

# IMPORTANT NEWS

## Five distinguished personalities to receive India's highest civilian honour

### Inside Story of the News:

- On February 9th, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that agricultural scientist MS Swaminathan, along with previous Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, will receive the Bharat Ratna award.
- Politicians Karpoori Thakur, a former chief minister of Bihar, and Lal Krishna Advani, a former deputy prime minister, had earlier been declared as the recipients of India's highest civilian award.
- The five recipients this year surpass the four that were given out in 1999, making it the most Bharat Ratnas given out in a single year.

### Bharat Ratna 2024 Awardees:

- **Karpoori Thakur (Posthumous)**
  - Bharat Ratna will be awarded posthumously to a well-known socialist politician and former chief minister of Bihar.
  - Known as "Jan Nayak" (people's leader) in the public eye, Thakur will be the 49th person to receive this esteemed honour.
- **Lal Krishna Advani**
  - Veteran member of the Bharatiya Janata Party and former deputy prime minister, he has been involved with the party from its founding in 1980.
  - From 1999 to 2004, Advani led Atal Bihari Vajpayee as both the home minister and the deputy prime minister.
- **Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao (Posthumous)**
  - Former Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao, departed in 2004.
  - Renowned Telugu statesman, he was prime minister for five years, from 1991 to 1996, and is greatly appreciated for having played a key role in enacting economic reforms.
- **Chaudhary Charan Singh (Posthumous)**
  - Another former Prime Minister and prominent Jat leader, Chaudhary Charan Singh, hails from western Uttar Pradesh.
  - He is renowned for having been a major force behind the anti-Congress political movement at a time when the party was gaining ground.
- **Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan (Posthumous)**
  - A respected agronomist will be the fifth individual to receive the Bharat Ratna.
  - Swaminathan is renowned for his noteworthy advancements in farming and farmer welfare.
  - He transformed Indian agriculture, guaranteeing the country's wealth and food security.

## NAL tests solar powered HAPS

### Inside Story of the News:

- The first test of a solar-powered high-altitude pseudo satellite (HAPS) was recently carried out at the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) in Bengaluru, demonstrating India's progress in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology.
- The drone-like prototype showed that it could fly for lengthy periods of time at heights of 18–20 kilometres, providing satellite-like benefits for monitoring and surveillance.

### About HAPS:

- With a cost much lower than that of satellites, HAPS, which is fuelled by solar energy, may remain in the air for months or even years while conducting surveillance.
- HAPS requires no rocket launches, which lowers operating costs greatly compared to satellites.
- The recent test flight, which took place in the Challakere testing range in Karnataka, was an important turning point in the development of HAPS.
- After nearly eight and a half hours of flight, the scaled-down prototype reached an altitude of around three kilometres.
- The goal of additional testing is to evaluate the solar power generation and storage technology by extending the flight duration to twenty-four hours.
- The requirement for constant border surveillance, which was brought to light after incidents like the 2017 Doklam standoff, led to the creation of HAPS.
- The endurance and coverage of battery-powered UAVs are limited, and the orbit patterns of satellites may prevent them from providing continuous monitoring.
- HAPS can also be used for mobile communication networks in remote locations and disaster management scenarios.
- This latest test flight demonstrates the potential for future developments in communication and surveillance technology and reflects an improvement in India's UAV capabilities.

## Patient 'free of cancer cells' after undergoing CAR-T cell therapy

### Inside Story of the News:

- A 64-year-old man has become the first patient in India to be cured with CAR-T cell therapy, following months after the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) approved the homegrown cancer treatment for commercial use.
- The ground-breaking therapy reprogrammes a person's immune system to combat cancer genetically.
- After receiving therapy at Tata Memorial Hospital, gastroenterologist Dr (Col) VK Gupta of Delhi has been pronounced "free of cancer cells."
- Dr Gupta, who had previously undergone an unsuccessful bone marrow transplant in 2022, paid ₹42 lakhs for the procedure; otherwise, it would have cost him almost ₹4 crore abroad.

### About CAR-T Cell Therapy:

- Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy is a sophisticated and specialized treatment that targets certain cancer types by enhancing the ability of T-lymphocytes, often known as T-cells, to combat cancer.
- Experts gather a patient's T-cells as part of this therapy, and then they genetically alter them to

produce powerful anti-cancer immune cells called CAR-T cells, which express chimeric antigen receptors (CARs) that are unique to cancer cells.

- These altered CAR-T cells are then reinfused into the patient's body after being grown in a lab, where they target the cancer cells.

## Eight former Indian Navy men imprisoned on espionage allegations released by Qatar

### Inside Story of the News:

- Seven of the eight former Indian Navy members were taken back to India and released from Qatari detention three months after receiving death sentences.
- Commander Purnendu Tiwari, whose death sentence was mitigated but who nonetheless received the heaviest punishment of a 25-year life term, is scheduled to return to India shortly, while seven sailors have already returned.

### Background:

- December of last year saw the eight former Indian Navy personnel's death sentence revoked by a Qatari appellate court.
- The Indian nationals were all employed by Dahra Global, a company located in Doha, when they were placed under arrest in August 2022.
- Authorities in Qatar withheld the charges against them from the public.
- They were accused of spying for Israel, a report claims.
- The Italian small stealth submarines, U212, were being inducted under the supervision of the Indians, who had been working in their private capacity with Dahra Global.
- They have been identified as Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Captain Saurabh Vasisht, Commander Amit Nagpal, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta and Sailor Ragesh.
- The Indian envoy in Doha had seen the eight former Indian Navy men who were given death sentences in October, but this was the first time they had met in prison in early December.
- After meeting Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, on the fringes of the COP28 conference in Dubai on December 1 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given consular access to the Indian envoy and the commutation that followed.
- Talking on the "well-being of the Indian community" in Qatar and bilateral partnerships, the two leaders appeared to be euphemistically talking about the circumstances surrounding the eight former Indian Navy sailors who were serving on death row.

## India's Critical Mineral List incorporating Thirty Minerals released

### Inside Story of the News:

- The government has published a list of 30 critical minerals for India.
- The list encompasses a diverse range of minerals including Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.

- Through the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and other organizations, the Ministry of Mines has intensified its focus on the exploration of these minerals within the nation.
- With the goal of locating and acquiring foreign mineral assets of a critical and strategic nature, such as lithium, cobalt, and others, to ensure supply side assurance, three Central Public Sector Enterprises—National Aluminium Company Ltd., Hindustan Copper Ltd., and Mineral Exploration Company Ltd.—joined forces to form Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL).
- KABIL is in negotiations to purchase significant and vital mineral properties with nations such as Australia, Argentina, and others.

## India, UAE sign agreements to connect digital financial systems, energy, and trade

### Inside Story of the News:

- India and the UAE recently signed pacts on bilateral investment promotion, port infrastructure development, power trade, interconnecting digital payment platforms like UPI, credit and debit cards, and an intergovernmental framework agreement on the India-Middle East Economic Corridor, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the UAE in Abu Dhabi.
- They applauded the expansion of the all-encompassing strategic alliance between many sectors, such as trade and investment, energy, digital infrastructure, fintech, infrastructure, culture, and interpersonal relationships.
- Global and regional issues were also discussed.
- A "key enabler for further promoting investments in both countries," the Bilateral Investment Treaty was signed by the two parties.
- India and the UAE have inked a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement as well as a Bilateral Investment Treaty.

### Details of the Pacts Signed:

- The UAE is anticipated to have invested US\$ 20–21 billion in India between April 2000 and March 2023, of which US\$ 15.5 billion came from foreign direct investment (FDI) and the remaining US\$ 20–21 billion came via portfolio investments.
- UAE was the fourth-largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in India in 2022–2023.
- It plans to put US\$75 billion into the infrastructure market in India.
- With a US\$1 billion investment in the National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF), Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), the primary sovereign wealth fund of the United Arab Emirates and among the largest in the world, is an anchor investor in the NIIF Master Fund.
- A framework agreement for intergovernmental cooperation on the India-Middle East Economic Corridor was also inked by the two parties.
- Additionally, agreements on the interconnection of the digital payment platforms AANI (UAE) and UPI (India) were inked by both sides.
- They also inked an agreement to link domestic debit and credit cards through JAYWAN (UAE) and RuPay (India).
- The two parties also inked agreements on energy, including one that "opens new areas of collaboration in the field of energy, including energy security and energy trade." The agreement was on cooperation in the area of electrical interconnection and trade.
- The leaders also spoke on how to make the energy alliance stronger. They noted that India was

now signing long-term contracts for LNG, and that the UAE was one of the biggest sources of LPG and crude.

- An agreement to collaborate on digital infrastructure projects was also inked by them. This will promote the transfer of technical information, skills, and expertise and establish a framework for broad cooperation in the digital infrastructure sector, including investment cooperation.
- Regarding culture, the two parties have inked a "cooperation protocol between the National Archives of the two countries," which will establish broad bilateral collaboration in the areas of historical material preservation and restoration. "Foster engagement between the two countries aimed at supporting the Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat" is the stated goal of a Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration in the fields of heritage and museums.
- Prior to the visit, RITES Limited and Gujarat Maritime Board signed agreements with Abu Dhabi Ports Company and Abu Dhabi Ports Company, respectively, for the construction of port infrastructure and improved connectivity between the two nations.
- Both sides agreed that the BAPS Temple (the first Hindu temple in the UAE) is a symbol of the UAE's dedication to harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence around the world as well as a celebration of the friendship and rich cultural ties between the UAE and India.