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Current affairs summary for prelims

7 February, 2024

Centre launches sale of 'Bharat' Rice

Context: *Shri Piyush Goyal, the Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Textiles, and Commerce and Industry, initiated the release of Rice branded as 'Bharat' and inaugurated 100 mobile vans for distribution.*

- **Availability of Essential Commodities at Affordable Rates:**
  - In addition to 'Bharat' Rice, consumers have access to other staple items such as Bharat Atta, Bharat Dal, onions, sugar, and oil at affordable prices.
  - These essential commodities are made available through outlets like Kendriya Bhandar, NAFED, and NCCF, ensuring accessibility to a wide consumer base at economical rates.
- **Government's Commitment to Consumer Welfare:**
  - The government, led by the Prime Minister, underscores its commitment to consumer welfare by closely monitoring and regulating the prices of essential commodities to ensure affordability for all sections of society.
  - The initiatives reflect a holistic approach towards addressing consumer needs while also supporting farmers through fair pricing mechanisms.
- **Efforts for Price Moderation in the Food Sector:**
  - The retail launch of 'Bharat' Rice is part of a broader strategy to moderate prices of essential food items and stabilize the market through increased supply and controlled pricing.
  - This initiative builds on previous efforts to keep essential food items affordable for consumers, contributing to overall food security and economic stability.
- **Details of 'Bharat' Rice Retail Launch:**
  - 'Bharat' Rice is offered in consumer-friendly packaging sizes of 5 Kg and 10 Kg bags, with a maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs. 29/kg, making it accessible to households of varying sizes and budgets.
  - The rice is available at designated outlets initially, with plans for expansion to other retail platforms and e-commerce channels to reach a wider consumer base.
- **Expansion of Availability and Consumer Accessibility:**
  - The government aims to extend the availability of 'Bharat' Rice beyond designated outlets to ensure accessibility for consumers across urban and rural areas through various retail channels.
  - This expansion aligns with the government's vision of providing essential commodities to every corner of the country, promoting inclusivity and equitable access to basic necessities.
- **Government Initiatives for Consumer Welfare and Farmer Support:**
  - The government implements initiatives like PMGKAY and MSP to safeguard consumer interests while supporting farmers by ensuring fair prices for their produce.
  - Through these measures, the government strives to create a balance between consumer affordability and farmer livelihoods, fostering a sustainable agricultural ecosystem.
- **Efforts for Ensuring Stability in Essential Commodity Prices:**
  - In addition to retail initiatives, the government undertakes procurement operations and extends PMGKAY benefits to stabilize prices and ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities to consumers.
  - These efforts are essential for maintaining price stability, especially during times of economic uncertainty or fluctuations in global commodity markets.
- **Price Moderation Measures in the Edible Oils Market:**
  - The government implements measures such as adjusting import duties and closely monitoring international price trends to regulate the prices of edible oils in the domestic market.
  - By ensuring that changes in global prices are reflected in domestic markets, the government aims to mitigate inflationary pressures and maintain affordability for consumers.
- **Role of Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) in Market Stability:**
  - The Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) serves as a vital tool for mitigating price volatility and ensuring market stability by procuring and distributing agri-horticultural commodities.
  - Through strategic interventions, the PSF aims to protect both consumers and farmers by maintaining stable prices and availability of essential commodities, thereby fostering economic resilience and food security.

Growth of Food Processing Industries in India

Context: *Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Km. Shobha Karandlaje highlighted the growth of FPIs in India.*

- **Growth of Food Processing Sector:**
  - Food Processing (FP) sector has become a significant contributor to India's GDP, employment, and exports.
  - Over the last seven years until 2021-22, the FP sector has experienced an Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR) of approximately 7.26%.
  - Gross Value Added (GVA) in the FP sector has risen from 1.30 lakh crore in 2013-14 to 2.08 lakh crore in 2021-22.
- **Government Initiatives and Schemes:**
  - Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) implements schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY) to develop modern infrastructure and efficient supply chain management.
  - The PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME) provides technical, financial, and business support to set up or upgrade 2 lakh Micro Food Processing Enterprises.
  - The Production Linked Incentive scheme (PLIS) aims to create global food champions and enhance the visibility of Indian food brands abroad.
- **Measures to Boost Investment:**
  - Processed food items are exempted from licensing under the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951.
  - 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is permitted through automatic route for the food processing sector.
  - Lower GST rates are applied to both raw and processed food products, covering over 71.7% of food products.
- **Challenges in Unorganized Sector:**
  - The unorganized FP sector comprises nearly 25 lakh unregistered and informal enterprises.

Face to Face Centres

DELHI MUKHERJEE NAGAR: 9205274741, 42 | LAXMI NAGAR : 9205212500, 9205962002 | RAJENDRA NAGAR: 9205274743 | UTTAR PRADESH PRAYAGRAJ: 0532-2260189, 8853467068 | LUCKNOW (ALIGANJ): 0522-4025825, 9506256789 | LUCKNOW (GOMTI NAGAR): 7234000501, 7234000502 | GREATER NOIDA: 9205336037, 38 | KANPUR: 7887003962, 7897003962 | GORAKHPUR : 7080847474, 9161947474 | ODISHA BHUBANESWAR: 9818244644/7656949029

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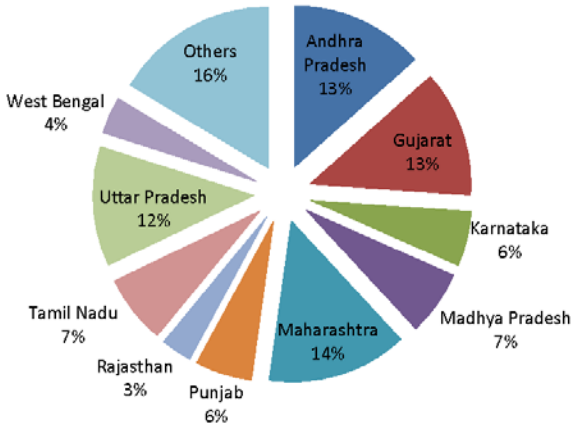
- These micro manufacturing units face challenges such as limited access to credit, technology, branding, marketing, and food safety measures.

Share of different states in Organised food processing units



➢ **Atmanirbhar Bharat Initiatives:**

- The PMFME scheme under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan aims to support micro food processing enterprises by providing financial, technical, and business assistance.
- Operational in all 36 States/UTs, the scheme has made significant progress in loan sanctions, seed capital release, and training of beneficiaries.

➢ **Key Progress Figures:**

- 72,556 loans have been sanctioned for credit-linked subsidy, including 1175 loans sanctioned in Odisha.
- Rs. 771.12 crores have been released as Seed Capital for 236,704 SHG members, including Rs. 67.91 crores for 23,400 SHG members in Odisha.
- 62,140 beneficiaries have been trained in Food Processing Entrepreneurship Development Program, including 6439 trained in Odisha.
- 14 ODOP Brands and 166 products have been successfully launched so far, with no proposals received from the State of Odisha in this regard.

2024 Climate and Catastrophe Insight

Context: *A report reveals that weather-related disasters accounted for 95% of natural calamities in 2023, resulting in damages exceeding $1 billion.*

➢ **Global Natural Disaster Trends in 2023:**

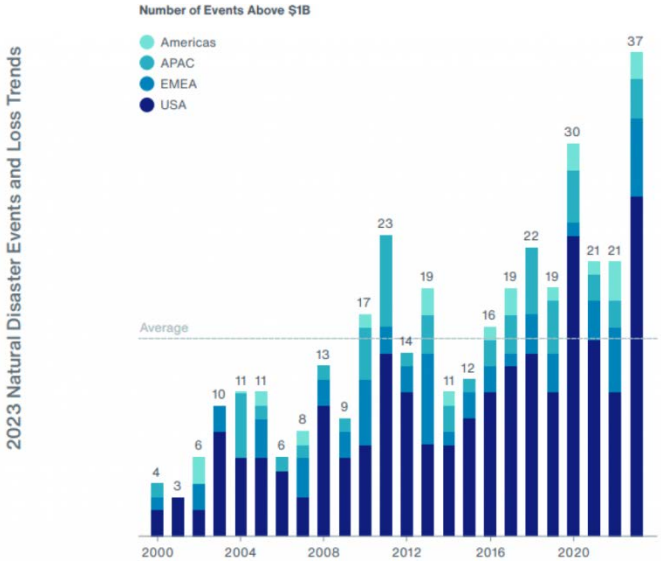
- In 2023, there were 398 natural disasters worldwide, resulting in $380 billion in damages.
- This represents an increase from the estimated $355 billion in economic losses recorded in 2022.
- The year saw 66 billion-dollar economic loss events and 37 billion-dollar insured loss events.
- Weather-related factors accounted for 95% of the natural disasters causing damages of at least $1 billion.

➢ **Climate and Catastrophe Insight Report Highlights:**

- The 2024 Climate and Catastrophe Insight report by Aon PLC highlights a 22% increase in damages compared to the 21st-century average.
- Earthquakes and severe convective storms (SCS) in Europe and the United States were significant drivers of this increase.
- Insurance coverage only paid out $118 billion, indicating a 69% protection gap, higher than the 58% in 2022.

➢ **Global Protection Gap:**

- Despite increasing natural disasters, the insurance coverage gap grew in 2023.
- The widest protection gap existed in the Asia and Pacific region (91%), followed by the Americas (non-US) (87%) and Europe, Middle East, and Africa (83%).



➢ **Impact on Different Regions:**

- Floods caused over 64% of all losses in the Asia-Pacific region, where insurance penetration remains low.
- In India, seasonal floods resulted in economic losses of approximately $300 million and claimed over 2,600 lives in 2023.
- In the US, insurance covered nearly $80 billion of the economic damage, but significant losses (30%) remained uninsured.

➢ **Implications for Insurers:** European countries like New Zealand, Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Croatia faced their costliest weather-related insurance events on record.

NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Anusandhan National Research Foundation

Recently, the Centre announced that the provisions of the newly constituted research board, the Anusandhan National Research Foundation had come into effect.

Anusandhan National Research Foundation:

- Anusandhan National Research Foundation is a **newly constituted research funding organization.**
- The ANRF **Act was passed by both Houses of Parliament in 2023**, and **its provisions came into effect on February 5, 2024.**
- Its **aim is to support research in natural sciences, mathematical sciences**, **engineering**, technology, environmental and earth sciences, health, agriculture and scientific and technological interfaces of humanities and social sciences.
- It has an **initial corpus of ₹50,000 crore,** with approximately ₹36,000 crore projected to come from the private sector and **additionally, ₹2,000 crore** has been provisioned for the financial year 2024-25.
- **It subsumes the existing Science and Engineering Research Board** (SERB), established in **2008**, with an expanded mandate covering activities beyond those of SERB.
- **Abhay Karandikar,** Secretary, Department of Science and Technology has been appointed as the interim CEO of the body.

Motion of Thanks

Recently, the Prime Minister of India replied to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in the Lok Sabha.

Motion of Thanks:

- The Motion of Thanks is **a motion in the Indian Parliament that follows the President's address** to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
- **Article 87** of the Constitution mandates the President to **address both Houses of Parliament** after each general election and at the commencement of the first session of every fiscal year.
- In the address, the **President outlines the government's policies and programs** for the previous and following years.
- This motion is moved in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha **by a Member of Parliament from the ruling party,** following the President's address.

Global Reporting Initiative

Recently, the newly introduced Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Biodiversity Standard has mandated the reporting of factors contributing to biodiversity loss and their impact on Indigenous Peoples.

About the Global Reporting Initiative:

- The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is **international independent standards organization** that helps organizations report on their environmental, economic, social, and governance performance.
- It was **initiated in 1997** by Ceres and the Tellus Institute, gaining support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- **Established in 1999**, GRI's voluntary sustainability reporting framework is utilized by multinational organizations, governments, SMEs, NGOs, and industry groups across more than 100 countries

	▪ It **produces free Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** to help companies and organizations report on their performance. ▪ Its new standards aim to help businesses, governments, and other entities understand and report their impacts on biodiversity, **climate change**, **human rights**, and **corruption**. ▪ Its headquarter is located in Amsterdam, **Netherlands**.
Bannerghatta National Park 	Recently, a proposal for the construction of a six-lane elevated highway in Bangalore's Bannerghatta National Park (BNP) has evoked protests by environmental activists over its potential adverse impacts on the ecologically sensitive park. **About Bannerghatta National Park:** ▪ Bannerghatta National Park is located in the **hills of the Anekal range of mountains** south of Bangalore, **Karnataka**. ▪ It was **established in 1940** and **declared a national park in 1974.** ▪ The stream of the **Suvarnamukhi river** serves as the primary water source for animals in the park as it runs through its center. ▪ In **2002**, a portion of the park became the Bannerghatta Biological Park, **the first biological park in India** with a fenced forested elephant sanctuary. ▪ **Flora:** The park boasts diverse flora including **Narcissus latifolia**, **Schleichera oleosa**, Sandalwood, Tamarind, **Eucalyptus**, etc. ▪ **Fauna:** The park is a prime habitat for various species, including **endangered Asian Elephants, Tigers**, **Leopards**, and other wildlife such as **Sambar** deer, Sloth bears and **Pangolins**.
Papikonda National Park 	Recently, a lone male tiger has safely entered to its natural habitat of Papikonda National Park (PNP) with good health from the end of the Eluru district. **About Papikonda National Park:** ▪ Papikonda National Park (PNP) is a **protected area in Andhra Pradesh**. ▪ It was established in **2008** and covers 1,012.86 square kilometers (391.07 square miles). ▪ The park is located in the **Papi Hills of the Eastern Ghats**, on both sides of the **Godavari river**. ▪ Historically, it transitioned from a **reserved forest in 1882** to a **wildlife sanctuary in 1978** and eventually became a **national park in 2008**. ▪ In 2016, as many as three tigers were recorded during the survey conducted by the AP Forest Department. ▪ Its landscape was covered in the two **Tiger Census -2018 and 2022.** ▪ The park is predominantly **covered by moist deciduous forest** and is home to various animal species including **tigers**, **mouse deer** and **gaur**.
MQ-9B drones 	Recently, the US has revealed that the sale of 31 armed drones (MQ-9B) to India at an estimated cost of nearly $4 billion would provide it with an enhanced maritime security and domain awareness capability and give the country outright ownership of these aircraft. **MQ-9B drones**: ▪ The MQ-9B drone, also **known as the Predator drone** is an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that has **two variants: SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian**. ▪ It has a **payload capacity of 3,850-pound** (1,746 kg). ▪ It has **nine hardpoints** that can **carry sensors**, **laser-guided bombs and air-to-ground missiles.** ▪ The Indian Navy has been operating the **SeaGuardian version of the MQ-9B since 2020**. ▪ The SeaGuardian can **operate at over 40,000 feet** and can **carry up to 5,670 kg with a fuel capacity of 2,721 kg.**

Mistiness

About Mistiness:

- Mistiness on a **vehicle's windscreen** during rains is **caused by tiny water droplets scattering light, making the glass opaque.**
- Wiping the windscreen with a cloth soaked in detergent leaves a residue on the glass, which **lowers the surface tension of water droplets**.
- Lowered surface tension allows water droplets to spread as a thin film rather than forming mist-inducing droplets.
- Similar to **writing on a dry bathroom mirror with soap**, the residue left by the detergent facilitates the **prevention of mistiness** by altering the behavior of water droplets.
- When steam condenses on a mirror after a hot bath or shower, areas of writing with soap do not mist up, contrasting with the misting of the background.
- The phenomenon illustrates a **practical method for preventing windscreen mistiness by using detergent-soaked cloth**, particularly **useful when driving with closed windows during rains.**

Place in News

Georgia

Recently, the Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili denounced a Russian plan to set up a Navy base in the breakaway Abkhazia region.

Georgia (Capital: Tbilisi)

Location: Georgia is a country in the **Caucasus region**, located at the **intersection of Eastern Europe and West Asia.**

Boundaries: Georgia shares its border with **Azerbaijan** (East & Southeast), **the Black Sea** (West), **Russia** (North & Northeast), **Turkey** (Southwest) and **Armenia** (South).

Physical Features:

- **The Likhi Range or Surami Range** is a mountain range in Georgia which divides the country into eastern and western halves.
- **Mount Shkhara** is the highest mountain in Georgia and the second highest is Mount Janga.
- The **Rioni** and the **Mtkvari** are the prominent rivers in Georgia.

POINTS TO PONDER

- In which country is Lake Rotorua located, where recent discovery was made about its hydrothermal system? **- New Zealand**
- What is the primary objective of the Gamma Ray Astronomy PeV EnergieS phase-3 (GRAPES-3) project? **- To study cosmic rays**
- Which state cabinet recently approved the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) report? **- Uttarakhand**
- Which European country became the first to accept the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) payment system? **- France**
- Where is Exercise Vayu Shakti 24 scheduled to take place? **- Pokhran**