



# WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

**FEBRUARY, 2023**

**Week-4**

**22-28 Feb., 2023**

★★ Useful for ★★

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

22<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

## REAIM 2023

- **Context:** The world's First International Summit on the Responsible Use of Artificial intelligence in the Military (REAIM 2023) was held in the Hague, Netherlands.

### Key Highlights:

- The REAIM 2023 brings together governments, corporations, academia, startups, and civil societies to raise awareness, discuss issues, and possibly, agree on common principles in deploying and using AI in armed conflicts.
- AI might soon exceed our combined knowledge. It is changing the way we live; it is changing the way we work, and it is clearly changing the military. It has been estimated that AI is as ground-breaking as nuclear technology, and it has huge potential.
- Objectives is Putting the topic of 'responsible AI in the military domain' higher on the political agenda, Mobilising and activating a wide group of stakeholders to contribute to concrete next steps and fostering and increasing knowledge by sharing experiences, best practices and solutions
- Themes included are Breaking Down the Characteristics of AI, Responsible deployment and use of AI and Governance frameworks
- The conference, co-hosted by South Korea, hosted 80 government delegations (including those from the US and China), and over 100s of researchers and defense contractors.
- India was not a participant in the summit.

## Follow-on Public Offer (FPO)

- **Context:** Recently, Adani Enterprises decided to call off its 20,000 crore follow-on public offer and return the money that it had collected from investors.

### Key Highlights:

- Given the unprecedented situation and the current market volatility the company aims to protect the

interest of its investing community by returning the FPO proceeds and withdrawing the completed transaction.

- Citing the unprecedented crash in stock prices, Adani Enterprises Chairman Gautam Adani said the board felt that going ahead with the FPO would not be morally correct under the extraordinary circumstances.
- An FPO is a process wherein a company that is already publicly listed in the stock market issues additional shares to investors.
- During an FPO, a company could decide to issue fresh shares to investors, or existing shareholders in the company could decide to sell their shares to other investors.

### About FPO:

- A follow-on public offer (FPO), also known as a secondary offering, is the additional issuance of a company's shares after its initial public offering (IPO).
- Companies usually announce FPOs to raise equity or reduce debt.
- The two main types of FPOs are dilutive, meaning new shares are added, and non-dilutive, meaning existing private shares are sold publicly.
- An at-the-market (ATM) offering is a type of FPO by which a company can offer secondary public shares on any given day, usually depending on the prevailing market price, to raise capital.

## Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA)

- **Context:** Recently, 20 Russian banks have opened Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) with partner banks in India.

### Key Highlights:

- A Vostro account is an account that domestic banks hold for foreign banks in the former's domestic currency, in this case, the rupee. For example, if CITI Bank, New York open an account in Rupees in ICICI Bank, India then it would be a Vostro Account for ICICI Bank.

- Domestic banks use it to provide international banking services to their clients who have global banking needs.
- Banking services such as wire transfers, conducting business transactions, accepting deposits and gathering documents on behalf of the other bank.
- Domestic banks gain wider to foreign financial markets and serve international clients without having to be physically present abroad access.
- The Economic Survey (2022-23) pointed out that SRVA would reduce the net demand for foreign exchange, for the settlement of current account-related trade flows.
- It would also reduce the need for holding foreign exchange reserves and dependence on foreign currencies, making the country less vulnerable to external shocks.
- Indian exporters could get advance payments in INR from overseas clients and in the long-term promote INR as an international currency once the rupee settlement mechanism gains pull.

### Three important components of SRVA are:

- **Invoicing:** All exports and imports must be denominated and invoiced in INR.
- **Exchange Rate:** The exchange rate between the currencies of the trading partner countries would be market-determined.
- **Settlement:** The final settlement also takes place in Indian National Rupee (INR).

## New CEO of NITI Aayog

- **Context:** Former IAS officer BVR Subrahmanyam was appointed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NITI Aayog by the government.

### Key Highlights:

- Former IAS officer BVR Subrahmanyam was appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of NITI Aayog.
- The former Commerce Secretary takes over from Parameswaran Iyer, who has been named as the Executive Director of World Bank.

- Subrahmanyam will take over from current CEO Parameswaran Iyer who will join World Bank as executive director in Washington DC.
- Subrahmanyam's appointment as NITI Aayog CEO was announced by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet. Mr. Subrahmanyam's appointment is for two years from the date of assumption of the charge of the post

### About NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog:

- NITI Aayog was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on 1 January 2015.
- It Functions As the apex think-tank of India's government, NITI Aayog provides both directional and policy inputs.
- It is developing itself as a state-of-the-art resource centre with the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable it to act with speed, promote research and innovation, provide strategic policy vision for the government, and deal with contingent issues.
- The numerous objectives of the NITI Aayog include fostering cooperative federalism, evolving a shared vision of national development priorities, sectors and strategies with the active involvement of states, and developing mechanisms to formulate credible plans at the village level and aggregate these progressively at higher levels of government.

23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

## Ama KrushAI

- **Context:** India's First Agri Chatbot Ama KrushAI Launched in Odisha.

### Key Highlights:

- Governor of Odisha Prof. Ganeshi Lal launched India's first AI Chatbot for the Agricultural sector 'Ama KrushAI' at the valedictory session of 'Krusha Odisha 2023'.

- Ama KrushAI chatbot will help the farmers with the best agronomic practices, inform them about government schemes, and loan products from more than 40 commercial and cooperative banks.
- Ama KrushAI will run under a pilot project involving more than 10,000 farmers and will be implemented in full-fledged in the next two months.
- Addressing the gathering, the Governor urged farmers to take advantage of different schemes announced by the state government to promote agriculture and help the state prosper.

## Ind-Ra: FY24 Growth Forecast

- **Context:** IndiaRatings (Ind-Ra) revised its FY24 growth forecast downward to 5.9% from the 6.4% projection by Reserve Bank of India.

### Key Highlights:

- The pent-up demand which had provided thrust to the growth is normalising, exports which had been buoyant are facing headwinds from the global growth slowdown, and credit growth is facing tighter financial conditions.
- The agency predicts that growth would not surpass 6% in 2023–2024 despite factors such as continuing government capital spending, deleverage corporations, reduced NPAs, the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme, and the expectation that global commodity prices will remain stable.
- While Ind-Ra anticipates services and agriculture to be the major drivers of growth, it thinks industrial growth will remain muted.

## Asian Development Bank

- **Context:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in order to help India, fulfil its most pressing development requirements, pledged up to \$25 billion.

### Key Highlights:

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed up to \$25 billion for the next five years to fund

India's infrastructure creation under the PM Gati Shakti initiative as well as social development and climate action to help the country meet its priority development needs.

- Under its green growth agenda, ADB will focus on supporting the decarbonisation of transport and the clean energy transition, including carbon market development and circular economy transition.
- ADB president Masatsugu Asakawa informed PM Narendra Modi during their discussion that ADB intended to provide \$20–25 billion in resources over a five-year period to help the nation achieve its goals of rapid, inclusive, and environmentally friendly growth.
- ADB will offer comprehensive support for India's top priorities, including the crucial infrastructure push under the PM's Gati Shakti (National Master Plan for Multimodal Connectivity) initiative, the construction of future cities, mobilising domestic resources, and bolstering basic services in underserved areas.

### About Asian Development Bank (ADB):

- It is a regional development bank established in 1966 is owned by 68 members, 49 from the region.
- It is headquartered at Manila, Philippines.
- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East or ECAFE) and non-regional developed countries.
- Dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.
- This is carried out through investments – in the form of loans, grants and information sharing – in infrastructure, health care services, financial and public administration systems, helping nations prepare for the impact of climate change or better manage their natural resources, as well as other areas.
- Further, it assists members and partners by providing loans, technical assistance, grants, and equity investments to promote social and economic development.

- It aims to promote social and economic development in Asia and the Pacific.
- As of 31st December 2019, ADB's five largest shareholders are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares), the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).

## El Nino

- **Context:** NITI Aayog has recently stressed that Indian agriculture is resilient to El Nino shocks.

### Key Highlights:

- India has witnessed four good monsoons in succession and the probability of a fifth normal monsoon this year looks challenging because of El Nino.
  - In this regard, experts have recently deliberated on the El Nino's impact on India's monsoon and have stressed the need for having a contingency plan to minimize the threat to the farm sector.
  - El Nino is a phenomenon of abnormal heating up of the ocean surface that triggers a change in wind patterns and impact weather across the world
  - The US government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has indicated the possibility of El Nino conditions developing this year.
  - While the first estimates of the impact of El Nino on India's monsoon expected by April, its impact can happen in the latter part of the monsoon season in August-September
  - La Nina, the colder counterpart of El Nino, is the last event in India and coincided with below-normal rainfall.
  - The Indian agriculture sector is becoming more resilient to deal with the impact of El Nino. Policymakers should have safeguards against too much dependence on rainfall to minimize the El Nino impact.
  - Contingency plan at the district level should be in place
  - Seeds of late sowing variety should be available if the arrival of rainfall gets delayed.
- The government should initiate water conservation and management, and closely watch the monsoon while maintaining water bodies.

### About El Nino:

- It is a phenomenon of abnormal heating up of the ocean surface that triggers a change in wind patterns.
- It impacts weather across the world.
- It occurs every 3-6 years and lasts for about 9-12 months.
- It can cause droughts, flooding, and changes in temperature.
- It can lead to below-normal rainfall, which affects India's agricultural sector.

### Government steps to mitigate the impact of El Nino:

- **Mission Amrit Sarovar:** It is a scheme of developing 75 ponds in each district by the government to help reduce the dependence on rainfall.
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):** It is a crop insurance scheme launched by the government to protect farmers from crop loss due to various natural calamities, including drought, floods, and other weather-related events.
- **Soil Health Card scheme:** This scheme aims to promote soil testing and provide farmers with the necessary information to help farmers to better manage their crops during periods of drought or other weather-related events.
- **National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPA):** This project aims to promote sustainable watershed management practices in rainfed areas to improve soil moisture and water availability for crops during drought periods.
- **National Food Security Mission (NFSM):** It aims to increase the productivity of crops in rainfed areas through the adoption of better farming practices and the use of new technologies.
- **National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS):** This scheme provides financial assistance to farmers in case of crop loss due to natural calamities, including drought and other weather-related events.

- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY):** It aims to promote efficient use of water resources in agriculture and increase water use efficiency to deal with drought and other weather-related events.
- **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY):** This scheme aims to promote agriculture development through various initiatives, including the development of rainfed agriculture and the use of modern technologies to improve crop productivity during drought periods.

24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

## Heat Dome

- **Context:** According to recent reports, the 'Heat dome' over North-West India may retract.

### Key Highlights:

- A heat dome occurs when the atmosphere traps hot ocean air like a lid or cap.
- Extreme heat waves have become more frequent in recent decades. Sometimes, the scorching heat is ensnared in what is called a heat dome.
- This happens when strong, high-pressure atmospheric conditions combine with influences from La Niña, creating vast areas of sweltering heat that gets trapped under the high-pressure "dome."
- Typically, heat domes are tied to the behavior of the jet stream, a band of fast winds high in the atmosphere that generally runs west to east.
- Normally, the jet stream has a wavelike pattern, meandering north and then south and then north again.
- When these meanders in the jet stream become bigger, they move slower and can become stationary. That's when heat domes can occur
- A heat dome can have severe impacts on people because the stagnant weather pattern that allows it to exist usually results in weak winds and an increase in humidity.

- Both factors make the heat feel worse – and become more dangerous – because the human body is not cooled as much by sweating.

### Impact of Climate Change:

- Scientists believe that the heat waves occurring today are more likely to be a result of climate change for which humans are responsible.
- A small increase in the Earth's average temperature can dramatically impact climate extremes, both hot and cold, increasing their chances of occurring exponentially.
- Extreme heat events are occurring more frequently with more severity, and therefore they will likely push the average temperatures higher for years to come.
- If greenhouse gas emissions are not significantly curtailed, the coldest and warmest daily temperatures are expected to increase by at least 5 degrees F in most areas by mid-century rising to 10 degrees F by the late century.

### About Heat Waves:

- It is a period of unusually hot weather that lasts for more than two days.
- The heatwaves can occur with or without high humidity and have the potential to cover a large area, exposing a high number of people to hazardous heat

## Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, 2023

- **Context:** The government announced revised guidelines for Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme-2023 (MPLADS-2023).

### Key Highlights:

- The Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation, Rao Inderjit Singh, launched the revised norms for MPLADS (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme).
- He also launched a new Web Portal for the Revised Fund Flow Procedure under MPLADS.

- The new MPLADs guidelines and the web portal will come into effect from April 1, 2023.
- The revised set of guidelines aims to broaden the scope of the scheme so as to enable the parliamentarians to recommend developmental works as per the changing needs of the community with an emphasis on improving the functioning, implementation and monitoring of the MPLAD scheme

### About MPLAD scheme:

- The MPLADS is a Plan Scheme fully funded by the Government of India. The annual MPLADS fund entitlement per MP constituency is Rs. 5 crores.
- It was introduced in December 1993.
- Lok Sabha Members can recommend works within their Constituencies
- Elected Members of Rajya Sabha can recommend works within the State of Election.
- Nominated Members of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the country.
- The objective is to enable the Members of Parliament (MP) to suggest and execute developmental works of a capital nature based on locally felt needs with an emphasis on the creation of durable assets.
- The Ministry of Rural Development initially administered the scheme. Since October 1994 it has been transferred to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The Ministry prepared guidelines of the scheme and amended this from time to time.

### New START Treaty

- **Context:** Recently, Russia suspended its participation in the New START treaty. It is the last remaining major military agreement with the United States.

### Key Highlights:

- The New START is officially known as the “Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms”.

- START stands for “Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty”. The term ‘strategic offensive arms’ applies to nuclear warheads deployed by Strategic Nuclear Delivery Vehicles (‘SNDVs’). SNDVs are Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (‘ICBMs’) with a range exceeding 5,500 kilometres.
- It is the last remaining arms control treaty between the world's two main nuclear powers, US and Russia.
- It is one of the key controls on the superpower deployment of nuclear weapons.
- A suspension of the treaty may mean that it will be harder for the US to monitor compliance.
- Earlier, Russia has already suspended mutual inspections of nuclear weapons sites and participation in a bilateral consultative commission.
- Suspension of reporting and data exchange on nuclear weapon movements and other related developments.

### About New START Treaty:

- This New START treaty is successor to the START-I, which was signed between the US and the erstwhile USSR in 1991, and came into force in 1994.
- START-I was replaced first by the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, also known as the Treaty of Moscow), and then by the New START treaty.

25<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

### India remains a ‘bright spot’: IMF

- **Context:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director has said that India continues to remain a relative “bright spot” in the world economy, and it will alone contribute 15% of the global growth in 2023.

### Key Highlights:

- The IMF is projecting this year to be difficult with global growth slowing down from 3.4% in 2022 to 2.9% in 2023.

- But she said that India will remain a bright spot and will alone contribute 15% of the global growth in 2023.
- India has done really well to turn digitalization into a major driver of overcoming the impact of the pandemic and creating opportunities for growth and jobs.
- India's fiscal policy has been responsive to economic conditions.
- India didn't shy away from learning the lessons from the pandemic and implementing very strong policies to overcome what has been really a difficult time for a number of months.
- **IMF MD said she is impressed by two things in India's annual budget 2023-24:**
  - How much care is placed on balancing development needs with fiscal responsibility in India.
  - The investment in capital expenditures is there to provide the long-term foundation for growth.

## Bandicoot: Robotic Scavenger

- **Context:** The Kerala government has launched robotic scavenger, "Bandicoot", to clean sewages in the temple town of Guruvayur, becoming the first state in the country to use robotic technology to clean all its.

### Key Highlights:

- Bandicoot, developed by Kerala-based Genrobotics, had recently bagged 'Kerala Pride' award at the Huddle Global 2022 conclave organised by Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM).
- Bandicoot robots are currently deployed in few towns across 17 states in India and three Union Territories. In 2018, KWA started using Bandicoot to clean the manholes in Thiruvananthapuram. Later, it was introduced in Ernakulam also.
- Genrobotics, a Technopark-based company, have developed "the world's first robotic scavenger" Bandicoot in an effort to eliminate manual scavenging

providing respite for workers engaged in manhole cleaning

- The robotic Tron Unit, which is the major component of Bandicoot, enters the manhole and removes sewage using robotic hands, similar to a man's limbs.
- The machine has waterproof, HD vision cameras and sensors that can detect harmful gases inside the manholes

## National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS)

- **Context:** Recently, Government made it mandatory that the attendance for MGNREGS workers will be captured through a mobile application, National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS).

### Key Highlights:

- The National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) App was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2021.
- It aimed at bringing more transparency and ensuring proper monitoring of the schemes.
- The NMMS App permits taking real time attendance of workers at Mahatma Gandhi NREGA worksites along with geo-tagged photographs.
- The app helps in increasing citizen oversight of the programme.

### About MGNREGS:

- It is a poverty alleviation programme of the Government of India, which provides the legal Right to Work in exchange for money to the citizens of the country.
- On average, every day approx. 1.5 crore people work under it at almost 14 lakh sites.
- It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.



- **Funding:** It is shared between the Centre and the States.
- The Central Government bears 100 per cent of the cost of unskilled labour, 75 percent of the cost of semi-skilled and skilled labour, 75 percent of the cost of materials and 6 percent of the administrative costs

26<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

## Social Stock Exchange (SSE)

- **Context:** The National Stock Exchange (NSE) announced that it received final approval from market regulator Sebi to establish a Social Stock Exchange (SSE) as a separate segment on its platform.

### Key Highlights:

- The Social Stock Exchange segment will provide a new avenue for social enterprises to finance social initiatives, increase their visibility, and increase transparency in fund mobilization and utilization by social enterprises.
- Any social enterprise, Non-Profit Organization (NPO), or For-Profit Social Enterprise (FPE) that establishes its primacy of social intent can be listed on the SSE segment, according to the rules.
- Corporate foundations, trade associations, political and religious organisations, infrastructure companies are not eligible to list on social stock exchange

### About Social Stock Exchange (SSE):

- The idea of SSE was first floated by the Finance Minister in her Budget speech for the financial year 2019-20.
- With business impacted due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown, SEBI constituted a panel on social stock exchanges which recommended direct listing of non-profit organisations (NPOs) through the issuance of bonds and a range of funding mechanisms in a report submitted to the market regulator.

- An SSE allows the listing of non-profit or non-government organisations on stock exchanges, providing them with an alternative fund-raising structure.
- It may be listed on BSE or NSE.
- Countries like the UK, Canada and Brazil have SSEs.
- The fund-raising is proposed through several instruments such as zero-coupon-zero-principal bonds, social venture funds and mutual funds.

## Aadhaar-Voter ID Link

- **Context:** The Election Commission of India has said that over 60% of India's 94.5 crore voters in India have linked their Aadhaar number to their voter IDs.

### Key Highlights:

- The Central Government passed The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which amended the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Representation Act, 1951 to implement certain electoral reforms.
- The amendment stated that an electoral registration officer may require a person to furnish their Aadhaar number.
- The amendments also stated that no individual will be denied inclusion in the electoral roll, nor have their names deleted from the roll if they are unable to furnish their Aadhaar number due to "sufficient cause as may be prescribed". Such individuals may be allowed to provide alternative documents prescribed by the government.
- The government claims the linkage will solve the problem of multiple enrollments of the same person at different places.
- Once the Aadhaar linkage is achieved, the electoral roll data system will instantly alert the existence of previous registration(s) whenever a person applies for new registration.

- This will help in cleaning the electoral roll to a great extent and facilitate elector registration in the location at which they are 'ordinarily resident'.
- Bio-Agri which comprises BT Cotton, pesticides, marine biotech, and animal biotech and has the potential to nearly double its Bioeconomy contribution from USD 10.5 billion to 20 billion in 2025

27<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2023

## India's Bio-Economy

- **Context:** The Union Minister of Science & Technology has said that India's bio-economy is poised to touch 300 billion USD (US Dollar) by 2030, with its rising innovation and scientific temper.

### Key Highlights:

- The bioeconomy aims to drive both sustainable development and circularity. In particular, the principles of the circular economy — reuse, repair and recycle — are a fundamental part of the bioeconomy.
- Through reuse, repair and recycling, the total amount of waste and its impact is reduced. It also saves energy, minimizes pollution of soil, air and water, thus helping to prevent damage to the environment, climate and biodiversity.
- India's bioeconomy is likely to touch USD 150 billion by 2025 and over USD 300 billion by 2030.
- The country's bioeconomy has reached over USD 80 billion in 2021, registering a 14.1% growth over USD 70.2 billion in 2020.
- On average, at least three biotech startups were incorporated every day in 2021 (a total of 1,128 biotech startups set up in 2021) and the industry crossed USD 1 billion in research and development spending.
- Bio-Industry got a fillip from India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision and India becoming 'energy independent' by 2047.

### About Bio-Economy:

Bio-Economy is the production, utilization and conservation of biological resources to provide information, products, processes and services across all economic sectors. These resources include biological related knowledge, science, technology and innovation.

### Government initiatives to boost Bio-Economy:

- **National Mission on Bioeconomy:** Amid attempts to boost rural economy by using bio-resources, a 'National Mission on Bioeconomy' was launched by the Institute of Bio-resources and Sustainable Development under the Science and Technology Ministry, in 2016.
- **Biotech KISAN:** Biotech-KISAN is a scientist-farmer partnership scheme launched in 2017 by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

## Phosphor-Gypsum

- **Context:** The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has partnered with the Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers. They will conduct field trials on NHAI projects for the use of Phosphor-Gypsum in National Highway Construction.

### Key Highlights:

- Phosphor-Gypsum is a by-product of fertilizer production.
- It has been found to be an effective material for road construction.

## 28th FEBRUARY, 2023

- An Indian fertilizer company has constructed a road using Phosphor-Gypsum. Based on the Central Road Research Institute's (CRRI) report, the Indian Road Congress (IRC) has accredited Phosphor-Gypsum waste material, for road construction.
- The use of Phosphor-Gypsum in road construction aligns with the principles of a circular economy. This process encourages the use of waste material to create new products, thus reducing waste and conserving resources.

### Licorice (Mulethi)

- **Context:** Recently, Himachal Pradesh has become the first state in India to start the organized commercial cultivation of Licorice (Mulethi).

#### Key Highlights:

- Mulethi commonly known as licorice, is an important sweet-tasting perennial shrub.
- It has a sweet taste due to the presence of glycyrrhizin, which is 50 times sweeter than sucrose.
- The plant thrives in a dry and sunny climate and is cultivated in subtropical and warm temperate regions suitable for cultivation
- It is used as a natural sweetener in herbal medicines, flavouring in candies and tobacco.
- It is also used in traditional medicines for treating chest and lung diseases, pneumonia, bronchitis, kidney and heart diseases, coughs, low blood pressure, liver toxicity and pancreatic disorders.
- Mulethi is grown mainly in Afghanistan, while minor producing countries include Pakistan, China, Nepal and India.
- India imports 8,047 tonnes of liquorice annually from Afghanistan, China and Nepal. To reduce these imports, India has started the organized cultivation of Mulethi.

### PM Kisan Samman Nidhi

- **Context:** The Prime Minister has transferred the 13th installment of about Rs 16,800 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to the bank accounts of more than 8 crore beneficiary farmers across the country.

#### Key Highlights:

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme Launched in 2019.
- Nodal Ministry is Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- Its aim is to supplement the financial needs of land holding farmers.
- Under the scheme financial assistance of Rs.6000 per annum is provided to all landholding farmer families across the country subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income strata.
- The amount is transferred in three four-monthly installments of Rs. 2000 each, directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiary farmers.
- State Government and UT administration are responsible for identifying the farmer families which are eligible for support as per scheme.
- The scheme was initially meant for small and marginal farmers having land holding up to two hectares but scope of the scheme has now been extended to cover all landholding farmers.
- Process of Self-registration of beneficiaries has been made simple and easy through mobile app, PM KISAN portal and walk-ins via Common Service Centers in order to give the maximum benefit to the farmers.
- In order to maintain the authenticity and validity of the scheme, a mandatory physical verification of 5% beneficiary every year is being done as per the provisions laid down in the scheme.

## Agnipath Scheme

- **Context:** The Delhi High Court recently upheld the validity of the Agnipath scheme launched by the Union government for recruitment in the Armed Forces.

### Key Highlights:

- The Supreme Court had made the Delhi High Court the core forum to examine the question of the legality of the Agnipath scheme.
- The High Court was responding to the petitions that challenged the constitutional validity of the scheme.
- The court dismissed a bunch of petitions challenging the scheme and stated that the scheme has been introduced in the national interest to ensure that the Armed Forces are better equipped.
- The court said “it’s needless to state the four years’ training period under the scheme would also instill a sense of nationalism in the recruits”, which would “more or less prompt them to use their skills and focus on the development of the country”.
- The court also found no merit in the argument that the government had failed to make provision for the meaningful employment of Agniveers in the future.
- The Government have in fact sought to extend entrepreneurship financial schemes such as MUDRA and Start-Up India to Agniveers as well.
- The High Court said that its advantages of employment, skill certificates, 25% of selected candidates to be appointed in the regular Army cannot be overlooked.
- On the matter of pension for the Agniveers, the court said that the petitioners had failed to realise the Indian government had not made it mandatory for youth to serve in the Armed Forces, as many nations do.

