

Current Affairs February 2022 Magazine (1 Feb 18 Feb)

Science and Technology

Earth Observation Satellite (EOS-04)

Context: PM congratulated Indian space scientists on successful launch of PSLV C52 mission.

About Earth Observation Satellite (EOS-04)

- **Launch Vehicle:** It was launched by PSLV C-52 launch vehicle from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota.
- **Weight:** Its weight is around 1,170 kg.
- **Orbit:** It will be placed in a sun synchronous polar orbit of 529 km away from earth.
- **Feature:** It is a radar-imaging satellite, designed to provide high-quality images under all weather conditions.

PSLV-C52 mission:

- **INSPIRESat-1:** It is a student satellite from the Indian Institute of Space Science & Technology in association with the Laboratory of Atmospheric & Space Physics at the University of Colorado, Boulder and
- **INS-2TD:** It is a technology demonstrator satellite from ISRO.
- **CMS-01 Mission:** It is India's communication satellite was launched by PSLV-C50 in 2020. It was injected into an elliptical sub-Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit. It is envisaged for providing services in extended C Band frequency spectrum.

First launch of 2022

On Monday, Earth Observation Satellite **EOS-04** and two small satellites — **INSPIRESat-1** and **INS-2TD** — were placed in the orbit by the **PSLV-C52** rocket. A detailed look at the payload

DETAILS OF THE LAUNCH

- 1 Monday's was the 54th flight of PSLV and 23rd mission using PSLV-XL configuration with six PSOM-XLs (strap-on motors)
- 2 After a flight of about 18 minutes, the vehicle injected the satellites into their intended orbit
- 3 Primary satellite EOS-04 was put into the intended sun synchronous polar orbit of 529 km altitude at 6.17 a.m.

EOS-04 Weight: 1,710 kg

Mission life: 10 years

Use: Radar Imaging Satellite is designed to provide high quality images under all weather conditions for applications such as agriculture, forestry and plantations, soil moisture and hydrology and flood mapping

INSPIRESat-1 Weight: 8.1 kg

Mission life: 1 year

Use: Two payloads in the satellite are aimed at improving the understanding of ionosphere dynamics and the sun's coronal heating processes

- The satellite is built by Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology in association with Laboratory of Atmospheric and Space Physics at University of Colorado Boulder, NTU, Singapore and NCU, Taiwan

INS-2TD Weight: 17.5 kg

Mission life: 6 months

Use: Having a thermal imaging camera as its payload, the satellite benefits the assessment of land surface temperature, water surface temperature of wetland or lakes, delineation of vegetation (crops and forest) and thermal inertia (day and night)

- This is a technology demonstrator satellite from ISRO, a precursor to the India-Bhutan Joint Satellite (INS-2B)

SOURCE: AP
IMAGES: ISRO

Flying start: ISRO's workhorse launch vehicle, PSLV, blasting off from the launchpad at Sriharikota at 5.59 a.m. on Monday

Lassa Fever

Context:

One of the three persons diagnosed with Lassa fever in the UK has died. The cases have been linked to travel to west African countries.

What is Lassa fever?

- The Lassa virus is named after a town in Nigeria where the first cases were discovered.
 - The Lassa fever-causing virus is found in West Africa and was **first discovered in 1969 in Lassa, Nigeria**.
 - The discovery of this disease was made after two nurses died in Nigeria.
 - The death rate associated with this disease is low, at around **one per cent**.
 - But the death rate is higher for certain individuals, such as pregnant women in their third trimester.

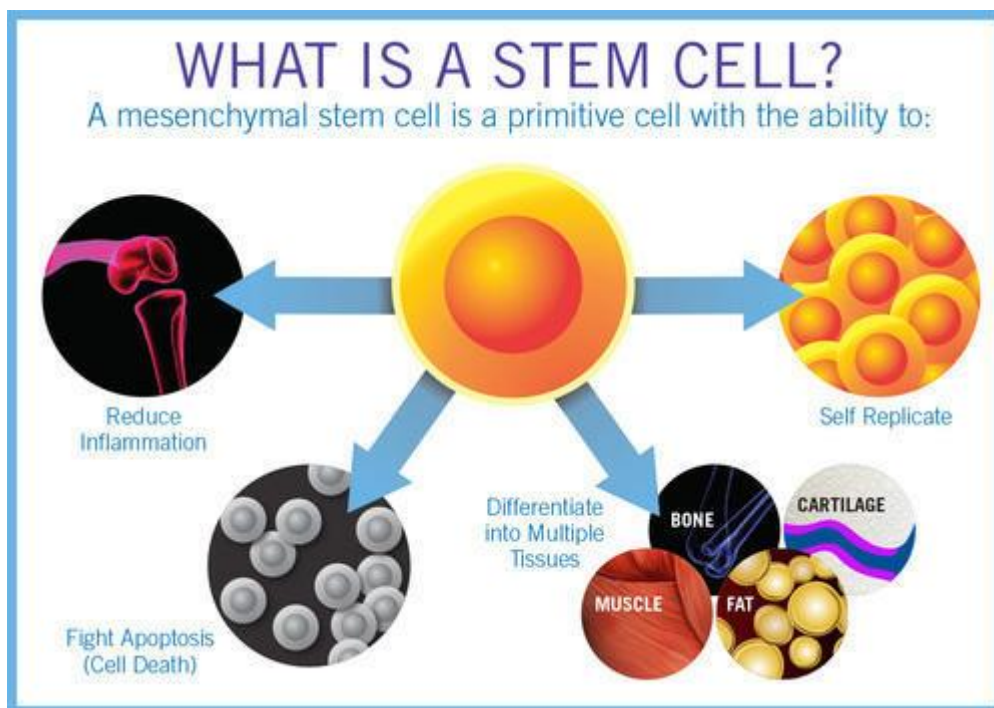
Stem cell therapy

Context:

The scientists reported that a woman living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and administered an experimental treatment is likely 'cured' with stem cell therapy.

What Are Stem Cells?

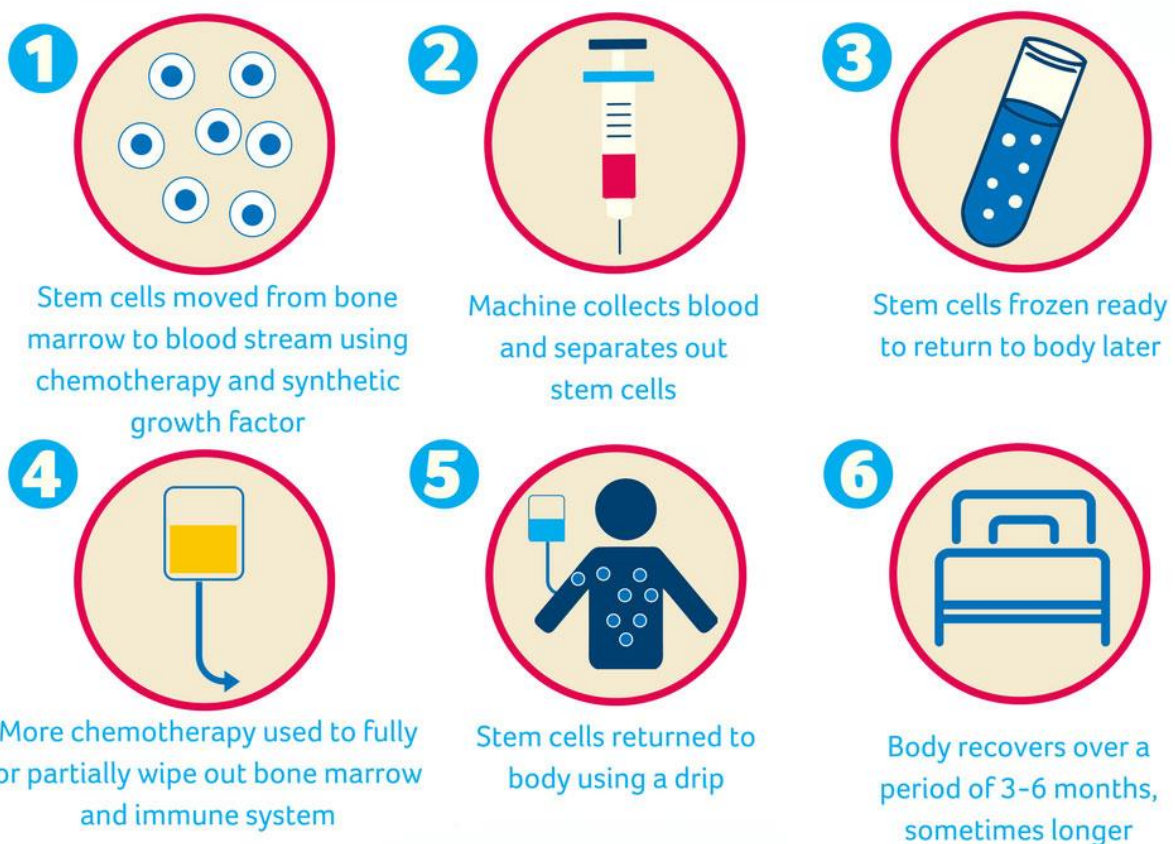
- Stem cells are special human cells that are able to develop into many different cell types.
- This can range from muscle cells to brain cells. In some cases, they can also fix damaged tissues.
- Researchers believe that stem cell-based therapies may one day be used to treat serious illnesses such as paralysis and Alzheimer disease.



Stem cell therapy:

- It is a cumbersome exercise and barely accessible to most HIV patients in the world.
- Moreover, this requires stem cells from that rare group of individuals with the beneficial mutation.
- Anti-retroviral therapy, through the years, has now ensured that HIV/AIDS isn't always a death sentence and many with access to proper treatment have lifespans comparable to those without HIV.
- A vaccine for HIV or a drug that eliminates the virus is still elusive and would be the long sought 'cure' for HIV/AIDS.

Six stages of stem cell therapy



Polity and Social Issues

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme

Context:

Demand for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme has dropped from the peak of the first lockdown.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, MGNREGA, is an Indian labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'. This act was passed in September 2005.
- **Mandate:** The mandate of the MGNREGA is to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- **Aims :**
 - To enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- It covers all districts of India except the ones with 100% urban population.
- MGNREGA is to be implemented mainly by gram panchayats (GPs). The involvement of contractors is banned.
- Core objectives of the MGNREGS are:
 - (a) Providing not less than one hundred days of unskilled manual work as a guaranteed employment in a financial year to every household in rural areas as per demand, resulting in creation of productive assets of prescribed quality and durability;
 - (b) Strengthening the livelihood resource base of the poor;
 - (c) Proactively ensuring social inclusion and
 - (d) Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions.

How MGNREGA came to be?

- In 1991, the P.V Narashima Rao government proposed a pilot scheme for generating employment in rural areas with the following goals:
 - Employment Generation for agricultural labour during the lean season.
 - Infrastructure Development
 - Enhanced Food Security
- This scheme was called the Employment Assurance Scheme which later evolved into the MGNREGA after the merger with the Food for Work Programme in the early 2000s.

Dilution of Lokayukta Powers in Kerala

Context:

Recently, the Kerala government has proposed to amend the Kerala Lokayukta Act, 1999 with an ordinance, a move that has drawn criticism from the opposition.

What is Kerala Proposal?

- The Kerala cabinet has recommended to the Governor that he promulgates the ordinance.
- The proposal sought to give the government powers to “either accept or reject the verdict of the Lokayukta, after giving an opportunity of being heard”.
- By this ordinance, the quasi-judicial institution will turn into a toothless advisory body, whose orders will no longer be binding on the government.

Lokayukta

- The Lokayukta is an anti-corruption ombudsman organization in the Indian states.
- Once appointed, Lokayukta cannot be dismissed nor transferred by the government, and can only be removed by passing an impeachment motion by the state assembly.
- The Lokayukta, along with the Income Tax Department and the Anti-Corruption Bureau, mainly helps people publicise corruption among the Politicians and Government Officials.
- Many acts of the Lokayukta have resulted in criminal or other consequences for those charged.

Lokayukta in different States:

- Maharashtra was the first state to introduce the institution of Lokayukta (considered the weakest Lokayukta due to lack of powers, staff, funds and an independent investigating agency).
- On the other hand, the Karnataka Lokayukta is considered the most powerful Lokayukta in the country.
- Karnataka Lokayukta is considered the most powerful Lokayukta in the country.

About Lokpal

- The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013 establishes Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States (Statutory Bodies) to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries.
- Composition: Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members, of which 50% shall be judicial members and 50% shall be from SC/ST/OBCs, minorities and women.
- Appointment process: It is a two-stage process.

- A search committee which recommends a panel of names to the high-power selection committee.
- The selection committee comprises the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Justice of India (or his nominee) and an eminent jurist (nominated by President based on the recommendation of other members of the panel).
- President will appoint the recommended names.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

Context:

The Development & Monitoring Evaluation Office of NITI Aayog has evaluated the centrally sponsored schemes of Ministry of Women & Child Development including PMMVY.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit programme being implemented in all districts of the country with effect from 2017.
- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** being executed by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**.
- Under PMMVY Cash benefits are provided to pregnant women in their bank account directly to meet enhanced nutritional needs and partially compensate for wage loss.
- All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), (excluding those who are in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits) who have their pregnancy on or after 1st January 2017 for the first child in the family – are the beneficiaries targeted by the scheme.
- Beneficiaries receive a cash benefit of Rs. 5,000 in three installments on fulfilling the following conditions:
 - Early registration of pregnancy
 - Ante-natal check-up
 - Registration of the birth of the child and completion of first cycle of vaccination for the first living child of the family.
- Implementation of the scheme is closely monitored by the central and state governments through the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana – Common Application Software (PMMVY-CAS).

Freedom of religion and attire

Context: A Karnataka school's denial of entry to six girls in hijab throws the spotlight on freedom of religion.

How is religious freedom protected under the Constitution?

- Article 25(1) of the Constitution guarantees the “freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion”.
- It is a right that guarantees a negative liberty — which means that the state shall ensure that there is no interference or obstacle to exercise this freedom.
- However, like all fundamental rights, the state can restrict the right for grounds of public order, decency, morality, health and other state interests.
- Over the years, the Supreme Court has evolved a practical test of sorts to determine what religious practices can be constitutionally protected and what can be ignored.
- In 1954, the Supreme Court held in the Shirur Mutt case that the term “religion” will cover all rituals and practices “integral” to a religion.

How have courts ruled so far on the issue of a hijab?

- In 2015, at least two petitions were filed before the Kerala High Court challenging the prescription of dress code for All India Pre-Medical Entrance which prescribed wearing “light clothes with half sleeves not having big buttons, brooch/badge, flower, etc. with Salwar/Trouser” and “slippers and not shoes”.
- Admitting the argument of the Central Board of School Education (CBSE) that the rule was only to ensure that candidates would not use unfair methods by concealing objects within clothes, the Kerala HC directed the CBSE to put in place additional measures for checking students who “intend to wear a dress according to their religious custom, but contrary to the dress code”.
- “If the Invigilator requires the head scarf or the full sleeve garments to be removed and examined, then the petitioners shall also subject themselves to that, by the authorised person. It is also desirable that the C.B.S.E issue general instructions to its Invigilators to ensure that religious sentiments be not hurt and at the same time discipline be not compromised,” Justice Vinod Chandran ruled.

Operation AAHT

Context:

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) has launched a nationwide ‘Operation AAHT’ to curb human trafficking.

Operation AAHT

- As part of this operation, special teams will be deployed on all long-distance trains/routes with focus on rescuing victims, particularly women and children, from the clutches of traffickers.
- The RPF will act as a bridge cutting across States to assist the local police in the mission to curb the menace.
- The infrastructure and intelligence network of the force could be utilized to collect, collate and analyse clues on victims, source, route, destination,

popular trains used by suspects, identity of carriers/agents, kingpins etc and shared with other law-enforcing agencies.

Constitutional provisions:

- **Article 23** which prohibits trafficking in human beings and begar and other similar forms of forced labour.
- **Article 39(e) and 39(f)** which ordain that the health and strength of individuals are not abused and that no one is forced by the economic necessity to do work unsuited to their age or strength and that childhood and youth should be protected against exploitation.

Privilege Motion

Context:

An MP from Telangana submitted a Privilege Motion against PM regarding his remarks over the bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh.

What is a privilege motion?

- Members of Parliament (MPs) enjoy certain parliamentary privileges which are bestowed on them collectively and individually so that they can discharge their duties and functions effectively.
- In the case that any of these immunities or rights are disregarded by any MP, the act is regarded as a '**breach of privilege**' and is a punishable offence under Laws of Parliament.
- When a breach of privilege is found, then an MP can move a privilege motion against those being held guilty of breach.
- **Both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha** reserve the right to punish any action of contempt (not necessarily breach of privilege) which is against its authority and dignity.

Where do these rules find mention?

- The rules governing privilege motion are mentioned as **Rule 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book** and as **Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha Rule Book**.
- According to the rules, an MP may raise a question of breach of privilege with the Speaker or the Chairperson, notices for which have to be sent to them before 10am.
- The breach of privilege could be of another MP, a committee or of the House. However, the rules mandate the notice should be regarding an incident which has occurred recently and that it needs the intervention of the House.

What if the Speaker/Chairperson refers the motion to a parliamentary committee?

- In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges which consists of 15 members proportionate to the strengths of various political parties in the Lower House of Parliament.
- They prepare a report which is then presented before the House for its consideration.
- The Speaker may allow a half-an-hour debate on the report before she/he passed the final orders.
- The Speaker can also direct that the report be tabled before the House and a resolution may be unanimously passed on the breach of privilege.
- The process is similar in the Upper House, except that the privilege committee consists of 10 members and is headed by the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha.

Have privilege motions been passed in Parliament earlier?

A number of privilege motions have been passed in Parliament earlier, with most of them being rejected and very few demanding penal actions.

- The most significant privilege motion was passed against Indira Gandhi in 1978.
- The then Home Minister Charan Singh had moved a resolution of breach of privilege against her on the basis of observations made by Justice Shah Commission, which investigated the excesses during the Emergency.
- Mrs Gandhi, who had just won the Lok Sabha elections from Chikmagalur, was expelled from the House.
- In another case, BJP MP Subramanian Swamy was expelled from Rajya Sabha in 1976 for bringing disgrace to Parliament through his interviews to foreign publications.
- In 1961, editor of 'Blitz' RK Karanjia was indicted with gross breach of privilege after the publication put out an article that publicly castigated Congress veteran JB Kripalani. Karanjia was reprimanded in Lok Sabha and the gallery pass of his correspondent was annulled.

Constitutional Provisions

Article 105: The powers, privileges and immunities of either House of the Indian Parliament and of its members and their committees are laid down in Article 105 of the Constitution.

Article 194: While, the powers, privileges and immunities of the State Legislatures, their Members and their committees are described in Article 194.

SC: Tribunal Appointments Being Taken Lightly

Context:

The Supreme Court said its judicial intervention saw the government make abrupt efforts to fill vacancies in tribunals some time back and nothing after that.

About the present vacancies in tribunals

- Chief Justice of India read out the details of over **240 vacancies** in key tribunals with some tribunals even lacking presiding officers.
- The tribunals included some critical ones like the **National Green Tribunal, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal and Central Administrative Tribunal** among others.
- The bench also lamented the fact that recommendations to the tribunals by the selection committees led by sitting Supreme Court judges have been largely ignored by the government.

Concerns regarding vacancies in tribunals

- The large vacancies have made the tribunals **ineffective and redundant**.
- The large vacancies mainly attributable to the delay in appointments have rendered the tribunals defunct and with High Courts having no jurisdiction over the areas of law wielded by tribunals, litigants have nowhere to go for justice and this would adversely impact the right of the people to access justice.

Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT):

- It was set up in **1985** with the principal bench at Delhi and additional benches in other states (It now has 17 benches, 15 operating at seats of HC's and 2 in Lucknow and Jaipur).
- It has original jurisdiction in matters related to recruitment and service of public servants (All India services, central services etc).
- Its members have a status of High Court judges and are **appointed by president**.
- Appeals against the order of CAT lie before the division of High Court after Supreme Court's Chandra Kumar Judgement.

State administrative tribunals (SAT):

- Central government can establish state administrative tribunals on request of the state according to Administrative tribunals act of **1985**
- SAT's enjoy original jurisdiction in relation to the matters of state government employees.
- Chairman and members are appointed by President in consultation with the governor.

- **Article 323-B:** which empowers the parliament and the state legislatures to establish tribunals for adjudication of disputes related to following matters:
 - Taxation
 - Foreign exchange, Imports and Exports
 - Industry and Labour
 - Land reforms
 - Ceiling on Urban Property
 - Elections to parliament and state legislature
 - Food stuffs
 - Rent and Tenancy Rights

Geography And Agriculture

Fortified rice

Context:

The Centre has distributed 3.38 lakh metric tonnes of fortified rice till December 2021 through anganwadis and mid-day meal schemes at government schools, according to the Economic Survey.

Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on “Fortification of Rice and its Distribution under Public Distribution System (PDS)”

- The Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on “Fortification of Rice and its Distribution under Public Distribution System (PDS)” has been approved for a period of three years beginning 2019-20.
 - The Pilot Scheme is funded by Government of India in the ratio of 90:10 in respect of North Eastern, Hilly and Island States and 75:25 in respect of the rest of the States.
 - The Pilot Scheme focuses on 15 districts, preferably 1 district per State.
 - The decentralized model of fortification by States/UTs has been approved in the Pilot Scheme with blending at the rice milling stage.
 - The operational responsibilities and identification of the districts for implementation of the Pilot Scheme lie with the States/UTs.
 - States/UTs have been requested to operationalize blending of fortified rice at milling stage and start its distribution through PDS as early as possible.
 - So far, 15 States have consented for implementation of the Pilot Scheme.

About Food Fortification:

- It is defined as the practice of adding vitamins and minerals to commonly consumed foods during processing to increase their nutritional value.
- It is a cost-effective strategy with demonstrated health, economic and social benefits.

- It is a safe strategy for improving diets and for the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies.
- Since the nutrients are added to staple foods that are widely consumed, this is an excellent method to improve the health of a large section of the population, all at once.
- As per the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) website, 21 varieties of biofortified staples including wheat, rice, maize, millets, mustard, groundnut had been developed by 2019-20.

Fortification of Rice

- It refers to the addition of key vitamins and minerals to increase the nutritional value of rice.
- The fortified Rice generally contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.
- Rice can be fortified by adding a micronutrient powder to the rice that adheres to the grains or spraying the surface of ordinary rice grains in several layers with a vitamin and mineral mix to form a protective coating.

Environment and biodiversity

Golden Langurs

Context: Neighbours of a golden langur habitat in western Assam's Bongaigaon district have opposed a move by the State government to upgrade it to a wildlife sanctuary.

About Golden Langur

- Gee's golden langur also known as simply the golden langur, is an Old World monkey found in a small region of Western Assam, India and in the neighboring foothills of the Black Mountains of Bhutan.
- It lives in high trees and has a herbivorous diet of ripe and unripe fruits, mature and young leaves, seeds, buds and flowers.
- The Gee's golden langur belongs to the Old World monkey family and is one of the most endangered primate species of India.
- These monkeys have a black face and a very long tail. Their coat ranges from cream to golden; on the flanks and chest the hairs are darker and often rust coloured.
- The coats of the juveniles and females are lighter, silvery white to light buff.



Protection status: Golden langur

- They are listed in Appendix I of CITES and Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- IUCN status: Endangered

Electric Vehicles Can Lower Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds in India by 2030

Context:

India can slash emissions of volatile organic molecules (VOC) by 76 per cent in the next eight years by swapping all two- and three-wheelers with electric vehicles and all diesel-fuelled ones with Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), a new study has predicted.

What is Volatile Organic Molecules (VOC)

- VOCs are **carbon-containing chemicals** released by petrol and diesel vehicles.
- They impact air quality and human health.
- However, VOCs can have a natural origin, too. Plants emit these chemicals to attract pollinators, defend themselves from pests and predators and adapt to environmental stress.
- Human-made VOCs are a cause for concern, yet they don't draw enough attention.
- **Benzene**, a chemical that induces cancer, is the only VOC included in the ambient air-quality standards

About Electric Vehicles:

- The earlier guidelines and standards were issued by the Ministry of Power in December 2018 and will be superseded by the new guidelines.
- Lack of charging infrastructure is one of the main reasons behind poor adoption of electric mobility in India.
- According to a survey by the Economic Times in May 2019, with appropriate infrastructure in place, 90% car owners in India are willing to switch to EVs.
- Under the NEMMP 2020, there is an ambitious target to achieve 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles by the year 2020.
- At present, EV market penetration is only 1% of total vehicle sales in India, and of that, 95% of sales are electric two-wheelers.

Green Hydrogen/ Green Ammonia Policy

Context: Ministry of Power notified Green Hydrogen/ Green Ammonia Policy.

What is green hydrogen?

Green hydrogen is hydrogen gas produced through electrolysis of water — an energy intensive process for splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen— using renewable power to achieve this.

What does the National Green Hydrogen Policy state?

- The new policy provides several incentives for manufacturers, consumers of green hydrogen and green ammonia.
- Under the policy, companies will have the liberty to set up the capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources such as solar or wind anywhere in the country by themselves or through a developer.
- This electricity will be allowed to be wheeled, free of cost through open access of the transmission grid, to the plant where hydrogen is to be produced.
- The government will also allow banking or storage of excess green hydrogen produced by any company for up to 30 days, in case of capacities that are set up before 2025.



How is the policy set to boost domestic production of green hydrogen production?

- The new policy offers 25 years of free power transmission for any new renewable energy plants set up to supply power for green hydrogen production before July 2025.
- This means that a green hydrogen producer will be able to set up a solar power plant in Rajasthan to supply renewable energy to a green hydrogen plant in Assam and would not be required to pay any inter-state transmission charges.
- The move is likely going to make it more economical for key users of hydrogen and ammonia such as the oil refining, fertiliser and steel sectors to produce green hydrogen for their own use.
- These sectors currently use grey hydrogen or grey ammonia produced using natural gas or naphtha.

What are the facilities to boost export of green hydrogen and ammonia?

- Under the policy port authorities will also provide land at applicable charges to green hydrogen and green ammonia producers to set up bunkers near ports for storage prior to export.
- Germany and Japan could be key markets for green hydrogen produced in India.

Economy

Union Budget 2022-23 Highlights

Context:

The Budget goals for FY2022-23 aim to further India's aspirations in Amrit Kaal, as it moves towards its 100th year post independence.

- Focus on growth and all-inclusive welfare
- Promoting technology-enabled development, energy transition and climate action
- Virtuous cycle starting from private investment, crowded in by public capital investment

The Union Budget for FY 2022-23 this year aims to strengthen the infrastructure with its focus on four priorities of:

- PM GatiShakti
- Inclusive Development
- Productivity Enhancement & Investment, Sunrise opportunities, Energy Transition, and Climate Action
- Financing of investments
- **Providing Greater Fiscal Space to States**
 - Enhanced outlay for 'Scheme for Financial Assistance to States for Capital Investment' from Rs.10,000 crore in Budget Estimates to Rs.15,000 crore in Revised Estimates for current year
 - Allocation of Rs.1 lakh crore in 2022-23 to assist the states in catalysing overall investments in the economy: fifty-year interest free loans, over and above normal borrowings
 - In 2022-23, States will be allowed a fiscal deficit of 4% of GSDP, of which 0.5% will be tied to power sector reforms
- **Agriculture and Allied Sectors**
 - Rs.2.37 lakh crore direct payment to 1.63 crore farmers for procurement of wheat and paddy
 - Chemical free Natural farming to be promoted throughout the country. Initial focus is on farmer's lands in 5 Km wide corridors along river Ganga
 - NABARD to facilitate fund with blended capital to finance startups for agriculture & rural enterprise
 - 'Kisan Drones' for crop assessment, digitization of land records, spraying of insecticides and nutrients
- **MSMEs & Industry**
 - Udyam, e-shram, NCS and ASEEM portals to be interlinked
 - 130 lakh MSMEs provided additional credit under Emergency Credit Linked Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)
 - ECLGS to be extended up to March 2023

- Guarantee cover under ECLGS to be expanded by Rs.50000 Crore to total cover of Rs.5 Lakh Crore
- Rs.2 lakh Crore additional credit for Micro and Small Enterprises to be facilitated under the Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)
- Raising and Accelerating MSME performance (RAMP) programme with outlay of Rs.6000 Crore to be rolled out
- **Education**
 - One class-One TV channel' programme of PM eVIDYA to be expanded to 200 TV channels
 - Virtual labs and skilling e-labs to be set up to promote critical thinking skills and simulated learning environment
 - High-quality e-content will be developed for delivery through Digital Teachers
 - Digital University for world-class quality universal education with personalised learning experience to be established
- **Public Capital Investment**
 - Public investment to continue to pump-prime private investment and demand in 2022-23
 - Outlay for capital expenditure stepped up sharply by 35.4% to Rs.7.50 lakh crore in 2022-23 from Rs.5.54 lakh crore in the current year
 - Outlay in 2022-23 to be 2.9% of GDP
 - 'Effective Capital Expenditure' of Central Government estimated at Rs.10.68 lakh crore in 2022-23, which is about 4.1% of GDP

Saksham Anganwadi

- Integrated benefits to women and children through Mission Shakti, Mission Vatsalya, Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0
- Two lakh anganwadis to be upgraded to Saksham Anganwadis

Health

- An open platform for National Digital Health Ecosystem to be rolled out
- National Tele Mental Health Programme' for quality mental health counselling and care services to be launched
- A network of 23 tele-mental health centres of excellence will be set up, with NIMHANS being the nodal centre and International Institute of Information Technology-Bangalore (IIITB) providing technology support

Energy Transition & Climate Action

- Additional allocation of Rs.19,500 crore for Production Linked Incentive for manufacture of high efficiency solar modules to meet the goal of 280 GW of installed solar power by 2030
 - Five to seven per cent biomass pellets to be co-fired in thermal power plants:
- CO2 savings of 38 MMT annually
- Extra income to farmers and job opportunities to locals
- Help avoid stubble burning in agriculture fields
 - Four pilot projects to be set up for coal gasification and conversion of coal into chemicals for the industry
 - Financial support to farmers belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who want to take up agro-forestry

Sunrise Opportunities

- Government contribution to be provided for R&D in Sunrise Opportunities like Artificial Intelligence, Geospatial Systems and Drones, Semiconductor and its eco-system, Space Economy, Genomics and Pharmaceuticals, Green Energy, and Clean Mobility Systems

Banking

- 100 per cent of 1.5 lakh post offices to come on the core banking system.
- Scheduled Commercial Banks to set up 75 Digital Banking Units (DBUs) in 75 districts

RBI's digital currency plans

Context:

In the Budget presented for 2022-23, Finance Minister had announced the introduction of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and that the digital rupee would give a 'big boost' to digital economy.

What is a CBDC?

- Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) are legal tender created by the central bank of a nation, though in digital form.
- The only difference between them and traditional cash or fiat currency is that CBDCs are digital.
- Unlike other cryptocurrencies that are DeFi or decentralised financial tokens, CBDCs will be backed by central reserves just like all other fiat currencies.
- The digital rupee is essentially going to be the digital representation of a rupee backed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- India is not the only country that is experimenting with a digital legal tender.

- The digital dollar, e-yuan, and digital euro are some of the projects that various central banks are experimenting with across the world.

Why are central banks issuing digital currencies?

- To bring down the use of physical cash.
- The cost of issuing digital currencies is far lower than the cost of printing and distributing physical cash.
- The RBI can create and distribute the digital rupee at virtually zero cost since the creation and the distribution of the digital rupee will happen electronically.
- Unlike physical cash, which is hard to trace, a digital currency that is monitored by the RBI can be more easily tracked and controlled by the Central bank.
- Central bank digital currencies are promised as reliable, sovereign-backed alternatives to private currencies which are volatile and unregulated.
- This feature of digital currencies, however, has raised various concerns regarding their privacy and could slow down their adoption.
- In fact, it is worth noting that the need for privacy has been one of the primary reasons behind the switch to private digital currencies.

What is Digital Rupee?

- Digital Rupee is basically the digital form of regular currency that we use for daily transactions. You can store the money digitally, in a secured format.
- Digital Rupee is powered by blockchain technology which makes currency management cheaper, allowing the Government to print less notes in the future.
- And since the currency operates digitally, its lifespan increases, as you cannot destroy digital forms, or lose it for that matter.

Why Has RBI Opted for Status Quo Again?

Context:

The six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept key policy rates unchanged for the **10th time in a row**, and retained the **accommodative policy stance**.

Accommodative policy stance to continue

- The policy panel, by a 5 to 1 majority, decided to continue with the accommodative stance “as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward”.
- While the current stance of ‘accommodative policy for as long as necessary to revive growth’ was up for a review, analysts said the RBI is likely to wait for some more time as the economic recovery is uneven and the Omicron variant has dented the sentiment.

About Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is the body of the RBI, headed by the **Governor**, responsible for taking the important monetary policy decisions about setting the repo rate.
- Repo rate is ‘the policy instrument’ in monetary policy that helps to realize the set inflation target by the RBI (at present 4%).

Membership of the MPC

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is formed under the RBI with **six members**.
- Three of the members are from the RBI while the other three members are appointed by the government.
- Members from the RBI are the Governor who is the chairman of the MPC, a Deputy Governor and one officer of the RBI.
- The government members are appointed by the Centre on the recommendations of a search-cum-selection committee which is to be headed by the Cabinet Secretary.

Repo rate

- The central bank has retained the repo rate – **the rate at which the RBI lends funds to banks – at 4 per cent to boost growth.**
- This means banks won’t hike lending and deposit rates and EMIs on loans will remain unchanged.
 - The RBI has reduced key policy repo rate by 115 bps to 4.0 per cent and reverse repo rates by 155 bps to 3.35 per cent since February 2020.
- Banks had since then reduced their interest rates (both deposits and lending) significantly.
- The large size of the FY23 market borrowings, and with no progress on the inclusion of Indian debt market in the global bond indices, might have prompted the RBI to delay the liquidity normalisation in an effort to keep the cost of large borrowings programme under control, said an analyst.
- It also retained the **marginal standing facility (MSF)** rate, and kept the Bank Rate unchanged at 4.25 per cent.

Reverse repo rate

- Contrary to expectations of a hike, the RBI has retained the reverse repo rate – **the rate at which the RBI borrows money from banks – at 3.35 per cent.**
- Bond yields had spiked after the government announced higher market borrowing of Rs 14.95 lakh crore in the next fiscal.

International Relations

Cross border insolvency: UN model UNCITRAL

Context:

The Economic Survey 2021-22 has called for a standardised framework for cross-border insolvency as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) at present does not have an instrument to restructure firms involving cross-border jurisdictions.

What are Cross border insolvency proceedings?

- Cross border insolvency proceedings are relevant for the resolution of distressed companies with assets and liabilities across multiple jurisdictions.
- A framework for cross border insolvency proceedings allows for the location of such a company's foreign assets, the identification of creditors and their claims and establishing payment towards claims as well as a process for coordination between courts in different countries.

Current status of foreign stakeholders in other jurisdictions under IBC

- While foreign creditors can make claims against a domestic company, the IBC currently does not allow for automatic recognition of any insolvency proceedings in other countries.
- In the case of Jet Airways, when one of the company's aircraft was grounded in Amsterdam over non-payment of dues to a European cargo firm, the National Company Law Tribunal had declined to "take on record" any orders of a foreign court regarding domestic insolvency proceedings in the absence of enabling provision in the IBC.
- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, however, permitted the recognition of Dutch proceedings as "non-main insolvency proceedings" recognising India as the Centre Of Main Interests (COMI) for the company.
- However, current provisions under the IBC do not allow Indian courts to address the issue of foreign assets of a company being subjected to parallel insolvency proceedings in other jurisdictions.

About UNCITRAL

- The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) is a subsidiary body of the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) responsible for helping to facilitate international trade and investment.
- Established by the UNGA in 1966, UNCITRAL's official mandate is "to promote the progressive harmonization and unification of international trade law" through conventions, model laws, and other instruments that address key areas of commerce, from dispute resolution to the procurement and sale of goods.

- UNCITRAL carries out its work at annual sessions held alternately in New York City and Vienna, where it is headquartered.

The UNCITRAL model

- The UNCITRAL model is the most widely accepted legal framework to deal with cross-border insolvency issues.
- It has been adopted by 49 countries, including the UK, the US, South Africa, South Korea and Singapore.
- The law allows automatic recognition of foreign proceedings and rulings given by courts in cases where the foreign jurisdiction is adjudged as the COMI for the distressed company.

India and UK Launch Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

Context

The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles launched the Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the United Kingdom.

What are Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)?

- Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are the arrangements between two or more trading alliances that primarily agree to lessen or dispose of customs tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.

Key features of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are as follows:

- The member nations of FTAs explicitly identify the duties and tariffs that are to be imposed on member countries when it comes to imports and exports.
- FTAs typically cover trades in
 - a) merchandise — such as agricultural or industrial products
 - b) services — such as banking, construction, trading and so forth
 - c) intellectual property rights (IPRs)
 - d) investment
 - e) government procurement
 - f) competition policy and so on.

Significance of India-UK FTA:

- The FTA negotiations with the UK is expected to increase our exports in Leather, Textile, Jewellery and processed Agri products.
- It also expected to register a quantum jump in the export of Marine Products through the recognition of 56 marine units of India.
- The Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) on Pharma could provide additional market access.

- There is also great potential for increasing exports in service sectors like IT/ITES, Nursing, education, healthcare, including AYUSH and audio-visual services.
- Observing that UK was a major trade partner of India with substantial bilateral volume of trade in goods and services, the cooperation extended across areas like tourism, tech, startups, education, climate change, etc.
- The two nations were looking forward to a mutually beneficial trade deal with balanced concessions and market access package in a wide range of sectors.
- It will also contribute in integrating value chains and help augment our mutual efforts to strengthen the resilience of supply chains.

Art and Culture

Sri Ramanujacharya

Context:

Prime Minister inaugurated the 216-feet tall 'Statue of Equality' commemorating the 11th-century Saint Sri Ramanujacharya to mark the 1,000 years since the birth of the Hindu reformist saint.



Who is Saint Sri Ramanujacharya?

1. Born in 1017 in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu, Saint Ramanujacharya is revered as a Vedic philosopher who revived the Bhakti Movement.

2. According to the ancient scriptures, he lived for 120 years, a claim often questioned by modern scholars and historians
3. In the early 11th and 12th centuries, the saint is said to have travelled across the length and breadth of the country to promote equality and social justice.
4. According to his followers, Ramanujacharya was one of the first who fought against social, cultural, gender, educational and economic discrimination.
5. He is said to have spread teachings like equality among every human regardless of nationality, gender, race, caste or creed.
6. Several scholars followed his path and the works of many ancient poets like Annamacharya, Bhakt Ramdas, Thyagaraja, Kabir, and Meerabai were inspired by him.
7. He is considered to be a timeless icon of equality for social reformists around the world.
8. He made education accessible to those who were the most deprived in those days and came up with the concept of 'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam', which means that all universe is one family.
9. He opened the doors of temples to all people, including those subjected to extreme discrimination.
10. He is also believed to have taught about the protection of nature and its resources like air, water and soil.

About The Statue of Equality

1. The Statue is made of a combination of five metals called 'Panchaloha', which includes gold, silver, copper, brass, and zinc.
2. The statue is the world's second tallest statue in a sitting posture. The Buddha statue in Thailand, at 301 feet, takes the spot as the world's tallest 'sitting' statue.
3. Mounted on a 54-ft high base building, named 'Bhadra Vedi', the basement features a Vedic digital library and research centre.
4. The building also hosts numerous ancient Indian texts, a theatre, an educational gallery detailing many works of Ramanujacharya inside.
5. It is learnt that in the complex, a temple of Ramanujacharya covering an area of about 300,000 square feet has also been constructed, where a 120 kg gold idol will be placed for daily worship. The 120 kgs is to mark the 120 years that the saint is said to have lived.
6. The statue has been conceptualised by Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami of Sri Ramanujacharya Ashram.
7. Built at Muchintal, a village in Telangana, the statue is located near the Hyderabad International Airport at Shamshabad. Conceptualised by Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami of Sri Ramanujacharya Ashram, the foundation stone for the structure was laid in 2014.
8. The project is believed to have been completed at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore that was funded entirely by donations.

9. The giant statue is also encircled by the replicas of 108 sacred shrines from the many parts of the country including Tirupati, Srirangam, Dwaraka, Badrinath etc.
10. It is believed that the project, which includes a 45-acre complex, has come with a price tag of Rs 1,000 crore and has been funded entirely by donations from devotees globally.

Chintamani Padya Natakam

Context:

Andhra Pradesh government banned a 100-year-old play named ‘Chintamani Padya Natakam’

- The **Arya Vysya community** has been petitioning governments for several years to ban the play, saying it portrays them in a negative light. The play is exhibited across the state, mainly in rural areas, during festivals and fairs.

Chintamani Padya Natakam

- ‘Chintamani Padya Natakam’ was written in **1920** by playwright **Kallakuri Narayana Rao**, who was also a social reformer.
- The play is about Chintamani, a courtesan and a **devotee of Lord Krishna**, who finds salvation by singing bhajans.
- She is courted by Subbi Shetty, a businessman from the Arya Vysya community, who loses his wealth and family due to his attraction to Chintamani.
- The original play had a social message, but over the years, it has been modified purely for entertainment.