

National and International Weekly Current Affairs 12 to 18 February 2024

National News

White Paper in Parliament

Recently, the government presented a **White Paper on the Indian economy in Parliament.**

Background:

- The Modi government, during the Union Interim Budget on February 1, 2024, announced its intention to release a **'White Paper.'**
- This document aims to compare the economic performances of the **Congress-led UPA government over ten years with that of the BJP-led NDA government.**

Definition of White Paper:

- A White Paper is a **governmental publication designed to showcase new policies and achievements**, seeking support and public feedback.
- Typically, it's bound in a white cover. This White Paper is **expected to analyze the Indian government's economic policies, including fiscal, monetary, trade, and exchange rate policies, over the years.**

Key Claims:

- **UPA mismanaged a once robust economy over a decade.**
- Neglected economic reforms caused macroeconomic instability.
- **Post-2008**, high economic growth led to inflation and **fiscal deficit.**
- Unproductive borrowing led to decreased capital expenditure and neglected infrastructure.
- Capital expenditure as a percent of total expenditure (excluding interest payments) **halved from 31% in FY04 to 16% in FY14** (this ratio stands at 28% in the current year).
- **Health expenditure minimally improved during UPA's tenure.**
- Policy paralysis caused defense preparedness shortages **by 2012.**
- UPA's tenure was marred by scandals and policy missteps.

Amrit Darohar Initiative: Strengthening Communities and Conservation at Ramsar Sites

Context:

- The Centre has launched the fourth phase of training under the **'Amrit Darohar'** capacity-building scheme.
- This initiative is targeted towards people residing close to the **Bhitarkanika National Park.**

Key points:

- **Collaboration:** The initiative involves collaboration between **IITM-Bhubaneswar**, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Objective:** The aim is to build the capacity of 60 local community members around the Ramsar site to strengthen nature tourism and provide alternative livelihoods.
- **Training:** Local community members will be trained and certified as nature guides.

About:

Goal: The goal of Amrit Dharohar is **'to promote unique conservation values of Ramsar Sites'.**

Purpose

The purpose is to maintain a healthy and effectively managed network of Ramsar Sites which:

- To provide water and food security
- To buffer the landscape from floods, droughts, cyclones and other extreme events
- To generate local employment and support livelihoods
- To provide habitats for species of local, national and international conservation significance
- To maintain and enhance carbon sinks
- To conserve and celebrate rich cultural heritage.

Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry(GROW) Portal

- Recently, **NITI Aayog** launched the **Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW) report and portal**, aiming to bolster efforts in environmental conservation and sustainable land use across India.

Report

- Utilizes **cutting-edge remote sensing and GIS technologies.**

- Offers comprehensive state-wise and district-wise analysis.
- Provides crucial insights for government departments and industries engaged in greening and restoration projects.

Initiative Overview

- Led by NITI Aayog.
- Employs remote sensing and GIS techniques for evaluation.
- Introduces Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI) for national-level prioritization.
- Highlights the potential of converting wastelands into productive agroforestry zones.

Current Status

- Agroforestry covers 8.65% of India's total geographical area.
- Encompasses approximately 28.42 million hectares.

GROW Portal

- "Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)-Suitability Mapping" portal launched on 'Bhuvan'.
- Provides universal access to state and district-level data.
- Expected to boost promotion of agroforestry initiatives by government bodies.

Maharashtra State News

National Productivity Day

- **National Productivity Day is celebrated in India every year on February 12th.**
- It marks the **foundation day of the National Productivity Council (NPC)**, an autonomous organization **established in 1958 to promote productivity consciousness and culture in the country.**
- The day is recognized as part of a **week-long National Productivity Week**, observed from **February 12th to 18th.**
- This year's **theme is "Artificial Intelligence (AI)- Productivity Engine for Economic Growth."**
- It highlights the crucial role of AI in driving a country's economic growth and productivity.

About:

- This date **marks the anniversary of the foundation of the International Labour Organization (ILO).**
- The **first NPD was celebrated in 1962.**

People lose Rs 3 crore to cybercrime across Maharashtra daily'

- **Cybercrime has become a major concern in Maharashtra**, with citizens losing a staggering **Rs 3 crore every day.**
- This **translates to approximately Rs 1.095 billion annually**, highlighting the vast impact of these illegal activities.
- **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data** revealed that **Maharashtra saw 8,249 cybercrime cases in 2022**, which was **48% higher than 5,562 incidents** recorded in the **previous year.**
- **Barely Rs 134 crore or 10%** of the total Rs 1,300 crore lost to cybercrime in Maharashtra since 2019 have been **recovered**

About:

- The types of cybercrime reported in the state include:
- **Financial Frauds:** Phishing scams, online investment frauds, mobile wallet thefts, etc.
- **Data Breaches:** Unauthorized access to personal or financial information.
- **Malware Attacks:** Viruses, ransomware, spyware, etc.

Marathwada agricultural university develops seven new crop varieties

- The **Parbhani-based Vasantrya Naik Marathwada Agricultural University** has **developed seven new varieties of crops.**
- The new varieties include **five field crops and two vegetable crops.**

Five Field Crops include:

1. American cotton non-Bt variety NH 677
2. Chickpea variety called Parbhani Chana-16
3. Soybean variety MAUS 731
4. Sorghum variety, Parbhani Shakti (PVK 1009)
5. Trombay Latur til TLT 10

Two vegetable varieties are:

1. **A new variety of chili**
2. **Tomato (PBNT 20)**

ASI to conserve 7 Maratha military forts across state

- Additional director general of ASI said that this year the **focus of ASI will be on maintaining**

and conserving the forts located in Maharashtra

- The statement followed the nomination of seven Maratha military forts under its jurisdiction in Maharashtra for the Unesco world heritage tag for the years 2024–25.
- These were among the 12, 17th-century forts marked as the Maratha military landscapes for the nomination this year.
- From Maharashtra, Shivneri, Lohagad, Raigad, Suvarnaburg, Panhala, Vijaydurg, and Sindhudurg forts are nominated.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science

- The International Day of Women and Girls in Science (IDWGS), celebrated annually on February 11th
- It aims to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology, and promote their full and equal access and participation in these fields.
- This year's theme, "Closing the Gender Gap in Science: Accelerating Action", underscores the urgent need to address the barriers that hinder women and girls from pursuing and thriving in STEM careers

About:

- On 22 December 2015, the General Assembly decided to establish an annual International Day to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology, through Resolution A/RES/70/212.

Jalyukta Shivar scheme to cover 24,000 villages in state

- State govt aims to target more than 24,000 villages in Maharashtra for recharging groundwater levels and saving water under the Jalyukta Shivar 2.0 scheme.

About:

- Govt initiated Jalyukta Shivar 2.0 in 2022 to carry out works on accumulating water so that it can make water available for drinking and agriculture purposes to local residents.
- During the first phase of the scheme, the government had taken water conservation

measures across 22,000 villages in the state, which saved water equal to 1.5 TMC.

₹4,000cr approved for climate resilient project in Maharashtra

- The state irrigation department and CM-led Maharashtra Institution for Transformation (MITRA) has proposed Maharashtra Climate Resilient Development Project (MCRDP)

About:

- It aims to address the concerns related to the floods in Kolhapur and Sangli district and the plan to divert flood waters to drought-prone areas of the state.
- The World Bank has approved Rs4,000 crore for MCRDP, of which 30% of funds have to be shared by the state government.

MAFSU's proposed Wildlife One Health Centre to be first in India

- The Maharashtra Animal and Fisheries Sciences University (MAFSU), Nagpur, has submitted a proposal for Wildlife One Health Centre to the state govt.
- It will be the extension of the present Wildlife Research and Training Centre (WRTC) at Gorewada.
- This ₹30 crore project would be the only institution dedicated to Wildlife Health in the country.

National Women's Day in India

- In India, Sarojini Naidu's birth anniversary, on February 13, is marked as National Women's Day in honour of a woman who represented the spirit of female empowerment throughout her life and championed equality.
- She was a prominent freedom fighter and poet known as the "Nightingale of India".

This day serves as a national observance to:

1. Recognize the significant contributions of women in various fields
2. Highlight their crucial role in shaping the nation's progress
3. Raise awareness about persisting gender disparities and challenges faced by women in India

World Radio Day

- February 13th, 2024, marks the 12th Annual World Radio Day, established by UNESCO
- The theme for World Radio Day 2024 is 'Radio: A century informing, entertaining and educating.'
- This year's celebration reflects on the past 100 years of radio's remarkable journey, its present relevance, and its promising future.

About:

- In 2011, the member states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared February 13 World Radio Day
- It was then adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013 as an international event.
- Radio remains the most widely consumed media platform globally, reaching billions of people, especially in remote areas and those with limited internet access.



MTHL Connection to Mumbai-Pune Expressway Set to Commence Soon

- The construction of a crucial connector linking the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL) with the Mumbai-Pune Expressway is about to begin.
- The estimated cost of project is ₹1,000 crore

- This project promises to revolutionize travel between Mumbai and Pune, offering several benefits:

Reduced Travel Time:

- Bypassing congested areas like Sion-Panvel Highway and Vashi toll plaza, the connection aims to cut travel time between south Mumbai and Pune by about an hour.

Enhanced Connectivity:

- The project involves two six-lane elevated roads, one connecting Chirle-Gavhan Phata and the other linking Palaspe to the Mumbai-Pune Expressway.
- This creates a seamless connection between Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, further boosted by future plans to connect MTHL with Worli.

Tiger Safari at Sanjay Gandhi National Park Roars Back After Renovations

- The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), also known as Borivali National Park, in Mumbai, has witnessed a surge in visitors to its tiger safari since its reopening after renovations in early 2024.
- The park has experienced a significant increase in visitors, with approximately 5,000 people visiting the national park daily and an average of 3,000 people participating in the safari activity each day
- The park now boasts revamped enclosures, improved infrastructure, and enhanced safety measures, providing tourists with a thrilling and informative experience while ensuring the well-being of the majestic tigers.

Shil Phata flyover to reduce travel time between city, Mum & Pune

- Shil Phata Flyover, officially known as the ShilPhata Junction Flyover, aims to significantly reduce travel time between Thane, Mumbai, and Pune.
- Located on National Highway 48 (NH-48) in Kalyan, Maharashtra, this flyover addresses a notorious traffic bottleneck known for congestion and delays.

Key Features:

- **Dual carriageway:** Each arm has three lanes, one for Panvel-bound traffic and the other for Thane-bound traffic.
- **Length and width:** 739.5 meters long and 24 meters wide, with a 300-meter viaduct.

- **Cost:** Approximately Rs 45.68 crore.

Private sugar mills surpass cooperatives in MH's sugar industry landscape

- In MH, the landscape of the sugar industry has undergone a significant shift with private sugar mills surpassing cooperatives in terms of sugar production and operational efficiency.
- This trend has several contributing factors:

Investment and Modernization:

- Private mills have invested heavily in modern technology and infrastructure, leading to higher efficiency and capacity compared to co-operatives.

Professional Management:

- Private mills often have professional management teams with expertise in the sugar industry, leading to better decision-making and financial management.

Focus on Efficiency:

- Private mills prioritize operational efficiency, reducing costs and maximizing profits.

Government Policies:

- Recent government policies have been more favorable towards private players, providing them with easier access to loans and other incentives.

Central team visits Nashik to address concerns of onion farmers

- A Central team from the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare recently visited Nashik, MH to address concerns raised by onion farmers.
- This proactive move aimed to prevent potential scarcity and price fluctuations ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Key concerns of farmers:

1. **Dissatisfaction with government policies:** This includes export restrictions and procurement practices by organizations like NAFED and NCCF.
2. **Demand for direct compensation:** Farmers prefer direct financial aid instead of the existing procurement process.
3. **Limited awareness about procurement centers:** Many farmers reportedly lack information about available support mechanisms.

Hindavi Swarajya Mahotsav 2024

- The Hindavi Swarajya Mahotsav 2024 is a three-day festival held from February 17th to 19th in Junnar, Pune, Maharashtra.
- It commemorates the 394th birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha Empire.
- The festival offers a vibrant exploration of Marathi history and culture through diverse activities:
- **Plays, folk dances, music programs,** and storytelling sessions bring history to life.
- Explore exhibits showcasing Maratha history, artifacts, and small-scale industries.
- Trek historical forts, participate in water sports, and engage in stargazing.
- Attend talks and workshops about Shivaji Maharaj's life and legacy.

State to build 7,000km of roads

- A decision to build another 7,000 km of roads and bridges under CM's Gram Sadak Yojana was taken in the state cabinet meeting.
- **Phase-II of CM's Gram Sadak Yojana** aims to have 10,000 km of roads.
- It has been decided in which districts to build 7,000 km of new roads.

Water level in dams falls to 50%

- **Water levels in dams falling to 50%** can be a cause for concern, indicating potential water scarcity.
- The severity of the situation depends on various factors, including:
- Different regions have **varying water needs and rainfall patterns.**
- A **50% level in a drought-prone area might be more critical** than in a region with regular rainfall.
- **Dams serve various purposes, including water supply, irrigation, hydropower generation,** and flood control.
- A low level for a drinking water reservoir is more alarming than for a flood control dam.

About:

- **Maharashtra has 2,994 small, medium and major dams** with a total live storage capacity of 40,485 million cubic meters.

- The total stock in these dams in mid-February was **20,472.63 million cubic meters**, or **50.57%** of the capacity, **18% lower** than last year's water level of **68.37%**.
- **Most dams in the state did not have adequate inflow in 2023** owing to dry spells during the monsoon.

Hi-tech mega projects to be declared thrust sector, get incentives

- The **state cabinet in MH** has declared hi-tech mega projects as a thrust sector to promote development in backward regions.
- Incentives include **stamp duty waiver, power duty waiver, and power bill reduction**.
- The cabinet has also approved incentives for integrated industrial areas, including a stamp duty waiver on lease rent.

6 new nursing colleges approved by the cabinet in Maharashtra

- In a Cabinet meeting held, a **decision was taken to establish six government nursing colleges** with an admission capacity of **100 students each**.
- These colleges will be affiliated with **Government Medical Colleges in Jalgaon, Latur, Baramati, Sangli (Miraj), Nandurbar, and Gondia**.
- CM Eknath Shinde chaired the meeting and **stated that considering the prevalence of infectious diseases in the state and the country, the government is making significant changes to the paramedical curriculum**.

MTDC to give 50% off for Women's Day

- On the occasion of **International Women's Day**, the **Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC)** has **decided to give a 50% discount** to women tourists if they reserve their accommodation in **MTDC hotels in online mode**.
- Additionally, the **MTDC will be providing new accommodation amenities** for tourists at various **Navegaon Bandh in Gondia district, Naleshwar near Kolara Gate of Tadoba Sanctuary in Chandrapur district, Sahastrakund and Tipeswar in Yavatmal**.

Nagpur to host national bridge meet after 28 yrs

- Nagpur, the "**Tiger Capital of India**," is set to **bridge the gap of 28 years** by hosting the prestigious **National Bridge Championship in 2024**.
- This event marks a **significant return for the city, which last held the tournament in 1996**.

About:

- **Anil Padhye**, who won a silver medal for India at the **World Bridge Championships in Italy in 2022**, says the **game supports development of the brain** and is especially found to help children get comfortable with mathematics.
- He will also take part in the **Dr NP Tolani Centennial Celebrations All India Tolani Open National Masters Bridge Championship**

Maharashtra amends rule, pvt schools may go out of RTE quota ambit

- **Private unaided schools in Maharashtra, mostly English mediums**, have been fighting with the state government for reimbursement of their **25% RTE quota admissions fees**.
- The government has **amended the education rules, exempting schools near government or aided institutions from participating in RTE admissions**, which raises concerns about the future of RTE admissions and the effectiveness of state schemes.

Summer onion plantation declines by 40% in Nashik

- The **summer onion plantation in four districts of north Maharashtra, including Nashik, Dhule, Jalgaon, and Nandurbar, has decreased by 40%** due to less rain.
- The production is estimated to **decline to 35 lakh tonnes**.
- In the **2022-23 season, the summer onion plantation in Nashik district was 2.21 lakh hectares**.

PM Modi to perform Bhoomi Pujan of Wadhwan Port in Maharashtra this month

- **PM Modi** is expected to perform the **Bhoomi Pujan (groundbreaking ceremony)** of the **Wadhwan Port** in Maharashtra
- The port, located in **Palghar district**, boasts one of the deepest drafts in the country, making it a potential game-changer for **Maharashtra's maritime trade and economy**.
- The project has faced delays due to environmental concerns, but has reportedly secured all necessary clearances.

Timber used in Ram Mandir cultivated and selected by the FDCM

- The **state Forest and Culture minister Sudhir Mungantiwar** while lauding **Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM)**'s record profits and dividends urged the corporation to **leverage its success to create more employment opportunities**.
- He also announced setting up a **furniture development corporation under FDCM**.
- This new venture, equipped with **cutting-edge technology**, aims to revolutionize **furniture design** by crafting pieces that perfectly match the **buyer's dream through AI-powered image creation**

About:

- The **timber used in the iconic Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the new Parliament building in Delhi** was meticulously cultivated and selected by the **Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM)**.
- This is testament to FDCM's commitment to **quality and sustainability**, ensuring the longevity of these national landmarks for centuries to come.

Maharashtra increase stipend of medical interns by 64%

- **Medical interns in Maharashtra** have received a **substantial 64% increase** in their stipend amount.
- The **stipend has been raised from Rs 11,000 to Rs 18,000**.
- This development also extends to students enrolled in **aided medical, dental, ayurveda,**

unani, and homeopathy colleges across the state

- This move aims to improve the working conditions and attract more talent to the healthcare sector in the state.

Shiv Jayanti 2024

- **Shiv Jayanti**, also known as **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti**, marks the birth anniversary of the revered **Maratha emperor, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj**.
- This year, it falls on **February 19th**.

About:

- The day is celebrated with great fervor, especially in the western Indian state of **Maharashtra, Shivaji's birthplace**.
- Grand processions, cultural performances, lectures, and prayers are held in his honor. Many educational institutions organize essay writing competitions and debates to engage students in his history and leadership principles.
- **Shivaji is remembered for his bravery, strategic brilliance, and progressive rule**.
- He **established the Maratha Empire**, known for its guerilla warfare tactics and efficient administration.

MH Backward Class Commission submits Maratha survey report to Shinde

- The **Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission** submitted a comprehensive survey report, covering nearly **2.5 crore families**, outlining the social, economic, and educational backwardness of the **Maratha community**.

About:

- This **data-backed report will aid in the formulation of a law to ensure reservations for the Maratha community**.

State News

Forest Dwellers' Rights in Tamil Nadu

Context:

- **Tamil Nadu** has been slow in implementing the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** compared to other states in India, particularly evident in the **Thanthai Periyar Sanctuary notification in Erode district**.

- This notification raised concerns among forest-dwellers about potential denial of their rights under the FRA.

Key points:

- Forest villages are settlements **within forest areas inhabited by tribal or indigenous communities.**
- In **1990, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)** mandated the conversion of forest villages into revenue villages, a process also reinforced by the **Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006.**
- The recent sanctuary notification acknowledges that rights granted under the **Tamil Nadu Forest Act of 1882 and the FRA will be preserved, but Tamil Nadu has been slow in implementing the FRA compared to other states in India.**

Read more about the rights of forest dwellers of this region.

International News

India – UAE Relations

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to the **UAE signifies the importance of the bilateral relationship.**
- Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit the UAE from **February 13-14, 2024.**
- He will inaugurate a temple built by the **Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha in Abu Dhabi.**

Overview of India – UAE relationship:

- India's relationship with the UAE has become one of its most significant bilateral relationships, evolving into a strategic partnership.
- The UAE has become an **important partner for India's engagement in the Gulf region.**
- There's a close rapport between UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Mr. Modi.
- **The BAPS temple, constructed on a 27-acre plot donated by the UAE President, is the second big Hindu temple to be inaugurated in the UAE recently.**
- Mr. Modi will also address the World Government Summit on February 14 in Dubai as the 'Guest of Honour'.

Economy News

Himachal's GDP to see growth at 7.1%

- Despite facing severe challenges from nature, **Himachal Pradesh is projected to experience a GDP growth of 7.1%.**
- The State's economy has shown resilience despite the **heavy monsoon rains that caused significant damage in July 2023.**
- In the financial year **2023-24**, the GDP growth is expected to increase from **6.9% in the previous year to 7.1%.**

Key points:

- The Economic survey projects that the **State's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices** will increase by over ₹9,428 crore in the current financial year compared to the previous year.
- The survey highlights Himachal Pradesh's substantial **hydroelectric potential**, with the State possessing about **25% of the national potential.**
- It is estimated that about **24,000 MW of hydroelectric power can be generated** from the construction on the five perennial river basins in the State.
- Currently, **11,209 MW of the total hydroelectric potential have been harnessed.**

Summits & Conferences News

World Government Summit 2024

- The **World Government Summit (WGS) is an annual global event** that brings together world leaders, policymakers, experts, and thought leaders from various fields to discuss and tackle pressing global issues.
- **Established in 2013** under the leadership of the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, the summit **takes place annually in Dubai, UAE.**
- Through its various activities, the **summit explores the agenda of the next generation of governments, emphasizing the use of innovation and technology to address universal challenges.**
- Since its inception, the summit has aimed to shape future governments and create a better future for humanity.

In 2024, the World Government Summit will focus on the theme **"Shaping Future Governments"** and will delve into six main themes:

- Government Acceleration and Transformation
- Artificial Intelligence and The Next Frontiers
- Reimagining Development and Future Economies
- Future Societies and Education
- Sustainability and The New Global Shifts
- Urbanization and Global Health Priorities

CMS COP14

- 14th Meeting of the **Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP14)** is set to take place as mentioned below:
- **Dates: February 12 to 17, 2024**
- **Location: Samarkand, Uzbekistan**

Theme and Significance

- **Theme: "Nature knows no borders"**
- **Significance:** Highlights the need for international collaboration in conserving migratory species, emphasizing that their survival depends on efforts beyond political boundaries.

Global Significance:

- One of the most significant global biodiversity gatherings since the **adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Biodiversity Plan) in 2022.**

Focus Areas:

- Habitat conservation and restoration
- Addressing threats such as overexploitation, habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, and climate change

Initiatives:

- Support implementation of the GBF
- Launch of major new report **State of the World's Migratory Species** and guidelines.

Do you know?

- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species is also known as the **Bonn Convention.**
- It was signed on **23 June 1979, in Bonn, Germany.**

Schemes and Committees News

PM SVANidhi : Findings of recent Study

- PM-SVANidhi boosted annual income of street vendors by Rs 23,000.

- Study was commissioned by **Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.**

About:

- Central Sector Scheme
- Provides affordable working capital loans to street vendors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Implementation until March 2022.
- Initial working capital of up to Rs. 10,000 for vendors.
- Interest subsidy of 7% for early or timely loan repayment.
- Monthly cash-back incentives for digital payments, ranging from Rs. 50-100.
- Higher loan eligibility upon timely repayment of the first loan.
- No requirement for collateral security.

Electoral Bonds Scheme

- Recently, the **Supreme Court directed the SBI to stop issuing these bonds immediately.**
- Electoral Bonds (EBs) are **interest-free bearer bonds or money instruments** available for purchase by companies and individuals in India from authorized branches of the **State Bank of India (SBI).**

About:

- EBs can be bought in **denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore**, similar to banknotes, and are payable to the bearer on demand without interest.
- They are purchased through a KYC-compliant account and can be used for making donations to political parties.
- EBs have a short lifespan of **15 days for making donations.**
- The donor's name and information are not mentioned on the bond, making them anonymous.
- There is no limit on the number of EBs a person or company can purchase.
- Donations made through EBs are tax-exempt under **Section 80 GG and Section 80 GGB of the Income Tax Act.**
- Only political parties registered under **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, and which secured not less than **1% of votes in the last general election**, are **eligible to receive EBs.**
- Political parties must encash the bonds within a specified period through a designated bank

account and disclose the amount to the Election Commission.

Defense News

DAC Clears ₹84,560 Crore Deals for Torpedoes, Refueller Aircraft, and More

- **DAC (Defence Acquisition Council)** has approved new deals including torpedoes and refueller aircraft, among others, worth ₹84,560 crore.

Key points:

- These deals aim to enhance the attacking capabilities of **submarines, improve reconnaissance, and strengthen maritime capabilities.**
- The approval includes the **procurement of heavy weight torpedoes for Navy's submarines, flight refueller aircraft for the Air Force,** and other equipment like anti-tank mines, radars, and software-defined radios.
- Additionally, amendments to the **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020** were approved, focusing on benchmarking, cost computation, payment schedule, and procurement quantity.

Science and Technology News

High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS)

- Recently, a prototype of an **advanced unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)** was successfully flown by the **National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) in Bengaluru,** marking a significant technological advancement.

About:

- **Definition:** Solar-powered unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operating in the **stratosphere (20 km above ground) without needing a rocket launch.**
- **Design:** Full-scale version has a 30-meter wingspan, weighs 150 kg, operates at 80-100 km per hour, and can stay airborne for 90 days at 17-20 km altitude, carrying up to 15 kg payloads.

Benefits of HAPS

- **Cost-effective:** Lower costs in building, launching, and operating compared to satellites.

- **Maneuverability:** Can be easily moved to different locations unlike satellites with predetermined paths.
- **Coverage:** Can cover large areas (around 500 km diameter) and link to multiple ground stations.
- **Speed and Latency:** Closer proximity to the ground allows for greater transmission speeds and lower latency.
- **Refurbishment and Reutilization:** Payloads can be reconfigured periodically.

Role of X Chromosome in Autoimmune Diseases

A 2023 study by the University of Oxford stated that about 10% of the population they had studied had autoimmune diseases of which 13% were women and 7% were men.

Key points:

What is Autoimmune Disease?

- Autoimmune disease occurs when the **body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells, tissues, and organs.**
- It can affect any part of the body, weakening bodily function and can be life-threatening.
- **There is no cure, but treatments can help manage symptoms, and most cases are not fatal.**

Susceptibility of Women

- Women are more susceptible to autoimmune diseases than men.
- Factors such as **environmental factors, genetics, hormonal imbalance, and lifestyle habits play a role.**
- Scientists previously thought it could be related to sex hormones or faulty regulation of the X chromosome.
- **A molecular coating found in half of women's X chromosomes might be the reason for this susceptibility.**

Digital Twin: Sangham

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has launched the **'Sangam: Digital Twin' initiative,** aiming to utilize Digital Twin technology for innovative infrastructure planning and design.

Objective:

- The 'Sangam: Digital Twin' initiative **aims to leverage Digital Twin technology to create virtual replicas of physical assets, enabling**

real-time monitoring, simulation, and analysis.

Stages:

- It consists of **two phases**: an **Exploratory phase** for creative exploration and horizon clarity, followed by a **practical demonstration stage** focusing on specific use cases for future scalability and replication.

Technological Integration:

- The initiative integrates advanced technologies like **5G, IoT, AI, AR/VR, AI-native 6G**, and next-gen computational technologies to foster collaboration and innovation in infrastructure planning.

Digital Twin Technology

Definition: Digital Twins are detailed and **dynamic virtual models** that replicate the behavior and performance of real-world assets in real-time.

Components: They consist of **physical assets, virtual models, sensors/IoT devices for data collection**, and data analytics/machine learning for insights and decision-making.

Benefits: Digital Twins enable organizations to **optimize operations, predict maintenance needs, and drive innovation by analyzing real-time data and integrating various data sources.**

Miscellaneous News

Dayananda Saraswati

Context:

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, delivered a message via video at an event commemorating the 200th birth anniversary of Swami Dayananda Saraswati.
- The event was held at Swami Dayananda's birthplace in **Tankara, Morbi, Gujarat.**

About:

- **Dayanand Saraswati**, an Indian philosopher and social reformer, founded the **Arya Samaj**, a movement aimed at reforming Hinduism.
- His influential work, "**Satyarth Prakash**," elucidates Vedic philosophy and human responsibilities.
- In 1876, he advocated for "**India for Indians**," a precursor to the Swaraj movement championed by **Lokmanya Tilak.**
- He vehemently opposed idolatry and ritualistic practices, striving to **revive Vedic principles.**

Key points:

- Renowned figures such as **S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo** hailed him as a **key figure in shaping modern India.**
- Dayanand Saraswati campaigned against social injustices like the **caste system, Sati practice, child marriage, and idol worship, aligning his teachings with the principles of the Vedas.**
- He championed the slogan "**Go Back to Vedas**," emphasizing the importance of Vedas as repositories of essential knowledge and spiritual truths for society.
- Swami Dayanand Saraswati's **ascetic lifestyle underscored his deep reverence for the Vedas and his commitment to their teachings.**

Brumation

- **Alligators and other reptiles** may appear dormant during colder months, leading to confusion about whether they are alive or dead.
- This state is called **brumation, akin to hibernation in mammals**, which allows reptiles to conserve energy and endure harsh environmental conditions.

Characteristics of Brumation

- **Dormancy:** Reptiles experience a period of dormancy or slowed activity.
- **Environmental Triggers:** Brumation is prompted by colder temperatures and limited food availability.
- **Metabolic Slowdown:** Reptiles' metabolism significantly decreases, enabling them to go without food for weeks or even months.

Behavior During Brumation

- **Seeking Shelter:** Reptiles retreat to underground burrows, rock crevices, or other sheltered areas with stable temperatures.
- **Reduced Activity:** Activity levels decrease to conserve energy.
- **Resource Conservation:** Reptiles minimize resource requirements during this period.

Examples Across Species

- **Box Turtles and Painted Turtles:** These turtles burrow into mud at the bottom of ponds or lakes.
- **Snakes:** Seek refuge in underground dens or caves.
- **Lizards:** Hide under rocks or within vegetation.

Importance of Brumation

- **Survival:** Crucial for reptiles to endure cold climates and challenging environmental conditions.
- **Reproduction:** Allows them to reemerge in more favorable conditions for feeding and reproduction.

Understanding Global Warming Patterns

- Global warming's impact is influenced by its patterns, not just its overall levels.
- Local conditions can moderate or amplify global warming effects.

Role of El Niño

- El Niño events impact global warming patterns, influencing phenomena like monsoons.
- The location and intensity of El Niño affect its global consequences.

Need for accurate predictions

- It is hardly possible to **over-emphasise our need for accurate predictions of warming patterns to manage the climate change impacts that have already landed.**
- We need such predictions not only on an event-to-event basis but also in order to **adapt to the changing seasons and the unavoidable harm** they are rendering to lives, livelihoods, and economies.

Assessment of 2023

- **Many warming records were broken in 2023, accompanied by climate disasters like wildfires, cyclones, droughts, and floods.**
- **Public focus often centers on whether the 1.5 degrees C warming threshold was crossed.**

SWATI Portal: Empowering Women in STEMM

- The Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India launched the "**Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI) Portal.**"

About SWATI Portal:

- **Purpose:** Represents and showcases Indian women and girls' contributions in STEMM fields.
- **Database:** Comprehensive database aiding policymakers in addressing gender gap challenges.
- **Interactive Features:** Designed to be interactive, facilitating easy access and contribution to the database.
- **Development:** Developed, hosted, and maintained by the **National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR) in New Delhi.**

Objectives:

- **Exponential Scaling:** To include every Indian woman in science across all career stages and subjects.
- **Research Support:** Compilation of a comprehensive database to support long-term research on equality, diversity, and inclusivity.
- **Active Search Engine:** Easy access to information about women scientists, their affiliations, areas of interest, and achievements.

Do you know?

- **National Women's Day in India is celebrated every year on 13 February.**
- The day marks the birth anniversary of Sarojini Naidu, an eminent freedom fighter and poet, also known as the "**Nightingale of India**".

Sangeet Natak Akademi

- **Sangeet Natak Akademi to have South India centre in Hyderabad.**
- Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA): A national institution **founded on 31 May 1952.**
- **Aim:** To preserve and promote India's rich cultural heritage in music, dance, and drama.

Key points:

- Apex body for performing arts, collaborating with governments and art academies.
- Established institutions like Manipur Dance Academy and Kathak Kendra.

Awards and Recognitions

- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award: Highest recognition for artists and scholars.
- SNA Fellowship (Ratna Sadsya): For distinguished individuals.
- Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar: For young artists.

- Tagore Ratna and Tagore Puraskar: Honoring Rabindranath Tagore.
- Kala Deeksha Initiative: Continuing Guru Shishya Parampara.

Dzuds

- Dzuds are a specific type of **disaster unique to Mongolia**.
- They are characterized by **extreme winters with freezing temperatures, heavy snowfall, and frozen ground, making it difficult for animals to reach pasture**.

Causes of Dzuds

- Dzuds are often preceded by **dry summers** with minimal grazing, leaving livestock without enough **fat reserves for winter**.
- The **UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)** attributes the increasing frequency and intensity of dzuds since 2015 to climate change and poor environmental governance.

The Dual "White" and "Iron" Dzud

- This winter, Mongolia is experiencing a dual dzud, characterized by two phases:
- The **"white dzud"** features deep snow cover, preventing animals from accessing grass.
- The **"iron dzud"** follows a short thaw and subsequent hard freeze, locking up pastures in ice.

Impact of Dzuds

- Dzuds freeze the soil, making it impossible for animals to access pasture.
- Livestock are left without adequate food sources, forcing them to resort to unconventional food, such as tree bark, for survival.

Hastal Minar: A Forgotten Gem in West Delhi

- The Mini Qutub Minar, a Grade A listed protected heritage monument, serves as a reminder of Shah Jahan's presence in Hastal and is in urgent need of conservation to preserve its historical significance.

History

- Constructed in **1650** by Mughal emperor **Shah Jahan** near his hunting lodge in Hastal.

- Originally a **5-storeyed tower with a domed Chhatri pavilion for Shah Jahan's entertainment**.
- Legends suggest a tunnel existed from the tower to the royal hunting lodge.
- Upper two storeys and the domed pavilion collapsed in the **18th century**.
- Abandoned and forgotten, surrounded by urbanization at present.

Architecture

- Resembles **Qutub Minar in Delhi**, built with Lakhori bricks and red sandstone
- Originally had five storeys with a narrowing diameter, accessed by a narrow staircase
- Each storey surrounded by an **octagonal ring with overhanging eaves (Chhajja)** like the Qutub Minar

Threats

- Endangered due to decades of neglect and lack of conservation
- Threatened by natural elements and encroachment of new constructions in Hastal
- Completely surrounded by haphazardly built houses and buildings, with new constructions encroaching upon the lower platform.

e-Jagriti Portal

- Consumer Affairs Secretary highlights the potential of AI in the **'e-Jagriti' portal for reducing pending cases in consumer courts**.

About:

- Initiative of the **Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution**.
- Serves as a portal for consumer commissions.
- **Aims to enhance customer experience**.
- Offers a simple, fast, and cost-effective consumer dispute redressal software solution.
- **Envisions integration of various consumer grievance platforms onto a single platform**, including OCMS, E-Daakhil, NCDRC Case Monitoring System, CONFONET website, and mediation application.
- **Features include case filing, online fee payment, and case monitoring modules for seamless disposal of cases by all Commissions**.
- Utilizes **AI technology for Smart search facility on archived consumer complaints/cases/judgements, metadata and keyword creation, and Voice-to-text**

conversion of judgements, case history, and other details.

- It will integrate **Virtual court facility for convenient and accessible resolution of consumer complaints.**

Black Day: Feb 14

- India marks the **5th anniversary of the Pulwama terror attack.**
- February 14 is considered '**Black Day**' due to the attack by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in 2019.
- The attack resulted in the death of at least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel.

Balakot airstrike

- Indian security forces conducted a counter-attack named '**Operation Bandar**' on **February 26, 2019**, in the **Balakot region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.**
- This operation involved airstrikes on Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) camps, located approximately 50 km from the Line of Control (LoC).
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) used **Israel-made "smart bombs"** and 12 Mirage 2000 fighter jets in the attack, reportedly resulting in the deaths of numerous terrorists.
- **This operation marked the first time since the 1971 war that India conducted an aerial assault in Pakistan.**

Replica of Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah's tomb

- Recently, a digital replica of **Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah's tomb** was revealed by the reality technology company **Hexagon in Hyderabad.**

Background:

- Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah was the **fifth sultan of the Qutb Shahi dynasty of Golkonda**, known for founding the city of **Hyderabad** and constructing its iconic landmark, the **Charminar.**
- His reign is celebrated for its administrative prowess and cultural achievements.
- He was also a prolific Urdu poet, composing verses in the Persian diwan style.
- His rule coincided with the times of **Akbar the Great, Jagat Guru, and Ibrahim Adil Shah.**

About:

- Qutb Shah's tomb, located in **Ibrahim Bagh, Hyderabad**, is an architectural marvel blending Persian, Hindu, and Pathani styles.
- **The digital twin technology used to create this replica offers a digital representation of a physical object, person, or process, providing insights for better decision-making.**

Baltic Sea

A Stone Age wall discovered beneath the Baltic Sea in Germany is believed to be Europe's oldest megastructure built by humans.

About:

- The Baltic Sea is a **semi-enclosed inland sea in Northern Europe**, extending from southern Denmark almost to the Arctic Circle.
- It has an approximately **8,000 km coastline shared by countries such as Sweden, Poland, and Russia**, covering an area of about 377,000 sq.km.
- With major gulfs like the **Gulf of Bothnia** and the **Gulf of Finland**, it's known for its low water salinity due to **inflowing fresh water and shallowness.**
- The sea is fed by **over 250 rivers and streams**, with the **Neva being the largest.**
- It boasts more than 20 islands and archipelagos, with Gotland as the largest.

Gulf Stream

- **A recent study suggests that the Gulf Stream could collapse as soon as 2025, potentially leading to a mini ice age.**

Key points:

- The Gulf Stream is a **major ocean current** that profoundly impacts **climate, weather, and marine ecosystems, starting in the Gulf of Mexico and extending across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.**
- It flows northeastward along the eastern coast of the United States before veering eastward into the Atlantic Ocean and towards Europe.

Impacts:

- The **Gulf Stream's impact on climate and weather** has significant economic implications for industries like **agriculture, fishing, tourism, and transportation.**

- It influences **sea routes and shipping lanes**, affecting navigation and **trade between North America and Europe**.
- For example, ports such as **Miami and Savannah in the USA** benefit from the Gulf Stream's moderating influence, maintaining relatively mild temperatures year-round.
- Similarly, the **Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands and the Port of Hamburg in Germany** benefit from the Gulf Stream, facilitating year-round shipping activities without significant interruptions due to ice formation.
- The **Port of Antwerp in Belgium** also benefits. Changes in the Gulf Stream could have far-reaching consequences for coastal communities, economies, and ecosystems

- Due to its proximity to Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asian countries, it is often referred to as the **"Golden Gate" to these landlocked nations**.
- Chabahar is also **700 kilometers away from Zahedan, the capital of the Sistan and Baluchistan province**.

Chabahar port

- India has encouraged Central Asian nations to utilize the **Chabahar port in Iran** to boost connectivity and trade with India and other global partners.

Key points:

- During the **sixth Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/National Security Advisers on Afghanistan** in Bishkek, India's Deputy National Security Adviser, Vikram Misri, emphasized the need for an **"inclusive and representative"** government in Afghanistan, advocating for a consensus-based approach towards the **Taliban-led administration**.
- In discussions with representatives from **Iran, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan**, Misri extended invitations for Central Asian neighbors to leverage the Chabahar port and the Shahid Beheshti terminal for maritime trade with India and beyond.

Chabahar port

- Chabahar Port, situated in **southeastern Iran on the Gulf of Oman**, is Iran's sole oceanic port, comprising **two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti**.
- It is approximately **170 kilometers west of Gwadar, a Pakistani port**.
- The port is strategically located on the **Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province**, at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, providing Iran with direct access to the **Indian Ocean**.

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