

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## 15TH INDIA-UAE JOINT COMMISSION MEETING (JCM)

### Context

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan co-chaired the 15th India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting (JCM).

### About

- The MoU between the **Emirates Polar Mission Steering Committee, UAE and the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), India** was signed.
  - This agreement paves the way for cooperation in polar operations, research and capacity building.
- Following the inauguration of the **IIT-Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi**, both sides reviewed progress on establishing overseas campuses of IIM-Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in Dubai.
- Both sides also discussed new technological platforms such as the **Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC) and the Maitri Interface**, designed to enhance trade efficiency by enabling paperless transactions.

### UAE and India relations

- Political:** India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established diplomatic relations in 1972.
- Multilateral Cooperation:** India and the UAE are currently part of several plurilateral platforms such as **I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) and UFI (UAE-France-India) Trilateral**, etc.
  - UAE was also invited as a Guest Country to the G-20 Summit
- Economic & Commercial:** India UAE trade is **US\$ 84.84 billion** making UAE, India's third largest trading partner for the year 2021-22 after China and US.
  - UAE is the second largest export destination** of India (after the US) with an amount of nearly US\$ 31.61 billion for the year 2022-23.
  - The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** was signed in 2022 as a major step in deepening trade relations.
  - The Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** was signed in 2024 to protect and encourage bilateral investments by providing investor safeguards.

- Defence cooperation:** It is steered through a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) at the Ministry level, with the signing of **Agreement on Defence Cooperation in 2003**, which came into effect in 2004.
  - The Desert Cyclone exercise 2024**, marked a milestone in military cooperation.
- Space Cooperation:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the UAE Space Agency signed an MoU regarding cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes in 2016.
- Indian Community:** Indian expatriate community of approximately **3.89 million** is the largest ethnic community in UAE constituting roughly about 35 percent of the country's population.

### Way Ahead

- Both nations cooperate in the energy sector and are exploring **long-term supply agreements**, collaboration in **upstream and downstream projects** and mutual investments in strategic reserves.
- They are also focusing on ways to expand the **strategic partnership** in areas such as defence, emerging technologies, nuclear energy, polar research, critical minerals and renewable energy.

### Concluding remarks

- The India-UAE relationship holds significant potential for growth, driven by both nations' goals of economic diversification and sustainable development.
- By leveraging each other's strengths, particularly in emerging sectors like renewable energy, technology, and innovation, they can create a resilient partnership.

Source: FE

## LOK SABHA PASSES RAILWAYS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

### Context

- The Lok Sabha passed the Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

### Key Objectives of the Bill

- Simplification of Legal Framework:** Merges the Indian Railway Board Act, 1905, with the Railways Act, 1989.
- Statutory Backing to Railway Board:** It amends the Railways Act, 1989, to provide legal sanction to the Railway Board.

- ♦ The statutory powers seek to enhance the functioning and independence of the Railway Board.
- **Decentralisation of Powers:** Grants greater autonomy to railway zones to manage budgets, infrastructure, and recruitment independently.
- **Establishment of an Independent Regulator:** Introduces an autonomous body to regulate tariffs, ensure safety, and facilitate private sector participation.

### About Railway Sector

- India has one of the **world's largest rail networks** in terms of passenger traffic.
- India has the **4th largest railway system** in the world, behind only the **US, Russia and China**.
- The Indian Railways consists of a total track length of **126,366 km** with 7,335 stations.
  - ♦ **5100 km** of track length was achieved during **2023-24**.

### Challenges in Railway Sector

- **Aging Infrastructure:** Much of the railway infrastructure, including tracks, stations, and signaling systems, is outdated and prone to accidents.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Indian Railways suffers from high operational costs and declining freight revenues, leading to financial stress.
- **Safety Concerns:** Despite improvements, railway accidents due to human error, derailments, and collisions remain a major challenge.
- **Capacity Constraints:** Overcrowding and delays are frequent on high-density routes, impacting passenger satisfaction.
- **Lack of Private Participation:** Limited participation of private players restricts investment and technological advancements.

### Way Ahead

- **Focus on Modernisation:** Accelerate the adoption of technological upgrades, such as AI-enabled monitoring systems, high-speed trains, and automated signaling.
- **Financial Restructuring:** Address cross-subsidisation issues and diversify revenue streams through freight corridors, tourism trains, and commercialisation of assets.
- **Public-Private Partnership (PPP):** Develop a conducive policy framework to attract private investments in infrastructure development, rolling stock, and operations.

- **Capacity Expansion:** Enhance capacity on high-density routes and develop dedicated freight corridors to meet rising demands.

### Concluding remarks

- The Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is a landmark reform aimed at transforming the Indian Railways into a modern, efficient, and competitive transport system.
- By addressing challenges related to governance, safety, and private participation, the Bill aligns with the government's vision of achieving a sustainable and future-ready railway sector.

Source: TH

## ECOURTS MISSION MODE PROJECT

### In News

- The Minister of Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal, announced the ongoing implementation of the **eCourts Mission Mode Project**, aimed at advancing the **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure** within the Indian Judiciary.

### About eCourts Project

- **Conceptualized in :** 2005 by the eCommittee, Supreme Court of India.
- **Launched:** 2007 under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice.
- **Aim:** Enhance judicial productivity and efficiency.
  - ♦ Provide predictable and reliable access to justice.
  - ♦ Automate judicial processes and improve accountability for all stakeholders.
- **Implementing Agency:** High Courts of respective jurisdictions oversee the project's implementation.
- **Phases of the eCourts Project:**
  - ♦ **Phase I (2007-2015):** Basic computerization of courts.
    - Establishment of internet connectivity.
    - Implementation of Case Information Systems (CIS).
  - ♦ **Phase II (2015-2023):** ICT enablement of district and subordinate courts.
    - Introduction of video conferencing facilities.
    - Launch of citizen-centric services like e-payment gateways and access to certified online documents.

- ◆ **Phase III (2023-2027):** Development of digital and paperless courts.
  - Digitization of legacy records and pending cases.
  - Expansion of video conferencing to hospitals and jails.
  - Enhanced focus on cloud computing architecture for data management.

#### Potential Benefits

- **Efficiency:** Streamlining court processes, reducing delays, and improving case management.
- **Transparency:** Making court information easily accessible to the public, promoting transparency and accountability.
- **Accessibility:** Improving access to justice for all, especially those in remote areas or with limited mobility.
- **Reduced Costs:** Lowering costs associated with physical paperwork and travel.
- **Modernization:** Modernizing the Indian judiciary and bringing it in line with global best practices.

#### Challenges

- **Digital Literacy:** Ensuring adequate digital literacy among all stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, and court staff.
- **Data Security:** Protecting sensitive court data from cyber threats.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Addressing infrastructure challenges, especially in remote areas.

Source: AIR

## INTERNAL POLICY BARRIERS HURDLE TO LEVERAGING CHINA-PLUS-ONE OPPORTUNITY

#### Context

- The **16th Finance Commission** Chairman Arvind Panagariya said that India should remain open to investments from China as other developed countries, with the exception of a handful of sectors.

#### What is the China-Plus-One strategy?

- The China-Plus-One strategy refers to a business diversification approach where **companies move manufacturing and sourcing** operations outside China to reduce dependency and mitigate risks.
  - ◆ Countries like **India, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia** are prime contenders for this shift.

- It provides benefits like market diversification, technology transfer, and greater global supply chain participation.

#### Factors Responsible for India's Limited Success in China-Plus-One

- **Land Acquisition:** Complex and time-consuming land acquisition processes discourage multinational investments.
- **Labour Reforms:** Despite progress, rigid labour laws hinder manufacturing competitiveness and scalability.
- **Regulatory Bottlenecks:** Although the GST has simplified taxation, excessive compliance requirements and bureaucratic delays raise operational costs.
- **Limited Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):** India's cautious approach to FTAs has limited its participation in global value chains.
  - ◆ In contrast, countries such as **Vietnam** actively signed FTAs, offering smoother trade processes and competitive tariffs to global investors.

#### Policy recommendations

- **Free Trade Agreements:** India must expand its FTAs to reduce cross-border tariffs and facilitate smoother participation in global supply chains.
- **Embrace Chinese Investments:** The **Economic Survey 2023-24**, too, had made a strong case for seeking foreign direct investments (FDI) from China to boost local manufacturing and tap the export market.
- **Land and Labour Reforms:** Further streamlining policies will attract multinationals relocating from China.

#### Concluding remarks

- The **NITI Aayog report** highlighted that countries like Vietnam and Thailand have leveraged cheaper labour, simplified tax structures, and proactive trade agreements to attract global investments.
- Currently India stands at a critical juncture to seize China-Plus-One strategy. Proactive policy reforms will be key to realizing this potential.

Source: IE

## NOVEL GENE THERAPY TO PROVIDE SOLUTION FOR HAEMOPHILIA

#### In News

- Indian scientists have successfully tested **gene therapy to treat severe hemophilia A**, a rare

hereditary condition that leads to spontaneous and potentially fatal bleeding episodes.

### What is Hemophilia A?

- A hereditary disorder caused by the **absence or dysfunction of Factor VIII**, a protein critical for **blood clotting**.
- **Severe hemophilia A patients** have less than 1% of the clotting factor, leading to frequent, spontaneous bleeding episodes.
- India has the **world's second-largest hemophilia patient pool**, with an estimated 40,000–100,000 individuals affected.

### Traditional Treatment

- Requires frequent injections of Factor VIII or other substitutes, making it expensive and burdensome.
- **Estimated cost:** 2.54 crore (\$300,000) per patient over 10 years in India.

### Gene Therapy as a One-Time Solution

- A therapeutic gene is introduced into the body, enabling it to produce sufficient levels of Factor VIII to prevent bleeding.
- The CMC Vellore trial **used lentivirus vectors** to integrate the clotting factor gene into the patient's stem cells, avoiding the use of adenovirus vectors, which can trigger immune responses.
  - ♦ Lentivirus is a type of viral vector capable of transferring genetic material into host cells.

### Accessibility and Affordability

- Developing gene therapy in India opens up the possibility of local manufacturing, which could significantly reduce costs and make the treatment more accessible to patients in India and other developing countries.

#### Gene Therapy

- **Definition:** A medical technique that uses genes to treat, prevent, or cure diseases by:
  - ♦ Replacing faulty genes.
  - ♦ Deactivating harmful genes.
  - ♦ Introducing new genes to restore health.
- **Methods Used:**
  - ♦ **Plasmid DNA:** Circular DNA molecules engineered to carry therapeutic genes.
  - ♦ **Human Gene Editing:** Tools like CRISPR for precise gene modifications.
- **Types of Gene Therapy:**
  - ♦ **Germline Gene Therapy:** Targets germ cells (sperm or egg) to introduce functional genes. Changes are heritable.

- **Somatic Cell Gene Therapy:** Transfers therapeutic genes to somatic cells (non-germline cells). Changes are not passed to offspring.
- **Applications:**
  - ♦ **Inherited Disorders:** Sickle cell disease, cystic fibrosis.
  - ♦ **Acquired Disorders:** Cancer, leukemia.

Source: TH

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

### Context

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

### About

- The Bill amends the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
- **The DM Act establishes:**
  - ♦ National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA),
  - ♦ State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA),
  - ♦ and the District Disaster Management Authority.
- These authorities are responsible for disaster management at the national, state, and district level, respectively.

### Key Highlights of the Bill

- **Preparation of disaster management plans:** The Bill provides that NDMA and SDMA will prepare disaster management plans, which was earlier prepared by the National a State Executive Committee.
- **Functions of NDMA and SDMA: The Bill adds these functions:**
  - ♦ taking periodic stock of disaster risks, including emerging risks from extreme climate events,
  - ♦ providing technical assistance to authorities below them,
  - ♦ recommending guidelines for minimum standards of relief,
  - ♦ and preparing national and state disaster databases, respectively.
- The Bill also **empowers NDMA to make regulations** under the Act with prior approval of the central government.

- **Disaster Database:** The Bill mandates the creation of a comprehensive disaster database at both national and state levels.
- **Urban Disaster Management Authorities:** The Bill empowers the state government to constitute a separate Urban Disaster Management Authority for state capitals and cities with a municipal corporation.
- **Formation of State Disaster Response Force:** The Bill empowers the state government to constitute a State Disaster Response Force (SDRF). The state government will define the functions of SDRF and prescribe the terms of service for its members.
- **Statutory status to existing committees:** The Bill provides statutory status to existing bodies such as the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and the High Level Committee (HLC).
  - ♦ The NCMC will function as the nodal body for dealing with major disasters with serious or national ramifications.
  - ♦ The HLC will provide financial assistance to state governments during disasters.
- **Appointments to NDMA:** The Bill empowers NDMA to specify the number and category of officers and employees, with previous approval of the central government. NDMA may also appoint experts and consultants as necessary.

#### Opposition Concerns:

- Several opposition members argued that the amendments could centralize power and undermine the autonomy of state governments.
- Some members also called for increased focus on early warning systems, prevention measures, and financial support for disaster-affected areas.

#### Conclusion

- Despite the opposition's concerns, the Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha.
- It will now be sent to the Rajya Sabha for further consideration.

Source: TH

## NEWS IN SHORT

### COMMISSIONING OF NIRDESHAK

#### Context

- The Indian Navy is set to commission the latest survey ship, Nirdeshak, at Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam.

#### About

- **Nirdeshak** is the **second** ship of the **Survey Vessel (Large) Project** and is **built** at GRSE Kolkata.
- **Purpose:** It is designed to conduct hydrographic surveys, aid in navigation, and support maritime operations.
- **Design:** The **110-meter-long** vessel, with a displacement of approximately **3800 tons**, is powered by **two diesel engines** and is equipped with **state-of-the-art Hydrographic and Oceanographic Survey Equipment**.
  - ♦ The ship has an endurance of over **25 days** at sea and a top speed exceeding **18 knots**.

Source: PIB

### EMBO GLOBAL INVESTIGATOR NETWORK

#### Context

- Dr. Prem Kaushal and Dr. Rajender Motiani, from the regional center for Biotechnology, has been selected for the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) Global Investigator Network.

#### About

- **The EMBO Global Investigator Network** supports young group leaders in **Chile, India, Singapore and Taiwan**.
  - ♦ The group leaders in the early stages of setting up their independent laboratories.
- The new EMBO Global Investigators receive financial support for **four years**.

#### Regional Center for Biotechnology (RCB)

- **RCB is established by the Department of Biotechnology**, with regional and global partnerships synergizing with the programmes of UNESCO as a Category II Centre.
- It aims to provide world class education, training and conduct innovative research at the interface of multiple disciplines.
- **In 2016**, RCB was recognised as an **Institution of National Importance** by the Parliament of India.

Source: PIB

### RIGHTS FOR FISHERMEN OVER MARINE RESOURCES

#### Context

- All the coastal State/Union Territories have already enacted their Marine Fishing Regulation

Acts (MFRA) / Marine Fishing Regulations to **govern fishing activities within 12 nautical miles of territorial waters.**

#### About

- The coastal States/UTs through these MFRA have earmarked the zones reserved for fishing **only by the traditional fishermen using non-motorized and motorized fishing boats.**
- Mechanized fishing vessels are **not allowed to fish.**
- **Areas Reserved by States:**
  - ♦ Gujarat has reserved the area up to 9 nautical miles from the shore,
  - ♦ Goa has reserved the area up to 2.7 nautical miles;
  - ♦ Karnataka has reserved the area up to 3.23 nautical miles;
  - ♦ Tamil Nadu and Odisha have reserved the areas up to 5 nautical miles;
  - ♦ and Andhra Pradesh has reserved the area upto 4.3 nautical miles.

Source: PIB

## RAJMARG SAATHI

#### Context

- National Highways Authority of India has updated specifications for new Route Patrolling Vehicles (RPVs) named **'Rajmarg Saathi'**.

#### About

- The RPVs conduct inspection of National Highway **stretches to monitor and respond to emergency situations.**
- **Rajmarg Saathi:**
  - ♦ It has the Provision for dashboard camera equipped with **'AI video analytics'** to capture and identify cracks & potholes.
  - ♦ The data/ video footage shall be collected on weekly basis by NHA and shall be integrated with NHA One application for more efficient maintenance of roads.
- Equipped with the advanced communication and safety tools, these vehicles will be useful in **minimizing traffic disruptions, improving road safety and enhancing overall road user experience along the National Highways.**

#### National Highways Authority of India (NHA)

- It was constituted by an **Act of Parliament in 1988** under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.**

- NHA has been set up as a **Central Authority** to develop, maintain and manage the National Highways.
- The authority, however, became operational in **1995.**

Source: PIB

## DURGADI FORT

#### Context

- A Kalyan civil court ruled in favour of the Maharashtra government, rejecting the Muslim community's claim to the disputed site at Durgadi Fort.

#### About

- Durgadi Fort is a historical fort located in the **town of Durgadi, near Kalyan in the state of Maharashtra.**
- It is situated on the **banks of the Ulhas River.**
- The fort dates back to the **15th century** and was originally **built by the Adil Shahi Sultanate and later modified by the Marathas.**
- Over time, it came under the control of various rulers, **including the Mughals and the Marathas.**
- In the 18th century, the fort was an important part of the **Maratha defense system in the region.**
- The fort is known for its strategic location and its role in defending the region.

Source: IE

## FIRST ICE-FREE DAY IN THE ARCTIC: STUDY

#### Context

- The Arctic Ocean may see its first ice-free day — when its waters have less than one million square kilometres of sea ice — by 2030, or sooner than previously expected, according to a new study.

#### About the study

- The study, **'The first ice-free day in the Arctic Ocean could occur before 2030'**, was published in the journal **Nature Communications.**
- **Major Predictions:**
  - ♦ The **first ice-free day** in the Arctic would be witnessed **within seven to 20 years** even if humans drastically cut **greenhouse gas emissions** in the following years.
  - ♦ The ice-free period can last between 11 and 53 days. This means that the Arctic can also witness the **first ice-free month.**

### Significance of Ice in Arctic Ocean

- The ice plays a critical role in regulating **ocean and air temperatures**, supporting marine habitats, and driving ocean currents that distribute heat and nutrients worldwide.
- The sea ice reflects sunlight back into space, a process known as the **albedo effect**.
  - ♦ As the ice melts, it exposes darker waters, which absorb more solar radiation, further accelerating warming in the region.

#### Arctic Ocean

- It is the **smallest** of the world's **five ocean basins** (after the Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, and the Southern Ocean).
- It occupies the most northern region of Earth. The landmasses of Eurasia (Europe and Asia), North America, and Greenland surround the ocean.

Source: IE

## COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)

### Context

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) passed an order under the Competition Act, 2002 (Act) against the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) and its affiliate bodies.

### About

- The **TT Friendly Super League Association** has alleged that TTFI and its affiliates are using anti-competitive practices.
- The Commission found that the TTFI and its affiliates violated **the Act** by restricting table tennis tournaments and preventing players from participating through WhatsApp advisories, public notices, and anti-competitive bye-laws.

### Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- It is a **statutory body** established in 2009 by the Government of India under the **Competition Act, 2002**.
- The composition of the Commission consists of a **Chairperson** and not less than two and not more than six other members.

- It operates under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)** with the following objectives:
  - ♦ Eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition,
  - ♦ Promote and sustain competition,
  - ♦ Protect the interests of consumers
  - ♦ Ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India
  - ♦ Establish a robust competitive environment.

Source: PIB

## SPORTSWASHING

### Context

- Saudi Arabia, the sole bidder, has secured the hosting rights for the 2034 FIFA World Cup, but it has also sparked concerns over sportswashing.

### What is sportswashing?

- It is a term used to describe the practice of nations, individuals, groups, or the corporations using sports to improve their reputations that have been damaged by misconduct or controversy.
- It can be accomplished through hosting sporting events, purchasing or sponsoring sporting teams, or participating in a sport.
  - Examples of sportswashing includes:
    - ♦ **The 1936 Berlin Olympics:** Hitler used the Olympics to improve Germany's international image.
    - ♦ **The 1978 FIFA World Cup:** Argentina hosted and won the World Cup while its military junta threw dissidents out of planes.
    - ♦ The **2022 Winter Olympics** held in China and the **2022 FIFA World Cup** in Qatar.

### Do you know?

- **Greenwashing** refers to misleading the general public into believing that companies, sovereigns or civic administrators are doing more for the environment than they actually are.
- This may involve making a product or policy seem more environmentally friendly or less damaging than it is in reality.

Source: TH

