



WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

MARCH, 2024

Week-3

15-21 March, 2024

★★ Useful for ★★

**CSE, ESE, PSUs, State Services Exams,
SSC and Banking Exams**

15th MARCH, 2024

Bengaluru Water Crisis

- **Context:** Bengaluru is recently witnessing one of the worst water crises.

Key Highlights:

Reason behind such a water crisis in Bengaluru:

- There has been haphazard and unplanned urbanization in Bengaluru. There are problems of contamination of groundwater resources by the discharge of industrial chemicals, sewers and improper mining activities
- Bengaluru faced sub-par monsoon in 2023 and received little rain since November. Half the city depends on groundwater, but many borewells have run dry. This has created acute water stress.
- High pace of concretization has reduced porous surface area and restricted rainwater from entering the lower layers of the grounds, because of which the groundwater table cannot be recharged. For ex- in the 1970s, Bengaluru had 68% green cover, and 8% of the surface was paved. Now, 86% of the surface is concretized and the green cover has shrunk to 3%
- Bengaluru is on a ridge, with a series of valleys acting as water conduits to rivers like Cauvery. Lakes were built across these valleys and floodwater flowed through them. Due to encroachment of valleys, the flow of rainwater was impeded which caused flooding and stagnation in these areas.
- With limited supply of fresh water piped from Cauvery, the city's groundwater table has been over-exploited.
- There is unregulated extraction, pumping and usage of water without any special protocol or judicious distribution. As a result, it reached a tipping point, when borewells ran out of water.
- Since water is a free resource, it is not valued by the citizens. Citizens are completely detached from the water issues.

Steps taken by the government:

- The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has introduced fines, beginning at 5,000,

for non-essential use of potable water such as gardening and car washing.

- The Karnataka government has capped water tanker prices based on distance travelled to avoid customers being overcharged. The government has also made it mandatory for the private water tankers in the city to register with the civic body.

Samudrayaan Mission

- **Context:** The minister of Earth Sciences confirmed that the Samudrayaan mission is scheduled to explore the bed of the ocean by 2025 end.

Key Highlights:

- India is on a path to send its scientists to study the deep ocean 6 km under the sea surface under the mission.
- India's Deep Ocean Mission (DOM) is implemented by the Ministry Of Earth Sciences (MoES) and was approved in 2021 at a cost of nearly Rs 4,077 crore over a five-year period in a phased manner.
- As a part of DOM, India's flagship deep ocean mission, 'Samudrayaan', was initiated in 2021 by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- With 'Samudrayaan', India is embarking on a crewed expedition to reach a depth of 6,000 m to the ocean bed in the central Indian Ocean.
- This journey will be accomplished by Matsya6000, a deep-ocean submersible.
- The Matsya6000 is India's flagship deep-ocean human submersible that aims to reach the ocean bed at a depth of 6,000 m.
- So far, countries such as the U.S., Russia, China, France and Japan have carried out successful deep-ocean crewed missions. India is poised to join the ranks of these nations by demonstrating expertise of and capability for such missions.
- The 'New India 2030' document outlines the blue economy as the sixth core objective for India's growth. The years 2021-2030 have been designated by the United Nations as the 'Decade of Ocean Science'.

- DOM is one of nine missions under the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PMSTIAC).
- The mission is significant for the sustainable extraction of valuable resources, including polymetallic nodules and polymetallic sulfides.

Problems faced by Gig workers

- **Context:** The survey titled "Prisoners on Wheels" highlighted the plight of cab drivers and delivery persons in India

Key Highlights:

- According to the Code on Social Security, 2020, A gig worker is a person who performs work or participates in work arrangements and earns from such activities, outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship.
- There are over 7 million gig workers in the country. It may rise to 23.5 million by 2030.
- The survey revealed a picture of overwork, financial struggle, caste discrimination, and arbitrary work culture for gig workers.
- The majority in both categories, that is cab drivers and delivery persons, have reported low fares and rates with higher premium reductions by platforms.
- There are issues of arbitrary ID deactivation, and customers behaving badly with cab drivers.
- They are not provided with social security benefits like accident, health, and retirement benefits
- One of the labor codes passed by Parliament provides some protection to gig workers. However, the rules have not been framed at the all-India level.
- There is a need for robust legislative protection for gig workers. However, the law should not be so stringent that it should stifle the growth of formal employment.

16th MARCH, 2024

Bharat Shakti Exercise

- **Context:** Recently, the Integrated tri-service exercise 'Bharat Shakti' was held at Pokhran in Rajasthan.

Key Highlights:

- It is an integrated tri-service exercise conducted at Pokhran, Rajasthan.
- It aims to counter any threat through synergised joint operations.
- The exercise will showcase live integrated multi-domain operations of the three services in offensive operations using indigenous equipment
- It will display an array of indigenous weapon systems and platforms as a demonstration of the prowess of the country.
- **It features indigenous weapon systems:** T-90 (IM) Tanks, Dhanush and Sarang Gun Systems, Akash Weapons Systems, Logistics Drones, Robotic Mules.
- The Indian Navy displays Naval Anti-Ship Missiles, Autonomous Cargo Carrying Aerial Vehicles, and Expendable Aerial Targets.
- **The Indian Air Force showcases indigenous aircraft:** Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, Light Utility Helicopters, and Advanced Light Helicopters.
- It will simulate realistic, synergised, multi-domain operations displaying integrated operational capabilities of the Indian Armed Forces to counter threats across land, air, sea, cyber, and space domains.
- It highlights the resilience, innovation, and strength of India's domestic defence capabilities on the global stage.
- The exercise defines success of Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) in defense.

Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI) Programme

- **Context:** Recently, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports inaugurated the unique Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI) programme.

Key Highlights:

- KIRTI is part of the flagship Central Sector Scheme called Khelo India.
- It is scouting and training programme to build a culture of sports and also create a cradle of talent that can win India medals at global competitions.

- It's aim is to scout talent among school-goers between the age of 9 and 18 years
- Concerned Ministry is Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
- To hunt talent from every nook and corner of the country
- To use sports as a tool to curb addiction towards drugs and other gadgetry distractions
- KIRTI aims to conduct 20 lakh assessments across the country throughout the year to identify talent through notified Talent Assessment Centres.
- KIRTI is launched across 50 centres in India. Fifty thousand applicants are being assessed in the first phase across 10 sports, including athletics, boxing, wrestling, hockey, football and wrestling.
- KIRTI's athlete-centric programme is conspicuous by its transparent selection methodology based on Information Technology.
- Data analytics based on Artificial Intelligence is being used to predict the sporting acumen in an aspiring athlete.
- For syncing Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, state ratification isn't required. However, for a common electoral roll and aligning local body elections with national polls, state approval is needed.
- According to the panel, the Constitution mainly entrusts Parliament, not states, with the power to conduct Assembly elections.

SM REITs- Small and medium real-estate investment trusts

- **Context:** The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) recently introduced amendments to the REIT Regulations of 2014, outlining provisions for the establishment of small and medium real-estate investment trusts, known as SM REITs or micro REITs.

Key Highlights:

- These are specialised real estate investment trusts that differ from conventional REITs in their scale and focus.
- It aims to regulate the fractional ownership industry and safeguard investor interests, incorporating both commercial and residential properties within the new framework.
- Traditional REITs invest in large-scale commercial properties like offices and malls, while SM REITs focus on smaller and medium-sized properties with lower values.
- It maintains diversified portfolios, spreading risk across different property types within the real estate market.
- Small and medium real-estate investment trusts may raise funds from Indian and foreign investors by the issuance of units.
- **The minimum subscription size for units:** 10 lakh is treated as one unit.
- To establish this trust, there must be a minimum of 200 unit holders (Not including the investment manager, its related parties, and associates)
- The investment manager responsible for launching an SM REIT must have a net worth of at least 20 crore, and a separate trustee will be appointed for oversight.

17th MARCH, 2024

Kovind Panel on One Nation, One Election

- **Context:** A committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind submitted a report on the 'One Nation One Election' initiative to the President.

Key Highlights:

- Committee Proposes holding Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local body elections together.
- Recommends 15 amendments to the Constitution, altering and adding to various provisions.
- Suggests amendments to three statutes governing Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, and other Union Territories.
- A Presidential notification would set an "appointed date" for these simultaneous elections.

- Micro REITs can be listed with asset values ranging from Rs 50 crore to Rs 500 crore.
- These funds will be utilized for acquiring and managing real estate assets, aiming to generate income for investors.
- Ownership of these assets will be organized through one or more schemes, each operated under special purpose vehicles (SPVs).

Global Methane Tracker 2024

- **Context:** According to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Global Methane Tracker 2024, methane emissions from fuel usage in 2023 nearly reached their highest level ever, totaling 120 million tonnes (Mt).

Key Highlights:

- In 2023, methane emissions from fuel use were nearly the highest ever, reaching 120 million tonnes (Mt). This represents a slight increase compared to 2022.
- Out of the 120 Mt of methane released into the atmosphere, approximately 80 million tons came from only 10 countries.
- Top emitters– The United States tops the list in methane emissions from oil and gas operations, with Russia following closely. Meanwhile, China leads in emissions from coal operations.
- Additional emission– Bioenergy, produced from plant and animal waste, resulted in an additional 10 million tons of emissions.
- Emission Trends– Although studies indicate that emissions are declining in certain areas, the overall emissions remain excessively high to achieve the world's climate objectives.
- The world must reduce methane emissions from fossil fuels by 75% by 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting warming to 1.5°C.
- The IEA estimated that this goal would require about \$170 billion in spending. This is less than 5 percent of the income generated by the fossil fuel industry in 2023.

- Methane contributes to about 30% of the global temperature increase since the preindustrial era. The energy sector, covering oil, natural gas, coal, and bioenergy, makes up more than one-third of human-caused methane emissions.

18th MARCH, 2024

Human Development Report 2023- 24

- **Context:** The United Nations Development Programme has released the Human Development Report 2023-24.

Key Highlights:

- The HDI is a composite index computed based on three parameters – life expectancy, education, and gross national income (GNI) per capita.
- **Rise in Global Inequalities:** After 20 years of convergence, the gap between the richest and poorest countries has started to widen from 2020.
- Rich countries are experiencing record levels of human development, while half of the world's poorest countries remain below their pre-covid level.
- **SDG Goal:** Before the covid crisis, the world was on track to reach an average “very high” HDI by 2030, coinciding with the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Now it is off track, with every region running below its pre-2019 projections.
- India has been ranked 134th out of 193 countries. India's ranking has improved by one position this year.
- India has been placed in the medium human development category.
- India saw improvements across all HDI indicators – life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.
- India demonstrated progress in reducing gender inequality, India's GII value is better than the global and South Asian averages.
- India also has one of the largest gender gaps in the labour force participation rate—a 47.8 percentage point difference between women (28.3%) and men (76.1%).

- **India's Neighbours:** Sri Lanka has been ranked at 78, while China is ranked 75, both categorized under the High Human Development category.
- Bhutan stands at 125 and Bangladesh is in the 129th position. Nepal (146) and Pakistan (164) have been ranked lower than India.
- **Top Ranked:** Switzerland has been ranked number one followed by Norway and Iceland.
- **Bottom Ranked:** Central African Republic (191), South Sudan (192) and Somalia (193) were at the bottom of the Index.
- ASI has 3696 monuments under protection, which are spread, throughout the country.
- The selected stakeholders will develop, provide and maintain amenities in hygiene, accessibility, safety and knowledge categories.
- The term of the appointment will be for a period of five years initially, which may be further extended up to five years.

19th MARCH, 2024

Recommendation as per the Report for Improvement in HDI:

- Planetary public goods for climate stability as we confront the unprecedented challenges of the Anthropocene
- Digital global public goods for greater equity in harnessing new technologies for equitable human development
- New and expanded financial mechanisms, including a novel track in international cooperation that complements humanitarian assistance and traditional development aid to low-income countries
- Dialing down political polarization through new governance approaches focused on enhancing people's voices in deliberation and tackling misinformation.

Adopt a Heritage 2.0

- **Context:** Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) unveiled the Revamped Website and Sign MoUs for Monuments Adoption under Adopt a Heritage 2.0.

Key Highlights:

- ASI launched the "Adopt a Heritage 2.0" programme in 2023.
- The programme seeks to foster collaboration with corporate stakeholders through which they can contribute to preservation of the monuments for the next generation.

India Navy gets first independent HQ 'Nausena Bhawan'

- **Context:** The Defence Minister inaugurated the 'Nausena Bhawan', the new state-of-the-art headquarters of the Indian Navy at the Delhi Cantonment.

Key Highlights:

- It establishes the Navy's first independent headquarters in Delhi. Previously, the Navy operated from 13 different locations, making it difficult to coordinate.
- It is a centralised and technologically advanced headquarter that reflects the nation's commitment to maritime excellence and national security.
- The Building comprises three wings and four stories, incorporates innovative construction technologies to optimise efficiency and sustainability.

ETHANOL 100

- **Context:** The Ministry of Petroleum has launched 'ETHANOL 100', a groundbreaking automotive fuel, at the Indian Oil Retail Outlet.

Key Highlights:

- Ethanol 100 offers a cleaner, greener fuel option with its blend of 92-94% ethanol, 4-5% motor spirit, and 1.5% Co-solvent higher saturated alcohol. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions by around 63% and is ideal for high-performance engines due to its high-octane rating.

- With the launch of ETHANOL 100 at 183 Indian Oil outlets, India is nearing its target of achieving 20% ethanol blending by 2025-26.
- India's Ethanol Blending Program will enhance farmer incomes and rural employment also contribute to environmental sustainability, with significant reductions in CO2 emissions and foreign exchange savings.

20th MARCH, 2024

Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024

- **Context:** Recently, the Centre has notified a set of rules called the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024.

Key Highlights:

- Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024 aims to liberalise the conditions under which elephants may be transferred within or between States.
- Circumstances under which captive elephants can be transferred-
 - (a) when an owner is no longer in a position to maintain the elephant
 - (b) when the elephant will likely have a better upkeep than in the present circumstances
 - (c) when a State's Chief Wildlife Warden "deems it fit and proper" in the circumstances of the case for better upkeep of the elephant.
- Before a transfer within the State, an elephant's health has to be ratified by a veterinarian.
- The Deputy Conservator of Forests must establish that the animal's current habitat and prospective habitat are suitable.
- The Chief Wildlife Warden (on receipt of such documents) may reject or approve the transfer.
- If the transfer involves moving the elephant outside a State, similar conditions apply.

- Before a transfer is affected, the "genetic profile" of the elephant has to be registered with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- A mahout and an elephant assistant should accompany the animal, a health certificate, a quarantine period before the transfer and more are also part of the rules.
- **Earlier provision:** Until August 2022, the Wildlife Protection Act explicitly prohibited the trade in wildlife including both wild and captive elephants. Amendments to the Act in 2022, brought in an exemption that for the first time allowed captive elephants to be moved.
- A Parliamentary Committee had recommended the deletion of this exemption clause for elephants. However, the final version of the amended Act retains the clause.

Patent Rules 2024

- **Context:** Recently, the Patent Rules, 2024 has been officially notified.

Key Highlights:

- Patent Rules, 2024 marked a significant milestone in the journey towards fostering innovation and economic development.
- These rules introduce several provisions aimed at simplifying the process of obtaining and managing patents to facilitate a conducive environment for inventors and creators.
- It is to accelerate economic development of the nation through science and technology to fulfil the Viksit Bharat Sankalp.
- A new 'Certificate of Inventorship' has been introduced to acknowledge the contribution of inventors in the patented invention.
- The streamlined provision for accessing Grace period benefits under Section 31 is facilitated through the introduction of new forms, specifically Form 31.
- The time limit for submitting foreign application filing details in Form 8 has been adjusted from six months

post-filing to three months after the issuance of the first examination report.

- Due to rapid technological advancements, the timeframe for filing a request for examination has been reduced from 48 months to 31 months, counted from either the priority date of the application or the date of application filing, whichever comes earlier.
- Provision to extend time limit and condone delay in filing has been further simplified and made more explicit to ease in practice.
- The time for doing any act/proceeding may be extended any number of times up to six months by a request in prescribed manner.
- Renewal fee has been reduced by 10% if paid in advance through electronic mode for a period of at least 4 years.
- Patent statements in Form 27 are now required every three fiscal years instead of annually. Additionally, a provision allowing a three-month delay in filing upon request has been added.
- The process for filing and handling pre-grant representations through opposition under section 25(1) has been enhanced and clarified. This includes establishing methods for disposing of representations and setting filing fees.

■ NOTE:

A patent is a type of intellectual property that gives its owner the legal right to exclude others from making, using, or selling an invention for a limited period of time in exchange for publishing an enabling disclosure of the invention.

21st MARCH, 2024

Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Integrated Ombudsman Scheme

- **Context:** The number of complaints filed under the Reserve Bank's ombudsman schemes increased by over 68 per cent to 7.03 lakh in the fiscal 2022-23.

Key Highlights:

- The RB-IOS was introduced on November 12, 2021.
- It integrates the erstwhile three Ombudsman schemes of RBI namely, (i) the Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006; (ii) the Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies, 2018; and (iii) the Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions, 2019
- The Scheme simplifies the grievance redress process at RBI by enabling the customers of Regulated Entities (REs) to register their complaints at one centralised reference point.
- RB-IOS, 2021 covers all commercial banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), Payment System Participants, most Primary (Urban) Cooperative Banks, and Credit Information Companies.
- The objective of the Scheme is to resolve the customer grievances involving 'deficiency in service' on part of REs in a speedy, cost-effective and satisfactory manner.

World Air Quality Report 2023

- **Context:** IQAir has released the 6th edition of the World Air Quality Report 2023.

Key Highlights:

- IQAir is a Swiss technology company.
- The data in report was gathered from more than 30,000 air quality monitoring stations across 7,812 locations in 134 countries and regions.
- A total of 124 (92.5%) out of 134 countries and regions exceeded the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline value of 5 µg/m³.
- **Top Polluted Countries:** Top 5 most polluted countries in the world in 2023 included: Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan and Burkina Faso.
- For the first time in the history of this report, Canada was the most polluted country in Northern America.
- **Third Most Polluted:** India was declared as the third-most polluted country in 2023, after Bangladesh and Pakistan.

- India has an average annual PM2.5 concentration of 54.4 micrograms per cubic metre.
- 96% of the Indian population experience PM2.5 levels more than seven times the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline.
- Most Polluted Cities: In the top 50 most polluted cities in the world, 42 cities were in India.
- Begusarai was the most polluted metropolitan area of 2023, followed by Guwahati and then Delhi.
- **Delhi:** Delhi has become the world's most polluted capital city and saw an increase in PM2.5 concentration from 89.1 to 92.7 micrograms per cubic meter over between 2022 – 23.
- **Least Polluted Cities of India:** Silchar in Assam (7th), Aizawl in Mizoram (8th) and Damoh in Madhya Pradesh (15th) were the least polluted cities in the central and south Asia region.
- **Countries Meeting WHO standards:** Seven countries which met the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline (annual average of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ or less) included Australia, Estonia, Finland, Grenada, Iceland, Mauritius, and New Zealand.

