



WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FEBRUARY, 2024

Week-2

08-14 Feb., 2024

★★ Useful for ★★

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

8th FEBRUARY, 2024

Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill

- **Context:** The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill was passed in the Uttarakhand Assembly.

Key Highlights:

- Article 44 in Constitution of India mentions about the Uniform civil code for the citizens, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."
- The UCC can be traced back to the debates during the framing of the Indian Constitution. Some members of the Constituent Assembly, including Dr BR Ambedkar believed that a UCC was necessary to promote gender equality, secularism, and national integration.
- Post independence, the demand to implement the UCC has come up many times, notably, in 1985, during the hearing of the Shah Bano case. This also led to a backlash since this was against Muslim personal laws.
- States like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Assam have expressed their willingness to follow the UCC, none have officially adopted it.
- However, a version of the UCC is in place in Goa. It follows the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867, which means that people of all religions in Goa are subject to the same laws on marriage, divorce, and succession.
- The Goa Daman and Diu Administration Act of 1962, which was passed after Goa joined the union as a territory in 1961, gave Goa permission to apply the Civil Code.
- Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill Sets a common marriage age of 18 years for both men and women across all religions.
- It bans the practice of having multiple spouses simultaneously.
- Its aim is to streamline adoption procedures for all individuals and couples, regardless of religion.

- Mandates registration of live-in relationships within the state, although it doesn't grant them legal status equivalent to marriage. Prescribes jail term of up to six months for not producing a "certificate" of the relationship.
- Essentially, the Bill seeks to equate heterosexual live-in relationships to the status of a marriage.
- It ensures equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters, irrespective of their religion.
- It Specifies uniform grounds for divorce applicable to all communities and also provides for maintenance to the woman when "deserted" by her partner.
- It Doesn't apply to tribal communities governed by their customary laws.

Lunar nuclear reactor project

- **Context:** NASA has recently announced that it has completed the first phase of its plans to put a nuclear fission reactor on the Moon.

Key Highlights:

- Its Objective is to create a small electricity-generating reactor for future lunar missions and outposts.
- The project involves designing a reactor, power conversion systems, heat rejection mechanisms, and power distribution systems.
- A nuclear reactor could be placed in permanently shadowed areas (where there may be water ice) of the moon. This would ensure continuous power production during lunar nights.
- It produces power without any dependence on weather and other conditions.
- It could play an important role in bolstering NASA's ambitions to have a sustained human presence on the Moon for at least 10 years.

Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)

- **Context:** Recently, astronomers utilized data from NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) to uncover and analyze a potentially habitable zone planet known as TOI-715b.

Key Highlights:

- It is a NASA mission dedicated to locating planets that orbit the brightest stars visible from Earth.
- It is a successor to NASA's Kepler space telescope which discovered thousands of exoplanets over a decade following its launch in 2009.
- Launched on April 18, 2018, using a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral (USA).
- The main mission concluded on July 4, 2020, and TESS is currently in an extended mission phase.
- TESS follows a distinctive high Earth orbit, completing its cycle every 12 to 15 days.
- This orbit is strategically inclined to minimize obstructions from Earth and the Moon, allowing the telescope an unimpeded view of the sky.
- During its two-year primary mission, TESS's four cameras scanned more than 200,000 nearby and bright stars, covering 75% of the sky.
- TESS discovers planets of various sizes and compositions, from small rocky ones to giant ones, demonstrating the galaxy's planet diversity.

9th FEBRUARY, 2024

Finance Bill 2024

- **Context:** The Lok Sabha passed the Finance Bill, 2024 by voice vote recently.

Key Highlights:

- A Finance Bill is a Money Bill as defined in Article 110 of the Constitution.
- It is introduced annually in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) after the Union Budget presentation.
- It embodies the government's budgetary proposals for taxation, spending, and other financial matters.
- The proposals of the government for levy of new taxes, modification of the existing tax structure or continuance of the existing tax structure beyond the period approved by Parliament are submitted to Parliament through this bill.
- The Finance Bill is accompanied by a Memorandum containing explanations of the provisions included in it.

- The Finance Bill can be introduced only in Lok Sabha. However, the Rajya Sabha can recommend amendments in the Bill.
- It requires approval from both houses of parliament before becoming law.
- The bill has to be passed by the Parliament within 75 days of its introduction.
- Due to the upcoming general elections in April-May 2024, the bill focuses on maintaining the existing tax structure for the financial year 2024-2025.
- Some minor tax reliefs are included for specific sectors or categories of taxpayers.
- It includes provisions for infrastructure development, investment promotion, and ease of doing business reforms.
- The government aims to reduce the fiscal deficit by proposing measures to control spending or increase revenue.

Good Friday Agreement

- **Context:** Recently, the US President was in Belfast to mark 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement, the deal that ended 3 decades of bloodshed.

Key Highlights:

- It was signed on April 10, 1998 at Belfast, the capital city and principal port of Northern Ireland, which was a significant milestone in the history of Ireland.
- It is also known as the Belfast Agreement.
- It ended more than three decades of bloody conflict, known as the 'Troubles'.
- The agreement had two parts: A 'multi-party agreement' between Northern Ireland's major parties, and An agreement between the governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- The economic integration and soft borders between the two Irelands were one of the key aspects.
- **The agreement legitimized the demands of both sides:** The majority in Northern Ireland wanted to remain a part of the UK and a substantial minority in Northern Ireland as well as the majority in the rest of the island, wanted a 'United Ireland'.

10th FEBRUARY, 2024

Increasing rice prices in India

- **Context:** The Indian government's efforts to manage rice prices through measures like mandatory stock reporting, launching affordable 'Bharat Rice', and regulating exports. Despite these efforts, rice prices are rising due to increased production costs, export demands, and regional production variations.

Key Highlights:

- India's rice production was 135 million tonnes in 2022-2023. In 2023-2024, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka saw production drops of 30% and 25% respectively due to inadequate rainfall, while northern states reported a 15% increase.
- Over the last year, retail rice prices increased by 14.51%. Prices of some rice varieties have risen by more than Rs 10 per kg.
- Non-basmati rice exports have surged, from 5.1 million tonnes in 2019-2020 to 16.1 million tonnes in 2022-2023.
- The Minimum Support Price (MSP) for rice has increased in the last five years, adding to overall production costs.
- Costs for transportation and storage of rice are escalating, contributing to higher retail prices.
- Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, major rice-producing states, have seen a drop in production by 30% and 25% respectively due to inadequate rainfall.
- The retail market is currently selling last season's stock, and with lower production in some regions, this shortfall is pushing prices up.
- There is a growing demand for rice in ethanol production and cattle feed, which impacts the availability and price in the consumer market.

The government initiatives to control rice prices in India:

- The government mandates all rice traders, wholesalers, retailers, and millers to report their stocks

online, including various categories like broken rice, non-basmati white rice, and basmati rice.

- Launch of 'Bharat Rice': 'Bharat Rice' has been introduced for retail sale to general consumers at 29 per kg, aimed at providing affordable rice options.
- The government banned the export of broken rice and imposed a 20% duty on par-boiled rice exports. It also categorized non-basmati white rice exports as prohibited from July 2023.
- To bolster domestic supply, the government procured 600 lakh tonnes of paddy in the current Kharif marketing season. This contributed to a central pool of 525 lakh tonnes of rice, aligning with the annual requirement of almost 400 lakh tonnes for welfare schemes.

Satyendra Nath Bose

- **Context:** Distinguished scientists came together to celebrate 100 years of Satyendra Nath Bose's publications contributing to quantum mechanics.

Key Highlights:

- He was an Indian physicist who established modern theoretical physics in India. He is best known for providing the foundation of Bose-Einstein statistics and developing the theory of Bose-Einstein condensates.
- He was born in Calcutta on January 1, 1894. He was an outstanding student who got inspired from brilliant teachers like Jagadish Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Roy.
- He started his career in 1916 as a lecturer in physics at Calcutta University and then joined Dacca University.
- At the University of Dhaka, Bose carried out research and studied the theory of relativity.
- By treating radiation as a gas of photons (Photon gas) and using new statistical techniques for counting photon states, Bose provided a new derivation of Planck's law.
- The pioneering ideas of Bose, developed further by Einstein, were confirmed by the observation of a new state of matter in a diluted gas of ultra-cold alkali

atoms, the Bose-Einstein condensate. This exotic material exists only when atoms of certain elements are cooled to temperatures near absolute zero.

- At that point, clusters of atoms begin functioning as a single quantum object with both wave and particle properties.
- According to scientists, BECs hold crucial information about curious phenomena like dark energy, the unidentified energy thought to be responsible for the universe's accelerating expansion.

11th FEBRUARY, 2024

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

- **Context:** The Central government has recently approved the "Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY).

Key Highlights:

- It is a sub scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, for the micro and small enterprises operating in the fisheries sector with an expected investment of 6,000 crore in the next four years.
- The sub-scheme PM-MKSSY is with 50% public finance, including the World Bank and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) external financing, and the rest 50% investment from the private sector leverage.
- It will be implemented for four years from 2023-24 to 2026-27 across all the States and union territories.
- Fishers, aquaculture farmers, fish workers and fish vendors are expected to benefit from the scheme.
- It is aimed at gradual formalisation of the fisheries sector and enhanced access to institutional credit.
- It will create 1.7 lakh new jobs, with a special emphasis on employing 75,000 women.
- It will improve value chain efficiency and ensuring safe, quality fish by supporting 55,000 targeted micro and small enterprises.

- It will ensure environment friendly fisheries sector.
- It will Facilitate Ease of Doing Business and transparency.

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

- **Context:** Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project has faced a definite setback after an important town in Myanmar was captured recently by a rebel group.

Key Highlights:

- Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is aimed at connecting the port of Kolkata with the port of Sittwe in Rakhine which would then be connected to Mizoram by road and the Kaladan river which flows by Paletwa.
- India entered into a Framework Agreement in 2008.
- It aims to create a multi-modal mode of transport for shipment of cargo from the eastern ports of India to Myanmar as well as to the North-Eastern part of India through Myanmar.
- It involves building roads to connect Mizoram state in northeastern India to the port of Sittwe in Myanmar's Rakhine state.
- The project includes the development of inland waterways along the Kaladan River, providing an alternative mode of transportation for cargo between India and Myanmar.
- A multi-modal terminal is being constructed at the port of Sittwe to facilitate the transfer of goods between different modes of transportation, such as ships and trucks.

12th FEBRUARY, 2024

SASEC Corridor Connectivity

- **Context:** The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for multiple road upgrade projects as part of the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Corridor Connectivity.

Key Highlights:

- Established in 2001, it brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in a project-based partnership.
- SASEC seeks to strengthen multimodal cross-border transport networks that boost intraregional trade and open up trade opportunities with East and Southeast Asia.
- **The key projects underway in the region include:** formulation and implementation of new Customs laws and regulations; strengthening of automated Customs systems; implementing provisions of the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) such as on pre-arrival processing, risk management and post-clearance audit; and developing trade portals for better transparency.

Payment Aggregators

- **Context:** The fintech startups like Decentro, Juspay, Stripe and Tata Pay received final authorisation from the RBI for payment aggregator (PA) licenses.

Key Highlights:

- A payment aggregator is a third-party service provider that enables customers to make and businesses to accept payments online.
- Payment aggregators enable clients to accept various payment methods such as debit cards, credit cards, cardless EMIs, UPI, bank transfers, e-wallets, and e-mandates.
- Similarly, they also enable disbursing payments to various stakeholders, such as partners, employees, suppliers, and authorities.
- Payment aggregators act as middlemen between customers, businesses, and financial institutions to facilitate online payments via various payment methods.

Payment Aggregator vs Payment Gateway:

- According to the RBI, both payment aggregators and gateways facilitate online payments, but only payment aggregators handle funds.

- Payment gateways are termed as technology infrastructure providers for online payments.
- Hence, RBI guidelines for payment aggregators are stricter.

India's BIT Framework

- **Context:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced plans to negotiate new Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) to increase foreign investment. India's BIT Framework

Key Highlights:

- India began making BITs in the mid-1990s to protect and encourage foreign investments. The first treaty was signed with the UK in 1994.
- By 2015, India faced 17 BIT claims, including high-profile disputes like the Cairn Energy Plc case, leading to substantial awards against the Indian government. This scenario prompted a reevaluation of the 1993 BIT model.
- In response, India adopted the 2016 Model BIT and terminated 68 of its 74 treaties, seeking renegotiation based on this revised model.
- This new model was stricter and required foreign investors to first exhaust all local remedies before international arbitration could be pursued.
- India's BIT Framework is important because India's previous bilateral treaties have been decreasing, especially after the 2016 Model BIT, which changed how India deals with foreign investments
- To achieve its goal of becoming a \$5-trillion economy, India needs to attract and keep foreign investments. This requires updating its BIT strategy to make it more welcoming while protecting national interests.

13th FEBRUARY, 2024

India's renewable energy (RE) status

- **Context:** India's efforts to increase its renewable energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, focusing on solar and wind energy.

Key Highlights:

- India aims to achieve 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030.
- So far, 72 GW of solar and 44 GW of wind energy have been installed.
- Peak power demand is projected to grow from 240 GW in FY24 to 285 GW in FY28, with deficits of 10-15 GW, mainly in the evenings.

Initiatives taken for achieving renewable energy (RE) goals:

- Renewable energy projects, particularly solar and wind, have been accorded a 'must run' status, ensuring their continuous operation except in case of safety issues.
- Introduction of favorable policies such as late payment surcharge waivers, inter-state transmission system charge waivers, and renewable purchase obligations to boost renewable energy growth.
- The renewable sector has seen a rise in competition among Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and an influx of foreign investments. This influx of competition and capital boosts innovation, leading to more efficient, cost-effective renewable energy solutions.
- India is developing power exchange markets to efficiently manage excess renewable energy. These markets enable the sale of surplus power, balancing supply and demand. This not only ensures grid stability but also enhances the financial viability of renewable energy projects.
- Recent bids require renewable energy generators to match hourly demand, enhancing the reliability and comparability of renewable energy to traditional power sources. For instance, in the recent firm and dispatchable RE (FDRE) bids invited by SECI, generators are required to match round the clock (RTC) demand of discoms on a 15-minute basis.

Latest Awardees of Bharat Ratna

- **Context:** Recently, the Prime Minister of India announced M.S. Swaminathan, P.V. Narasimha Rao, and Choudhary Charan Singh to get Bharat Ratna.

Key Highlights:

M.S. Swaminathan:

- He was a legendary agricultural scientist and a key architect of India's 'Green Revolution' and instrumental in introducing and further developing high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice in India.
- His efforts, in collaboration with Norman Borlaug and other scientists, helped India achieve self-reliance in agriculture and ensured the nation's food security.

P.V. Narasimha Rao:

- He served as the 9th Prime Minister of India from 1991 to 1996.
- He was from a non-Hindi-speaking region (Telugu) and the first from South India (United Andhra Pradesh).
- He is known for introducing various liberal reforms to India's economy.
- He contributed to India's foreign policy, and enriched its cultural and intellectual heritage.
- **Recognition:** He earned the title of the 'Chanakya of Indian politics' for his strategic manoeuvres and significant economic reforms during his tenure as Prime Minister.

Choudhary Charan Singh:

- He was an Indian politician and a freedom fighter.
- He entered politics as part of the Indian Independence Movement motivated by Mahatma Gandhi.
- He was elected to the then United Provinces Assembly from Chhaprauli in 1937.
- He served as the 5th Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and 5th Prime Minister of India.
- He was known for his dedication to the rights of farmers and their welfare.

14th FEBRUARY, 2024

SWATI Portal

- **Context:** The Government has launched the SWATI Portal on the occasion of the International Day for Girls and Women in Science.

Key Highlights:

- Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI) Portal is aimed at creating a single online portal representing Indian Women and Girls in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine).
- The database of SWATI Portal will serve in policy making to address the challenges of Gender-gap.
- The Portal is a complete interactive database; and the first-of-its-kind in India which is developed, hosted and maintained by the National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR).

Government Initiatives to counter Gender Disparity in Science

- **KIRAN (Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing) Scheme:** Launched by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), KIRAN aims to provide various career opportunities to women scientists and technologists, including fellowships, grants, and training programs.
- **Women Scientists Scheme (WOS):** Under DST, the WOS provides opportunities for women scientists to pursue research in emerging areas of science and technology, allowing them to re-enter the workforce after a career break.
- **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA):** This program focuses on improving the quality of education in secondary schools, including promoting the participation of girls in STEM subjects and providing them with relevant skills and opportunities.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** AIM, under the NITI Aayog, aims to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in India.
- **Biotechnology Career Advancement and Re-orientation (BioCARE) Program:** Under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), this program aims to support women scientists by providing career development opportunities, mentoring, and financial assistance for research projects.

- **Women Start-up Program (WSP):** It was launched by DST in partnership with Goldman Sachs and aims to support ambitious and innovative women entrepreneurs by enabling them to transform their idea into a business venture. WSP reached out to 6200 women across the country through the Massive Open Online Course program.
- **Vigyan Jyoti program aims** to provide exposure and mentorship to girls in STEM.

Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)

- **Context:** Government is preparing to include ASHA and anganwadi workers/helpers in its Ayushman Bharat scheme as announced in Interim Budget 2024.

Key Highlights:

- Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri – Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) is the largest publicly funded health assurance scheme in the world.
- It provides health cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- The households included are based on the deprivation and occupational criteria of Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 (SECC 2011) for rural and urban areas respectively.

Kilkari Programme

- **Context:** Ministers of State for Health recently launched 'Kilkari' programme, a mobile health initiative for beneficiaries, in local content, in Gujarat and Maharashtra as part of Digital Health India Programme.

Key Highlights:

- 'Kilkari' (meaning 'a baby's gurgle'), is an IVR based mobile health service which delivers free, weekly, time-appropriate 72 audio messages about pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare directly to families' mobile phones from the second trimester of pregnancy until the child is one year old.

- Kilkari Programme is centrally hosted by MoHFW for all the States/UTs and no further investment in the technology, telephony infrastructure or operational costs is required to be borne by States/UTs.
- This service is FREE of cost for States/UTs and beneficiaries.
- The programme is integrated with the centralized Reproductive Child Health (RCH) portal of MoHFW's and is the single source of information for this mHealth service.

