

CURRENT AFFAIRS FEBRUARY 2024

MONTHLY CONSOLIDATION

1. APAAR- One nation, one student ID Card

Recently, the National Conference on APAAR: One Nation One Student ID Card was held in New Delhi. Vital interconnection between APAAR IDs, the Academic Bank of Credit, and Digi locker, facilitating streamlined operations, was also highlighted in the event.

Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry is a specialized identification system designed for all students in India, from an early age.

What is the Academic Bank of Credits and Digi Locker?

Academic Bank of Credits: As per NEP 2020, the Academic Bank beginning of Credits(ABC) has been envisaged to facilitate the academic mobility of students with the freedom to study across the education Institutions in the country with an appropriate “credit transfer” mechanism from one programme to another. € If the student changes schools, whether within the state or to another state, all their data in the ABC gets transferred to her/his new school just by sharing the APAAR ID.

DigiLocker: It is a cloud-based platform that allows users to store, issue, and verify documents and certificates digitally. It is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under Digital India programme. €

The issued documents in DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents as per Rule 9A of the Information Technology (Preservation and Retention of Information by Intermediaries providing Digital Locker facilities) Rules, 2016.

2. Smart Gram Panchayat

Recently, the Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj inaugurated the ‘Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat’ Project at Paprou Gram Panchayat of Begusarai District, Bihar signalling a significant leap towards digital empowerment in rural India.

What is the Smart Gram Panchayat Project?

The project aims to extend the PM-WANI (Prime Minister’s Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) Service to Gram Panchayats in Begusarai, marking a paradigm shift in rural connectivity. Begusarai leads the digital transformation in Bihar by equipping all Gram Panchayats with Wi-Fi services under the PM-WANI Scheme.

3. Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

The two houses of the Parliament recently approved the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024.

What are the Major Provisions of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024?

About: The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, has long been a cornerstone of India’s environmental legislation to ensure sustainable management of water resources.

The recent amendment seeks to address certain shortcomings and adapt regulatory frameworks to contemporary needs. Amendments in the Water Act are also necessary to make in line with the Air Act, as both laws contain similar provisions .

Major Amended Provisions: Decriminalization of Minor Offences:

It focuses on decriminalizing minor offences related to water pollution, alleviating fears of imprisonment for technical or procedural lapses. The rationale is to ensure penalties align with the severity of offences, promoting compliance without overly burdening stakeholders. €

Exemption for Certain Industrial Plants: The amended bill empowers the central government to exempt specific categories of industrial plants from certain statutory restrictions, such as those outlined in Section 25 regarding the establishment of new outlets and discharges.

This provision intends to streamline regulatory processes and reduce duplication of surveillance efforts, and alleviate unnecessary burdens on regulatory agencies, promoting efficiency

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 - was enacted for the prevention and control of water pollution and maintaining or restoring the wholesomeness of water. The Central and State Pollution Control Boards have been constituted under Section 3 and 4 of the Act respectively.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), a statutory organization, was constituted in September, 1974 under the Water ((Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala Case, 1973: In this case, for the first time, a bench of 13 judges was assembled to hear a writ petition. The Court held that: The Preamble of the Constitution will now be considered as part of the Constitution. It held that the Preamble could be amended under Article 368, subject to the condition that no amendment is done to the 'basic structure' of the Constitution.

S R Bommai vs Union of India Case, 1994: The Supreme Court again held that the Preamble is an integral part of the Constitution.

4. SC Questions Amendment of Preamble

Recently, a Supreme Court bench while hearing a petition seeking to delete the words 'socialist' and 'secular' from the Preamble, asked if the Preamble of the Constitution could have been amended without changing the date of its adoption on November 26, 1949.

The Preamble was amended only once in 1976 to introduce the words 'socialist' and 'secular' through 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act.

Berubari Union Case, 1960: Through the Berubari case, the Court stated that 'Preamble is the key to open the mind of the makers' but it can not be considered as part of the Constitution. Therefore it is not enforceable in a court of law.

ARTICLES	PROVISION FOR TRIBALS
Article 342 (1)	President's power to specify tribes as ST
Article 15(4)	Special provisions for OBCs (including STs)
Article 29	Protection of the Interests of Minorities (including STs)
Article 330	Reservation for STs in the Lok Sabha
Article 332	Reservation for STs in State Legislature
Article 243	Reservation in Panchayats
Article 275	Allocation of special funds for states for the welfare of STs with a better administration

5. Motion of Thanks

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi replied to the Motion of Thanks on the President's address to Parliament in the Rajya Sabha, highlighting the significant milestones in India's journey towards the 75th Republic Day. What is a Motion of Thanks?

The Motion of Thanks is a parliamentary procedure in which a formal motion is presented to express gratitude or appreciation for the President's Address to both Houses of Parliament.

5. Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions

The recently released report titled 'Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions' by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for the fiscal year 2022-23 sheds light on the financial dynamics of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

Revenue Composition: Panchayats earn only 1% of their revenue through taxes. Majority of their revenue comes from grants provided by the Centre and the States. z Data indicates that 80% of the revenue is from Central government grants, while 15% is from State government grants.

6. DELIMITATION

The Delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the First Census after 2026. The 2021 Census was originally postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently due to delays on the part of the Central government.

What is Delimitation?

Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. It also includes determining the seats to be reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses.

This 'delimitation process' is performed by the 'Delimitation Commission' that is set up under an act of Parliament.

7. Constitution (J&K) ST Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024

Recently, the Lok Sabha has passed the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, aiming to include specific ethnic groups and tribes from Jammu and Kashmir into the list of Scheduled Tribes.

The Union government has also introduced the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to provide reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in panchayats and Municipal Bodies of Jammu and Kashmir.

8. Scheme Approved in Budget 2024-25

Recently, the Union cabinet has approved a slew of key economic decisions, including extension of various schemes such as Extension of Subsidised Sugar Scheme among others.

What are the Key Schemes Approved by the Union Government?

Extension of Subsidised Sugar Scheme: The Cabinet extended the scheme to distribute subsidised sugar to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families for two more years till 31st March 2026. The Scheme facilitates access to sugar to the poorest of the poor and adds energy to their diet so that their health improves. Under the Scheme, the Central Government gives subsidies of Rs.18.50 per kg per month of sugar to AAY families of participating States.

The approval is expected to extend benefits of more than Rs.1850 crore during the period of the 15th Finance Commission (2020-21 to 2025-26).

The Government of India is already giving free ration under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna (PM-GKAY).

Selling ‘Bharat Atta,’ ‘Bharat Dal,’ tomatoes, and onions at affordable and fair prices are measures to ensure an adequate food supply for citizens, extending beyond the PM-GKAY program.

With this approval, **the Government will continue giving subsidies to participating States for the distribution of sugar to AAY families** through PDS (Public Distribution System) at the rate of One kg per family per month. States have the responsibility to procure and distribute sugar.

Continuation of Scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) for export of Apparel/Garments: €

The Cabinet approved the continuation of a scheme granting a rebate on state and central taxes and levies for the export of apparel and garments up to 31st March 2026.

9. UGC’s Draft Guidelines on De-reservation

The University Grants Commission’s (UGC) draft guidelines on implementing reservations in high education have sparked significant debate, largely due to the proposal of ‘de-reservation’ in certain exceptional cases.

In response, the Union government and the UGC have clarified that faculty positions in universities reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Economically Weaker Section (EWS) candidates will not be opened to the general category. Note: De-reservation refers to the potential removal of reserved seats or quotas allocated to specific categories, such as SCs, STs, OBCs and EWS.

10. Corruption Perception Index 2023

Recently, the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023 has been released by Transparency International showing that most countries have made little to no progress in tackling public sector corruption.

The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories around the globe by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Global Highlights of CPI 2023: €

Top Three Countries: Denmark with a score of 90 tops the index for the sixth consecutive year, with Finland and New Zealand following closely with scores of 87 and 85, respectively. Due to well-functioning justice systems, these countries are also among the top scorers in the Rule of Law Index. €

Bottom Spots: Somalia, Venezuela, Syria, South Sudan and Yemen, with their scores 11, 13, 13, 13 respectively, take the bottom spots in the index. They are all affected by protracted crises, mostly armed conflicts. €

India's Rank and Score: India was ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the CPI 2023. The overall score for India in 2023 was 39, a slight decrease from 40 in 2022. In 2022, India was ranked 85.

11. UPI Services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius

Recently, the Prime Minister of India along with the President of Sri Lanka, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurated the launch of Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and also RuPay card services in Mauritius.

This move aims to facilitate seamless digital payments among citizens of the three countries, fostering stronger economic ties.

These projects have been developed and executed by NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL), along with partner banks/non-banks from Mauritius and Sri Lanka, under the guidance and support of the Reserve Bank of India.

12. Blue Economy 2.0

The recent presentation of the Interim Budget included a significant emphasis on advancing Blue Economy 2.0 through the introduction of a novel scheme focused on restoration, adaptation measures, coastal aquaculture, and mariculture, employing an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy.

What is the Blue Economy?

Blue economy refers to the sustainable use of marine resources for exploration, economic growth, improved livelihoods, and transport while preserving the health of marine and coastal ecosystems. In India, the blue economy encompasses a wide range of sectors, including shipping, tourism, fisheries, and offshore oil and gas exploration.

13. INTERIM BUDGET 2024

What are the Major Highlights of the Interim Budget 2024-25?

Capital Expenditure: An 11.1% increase in the capital expenditure outlay for 2024-2025 was announced. The capital expenditure is set at Rs 11,11,111 crore, constituting 3.4% of the GDP.

Economic Growth Projections: The GDP growth for FY 2023-24 real GDP growth is projected at 7.3%, aligning with the RBI's revised growth projection. The International Monetary Fund upgraded India's growth projection to 6.3% for FY 2023-24. It also anticipates India becoming the third-largest economy in 2027.

Revenue and Expenditure Estimates (2024-25): ₹ Total Receipts: Estimated at Rs 30.80 lakh crore, excluding borrowings. ₹ Total Expenditure: Projected at Rs 47.66 lakh crore. ₹ Tax Receipts: Estimated at Rs 26.02 lakh crore.

GST Collections: Reached ₹1.65 lakh crore in December 2023, crossing the ₹1.6 lakh crore benchmark for the seventh time.

Fiscal Deficit and Market Borrowing: Fiscal deficit is estimated at 5.1% of GDP in 2024-25, aligning with the goal of reducing it below 4.5% by 2025-26 (announced in budget 2021-22). Gross and net market borrowings through dated securities in 2024-25 are estimated at Rs 14.13 and 11.75 lakh crore, respectively.

Taxation: The Interim Budget maintains the existing rates for direct and indirect taxes, including import duties. **€ For Corporate Taxes:** 22% for existing domestic companies, 15% for certain new manufacturing companies. **€**

No tax liability for taxpayers with income up to ₹7 lakh under the new tax regime. **€** Certain tax benefits for Start-Ups and investments extended by one year up to March 31, 2025.

Priorities: Emphasizing the focus on the Poor, Women, Youth and Farmer.

14. Ramsar Sites in India

Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change announced that on the eve of World Wetlands Day, 2024, India has increased its tally of Ramsar sites to 80 from the existing 75 by designating five more wetlands as Ramsar sites.

Three of these sites, Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve, Aghanashini Estuary and Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve are located in Karnataka whereas two, Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary and Longwood Shola Reserve Forest are in Tamilnadu. Tamil Nadu continues to have the maximum number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites) followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).

What is the Ramsar Convention?

It is an intergovernmental treaty, adopted on 2nd February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. In India, it came into force on 1st February 1982, under which wetlands of international importance are declared as Ramsar sites

World Wetlands Day (WWD): € It is celebrated across the globe to commemorate the adoption of this international agreement on wetlands on 2nd February 1971.

15. Bharat Ratna Awardees 2024

The prestigious Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, is set to be conferred upon five eminent personalities who have made remarkable contributions to politics, governance, and agriculture.

They are Karpoori Thakur, Mankombu Sambasivan (MS) Swaminathan, Pamulaparthy Venkata (P. V.) Narasimha Rao, Lal Krishna Advani, and Chaudhary Charan Singh.

What are the Notable Contributions of Bharat Ratna Awardees (2024)?

Karpoori Thakur: Karpoori Thakur, known as "Jan Nayak," served as Bihar's 11th Chief Minister twice, from 1970-71 and 1977-79. He will be conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously. €

Karpoori Thakur was the pioneer in providing the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) with the benefit of reservation as he implemented the recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Commission during his tenure as Bihar CM from 1977 to 1979. € In 1978, he introduced a groundbreaking reservation model, allocating 26% of reservations with specific quotas for OBCs, Economically Backward Classes (EBCs), women, and economically backward classes among upper castes. Thakur advocated for marginalised communities' rights, emphasising social justice and inclusive development.

16. Kyasanur Forest Disease

Since the beginning of 2024, two individuals have lost their lives due to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a viral infection prevalent in Karnataka.

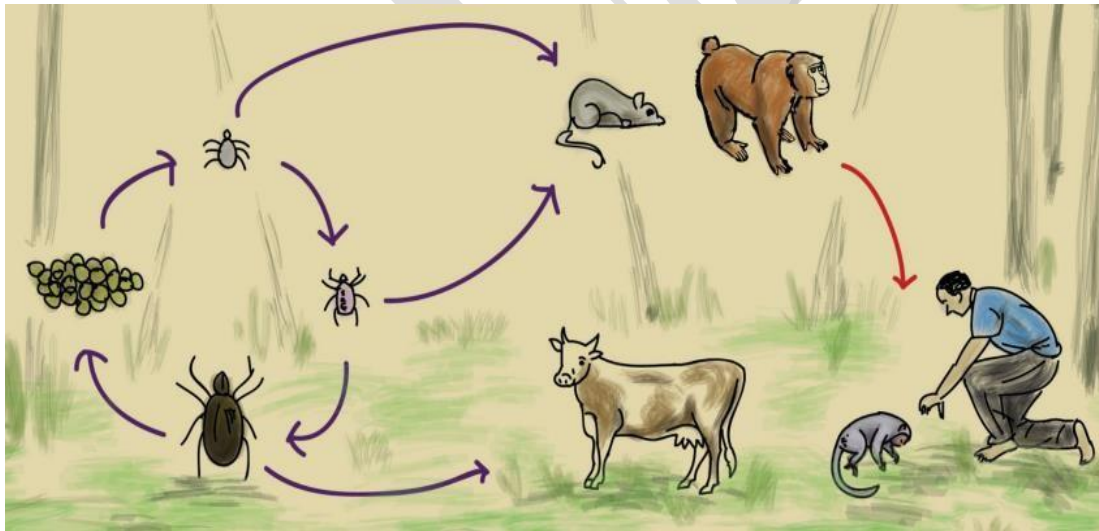
The number of deaths reported due to the disease since 1956, when it was noticed in the forests of Shivamogga district, is above 560.

What is Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)?

About: Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a zoonotic illness, is colloquially referred to as “monkey disease” due to its link with monkey fatalities. It is caused by the Kyasanur Forest disease Virus (KFDV), which primarily affects humans and monkeys.

It was first identified in 1957 in a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka. Since then, between 400-500 human cases per year have been reported. Eventually, KFD emerged as a grave public health problem spreading through the entire Western Ghats.

Transmission: In nature, the virus is maintained mainly in hard ticks (*Haemaphysalis spinigera*), monkeys, rodents, and birds. To humans, it may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal (a sick or recently dead monkey).



17. Grammy Award 2024

Shakti, a fusion music group comprising tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and singer Shankar Mahadevan, has won the 66th Grammy Award (2024) for Best Global Music Album for “This Moment”.

Shakti’s third studio album, “This Moment,” was released on 23rd June 2023, marking their return after 46 years under the same name.

What are Grammy Awards?

About: Grammy Award (originally named Gramophone Award) is a series of awards presented annually in the United States (US) by the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS) or the Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (LARAS), (LARAS only for recordings in Spanish/Portuguese languages).

This annual event to recognize musical achievements was started in 1959 to respect the performers for the year 1958. The honorees receive a golden statuette of a gramophone.

India’s Performance in 2024 Awards: € Shakti, comprising Zakir Hussain, Shankar Mahadevan, John McLaughlin, Ganesh Rajagopalan, and Selvaganesh Vinayakram, won the 2024 Grammy for their album “This Moment.”