

Current Affairs Update (May 1-6)

National

Ayurveda practitioners Vs Allopathy doctors

The Supreme Court of India has set **aside a 2012 Gujarat High Court** order which held that **Ayurveda practitioners working** in government hospitals should be treated at par with allopathy doctors and entitled to equal pay.

SC contention:

- Both categories of doctors were **not performing equal work to be entitled to equal pay.**
- Allopathy doctors were required to **perform emergency duties and provide trauma care**, which could not be performed by Ayurveda doctors.
- **Complicated medical conditions and post-mortem/autopsy** cannot be carried out by Ayurveda doctors
- **Doctors with MBBS degrees attend to hundreds of patients** during outpatient days in general hospitals, which is not the case for Ayurveda practitioners.

Article 142

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that **it can directly grant divorce** to couples under **Article 142 (1)** of the Constitution, which allows it to do **“complete justice”** in any cause or matter. **Article 142 (1) provides discretionary power to the Supreme Court** as it states that the **SC in the exercise of its jurisdiction** may pass **such decree or make such order** as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it.

The court can waive the **mandatory six-month waiting period for divorce under The Hindu Marriage Act (HMA), 1955**, and allow the dissolution of the marriage on grounds of an **irretrievable breakdown** even if one of the parties is not willing.

Significance of the decision: The decision enables couples to bypass the time-consuming process of obtaining a decree of divorce through family courts, which have a large number of similar cases pending.

Article 142 has some **negative aspects such as ambiguity, promoting judicial overreach, and unaccountability**. The phrase **“complete justice”** is still unclear and judgments passed by the Supreme Court have created confusion.

Bail

The Supreme Court has ruled that an **accused person's fundamental right (under Article 21)** to receive default bail **cannot be violated** by probe agencies by filing supplementary charge sheets in cases where the investigation is yet to be completed. The violation of such a right directly attracts **consideration under Article 32** of the Constitution

Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

Ten personnel of the Chhattisgarh Police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) were reported killed in an IED attack by Maoists in the state's Dantewada district. **In the last five years (2018-22)**, 1,132 violent incidents, in which 168 security forces personnel and 335 civilians lost their lives, accounted for over a third of all Maoist-related violence.

Why does Chhattisgarh continue to remain troubled?

- The counter-insurgency measures **started late** in Chhattisgarh.
- By this time, the police of neighbouring states had pushed Maoists from their states to Chhattisgarh, making it a **concentrated zone** of Maoist influence.
- The special unit of the Chhattisgarh Police, the DRG, was **raised from the local tribal population and trained to fight Maoists** and has become active relatively recently.
- **The absence of roads and minimal presence of the administration** in the interiors of Bastar has **stymied the operations of security forces** and **ensured Maoists' influence** through a mix of fear and goodwill.

Zero Shadow Day

Zero Shadow Day is a phenomenon where the sun is exactly overhead and vertical objects appear to cast no shadow. It happens **twice a year for every point** on Earth between the **Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn**.

Cause: Earth's rotation axis is tilted at an angle of **roughly 23.5° to the axis** of revolution around the Sun

As the Earth revolves around the Sun, it also rotates on its axis. During the year, the **Sun's location moves from 23.5 degrees south** of the celestial equator to **23.5 degrees north** of the equator (Uttarayan), and then back again (Dakshinayan). All places whose **latitude equals the angle between the Sun's location and the equator** on that day experience Zero Shadow Day

Northern Lights in India

- The **Indian Institute of Astrophysics in Bengaluru** recently captured a rare occurrence of **aurora in Ladakh**, India, on camera. This is the **first time** that such an occurrence has been witnessed in Ladakh.

- Auroras, also known as polar lights, are a **natural phenomenon** that occurs in the high-latitude regions of the Earth's atmosphere, particularly in the Arctic and Antarctic regions.
- Auroras occur when **charged particles from the Sun collide** with gases in the Earth's atmosphere, producing a **display of light** in various colours, shapes, and patterns in the **high-latitude regions** of the Earth.

Smart Cities Mission

- The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry (MoHUA) has **extended the deadline for the Smart Cities Mission** from June 2023 to June 2024.
- It is an initiative of the MoHUA launched as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** on June 25, **2015**.
- To **promote cities** that provide core infrastructure, and a clean and sustainable environment, **100 cities** (to be developed as Smart Cities) have been selected through a two-stage competition (from January 2016 to June 2018).
- 66 of the cities are small (less than 1 million population) and are implementing two-thirds of the projects.

Shilabhatarika

Researchers at the **Pune-based Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in India** have decoded copper plates revealing that the celebrated Sanskrit poetess **Shilabhatarika** was a daughter of the "Satyashraya" **Chalukyan ruler Pulakeshin II**. Previously, it was thought that she was the wife of the **8th-century Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva**. The title of "**Satyashraya**" (**patron of truth**) was associated with Chalukyan Emperor, Pulakeshin II of Badami

Works of Shilabhatarika:

It adheres to the **Panchali style** that calls for a balance of words with its meaning. She inspired the Sanskrit **poet-critic Rajashekara** (who lived in the 9th-10th century CE) and was the court poet of the **Gurjara-Pratiharas** and noted **Marathi poetess, Shanta Shelke** drawn inspiration from **Shilabhatarika's verse** to compose one of her most iconic songs— *toch chandrama nabhat* (translated as 'it is the same moon in the sky').

Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA)

An Assam-based insurgent group – **Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA)** – signed a peace agreement with the State Government and the Centre.

Highlights:

- Completely **end the insurgency** in the region
- The government of Assam will establish the **Dimasa Welfare Council** to protect the social, cultural, and linguistic identity of the Dimasa people.

- A **commission** will be appointed under the **Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution** to examine the demand for the inclusion of additional villages contiguous to the **North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council** with the council.
- A **Special Development package of ₹500 crore each** will be provided by the Government of India and the Government of Assam over five years, to **rehabilitate the surrendered armed cadres of DNLA**

International

Veto Power

Veto power is a **special power given to the permanent members** of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Essentially, it gives these countries the **ability to reject or veto any action by the UNSC** that does not align with their national interests or foreign policy objectives.

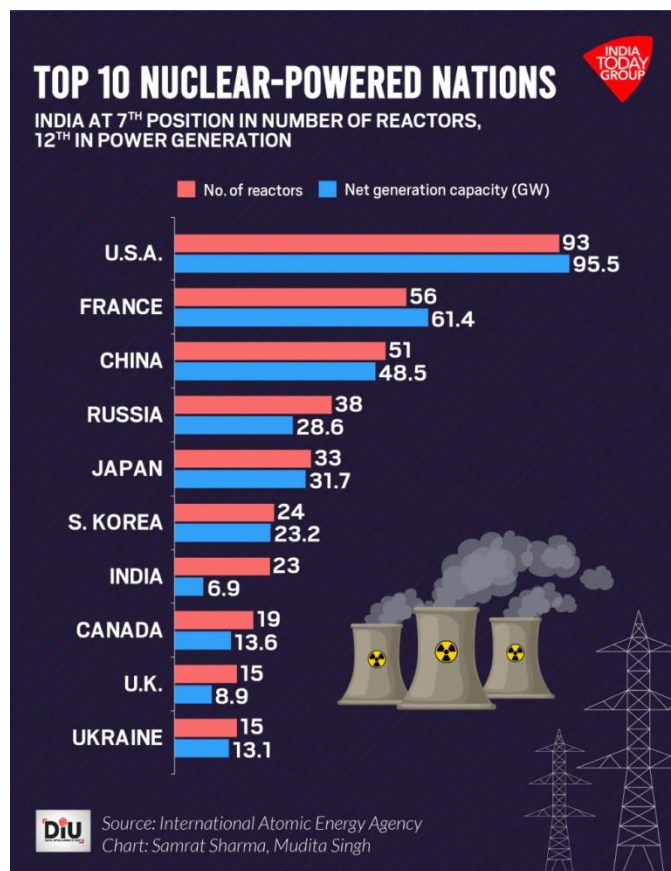
In the United Nations Security Council, decisions are made **with a majority of 9 votes of the 15 Council members' votes**. All decision is rejected if one of the five permanent members of the Security Council **makes use of its veto**

The Need for Veto Power:

- It prevents the UNSC **from making hasty or poorly thought-out decisions** that could have negative consequences.
- The UN veto has in some ways **saved the UN** as it gives **teeth to P5 nations**. The **League of Nations** failed because **it didn't have the power** to implement its initiatives
- Veto power **gives the P5 members a sense of security** in knowing that their interests will not be overridden by the other members.

Global outlook for nuclear power

- **In Europe and the U.S.**, nuclear power is seeing an **upsurge**, particularly after the Ukraine war.
- **The U.K.** is scaling up nuclear power to **decarbonise the electricity**
- **Germany** has shut down the last of its nuclear power plants, while **France** (the nuclear powerhouse of the world) is struggling to replace its ageing reactors.
- **China and South Korea** have committed to increasing the share of nuclear power in the country's energy mix (to 30% by 2030 in S. Korea).
- **Japan** is restarting the shutdown of reactors after the Fukushima (accident) because it was otherwise dependent either on expensive imported coal/natural gas (LNG).



BRICS

- 19 nations including **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain, and Iran** have expressed interest in joining the emerging-markets bloc of **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).
- **BRICS (founded: 2009; HQ: Shanghai)** is an acronym for the grouping of the **world's leading emerging economies**, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (included in 2010)
- The term "**BRIC**" was coined by the **British Economist Jim O'Neill in 2001** to describe the four emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- BRICS brings together five of the largest developing countries, representing **41% of the global population, 24% of the global GDP, and 16% of the global trade** (By 2028, BRICS is expected to make **up 35 per cent of the global economy**)
- The chairmanship of the forum is **rotated annually among** the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S. **South Africa** is the chair for 2023.

World Press Freedom Index 2023

India has slipped in the **World Press Freedom Index 2023** rankings, coming in at **161 out of 180 countries**, indicating a decline in press freedom. It is published every year since 2002 by **Reporters Without Borders** (an independent NGO based in Paris). **100 is the highest possible level of press freedom, and 0 is the worst**

Norway ranks first on the Index for the seventh year in a row, with **Ireland** ranking second, and **Denmark** third. The Indian government **does not agree with the country rankings** of the World Press Freedom Index due to its low sample size, little or no weightage to fundamentals of democracy, and a questionable methodology

Science-Tech & Environment

“Triple tests” for Altruistic surrogacy

The High Court of Karnataka has developed “triple tests” to help a couple facing legal hurdles have a child through altruistic surrogacy.

Surrogacy is a process in which a woman carries and gives birth to a child for another person or couple who are unable to have children on their own.

“Triple tests” to help a couple facing legal hurdles to have a surrogate child under provisions of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021:

- **Genetic test** for the husband to ensure the child is not born with any disorder
- **Physical test** for a couple to ascertain their capacity to manage the child
- **Economy tests** for couples to ensure that they can protect the future of the child.

World Wide Web

It is a **collection of websites or web pages** stored in web servers and connected to local computers through the internet.

India’s push towards **digital public infrastructure** and the deployment of the Internet of Things in **development projects** offers significant possibilities for deploying Web 3.

Challenges in the deployment of Web 3.0:

- Limited awareness and understanding of the technology
- Inadequate infrastructure
- A lack of technical expertise
- Absence of clear regulations and policies for Web 3.0 implementation

- Issues related to privacy and data security
- High cost of hardware and software needed for Web 3.0 deployment

Nuclear Liability

Talks between Indian and French officials over several issues, including liability, for the **construction of six nuclear power reactors in Maharashtra's Jaitapur**, have not resulted in any breakthrough.

Issues concerned:

- **India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA)**
- **The high cost of power per unit**
- **Opposition from activists and locals** for the fear of environmental damage and health hazards
- **Safety concerns:** Concerns over the **safety of nuclear power** have prompted Germany to switch off its last nuclear power reactor.

Nuclear liability refers to the legal responsibility for damages and compensation in case of a nuclear accident or incident. It involves determining who is responsible for the damages caused and who will pay for the compensation of those affected.

What is CLNDA?

It is an Indian law enacted in 2010 to provide a **civil liability regime for nuclear damage** in India. Key provisions of the Act:

- It provides for **strict and no-fault liability on the operator**, where it will be held liable for damage regardless of any fault on its part.
- Concept of **supplier of equipment's liability** over and above that of the operator's
- It specifies the **liability of nuclear operators**
- The compensation payable in the event of a nuclear incident

Shingrix

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Pharma has announced the launch of the **Shingrix vaccine in India for the prevention of shingles (herpes zoster)** and post-herpetic neuralgia in adults aged 50 years and above. It is the **world's first non-live, recombinant subunit vaccine** to be given intramuscularly in two doses.

Shingle is a **viral infection** that causes a painful rash. It can occur anywhere in your body. Shingles are caused by the **varicella-zoster virus** — the same virus that causes chickenpox

Wildlife translocation

- It is the **intentional movement of animals** for conservation purposes – a technique to mitigate the loss and depletion of endangered species.

- It requires **planning, a detailed analysis of the habitat, and consideration of the long-term prospects** for the survival of the released animals.
- The **ecological, economic, and societal consequences** of the release are also taken into account.

Advantages:

- An important **conservation tool for restoring threatened and endangered wildlife**
- To meet the goal of **re-establishing populations in formerly occupied areas**.
- **Population balancing** – shifting from high/overpopulation to low population regions.

Risks associated:

- Legal and policy issues
- Disease concerns
- **Stress to the animal:** Translocation, unlike dispersal, is not due to natural or deliberate behaviour.
- **Homing:** It refers to an animal's capacity to travel back to its original catch site after translocation.

Pesticides in Tea

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has put in place a **maximum residue limit (MRL) for five pesticides** used in tea plantations. These pesticides are **emamectin, benzoate, fenpyroximate, hexaconazole, propiconazole and quinalphos**.

Neurotoxins

11 people died due to a gas leak in the Giaspura area of Ludhiana, Punjab.

The reason behind the deaths: According to the air quality sensors used by NDRF, high levels of **Hydrogen Sulphide gas, a kind of neurotoxin**, have been detected.

Neurotoxins are **poisonous** substances which can directly affect the **nervous** system. They directly attack the **respiratory tract** of the body, thereby overpowering the oxygen concentration of the body and then the nervous system as well.

Neurotoxic gases: Methane, hydrogen sulphide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide are common neurotoxic gases. While methane and carbon monoxide are **odourless** gases, hydrogen sulphide has a **pungent** odour and in higher concentrations, it can be fatal for humans.

How to remove these gases? To remove gases such as hydrogen sulphide from wastewater, **chemical oxidation is done**, where oxidants such as hydrogen peroxide are added to the wastewater.

Fit for 55

The Fit for 55 packages is a set of proposals **aimed at revising and updating EU legislation and implementing new initiatives to align EU policies** with the climate goals agreed by the Council and the European Parliament.

The package is named after the EU's target of **reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030**.

Bluebugging

Bluebugging is a form of hacking that involves accessing a device through its discoverable Bluetooth connection. Once a device is bluebugged, a hacker can listen to calls, read and send messages, and steal and modify contacts. This type of attack is particularly dangerous because many smartphones have their Bluetooth settings on discovery mode, making it easy for hackers to access them when they are within 10 meters of the device.

Data Security: In a bluebugging attack, hackers can steal sensitive information, photos, and files. This stolen data can be used for blackmailing purposes. To avoid such incidents, it's crucial to secure data and ensure that the devices are free from vulnerabilities.

International Leopard Day 2023

- International Leopard Day is a new annual event that was officialized on May 3, 2023, with the launch of a dedicated portal, "**internationalleopardday.org**" by the Cape Leopard Trust (CLT).
- The leopard is the **smallest of the Big Cats** (Of genus Panthera namely the Tiger, Lion, Jaguar, Leopard, and Snow Leopard), and known for its ability to adapt in a variety of habitats.
- As per a recent report '**Status of leopards in India, 2018**' (by MoEFCC), there has been a "**60% increase in the population count of leopards** in India from 2014 estimates". It numbers nearly **13000 currently** with the highest population in Madhya Pradesh> Karnataka> Maharashtra

Economics

WTO: Outlawing India's tech tariffs

3 WTO **dispute settlement panels** have found India's tariffs (between 7.5 – 20%) on certain ICT products such as mobile phones inconsistent with India's WTO obligations.

In the complaints brought by the EU, Japan and Taiwan, the WTO panels concluded that India has **violated Article II of the GATT** because India's tariffs breach its Goods Schedule.

India's argument: The ITA (which it signed in 1997) contains India's legally binding tariff commitments on ICT products, hence, they are not legally binding.

Implications for India:

- Compliance would mean **dismantling the high protective tariff wall** that India has erected to **boost domestic manufacturing of ICT products**.
- In case of non-compliance, the EU can **unilaterally impose trade sanctions** against the losing country.
- Even if the EU does not impose trade sanctions, **it might use this ruling as a bargaining tool in the ongoing FTA negotiations with India**

Twenty Point Programme

The Twenty Point Programme (TPP) (initially launched in 1975, and restructured in 1982, 1986, and 2006) is a package of government programs, with the aim of improving the quality of life in rural areas. The program includes a **range of schemes related to poverty alleviation**, employment generation, education, health, housing, and environmental protection.

Monitoring: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) monitors the performance of the TPP based on reports received from state governments and central nodal ministries.

World Bank President

Indian-origin **Ajay Banga** has been selected as the new World Bank President. He will serve in this position for five years starting from June 2, succeeding David Malpass. Ajay Banga is a recipient of India's fourth-highest civilian award, Padma Shri.

Ethics & Society

Bluewashing vs Greenwashing

Bluewashing: A marketing tactic used by companies to deceive consumers into believing that they are working towards achieving sustainable use and conservation of food systems and water bodies.

Example: An oil and gas company claiming to be a leader in protecting the ocean, while continuing to engage in deep-sea oil drilling and other activities that harm marine ecosystems.

Greenwashing: A marketing tactic used by companies to deceive consumers into believing that their products or services are environmentally friendly or sustainable. Example: A clothing company claiming their clothes are eco-friendly, but still using unsustainable materials and manufacturing practices.

Steps taken to reduce nutritional deprivation among young children

- **Mission Poshan 2.0:** The flagship programme dedicated to maternal and child nutrition.
- **National Food Security Act 2013**
- **Zero Hunger Programme:** Began in 2017 to improve agriculture, health and nutrition.
- Eat Right India Campaign
- Food Fortification
- PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

Labour Day

- May 1 is widely known as Labour Day/International Worker's Day – a day to celebrate the contribution of workers worldwide.
- The origin of Labour Day dates back to the **19th century** – when a nationwide strike of **1886** for an **eight-hour workday** culminated in a violent movement in **Chicago, US**.
- **In 1889**, the International Socialist Conference declared May 1 would be an international holiday for labour/May Day/Labour Day/Workers Day.
- **In India**, the first Labour Day (initiated by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan) was celebrated on **May 1, 1923, in Madras**.

The primary objective of Labour Day:

- To acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the working class,
- **Create awareness about their rights**
- Protect them from exploitation.

Indian labour market – Major issues:

- **Surplus labour force:** Without the commensurate rise in job opportunities in the labour market.
- **Unskilled labour force:** Leading to a rise in indecent/poor quality jobs like manual scavenging, etc.
- Low absorption of skilled labour
- **Labour market imperfections:** Such as lack of adequate information regarding jobs, **numerous labour laws**, etc.
- **The workers in the unorganised sector:** Constitute about **93%** of the total workforce in the country → not covered under social security measures → most affected during COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Unemployment:** Causing problems like disguised unemployment, seasonal unemployment, open unemployment and educated unemployment.
- **Son of the soil doctrine:** For example, Haryana enacted a new law reserving 75% of private sector jobs with monthly salaries up to ₹30,000 for locals.

Internal Complaints Committee

The ICC is the **first port of call for any grievance** under the PoSH Act, and it needs to have a **minimum of four members** with at **least half of them women** and **one external member**, preferably from an **NGO or an association** that works for women's empowerment or a person familiar with issues related to sexual harassment, like a lawyer.

An investigation has revealed that as **many as 16 out of 30 national sports federations in India** don't comply with the **Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act**, which mandates an **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** to create a safe workplace environment for women.

Wayanad District Tops ODF Plus Ranking

Wayanad, a district in the southern Indian state of Kerala, has achieved a remarkable feat by becoming the first ODF Plus district in India. This is a significant milestone in the country's efforts towards maintaining cleanliness and sanitation under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission).

ODF stands for **Open Defecation Free**. The ODF programme is part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, which was launched on October 2, 2014, by the Indian government to achieve cleanliness and sanitation across the country.

Current Affairs Update (May 7-13)

National

Issues in Manipur

The central valley of Manipur (10% of the geographical area) is home to the **Meitei and Meitei Pangals** who constitute roughly **64% of the state's population**. The remaining **90% of the state's geographical area** comprises hills surrounding the valley, which are home to the recognized tribes, making up about **35% of the state's population**.

The **Meitei community (living in the valley) wants to be included** in the **state's Scheduled Tribes list**. The demand has been led by the Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) since 2012. They argue that being left out of the ST list has caused the community to be **victimized without any constitutional safeguards**.

A single judge of the **Manipur High Court** passed an order asking the government to consider the **demand of the Meitei community for ST status**. The order has been opposed by tribal groups in the state. Both the demand and the order, passed by a single judge of the High Court, have been strongly opposed by groups **representing the state's tribal communities such as Kukis and Naga (living in Hills)**

Opposition to the inclusion of the **Meiteis in the Scheduled Tribe (ST)** category by hill tribe in Manipur is due to their **dominant population and political representation** of Meitei (40 out of 60 Assembly constituencies of the state are in the valley), and fear of job loss. Additionally, the **Meitei language is already included in the Constitution**, and sections of the Meitei community are already classified as **Scheduled Castes or Other Backward Classes** with access to opportunities associated with that status.

Power to direct changes in STs list

CJI questioned an old Constitution Bench judgment – no court or State has the power to add/subtract/modify the Scheduled Tribes List – was not shown to the Manipur HC.

Background: Violent clashes followed after a Single Judge Bench of the Manipur HC directed that the State government shall consider the case for the inclusion of the Meitei/Meitei community (in Manipur) in the ST list, expeditiously.

Article 342 of the Indian Constitution:

- **Clause (1): The President** may, with respect to any State (after consultation with the Governor) or UT, by public notification, specify the tribes deemed to be ST in relation to that state or UT.

- **Clause (2): The Parliament** may by law include or exclude from the list of ST specified in the above notification.
- The above Article also provides for listing of STs State/UT wise and not on an all-India basis.

The Maharashtra versus Milind (2000) case: A notification issued under Article 342 (1), specifying STs, **can be amended only by law to be made by Parliament.** In other words, inclusion/exclusion from the list of STs issued under Article 342 (1) **can be made only by Parliament by law and by no other authority.**

How are cyclones named?

- They are named by the **regional specialised meteorological centres (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs).**
- There are **six** RSMCs in the world and **five**
- As an RSMC, the **IMD names the cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean**, including the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.
- The IMD is also mandated to issue advisories to **12 other countries in the region on the development of cyclones and storms.**

According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), a cyclonic/low-pressure area is developing in the Bay of Bengal and may intensify into a cyclonic storm. Cyclone **Mocha** (pronounced 'Mokha') – a name suggested by **Yemen** after the Red Sea port city, which is known to have introduced coffee to the world over 500 years ago.

Vaishakh Buddha Purnima

It is the most sacred day of the year for Buddhists all over the world as it marks the **three main events of Lord Buddha's life** –

- **Birth** (564 BC, Lumbini Province, Nepal),
- **Enlightenment** [Siddhartha became a Buddha ("enlightened one")], and
- **Mahaparinirvana** [Kushinagar (India) is said to be the place of death of Gautama Buddha].

Since 1999 it has also been recognised by the United Nations as the '**UN Day of Vesak**'.

Enforcement Directorate (ED)

The tenure for **directors** of CBI and ED is **two years**. However, in November 2021, the President promulgated two **ordinances** allowing the Centre to extend the tenures **from two years to up to five years**. So, now they can be given three annual extensions. The Supreme Court had previously **upheld this and allowed** the extension of ED's chief Sanjay Kumar Mishra, but said that such extension should be done in **rare and exceptional cases** and for a **short period**.

Now, the government **has again extended the tenure of Mr Mishra** citing a pending review by the Financial Action Task Force and that Mishra would not remain in service after his term comes to an end in November. This has been challenged in SC again.

Drug recall

A drug recall is the process of **removing a prescription or over-the-counter drug** from the market. A recall may occur if a medication is found to be defective, contaminated, or potentially harmful to the public. India **has not implemented a law to recall bad drugs** from the market since 1976, even though discussions have taken place on this topic several times over the years.

In India, drugs and cosmetics are regulated by:

- **Act: Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945:** It assigns various responsibilities to central and state regulators.

Agencies:

- **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI):** It is responsible for approving licenses for **specified categories of drugs**, setting standards for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India, and heads the department of CDSCO.
- **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO):** It prescribes standards for ensuring the safety, efficacy, and quality of drugs, cosmetics, diagnostics, and devices. It also regulates the **market authorization of new drugs** and **clinical trial standards**.
- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA):** It controls the pricing of pharmaceutical drugs in India

International

Soft power diplomacy

Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment. **Soft power diplomacy** refers to the use of **cultural, social, and economic** means to influence the attitudes and behaviours of other countries, rather than relying solely on military or economic coercion. The concept of soft power was coined **by Joseph Nye** in the 1990s. **Examples of soft power diplomacy** include cultural exchanges, educational programs, humanitarian aid, and public diplomacy campaigns.

New York Becomes the First US State to Ban Fossil Fuels in New Buildings

New York has taken a monumental step in the fight against climate change by becoming the first state in the United States to ban natural gas and other fossil fuels in most new buildings.

The legislation prohibits gas-fueled stoves, furnaces, and propane heating, while promoting the usage of environmentally friendly equipment, such as induction stoves and heat pumps, in the majority of new homes built in the state. Additionally, all-electric heating and cooking will be mandated for buildings under seven stories by 2026 and for taller buildings by 2029.

Washington Declaration

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol **visited the U.S. on April 25** to celebrate the **70th anniversary of U.S.-South Korea bilateral relations**. During the visit, the two countries signed the “**Washington Declaration**,” which focuses on nuclear deterrence strategy. The Washington Declaration is an **agreement signed between the United States and South Korea**, outlining a joint nuclear deterrence strategy.

The declaration specifies several measures that the two countries will take in cooperation towards deterrence, including:

- Deployment of an **American nuclear ballistic submarine** in the Korean peninsula
- Formation of a **nuclear consultative group** to formulate principles of joint response tactics
- Strengthening of **South Korea’s nuclear deterrence capabilities**

The declaration reaffirms that **South Korea would not make its own nuclear capabilities** and would instead focus on deterrence measures through an alliance-based approach.

COVID-19 is no more a public health emergency

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 was no longer a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). COVID-19 was announced as a ‘PHEIC’ by the WHO on **January 30, 2020**.

Lessons from COVID Pandemic that India must embrace and implement:

- **Invest in healthcare (HC) infrastructure.**
- **India needs National HC Services Regulatory Authority:** To check rampant black marketing of critical drugs, artificial shortage and discrepancies in the cost of the same.
- India needs more doctors, paramedics and hospitals.
- **Revamp Primary health centres with the PPP model.**
- Bring the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) under PMO to enhance proficiency in predicting future pandemics.
- **Better pay and training of ASHA workers:** They played a critical role in creating awareness in rural India – allaying fake apprehensions regarding vaccines.
- **Fight disinformation in mission mode.**
- **A strategic reserve of critical medicines.**

India-UAE CEPA

The India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has had a significant impact on bilateral trade between the two countries **since its implementation in May 2022**. It is expected to **increase the total value of bilateral trade in goods** to over USD 100 billion and trade in services to over **USD 15 billion within five years**.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) is **India's 3rd largest trading partner**, after the United States and China, with a bilateral trade turnover of **USD 68 billion** in 2021. The UAE is also the **7th largest investor in India**.

A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is a **bilateral or multilateral trade agreement** between countries aimed at **promoting economic cooperation and integration** by reducing barriers to trade and investment.

Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)

- India has officially begun the **operation of the Sittwe Port in Myanmar** by flagging off a vessel containing **1,000 metric tonnes of cement** from the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata.
- **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)** connects the eastern Indian seaport of **Kolkata with the Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State**, Myanmar by sea. In Myanmar, it will then link the **Sittwe seaport to Paletwa in Chin State via the Kaladan river** boat route, and then from Paletwa by road to Mizoram state in Northeast India.
- **Route:** Kolkata (India) – Sittwe (Myanmar) – Paletwa (Myanmar) – India-Myanmar border

Science-Tech & Environment

CORSIA

India will start participating in **the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA)** and the Long-Term Aspirational Goals (LTAG) in 2027.

CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) is a global scheme established by the ICAO to address the **growth in CO2 emissions from international aviation**.

Objective: To mitigate the growth of carbon emissions from international aviation by offsetting and reducing emissions. CORSIA aims to **achieve carbon-neutral growth** for international aviation from 2020 onward and reduce CO2 emissions from international aviation by **50% by 2050 compared to 2005 levels**.

Long-Term Aspirational Goals (LTAG): It is an initiative of the ICAO to achieve net-zero carbon emissions from international aviation by 2050. It does not attribute specific obligations or commitments in the form of emissions reduction goals to individual States but each state will contribute within its own national timeframe

The International Civil Aviation Organization (est. 1944; HQ: Montreal, Canada) is a **specialized agency of the United Nations** that coordinates the principles and techniques of international air navigation and fosters the planning and development of international air transport to ensure safe and orderly growth.

Petersberg Climate Dialogue

The Petersberg Dialogue on Climate Change was held in Berlin from May 2-3, 2023, and was hosted by **Germany and the United Arab Emirates**, which is hosting the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The conference brought together ministers from 40 countries to discuss the way forward towards COP28.

The goal of the **Acceleration Agenda** is to hasten countries' Net Zero targets by requiring the phasing out of coal in OECD nations by 2030 and by 2040 in all other countries, as well as reaching Net Zero electricity production and decarbonizing major industries.

2023 is the year for the Global Stocktake, which is a periodic review of global climate action that aims to assess whether current efforts will enable us to reach the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement. The report has been underway for the past two years and is set to be released in September of 2023.

Planetary boundaries

The **environmental thresholds** that establish a “**safe operating space for humanity**” are known as planetary boundaries. **The nine planetary boundaries are:**

- Biodiversity loss
- Land-use change
- Climate change
- Nitrogen and phosphorus (geochemical) cycles
- Freshwater use
- Ocean acidification
- Chemical pollution
- Atmospheric loading
- Ozone depletion

EU's carbon border tax

- The European Parliament – the legislative body of the 27-member EU, reached a political deal on the carbon border tax – **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**.

- CBAM was first introduced as a part of the **European Green Deal**, which serves as a guide for both tax and non-tax policy initiatives in the EU to achieve its ambitious target of **becoming climate neutral by 2050**.
- This was followed by a proposal for a regulation on CBAM in 2021 as part of the “**Fit for 55**” policy package, aiming to reduce GHG by at least 55% by 2030, from the levels of 1990.
- It plans to impose a **tariff/import duty on a set of carbon-intensive imports**, which will have to be paid by EU importers and companies who export such goods to EU countries.

Regulation of AI

- The regulation of artificial intelligence (AI) is a challenging issue because it is rooted in two problems: the pacing problem and the Collingridge dilemma.
- **The pacing problem:** The difficulty of predicting the long-term impacts of a technology when it is introduced quickly and widely.
- **The Collingridge dilemma:** The difficulty of controlling the development and use of a technology once it has been widely adopted.

Napier grass

Napier grass, also known as **elephant grass**, is a productive and **versatile forage grass native** to Africa and Southeast Asia. It is widely used as **feed for livestock and in bioenergy applications**. **Napier grass** is found in various parts of India, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.

Favourable properties for its use in bio-energy:

- Energy **output-to-input ratio of approximately 25:1**
- High **yield**
- Ability to withstand **drought conditions**
- **An excellent feedstock** for anaerobic digestion processes
- it can be harvested **5-6 times annually**
- **Short cycle:** Its first harvest occurs **four months after planting**.

FluHorse

- A new **Android malware named ‘FluHorse’** has been discovered that targets users in **Eastern Asia with fake carrier apps** that mimic legitimate versions, such as the Taiwanese toll collection app ‘ETC’ and the Vietnamese banking app ‘VPBank Neo’.
- The malicious apps are designed to extract sensitive information, including **user credentials and Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) codes**.
- Android malware is malicious software designed to target Android smartphones and tablets. Malware can come in various forms, such as trojan horses, viruses, and spyware, and can be distributed through various channels, such as malicious apps, phishing emails, and websites.

35th Indo-Thai CORPAT

The Andaman Sea hosted the 35th iteration of the India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (Indo-Thai CORPAT), which involved the participation of the Indian Navy and the Royal Thai Navy

Economics

RBI's report on currency and finance

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a report on currency and finance for the financial year (FY) 2022-23. The theme of the report is '**Towards a Greener Cleaner India**'.

Highlights:

- **Central bank digital currency can be more environment-friendly** compared to alternative cashless methods. Payments effected through CBDC would be instantaneous and final, and reduced reliance on clearing corporations and other settlement infrastructure could cut down energy consumption. Higher use of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDCs) can help lower carbon footprint
- **Public sector banks (PSBs) may be more vulnerable** than private sector banks (PVBs) in India on the basis of Climate stress tests (loss to the financial system due to climate-related risks)
- An additional annual investment of **about 2.5 per cent of GDP** by 2030 would be required to fill the infrastructure gap due to Climate change.
- India could lose anywhere around **3 to 10% of its GDP** annually by 2100 due to climate change.
- **Job loss:** 34 million job losses from heat stress associated with productivity decline by 2030.

Government steps to promote agricultural exports

- **Agriculture Export Policy (2018):** It aims to harness export potential of Indian agriculture to make India a global power in agriculture and raise farmers' income.
- **'District as Export Hub' Initiative** of the Department of Commerce would be utilised to achieve the objectives of Agriculture Export Policy.
- **Transport and Marketing Assistance for Specified Agriculture Products** – a Central Sector Scheme to mitigate the freight disadvantage for the export of agriculture products.
- Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (**TIES**)
- Market Access Initiatives (**MAI**) Scheme
- **The Export Promotion Schemes** of APEDA

Export profile:

- **Basmati exports** are mainly to the Persian Gulf countries, while **non-basmati** shipments are more diversified, spreading across –**Asia** (Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, UAE

and Iraq) and **Africa** (from Senegal, Ivory Coast and Benin to Somalia and Madagascar). **It's non-basmati that has made India the biggest rice exporter, ahead of Thailand.**

- **In sugar exports**, the country has emerged as the **world's No. 2 exporter after Brazil**. Indian mills have built markets for both **raw sugar** (among refineries in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Iraq)

Front-Running

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has banned five entities, including an employee of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), from the securities market for 'front-running'

Front-running is an **illegal practice in the stock market** where an individual or entity trades based on **advanced information** obtained from a broker or analyst before it is made available to their clients.

Why gold is used as a reserve in Central banks?

Unlike fiat currencies, which can be subject to **inflation or devaluation** due to various economic factors, the value of gold tends to be **relatively stable over time**, which makes it an attractive asset for central banks to hold as a reserve. Additionally, gold is **highly liquid**, which means it can easily be converted into cash or used to settle international transactions.

India's First Pod Taxi

The **Yamuna Authority** recently gave its nod to India's first pod taxi project. The Personalised Rapid Transit project, an advanced mode of transportation, will be automated and environment-friendly. The pod taxi project will be located between **Noida International Airport and the Film City**.

Pod taxis are automated, environment-friendly vehicles that run on separate tracks to avoid road traffic. These vehicles are powered by electricity, which makes them a more eco-friendly mode of transportation. Pod taxis are designed to transport a fixed number of passengers and are considered one of the most advanced modes of transportation available today.

Haryana GK

Quota in Urban Local Bodies

The Haryana Cabinet has accepted the **State Backward Classes Commission's report** on the proportion of reservations for the Backward Classes Block-A category in urban local bodies.

Recommendation of the commission:

- The commission has recommended that **every municipal body should have at least one councillor belonging** to BC (A) if its population is **not less than two per cent** of the total population of the urban local body.

- There are **78 backward classes** in Haryana and **72** of them have been notified in the Block-A sub-category and six in the Block-B category.

Ethics & Society

Reasons for insufficient representation of women in India's workforce

- **India is still a largely patriarchal society:** Indian women spend 8 times the number of hours on **unpaid care work compared with men**. The global average is 3 times.
- **Only 32% of Indian women work after they get married** and most of them are part of the agricultural sector.
- **Safety concerns:** Not being able to find jobs close to home also prevent women in big cities from joining the workforce.
- **Insufficient formal wage employment opportunities:** For example, women employees account for less than 20% of India's manufacturing sector.
- **Concentration in low/non-productive jobs:** Like agriculture, primary caregiver at home, etc.
- **Lack of opportunities for women returning** to their careers after a professional break.