

## IMPORTANT NEWS

### Mid Planning Conference (MPC) for MILAN 24

#### Inside Story of the News:

The Eastern Naval Command (ENC) conducted the Mid Planning Conference (MPC) for **MILAN 24 (Multilateral Naval Exercise - 2024)**, which is scheduled to be hosted by the **Indian Navy in Visakhapatnam in February 2024**.

- MILAN is a **biennial multilateral naval exercise** initiated by the Indian Navy in 1995, with its beginnings at the **Andaman and Nicobar Command**.
- In its inaugural edition in 1995, only four countries, named **Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand**, participated.
- Since then, the exercise has grown significantly in terms of both the number of participating nations and the complexity of the exercises.
- Initially aligned with India's 'Look East Policy,' MILAN has evolved over the years to encompass India's 'Act East policy' and the SAGAR Initiative.
- It expands its scope to include **participation from island nations** in the **Western Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and IOR littorals**.
- MILAN exercises will involve **large-force maneuvers, advanced air defense operations, anti-submarine warfare, and anti-surface warfare operations**.
- MILAN 22 took place in the vicinity of Visakhapatnam from February 25 to March 4, 2022, and saw participation from 39 countries."

### The Supreme Court Emphasizes Duty of Union and States to Eradicate Manual Scavenging

#### Inside Story of the News:

The recent ruling by the Supreme Court emphasized that the Union and States have a solemn obligation **to eliminate manual scavenging by rigorously enforcing the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**.

- Enacted in 2013, this legislation was designed to prohibit the employment of manual scavengers and to facilitate the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and their families.
- The Act's primary objectives aim **to eliminate unsanitary latrines and prohibit the employment of manual scavengers, especially in the hazardous manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks**.
- Additionally, it mandates the maintenance of a comprehensive survey to identify manual scavengers and ensure their rehabilitation.
- Manual scavenging involves **the manual cleaning, handling, and disposal of human excreta** and other waste materials from dry latrines, open drains, and sewers.
- The Act provides several provisions to assist identified manual scavengers in their rehabilitation, which include:

- A one-time cash assistance of Rs. 40,000 to one identify manual scavengers within a family.
- Skill development training for manual scavengers and their dependents for up to two years, along with a monthly stipend of Rs. 3,000 during the training period.
- Capital subsidy of up to Rs. 5.00 lakh for those who have taken loans for self-employment projects, including those related to sanitation.
- Health insurance coverage under Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) for the families of all identified manual scavengers.

### Impacts of Manual Scavenging: Exploring the Consequences:

- Health-related problems:
  - Manual scavengers are exposed to **harmful gases like hydrogen disulfide, carbon (IV) oxide, ammonia, and methane during their work.**
  - Prolonged exposure to these gases can result in death by asphyxia.
  - Sewer workers also come into contact with discharges from rodents present in the sewers, which can carry infections like leptospirosis.
  - Other health-related problems associated with manual scavenging include **dermatitis and Helicobacter pylori infection.**
  - These can lead to gastric cancer, and respiratory issues.
- Structural violence against manual scavengers:
  - Manual scavengers often **face structural violence due to caste discrimination and the harsh conditions of their work.**
  - This discrimination and difficult work environment can expose them to physical violence and exploitation.
- Social discrimination:
  - The nature of the job results in most manual scavengers being stigmatized by their communities.
  - Social discrimination and prejudice are common challenges they face due to their occupation.

## Is It Time for India to Reevaluate the Dam Safety Act?

### Inside Story of the News:

The devastating floods in Sikkim, triggered by a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) and exacerbated by the collapse of a hydropower dam, have raised significant concerns regarding the potential impact of such events on both existing and proposed hydropower projects in the region.

- In response to dam failure-related disasters resulting from inadequate surveillance and maintenance, **the Dam Safety Act** was introduced in the **Rajya Sabha in December 2021.**
- The Act delineated key responsibilities and mandated the establishment of national and state-level bodies for its enforcement.
- The Act proposed the formation of a National Committee on Dam Safety, **responsible for overseeing dam safety policies and regulations.**

- A National Dam Safety Authority would be tasked with implementing these policies and resolving state-level disputes.
- The Chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC) would lead national-level dam safety protocols.
- At the state level, the Act called for the creation of a State Committee on Dam Safety (SCDS) and a State Dam Safety Organisation (SDSO).
- The Act also laid out provisions requiring states to classify dams based on their **hazard risk, conduct routine inspections, establish emergency action plans, implement emergency flood warning systems, and undertake safety reviews and periodic risk assessment studies.**
- Furthermore, states were mandated to report and record incidents of dam failures.
- This marks a significant change, as, until now, there was no statutory provision that required systematic reporting of dam failures.
- Also, no single agency was responsible for tracking such data.
- While the CWC maintains a record, it has not been regularly updated.

#### Challenges Faced:

- A strong Dam Safety Act (DSA) should facilitate easy access to information for various stakeholders, but the framework in India has limitations.
- Periodic reviews are frequently omitted, and even when conducted, their results are not readily accessible to the public.
- While the act mandates dam builders to carry out thorough dam safety evaluations, there is a lack of standardization in how failures are analyzed and reported.

#### Measures for Dam Safety:

- Dam safety relies on various elements such as compliant dam design, maintenance following guidelines, real-time data recording, hazard prediction, and emergency plan establishment.
- Hazard risk is highly sensitive and responsive to factors like climate variations, urbanization trends, alterations in water usage, and the relocation of people and businesses.
- Periodic reviews are expected to yield updated inundation maps and revised rule curves, both of which play a significant role in ensuring the safety of downstream areas.

## The Paintbrush Swift Butterfly

#### Inside Story of the News:

"**The Paintbrush Swift**, a rare butterfly species from the Hesperiiidae family, has been observed and documented in **Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district** for the first time. This significant find is a result of the **Wild Bhattiyat Project** initiated by the Bhattiyat Forest Range, showcasing the state's abundant biodiversity.

- The Paintbrush Swift, which was first described by lepidopterist Frederic Moore over 145 years ago in the eastern Himalayas, has made its debut appearance in Himachal Pradesh.
- The project has successfully **documented 120 butterfly species**, including unusual ones like the anomalous nawab, blank swift, tailed jay, and siren.

- The distinguishing feature of the Paintbrush Swift is the presence of two separated spots in the upper forewing cell, setting it apart from closely related species such as the blank swift and figure-of-eight swift.
- This discovery enriches Himachal Pradesh's biodiversity, which is already a habitat for approximately 25% of all butterfly species found in India.
- The documented findings offer valuable insights into butterfly conservation efforts in the region and contribute to our understanding of rare and lesser-known species.
- The ongoing Wild Bhattiyat Project provides research opportunities **to study the diverse butterfly species and their habitats in the area.**

## Reviving the Environmental Well-being of the Himalayan Region

### Inside Story of the News:

The recent environmental devastation in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim has **reignited discussions on the 'carrying capacity' of these regions.**

- The Supreme Court of India has called upon the Union government to propose a way forward for evaluating the carrying capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), encompassing its towns and cities.
- Carrying capacity refers to the **maximum sustainable population size that an ecosystem** or environment can support over a specific period without causing significant degradation or harm to its natural resources and overall well-being.
- The Union government's proposal suggests that the assessment of carrying capacity should be **spearheaded by the Director of the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment.**
- The government has also requested the Court to instruct the Himalayan States and Union Territories to establish committees, with the Chief Secretary of each state heading them, and appointing members as deemed appropriate.
- The Indian government has launched several initiatives aimed at the holistic development of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), including the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Programme, Secure Himalaya Project, and guidelines on 'Carrying Capacity in the IHR.'
- The Ministry of Environment and Forests has reminded all states **to submit an action plan related to carrying capacity if they have not already done so.**

### Obstacles and Concerns:

- Despite previous efforts, limited progress has been made in assessing and implementing carrying capacity plans.
- Concerns exist regarding the credibility of recommendations, as the same individuals responsible for environmental damage are tasked with finding solutions.
- There is a narrow focus on towns and cities, without considering the broader impacts of infrastructure, such as road networks leading to spontaneous settlements."

## CBI Initiates Operation Chakra-II

### Inside Story of the News:

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), under its '**Chakra-II**' operation, has made significant progress in two cases **involving an international online investment fraud targeting Indian nationals, with losses amounting to hundreds of crores**, as well as a **cyber-enabled impersonation scheme that defrauded Singaporean citizens**.

- The '**Chakra-II**' operation was initiated **to combat transnational organized cyber-enabled financial crimes in India**.
- In this endeavor, CBI has collaborated with **Microsoft and Amazon**, in addition to national and international agencies, to disrupt and dismantle the infrastructure of illicit call centers.
- The CBI is working in conjunction with the **United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), INTERPOL's Cyber Crime Directorate and IFCACC, the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA), the Singapore Police Force, and Germany's BKA** to pursue further leads.
- During Operation Chakra-II, law enforcement confiscated 32 mobile phones, 48 laptops/hard disks, images of two servers, 33 SIM cards, and numerous pen drives. Multiple bank accounts were also frozen.
- According to companies involved, cybercriminals have targeted more than 2,000 customers located in the US, Canada, Germany, Australia, Spain, and the UK.
- Amazon and Microsoft will collaborate on addressing the technological aspects of online threat mitigation.
- Meanwhile, users are advised to exercise caution when receiving 'tech support' calls.
- Amazon has encouraged customers to directly access their order and communication history by logging into their Amazon accounts and checking the Message Center.

## Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhuydaya Yojana (PM-AJAY)

### Inside Story of the News:

The Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhuyday Yojana (PM-AJAY) has been in effect since the fiscal year 2021-22.

- This initiative consolidates three Centrally Sponsored Schemes, namely the **Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCA to SCSP), and Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana (BJRCY)**.
- PM-AJAY's primary objectives include **reducing poverty within Scheduled Caste (SC) communities by creating additional employment opportunities through skill development, income-generating schemes**, and other initiatives.
- It also aims to **enhance socio-economic development indicators by ensuring the availability of necessary infrastructure and essential services in SC-dominant villages**.

- The scheme consists of three key components:
  - Development of SC-dominant villages into model villages ('Adarsh Gram') strives for the integrated development of villages with a majority of SC residents, ensuring the provision of vital infrastructure and addressing socio-economic development needs.
  - Grants-in-aid for district/state-level projects that promote the socio-economic well-being of SCs. These projects may encompass infrastructure development in SC-dominant villages, including those chosen under the 'Adarsh Gram' component, and the construction of hostels or residential schools.
  - Comprehensive livelihood projects, which may encompass skill development, related infrastructure improvements, financial assistance for beneficiaries to acquire or create assets essential for generating livelihoods.
- Furthermore, the scheme encompasses the construction of hostels in higher educational institutions.
- These institutions are selected based **on their high rankings in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) of the Government of India** and **receive financial support from the central government, state governments, or union territories, either in full or in part.**

## Exercise Harimau Shakti 2023: India-Malaysia Joint Training Exercise

### Inside Story of the News:

The Exercise Harimau Shakti 2023 has recently commenced at Umroi Cantonment, India.

- This exercise is **a joint bilateral training event involving the Indian and Malaysian Armies.**
- The Malaysian Army contingent is composed of troops from the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Battalion of the Malaysian Army, while the Indian contingent is represented by a Battalion of THE RAJPUT REGIMENT.
- The primary aim of this exercise is **to enhance military capabilities for the execution of Multi Domain Operations in a sub-conventional scenario.**
- During the exercise, both contingents will establish a Joint command post and set up an integrated surveillance grid along with a Joint Surveillance Centre.
- Both sides will practice deploying joint forces in jungle, semi-urban, and urban environments.
- Additionally, they will conduct drills for intelligence collection, collation, and dissemination.
- The exercise will also feature the use of Drones/UAVs and Helicopters.
- Casualty management and evacuation drills will be practiced, along with discussions on logistics management and survival training at the Battalion level.
- The training will emphasize a high level of physical fitness, tactical level drills, and the exchange of best practices.
- The exercise will conclude with a 48-hour validation exercise in a semi-urban area.
- The previous edition of this exercise took place in Pulai, Kluang, Malaysia in November 2022."

## Tensions Threaten India-Canada Relations

### Inside Story of the News:

At present, the diplomatic ties between **Canada and India** are under strain due to tensions related to the **Khalistan movement**.

- The current state of Canada-India diplomatic relations has generated significant uncertainty for both current and prospective immigrants.
- India and Canada have a **longstanding history of bilateral relations rooted in shared democratic, pluralistic, and interpersonal values**.
- These relations have been fortified through a growing network of bilateral agreements, official dialogues, and memoranda of understanding.
- In 1947, diplomatic relations were established between India and Canada following India's independence.
- Both nations share similarities in their federal structures, with features like federation with a strong central authority and the vesting of residuary powers in the central government inspired by the Canadian constitution.
- However, India-Canada relations faced challenges when India conducted nuclear tests and were strained further **when Sikh terrorists targeted Air India Flight 182 in 1985**.
- The visit of the Prime Minister of India to Canada in April 2015 elevated the bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership.
- In recent years, both countries have been working to enhance bilateral cooperation across various mutually beneficial domains."

### Ongoing India-Canada Diplomatic Strains:

- Tensions between the two nations escalated when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made statements regarding '**credible allegations**' **implicating the Indian government in the killing of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was the chief of the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) and a designated terrorist in India**.
- Following Nijjar's killing, Canada canceled a trade delegation visit to Delhi, paused Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks, and the \$55 billion investment in India from Canadian Pension Funds may also be affected.
- In September 2023, tensions flared up again over the Khalistan issue.
- The Canadian Prime Minister accused India of involvement in the assassination of a Sikh separatist, a claim vehemently denied by India.
  - **G20 Summit:** During the G20 Summit 2023 held in India, India held bilateral meetings with numerous world leaders, but not with Canada.
  - **Pause in Trade Negotiations:** India-Canada Free Trade Agreement talks have been postponed once more due to concerns about pro-Khalistan activities.

- **Ambassadorial Actions:** Both India and Canada expelled senior diplomats, and India has recently directed Canada to reduce the number of its diplomats in the country.
- **Visa Disruption:** Due to unfounded accusations and ongoing diplomatic tensions, India has suspended visa processing for Canadians seeking to visit India, whether within India or in third-party countries.
- **Role of Five Eyes and the US:** The 'Five Eyes' is an intelligence-sharing network consisting of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- In a recent interview, the US Ambassador to Canada stated that 'shared intelligence among Five Eyes partners' played a role in Canada's assertions."

### Empowering and Safeguarding Immigrants: The Path Forward:

- Canada and India are not **only members of the Commonwealth** but also signatories to the global compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration.
- This international agreement was adopted at an intergovernmental conference on migration in Marrakesh, Morocco, in December 2018.
- Among the 23 objectives of the global compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration, one objective stands out.
- Objective number 19 aims to 'create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries.'
- The ongoing diplomatic tensions between the two governments appear to be undermining objective 19 of the Global Compact.
- This has cast uncertainty over the status of migrants and the diaspora in Canada and India.
- If this issue is not resolved promptly, it could irreparably erode the cherished values of trust, time, and loyalty, ultimately to the detriment of the Global Compact.
- Restoring the commitment to these values in both governments would hinge on a steadfast dedication to regain the trust, time, and loyalty of their migrants, diaspora, and, above all, their citizens."

## Understanding the UMEED Scheme

### Inside Story of the News:

A self-help group (SHG) recently inaugurated a **flower nursery as part of the UMEED scheme in Budgam.**

- The UMEED scheme, operating under the Jammu and Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKRLM), is a centrally sponsored initiative designed to promote women's self-sufficiency and self-dependence.
- The primary goal of the scheme is to **uplift the rural poor across Jammu and Kashmir.**



- It encourages **women to save modest amounts**, with the aim of eventually making their Self-Help Groups (SHGs) eligible for bank loans at reduced interest rates.
- It supports women entrepreneurs in showcasing and marketing their products, with implementation overseen by the Jammu & Kashmir State Rural Livelihoods Society.
- The mission's objective is to reduce poverty by establishing robust grassroots institutions for the impoverished in Jammu and Kashmir.
- This is a poverty alleviation program that focuses on **women's empowerment through self-managed and sustainable women's institutions, financial inclusion, and sustainable livelihoods**.
- It involves these communities in sustainable livelihood initiatives and aims to ensure substantial long-term improvements in their income.
- Operating under the national flagship program of the Government of India, the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), this initiative is known as JKRLM or UMEED in J&K.

## Kasturi Cotton Bharat Initiative

### Inside Story of the News:

The website for "Kasturi Cotton Bharat" was officially launched by the Union **Minister of Textiles, Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, and Food & Public Distribution**.

- This collaborative initiative involves a primary objective of implementing self-regulation for the branding, traceability, and certification of Indian Cotton.
- This approach aims **to enhance the global competitiveness of Indian cotton and create a sustainable ecosystem for all stakeholders**.
- The website serves as a digital platform for disseminating information, updates, and outlines the registration process for ginners to produce the Kasturi Cotton Bharat Brand.
- Additionally, all ginners in the country are now empowered to produce the Kasturi Cotton Bharat brand according to established protocols.
- To ensure complete traceability throughout the supply chain, QR-based certification technology will be employed at each processing stage, and a blockchain-based software platform will offer end-to-end traceability and transaction certification.
- The Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (TEXPROCIL), the apex body, has been entrusted as the **implementing agency for the traceability, certification, and branding of "KASTURI Cotton India."**

## Vikram-1 Rocket: India's Indigenous Satellite Launch Vehicle

### Inside Story of the News:

Indian space start-up Skyroot Aerospace has revealed its domestically developed Vikram-1 rocket, anticipated to begin launching satellites into low Earth orbit in the early part of the upcoming year.

- **Named after Vikram Sarabhai**, the father of India's space program, Vikram-1 is a multi-stage launch vehicle designed **to carry payloads of approximately 300 kg to low Earth orbit.**
- Constructed by Hyderabad-based skyroot aerospace, this all-carbon-fiber-bodied rocket has the capability to **deploy multiple satellites into orbit.**
- It employs solid fuel and simpler technologies, requiring minimal infrastructure for launch and the ability to be assembled and launched within 24 hours from any site.
- **Low Earth orbit (LEO) is relatively close to Earth's surface**, typically at an altitude of less than 1000 km, but it can be as low as 160 km above the Earth's surface.
- Most satellites, including the International Space Station (ISS), are situated in LEO.
- Satellites in this orbit must travel at speeds of around 17,500 miles per hour (7.8 kilometers per second) to complete an orbit around the planet in about 90 minutes.
- LEO's proximity to Earth makes it suitable for various applications, including satellite imaging, which benefits **from its nearness to the surface for capturing high-resolution images.**