — to put an end to the war.

Significance of the Visit

- **Historical Importance:** This visit marks the first time an Indian Prime Minister has visited Ukraine post its independence, signalling a clear intent to strengthen diplomatic ties and enhance cooperation between the two countries.
- **Diplomatic Balancing Act:** Amidst tensions between Russia and the West, India is positioning itself as a key player capable of engaging with both sides, thereby enhancing its diplomatic leverage.

- **Influence on the Global South:** Ukraine hopes that India's willingness to hear Ukraine's case and contribute to the peace efforts will help turn the political tide in the Global South that has stood apart from the war, despite its massive economic consequences.
- **Diplomatic space:** PM's visit to Ukraine is a signal that India will no longer be a passive bystander in a conflict that is reshaping the world.
 - ♦ It underlines India's determination to actively shape the major European and global war of the times.
- **Navigating Complex Geopolitics:** The visit demonstrates India's ability to navigate complex geopolitical waters, balancing its relationships with Russia, Ukraine, and Western nations.

Overview of India-Ukraine Relations

- The Government of India recognized the Republic of Ukraine as a sovereign country in 1991 and **established diplomatic relations in 1992**.
- **Commerce and Trade Relations:** Bilateral trade between the two countries has grown significantly in the last 25 years, reaching US \$ 3.386 billion in 2021-22.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** Taking into account the humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, India decided to extend humanitarian Assistance to Ukraine and neighbouring countries.
- **Support in International Forums:** India has generally supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in international forums. Ukraine has appreciated India's balanced approach in global politics.

Challenges and Tensions

- **Concerns Over Recent Moscow Visit:** Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Russia has drawn criticism from Ukraine.
 - ♦ This may continue to cast a shadow over the current visit, raising questions about India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its ability to maintain impartiality.
- **Neutrality vs. Explicit Support:** While India has reiterated its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, its stance of neutrality and reluctance to explicitly condemn Russia's actions remains a contentious issue.
 - ♦ This ambiguity may affect India's credibility and its ability to influence the international community on matters of sovereignty and aggression.

Conclusion

- PM Modi's visits to Ukraine **reflect India's strategic balancing act** in a complex geopolitical landscape.
- By engaging with both countries, **India aims to strengthen its bilateral relations** while maintaining its independent stance on the Ukraine-Russia conflict.
- The outcomes of these visits will likely shape India's diplomatic trajectory in the region and further its role as a key player in global peace and stability efforts.

Source: TH

NEED TO PROHIBIT USE OF PESTICIDES TO ENSURE FOOD SAFETY

Context

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has urged states to establish an inter-ministerial committee to focus on reducing pesticide use and developing strategies to regulate pesticide at the farmer level.

Benefits of Pesticides

- **Increased Crop Yields:** By controlling pests that damage crops, pesticides help farmers achieve higher yields and more reliable harvests.
- **Economic Efficiency:** Pesticides reduce crop losses, which in turn lowers food prices and increases the profitability of farming.
- **Disease Prevention:** Some pesticides control vectors like mosquitoes, which are responsible for spreading diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.
- **Weed Control:** Herbicides, a type of pesticide, effectively manage weed populations that compete with crops for nutrients and water.

Issues

- **Ecological Impact:** Pesticides can harm non-target species, including beneficial insects like bees, butterflies, and predatory insects that help control pest populations naturally.
- **Soil Health:** Prolonged use of pesticides can degrade soil health by killing microorganisms essential for soil fertility.
- **Water Contamination:** Pesticides can leach into groundwater or run off into surface water bodies, causing contamination.

- **Human Health Risks:** Pesticides, when used excessively or inappropriately, can **leave harmful residues** in food products, **posing significant health risks** to consumers.
 - ♦ These risks include **acute poisoning, endocrine disruption**, and long-term effects such as cancer and neurological disorders

Governments Steps

- **Food Safety on Wheels:** The FSSAI's emphasis on regulating pesticide use aligns with global standards to minimize these risks and promote public health.
 - ♦ The FSSAI has highlighted the need to identify key locations within states where mobile labs, known as "**Food Safety on Wheels**," can be deployed.
 - ♦ These mobile labs will play a crucial role in raising consumer awareness and disseminating vital information about food safety practices.
- **Maximum Residue limit (MRLs) of pesticides** : MRLs of pesticides are **fixed differently for different food commodities** based on their risk assessments.
 - ♦ **Insecticide Act, 1968** : Pesticides are regulated by the Ministry of Agriculture through the Central Insecticide Board and Registration Committee (CIB & RC) constituted under the **Insecticide Act, 1968**.
 - ♦ The CIB & RC regulate the manufacturing, import, transport, storage of pesticides and accordingly the pesticides are registered/banned/restricted by CIB & RC.
- The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) increased the maximum residue limit (MRL) of pesticides in herbs and spices from **0.01 milligrammes per kilogramme (mg / kg) to 0.1 mg / kg**.
 - ♦ MRLs fixed by CODEX for spices and culinary herbs range from 0.1 to 80 mg/kg.
- FSSAI aligns with the updated standards of MRLs set by **Codex Alimentarius Commission** (an International Food Safety and Quality Standard setting body created by WHO and FAO of UN) and the European Union.
- **Anupam Verma Committee:** It was constituted by the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare to review **66 pesticides which are banned/restricted** in other countries but continued to be registered for use in India.
- **Organic farming:** Organic farming avoids the use of pesticides which results in food products

that are free from harmful chemical residues with higher levels of essential nutrients.

- ♦ The government is promoting use of **biopesticides**, which are generally safer than chemical pesticides.
- FSSAI has also asked State Food Safety Commissioners to undertake an **awareness campaign on pesticides/insecticides residues** in fruits and vegetables.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Pesticides remain a vital tool in modern agriculture, contributing to food security and economic stability.
- However, their use must be carefully managed to balance agricultural productivity with environmental sustainability and human health.

Source: AIR

INDIA, US SIGNED TWO PACTS TO DEEPEN DEFENCE COOPERATION

Context

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reached Washington DC on a four-day official visit.

About

- India and US signed two key pacts — a **non-binding Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA)** and a **Memorandum of Agreement regarding Assignment of Liaison Officers**.

Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA)

- The SOSA will **mandate the US and India** to provide **reciprocal priority support** for goods and services that **promote national defence**.
- The arrangement will enable both countries to **acquire the industrial resources** they need from one another to **resolve unanticipated supply chain disruptions** to meet national security needs.
- **India is the 18th SOSA partner of the US** after Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.
- The two sides also signed a **memorandum of agreement** regarding the assignment of liaison officers to deepen defence cooperation.
 - ♦ This agreement seeks to **enhance cooperation, understanding,**

interoperability, and sharing of information on matters of mutual interest.

Overview of India and US Bilateral Relations

- Since India's independence, ties with the United States have weathered the **Cold War-era distrust and estrangement over India's nuclear program**.
 - ♦ Relations have **warmed in recent years** and cooperation has strengthened across a range of economic and political areas.
- **Bilateral Trade:** The bilateral trade between the two countries has **risen by 72 percent** between 2017-18 and 2022-23.
 - ♦ The US accounted for **18 percent of the gross FDI inflows into India** during 2021-22, ranking second behind Singapore.
- **Defense and Security:** India and the US have signed a **troika of "foundational pacts"** for deep military cooperation, beginning **with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** in 2016, followed by the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** after the first 2+2 dialogue in 2018, and then the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** in 2020.
 - ♦ In 2016, the United States elevated India to a **major defense partner**, a status no other country holds.
 - **Space: Artemis Accords** signed by India established a common vision for the future of space exploration for the benefit of all humankind.
 - ♦ The United States and India cooperate through the bilateral Civil Space Joint Working Group.
 - **Multilateral Cooperation:** India and the United States cooperate closely in multilateral organizations and fora, including the United Nations, G20, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-related fora, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.
 - ♦ Together with Australia and Japan, the United States and India convene as the Quad, a diplomatic network, to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.
 - **Nuclear Cooperation: Civil Nuclear Deal was signed in 2005**, under the agreement, India agrees to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and place all its civil resources under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.
 - ♦ In exchange, the United States agrees to work toward full civil nuclear cooperation with India.

Challenges

- **India's preference to its strategic autonomy:** While its embrace with the U.S. is getting stronger, deeper and more comprehensive, India is also cognisant of the need to maintain its strategic autonomy.
- **Conflicting positions:** India's muted criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 expectedly led to some frustration in the West, raising questions over India's credibility as a security partner.
- **Defence Relations with Russia:** The United States has expressed particular concern regarding new streams of arms like the S-400 air defense system, because they fuel Russian power, diminish prospects for interoperability of and secure communications between U.S. and Indian forces, and preclude sharing of existing sensitive weapons technologies.

Conclusion

- The **evolving relationship** between India and the United States holds significant importance in shaping the global order of the 21st century.
- To fully unlock the potential of this partnership, both governments must focus on **reducing bilateral and multilateral bottlenecks** and charting a course for a comprehensive and strategic global alliance.
- The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries is of significance in the context of an increasingly aggressive China.

Source: IE

CONTRIBUTION OF SPACE SECTOR TO INDIA'S GDP

Context

- India's space sector has directly contributed about \$24 billion (20,000 crore) to India's Gross Domestic Product over the last decade.

Space Sector of India

- India's space sector has benefitted from decades of consistent investment, with **\$13 billion** invested in the last decade.
 - ♦ It is the **8th largest space economy** (in terms of funding) in the world.
- In the recently announced Union Budget for **2024-25**, India's space sector received a significant

boost. The Central government allocated **₹13,042.75 crore** to support space-related initiatives.

Contribution of Space Sector to India's GDP

- The Sector has supported **96,000 jobs** in the public and private sector.
- For every dollar produced by the space sector, there was a **multiplier effect of \$2.54** to the Indian economy and India's space force was **2.5 times more productive** than the country's broader industrial workforce.
- The Indian space sector was diversifying and now had 700 companies including **200 start-ups** and had seen revenues **grow to \$6.3 billion in 2023**, which was about **1.5%** of the global space market.
- **Satellite communications** contributed **54% to the space economy**, followed by **navigation (26%)** and launches (11%).
 - ♦ The main industries supported by the space sector were **telecom (25%), information technology (10%)** and **administrative services (7%)**.

FDI in space sector

- Under the amended FDI policy, **100% FDI is allowed** in the space sector. The entry route for the various activities are as follows:
 - ♦ **Up to 74% under Automatic route:** Satellites- Manufacturing & Operation, Satellite Data Products and Ground Segment & User Segment.
 - ♦ **Up to 49% under Automatic route:** Launch Vehicles and associated systems or subsystems, Creation of Spaceports for launching and receiving Spacecraft.
 - ♦ **Up to 100% under Automatic route:** Manufacturing of components and systems/sub-systems for satellites, ground segment and user segment.

Potential of Space Sector

- **Export Potential and Investment:** Currently, India's export market share in space-related services stands at 2,400 crore (about \$0.3 billion). The goal is to boost this to 88,000 crore (\$11 billion).
- **Rise of Space Tourism:** In 2023, the space tourism market was valued at \$848.28 million.
 - ♦ It is expected to grow to **\$27,861.99 million by 2032**.

Challenges in India's Space Sector

- **Competition and Global Market Share:** To achieve this ambitious goal of 8% of the global market share, Indian space companies must compete effectively on the international stage.
- **Private Sector Participation:** While the private sector has shown interest, there's a need for more substantial investment and commitment.
- **Technology Development and Innovation:** Developing cutting-edge technologies, such as reusable launch vehicles, miniaturized satellites, and advanced propulsion systems, requires substantial investment and research.
- **Regulatory Framework and Licensing:** Navigating licensing processes, export controls, and compliance can be complex.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Developing and maintaining such infrastructure requires significant capital.

Major Reforms In Space Sector of India

- **Indian Space Policy 2023:** It laid down roles and responsibilities of organizations such as ISRO, New Space India Limited (NSIL) and private sector entities.
 - ♦ It aims to enhance the participation of research, academia, startups and industry.
- **Strategic Proposals by SIA:** The Space Industry Association – India (SIA-India) in its Pre-Budget Memorandum for the **FY 2024-25** has proposed a substantial increase in India's space budget.
 - ♦ It aims to support India's expanding space program, foster private sector involvement, drive technological advancements, and position the nation as a key player in the dynamic global space ecosystem.

Way Ahead

- India aims to commission the **Bharatiya Antariksha Station (BAS)** by **2035** and land

Indian astronauts on the Moon by 2040.

- Private entities are now actively involved in crucial aspects of research, manufacturing, and fabrication of rockets and satellites, fostering a vibrant ecosystem of innovation. It is expected to integrate Indian companies into global value chains.
- With this, companies will be able to set up their manufacturing facilities within the country duly encouraging 'Make In India (MII)' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives of the Government.

Source: TH

BANGLADESH UNREST HITS ENGINEERING SHIPMENTS TO INDIA

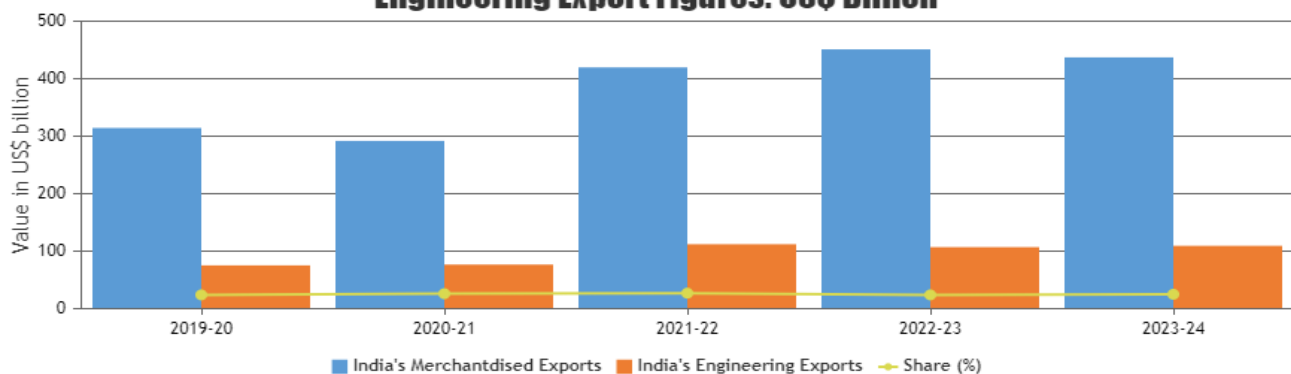
Context

- According to the **Engineering Export Promotion Council of India (EEPC)**, India's engineering goods exports to Bangladesh have faced a significant challenge due to the recent unrest in the neighbouring country.

India's Engineering Export performance

- Accounting for **3% of the total GDP**, the Indian engineering sector forms a crucial backbone of the Indian economy.
- The engineering sector is the **largest contributor to India's overall exports with a share of 24%** and also contributes **approximately 40% of the total manufacturing export**.
- Engineering exports in fiscal **2023-24 grew by 2.13%** and reached at US \$109.32 billion, which is contrary to the merchandise export trend which declined by 3.11%.
- It performed well given the weak global trade trends, dwindling demand, forex crisis and geopolitical conflicts.

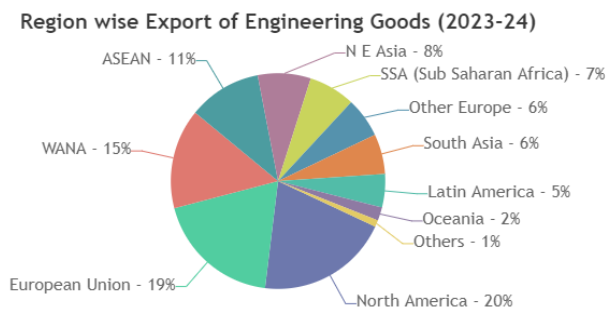
Engineering Export Figures: US\$ Billion



- Today, out of total engineering exports, the proportion of **consumer durables** decreased from **34% in 1956-57 to 9% in 2023-24**, while the proportion of **capital goods increased** considerably from **12% in 1956-57 to 60% in 2023-24**.

Export Destinations

- India exports engineering products to the following regions: ASEAN, North-East Asia, Africa, EU, North America, CIS, Latin America, South Asia, Africa, Middle East, West Asia, etc.



- India's engineering exports continued their year-on-year growth for the second consecutive month into **January 2024** with a **4.20% increase** that was attributed to **increased shipments of Iron & Steel, Aircrafts, spacecraft and parts, Copper and copper products, and Electric machinery**.
 - ♦ Additionally, heightened demand from South Asia, the European Union, and North America contributed to this growth.

Concerns after recent turmoil in Bangladesh

- **Export Decline:** In the first four months of the year, India's engineering goods exports to **Bangladesh declined by 9%**.
 - ♦ It has raised concerns for an industry that constitutes a quarter of India's merchandise exports.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** The ongoing unrest in Bangladesh disrupted supply chains, affecting the smooth flow of goods between the two countries.
 - ♦ As a result, Indian exporters faced difficulties in shipping engineering products to their Bangladeshi counterparts.
- **Revenue Losses and Uncertainty:** The situation has raised the spectre of revenue losses for Indian exporters. With engineering goods being a crucial part of India's export portfolio, any disruption can have far-reaching consequences.

- **Specific Export Categories:** While overall engineering goods exports from India had risen by 4.2% between April and July, there was a sharp 31.6% dip in exports of iron and steel.
 - ♦ Additionally, several of the sector's top export markets—including Italy, Korea, Nepal, and Bangladesh—showed reduced appetite for Indian goods during this period.
- **Offsetting Factors:** Despite the decline in exports to Bangladesh, there were positive trends elsewhere. Exports to the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** saw an almost 44% spike, and shipments to **Saudi Arabia** increased by 33%.
 - ♦ These two countries **together imported \$4.4 billion** worth of Indian engineering goods, **second only to the \$6.1 billion** exported to the **United States**.
- **Global Impact:** The unrest in Bangladesh has not only affected Indian exporters but also caused substantial losses for exporters worldwide.
 - ♦ The violence and protests disrupted imports, creating challenges for businesses across borders.

Government Initiatives

- In **2019**, the government announced an investment of **Rs. 100 lakh crore (US\$ 1.5 trillion)** in infrastructure development over the **next five years**.
- In the **Interim Union Budget 2024-25**, the government greatly pushed the infrastructure sector by allocating **Rs. 11,11,111 crore (US\$ 133 billion)** to enhance the transport infrastructure.
- The government of India has implemented **various export promotion schemes**, such as the Zero Duty Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme, Towns of Export Excellence (TEE), Market Access Initiative (MAI), etc aiming at encouraging the exporter and to help increase the revenue from international markets.
- Schemes such as duty exemption, advance authorization, duty-free import, rebate on service tax, etc. have been implemented to ease raw material imports.
- India has taken several initiatives to support and enhance the competitiveness of the domestic engineering goods manufacturing firms such as the 'Make in India' initiative, PLI scheme for Automobile, and Auto components, PLI scheme for National Programme on Advanced chemistry cell (ACC) Battery Storage, FAME INDIA II scheme, Capital Goods Scheme, Industry 4.0.

Conclusion

- The recent turmoil in Bangladesh has had tangible effects on India's engineering exports, emphasising the importance of stable trade relations between the two nations. As the situation evolves, exporters will need to adapt and find ways to mitigate disruptions in supply chains.

Do you know?

- India became a **permanent Washington Accord member in June 2014**, and now part of **an exclusive group of 17 countries** that are **permanent signatories** of the **Washington Accord**, an elite international agreement on engineering studies and the mobility of engineers.

Source: TH

STATE OF THE CLIMATE IN 2023 REPORT IN CONTEXT OF DROUGHT

In News

The State of the Climate in 2023 report was released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Key Findings

- Extreme Drought:** July 2023 set a new record with 8% of global land area under extreme drought, surpassing the previous high of 6.2% from July 2022.
- Global Drought:** 29.7% of global land experienced moderate or worse drought, another record-breaking figure.
- Temperature:** 2023 was the warmest year on record, with global surface temperature 0.55-0.60°C above the 1991–2020 average
- Greenhouse Gases:** Carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide reached new record levels.
- Ocean Heat:** Global ocean heat content up to 2,000 meters depth set new records.
- Sea Level:** Global mean sea level reached 4 inches (10 cm) above the 1993 average, a record high for the 12th consecutive year.
- Cyclones:** Tropical cyclone activity was below average with 82 named storms, but the accumulated cyclone energy was above average, with over seven reaching Category 5.

Regional Impact:

- Mexico had its driest and hottest year since 1950. South America, West Asia, and Europe

experienced severe drought

- Wildfires:** Canada had its worst wildfire season on record, burning 15 million hectares; Greece also saw record wildfires, burning more than four times its long-term average.
- Australia:** Experienced its driest three-month period on record, with extensive bushfires in the Northern Territory.
- Arctic:** Fourth-warmest year on record; thawing permafrost and fifth-smallest seasonal sea ice extent observed.
- Antarctica:** Record lows in sea ice extent and area were seen in eight months, with February 21, 2023, reaching all-time record low

Source : DTE

NEWS IN SHORT

MARSYANGDI RIVER

Context

- Recently, an Indian tourist bus, carrying around 40 passengers, veered off the highway and plunged into the fast-flowing Marsyangdi River in Nepal's Tanahun district resulting in the several loss of lives, and injuries.

About the Marshyangdi River

- It originates at an altitude of 3,600 metres northwest of the **Annapurna massif** in Nepal, where the **Khangsar Khola and Jharsang Khola** mountain rivers meet.
- It flows eastward through Manang District, then southward through Lamjung District, and **eventually joins the Trishuli River near Mugling as a tributary.**
- It is **part of the Gandaki River system**, which is also known as **Narayani**.
- Its tributaries are Nagdi Khola, Dordi Khola, Chepe Khola, Chundi Khola, and Daraudi etc

Source: DD News

VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE AT HAMPI

Context

- The conservation of Hampi is crucial after the **Saalu Mantapa**, a pavilion at the Virupaksha temple in Hampi, collapsed in torrential rainfall earlier this year.

About the Virupaksha Temple of Hampi

- It is located in **Hampi, Karnataka, India.**



- It holds immense religious and cultural significance and is part of the **Group of Monuments at Hampi**, which has been designated as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site.**

Historical Significance

- It dates back to the **7th century CE.** Some historians suggest that it existed even before the Vijayanagara Empire established its capital in Hampi.
- During the **14th to 16th centuries**, under the **Vijayanagara rulers**, the temple underwent extensive expansion and flourished as a vital centre for religious and cultural activities.
 - ♦ The **Vijayanagara empire** was founded by **Harihara I of the Sangama dynasty**, it expanded from a strategic position on the **banks of the Tungabhadra river** to become one of the most powerful kingdoms of its time.

Architectural Marvels

- **The Vijayanagara Empire (1336 to 1646)**, known for its grand architecture, built **Dravidian-style temples** and palaces in Hampi, including the **Virupaksha Temple.**
- Notable features include towering **gopurams (gateways)**, **pillared halls**, and **shrines** dedicated to various deities.
- **The Vitthala Temple within the complex** stands out for its exquisite ornate structure, representing the **pinnacle of Vijayanagara temple architecture.**
 - ♦ It features a *grand bazaar street, a stepped tank, and beautifully carved mandapas.*

Religious Significance

- The temple is dedicated to **Lord Virupaksha, a form of Lord Shiva.**

- It is associated with the **local goddess Pampadevi**, linked to the Tungabhadra River.
- Worship at the Virupaksha Temple has persisted over centuries, even after the city's destruction in 1565.

Source: IE

PHILADELPHI(SALAHEDDIN) CORRIDOR

In News

A narrow stretch of land along the Gaza Strip's border with Egypt has emerged as the main stumbling block in negotiations.

About the Corridor

- It is a 14-km stretch along Gaza's border with Egypt, and is central to ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas.
- It was built by the Israeli military when Gaza was under its direct occupation between 1967 and 2005.
 - ♦ The U.S.-brokered 1979 agreement was the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab country
- **Israeli Prime Minister** Netanyahu insists on permanent Israeli control of the corridor to prevent Hamas from rearming.
- **Hamas demands a full Israeli withdrawal** from Gaza, including the corridor.
- A **2005 agreement between Israel** and Egypt established the corridor as a buffer zone to manage Gaza's movement and smuggling.
- After Israel's **2005 withdrawal**, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority managed the area, but Hamas took control in 2007.
- The corridor has been used for smuggling, including arms and goods, through numerous tunnels.
- Egypt has destroyed many tunnels and views Israeli control as a violation of agreements.

Source:Th

BOTSWANA DISCOVERED THE WORLD'S SECOND LARGEST DIAMOND

In News

The world's second-largest 2,492-carat diamond has been discovered in Botswana at a mine owned by Lucara Diamond, a Canadian firm.

- The largest diamond – 3,106-carat – was found in South Africa in 1905, also known as the Cullinan Diamond.

Botswana

- It is situated in the Southern African region.
- It is a land-locked country dominated in geographical terms by the **Kalahari Desert**.



- It is bordered by Zambia and Zimbabwe to the northeast, Namibia to the north and west, and South Africa to the south and southeast.
- Capital City:** Gaborone
- Botswana's climate is semi-arid though it is hot and dry for much of the year.



- Botswana's highest point is Tsodilo Hills
- Major Rivers :** Significant rivers include the **Limpopo, Okavango, and Shashe** with the Molopo River creating a geographical border between South Africa and Botswana.
- It is home of the world's largest elephant population

Source:TH

RAIL FORCE ONE: A SYMBOL OF IRON DIPLOMACY

Context

- India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi boarded 'Train Force One' from Poland to travel to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

About

- Foreign dignitaries visiting Kyiv have been taking the train ever since Ukraine's airspace was closed following the Russian invasion in February 2022.

Rail Force One

- Train Characteristics:** The train, operated by Ukrainian Railways (Ukrzaliznytsia), is painted blue and yellow and features luxury amenities such as wooden panels, cream and blue curtains, leather sofas, king-size beds, and wall-mounted flatscreen TVs.
- Journey Details:** The train travels approximately 700 km from Przemyl Główny station in Poland to Kyiv, taking around 10 hours.
- Historical Use:** The train was initially used for wealthy tourists visiting Crimea before Russia's annexation in 2014.
- Symbol of Diplomacy:** The train has become a symbol of "Iron Diplomacy," a term used by Ukraine's Strategic Industries Minister Alexander Kamyshin.
- Importance to Ukraine:** The train network is crucial for Ukraine, aiding in war efforts and transporting both aid and evacuees. It has also served as a morale booster and public relations asset during the conflict.

Source:IE

PM-WANI SCHEME

Context

- Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released a draft Telecommunication Tariff (70th Amendment) Order, 2024 on "Regulatory framework for PM-WANI scheme".

What is the PM-WANI scheme?

- Prime Minister's WiFi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI)** was launched by the Department of Telecommunication in **2020**.
- The scheme aims** to enhance the **proliferation of public WiFi hotspots** to create robust digital communications infrastructure in the country, especially in rural areas.

- The government aims to **increase employment for small and micro-entrepreneurs** and provide low-cost internet to the underserved urban poor and rural households.
- The scheme encourages local shops and establishments to provide Wi-Fi for last-mile internet delivery which does not require a license or charge a registration fee.

PM-WANI ecosystem

- **The PM-WANI ecosystem consists of four parts:** Public Data Office (PDO), Public Data Office Aggregator (PDOA), App Provider, and Central Registry.
 - ♦ **PDO** establishes the Wi-Fi Hotspots and provides internet access to users.
 - ♦ **PDOA** provides authorisation and accounting services to PDOs.
 - ♦ **The app provider** displays the available hotspots in the phone's proximity.
 - ♦ **The central registry** overseen by the Centre for Development of Telematics maintains details of App Providers, PDOs, and PDOAs.

What are the concerns?

- **The National Digital Communications Policy, 2018** under 'Connect India' mission had set the goal to enable deployment of 10 million public Wi-Fi hotspots by 2022 for creating a robust digital communication infrastructure.
- Further, the **Bharat 6G Vision** also sets the goal of 10 million public Wi-Fi hotspots by 2022 and 50 million by 2030 for Digital India 2030 mobile and broadband policy objectives.
- However, PM-Wani hotspot numbers presently are much below the targeted numbers, as envisaged in NDCP, 2018 document and in Bharat 6G vision document.

Source: PIB

DEEN DAYAL SPARSH YOJANA

Context

- The Department of Posts has launched a philately scholarship scheme, Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana, to promote and bring philately into the mainstream of the education system.

Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana

- The scheme proposed to **grant a scholarship of ₹ 6,000/ - per annum** to those meritorious

students whose academic records are good as well as who have adopted Philately as a hobby.

- Scholarships will be provided at all India levels and each Postal circle will provide a maximum of 40 scholarships to 10 students of class 6, 7, 8, and 9 each.

Eligibility

- The selection for scholarship will be done on the basis of performance in a **Philately written Quiz**.
- One should be a student of a recognized school in India. The concerned school should have a **Philately club** and the **candidate should be a member of the club**.
- In case the school does not have a Philately Club, the name of a student of that school who has his/her own **Philately Deposit account** can also be considered.
 - ♦ A Philately Deposit account can be opened in Post offices.
- The candidate must have **secured at least 60 percent marks** or equivalent grade/grade points in the last final examination.
 - ♦ There will be a relaxation of 5% for SC/ST candidates.

Source: PIB

PM-JANMAN MISSION

Context

- The Union government has launched a nationwide campaign to inform and deliver benefits to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) under the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyaan (PM-JANMAN).

PM-JANMAN

- Launched on **Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas** (15th November, 2023), from the Khunti District of Jharkhand, it aims to provide essential services like housing, clean water, sanitation, education, healthcare, and better road and telecom connectivity to PVTG families.
- The mission focuses on 11 critical interventions related to 9 key aligned Ministries/Departments, with budgetary outlay of Rs. 24,104 crores (Central Share: Rs.15,336 crore and State Share: Rs.8,768 crore) from FY 2023-24 to 2025-26, under the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST).

Do you know?

- India has a Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of 10.45 crore as per 2011 census, out of which 75 communities located in 18 States and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been categorized as PVTGs.
- Odisha has the largest population of PVTGs followed by Madhya Pradesh.

Source: PIB

SUBHADRA SCHEME**Context**

- Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Majhi announced **the implementation of the Subhadra scheme.**

About

- Under the scheme, ₹50,000 will be provided over five years to **one crore poor women aged between 21 and 60.**
- A total of **₹10,000 per annum** will be paid in **two instalments of ₹5,000** each on Rakhi Purnima Day and International Women's Day (March 8).
- Women who are receiving assistance of **₹1,500 or more per month**, or **₹18,000 or more per year** under any other government scheme, will be ineligible for inclusion under Subhadra.
- The money will be deposited directly into the beneficiary's Aadhaar-enabled single-holder bank account; A Subhadra Debit Card will also be issued to them.

Source: TH

PASMANDA MUSLIM**Context**

- **All India Pasmanda Muslim Mehaz (AIPMM)** and other Muslim groups has demanded inclusion of at least **12 Muslim castes among scheduled castes.**

About

- **Muslims in India** are broadly sorted in **three categories:** the Ashrafs (the 'noble' elite or the 'honourable ones'), the Ajlafas (backward Muslims), and the Arzals (Dalit Muslims).
- **'Pasmanda'**, a Persian word, means the **'ones left behind'**, and is used to describe depressed classes among the Muslims, while underlining their deliberate or conscious exclusion.
- Pasmanda has become an **umbrella identity** used by **backward, Dalit, and tribal Muslims.**
- The term **'Pasmanda Muslims'** was first used in **1998 by Ali Anwar Ansari** when he founded the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz.
- Pasmanda Muslims say that **despite their overwhelming numerical strength** within the community, they are **under-represented** in jobs, legislatures and government-run minority institutions, as well as community-run Muslim organisations.
- **The major Pasmanda demands include** conducting a caste census, restructuring of the existing reservation categories, and state support for artisans, craftspersons, and agricultural labourers.

Source: IE