India-United States Trade Policy Forum (TPF)

❖ Context

➢ **Union Minister of Commerce and Industry** visited Washington D.C. to participate in the **13th Ministerial Meeting of the India-U.S. Trade Policy Forum.**

India-US Trade Policy Forum:

- **The TPF is a platform for** continuous engagement between the two countries in the area of trade and to further bilateral trade and investment relations.
- The 12th TPF Ministerial meeting was held in New Delhi.
- There was no TPF in 2022.

Highlights of the 13th India – USA TPF 2023

- Ministers appreciated that, bilateral trade in goods and services continued to rise rapidly and reached about **$160 billion in 2021.**
- India appreciated the **resumption of inspections by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**.
- **India asked U.S. side** to also resume inspections of new facilities and non-priority areas at the earliest.
- The Ministers welcomed the finalization of the **Turtle Excluder Device (TED) design**.

- It will ensure that the TEDs are effective in **minimizing the impact of fishing on sea-turtle populations.**
- India highlighted its interest in restoration of its beneficiary status under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences program**.**
- The United States noted that this could be considered, as warranted, in **relation to the eligibility criteria determined by the U.S. Congress**.
- The Ministers acknowledged the ongoing discussions on a **Social Security totalization agreemen**t and supported intensifying the work to achieve early outcomes in the matter.
- The Ministers launched a new working group on "**Resilient Trade" to deepen bilateral dialogue.**
- Ambassador Tai welcomed India's G20 Presidency and said the United States looks forward to **working together in the Trade and Investment Working Group**.

Vibrant Democracies:

- **Both India and USA are natural partners** and have trade complementarities, long standing strategic and economic relationship, and people to people contact.
- The two countries are also collaborating under the **QUAD**, **I2U2** (India-Israel/ UAE-USA) and **IPEF** (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework).
- **Regular exchanges** at the leadership-level have been an integral element of the expanding bilateral engagement.
- The outcomes emerging from these visits have been instrumental in further **strengthening the multifaceted ties between the two countries**.

Basic Structure of the Indian Constitution

❖ Context

➢ Recently, Vice President of India criticised the Supreme Court for using the doctrine of basic structure to strike down the constitutional amendment that introduced the **National Judicial Appointments Commission Act.**

Key Highlights:

- The Doctrine of Basic Structure is a form of **judicial review** that is used to test the legality of any legislation by the courts.
- The doctrine was **evolved by the Supreme Court** in the 1973 landmark ruling in **Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala.**
- A 13-judge Constitution Bench ruled that the **'basic structure' of the Constitution is inviolable**, and could not be amended by Parliament.
- If a law is found to "damage or destroy" the "basic features of the Constitution", the Court declares it unconstitutional.
- **Significance**
  - The test is applied to constitutional amendments to ensure the **amendment does not dilute the fundamentals of the Constitutional itself.**
  - The test is widely regarded as a **check on majoritarian impulses** of the Parliament since it places substantive limits on the power to amend the Constitution.
  - It **protects the fundamental rights** of the citizens against arbitrariness and **authoritarianism of the legislature.**
  - It **strengthens the cause of democracy** and maintains the sanctity of the vision of our founding fathers.
- The doctrine **has not been specifically defined** but the various court judgements have helped in formulating a scope of the same and it includes the following:
  - Supremacy of the Constitution.
  - Republican and democratic form of government.
  - Secular character of the Constitution.
  - Separation of powers between the legislature, executive and the judiciary.
  - Federal character of the Constitution.
  - The mandate to build a welfare state contained in the Directive Principles of State Policy.
  - Unity and integrity of the nation.
  - Rule of law.
  - Sovereignty, liberty and republic nature of Indian polity.
  - Judicial review.
  - Harmony and Balance between fundamental rights and directive principles.
  - Parliamentary system.
  - Rule of equality.

- Free and fair elections.
- Powers of SC under Article 32,136,142,147.
- Power of HC under Article 226 and 227.
- Limited power of parliament to amend the constitution.
- Freedom and dignity of an individual.

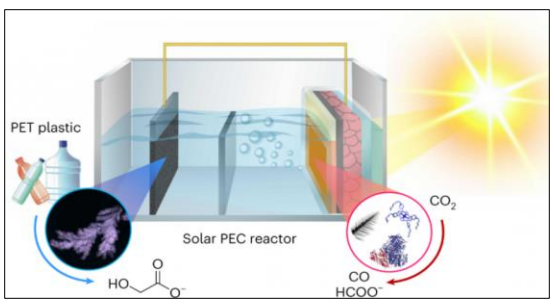
A System that can Transform Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) Plastic Waste and Greenhouse Gases into Sustainable Fuels

❖ Context

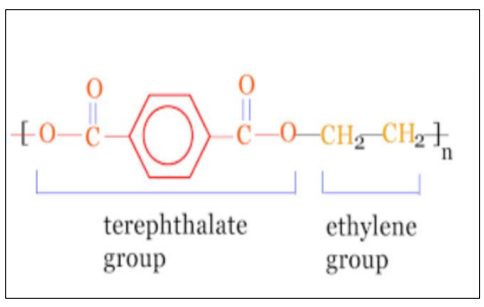
➢ Recently, Cambridge researchers find way to turn PET plastic bottles and carbon dioxide into sustainable fuels like CO, syngas or formate.

Key Highlights:

- Conversion of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and plastics into value-added products, driven by solar energy, is an important step in the transition to a more sustainable, **circular economy.**
- **Mechanism**
  - The researchers developed an **integrated reactor with two separate compartments**: One for plastic and one for greenhouse gases.
  - The reactor **uses a light absorber** based on **perovskite** — a promising alternative to silicon for next-generation solar cells.



  - The team designed different catalysts, which were integrated into the light absorber.
  - By changing the catalyst, the researchers could then change the end product.
- The reactor produced these products at a rate that is also much higher than conventional photocatalytic CO2 reduction processes.
- **Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET).**
  - Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) is a form of polyester that is **used in the production of plastic bottles and containers for food, beverages, and cosmetics.**
  - It was **patented in 1973** by chemist Nathaniel Wyeth by combining modified **ethylene glycol and purified terephthalic acid.**



  - It is popular among manufacturers for its ease of production, transparency, lightweight, and the fact that is easily recyclable.

News in Between the Lines

Standards For Basmati Rice

❖ Context

➢ **First time in India**, FSSAI notifies comprehensive regulatory standards for Basmati Rice.

❖ Key Highlights:

- FSSAI has specified the **identity standards for Basmati Rice** including Brown Basmati Rice, Milled Basmati Rice, Parboiled Brown Basmati Rice and Milled Parboiled Basmati Rice.
- As per these standards, **Basmati rice shall possess natural fragrance** characteristic of basmati rice and be free from **artificial colouring**, polishing agents and artificial fragrances.
- **These standards also specify** various identity and quality parameters for basmati rice such as **average size of grains** and their **elongation ratio** after cooking; maximum limits of **moistur**e, **amylose content, uric acid**, defective/damaged grains and incidental presence of other non-basmati rice etc.
- **These standards** will be enforced w.e.f 1st August, 2023.

White Tufted Royal Butterfly

❖ Context

➢ Recently, a team of butterfly observers and researchers found **White Tufted Royal Butterfly**, a rare butterfly species at Kalliyad in Kannur.

❖ Key Highlights:

- The species had **earlier been spotted in Agasthyakoodam in 2017 and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary in 2018.**
- The wingspan of the butterfly is just **32-40 mm.**
- Its larvae feed on **Scurrula parasitica**, a plant belonging to the **Loranthaceae family**.
- There were eight species of the butterfly. While two are common, the others are rare.
- Unregulated laterite and granite quarries operating in Kalliyad is effecting the survival of such rare species.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **Wildlife Protection Act 1972** - Schedule 2.

Swami Vivekananda

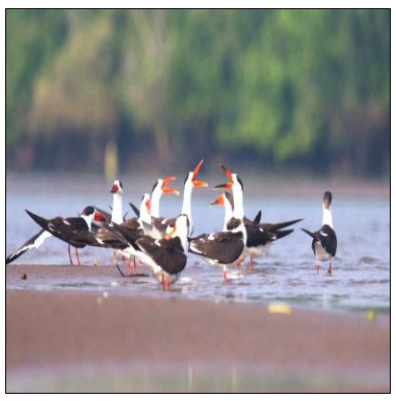
❖ Context

- The Prime Minister has paid tributes to **Swami Vivekananda on his Jayanti.**

❖ About Swami Vivekananda:

- **Vivekananda, original name Narendranath Datta**, was born **on January 12**, 1863, near Calcutta.
- He **was educated at a Western-style university** where he was exposed to Western philosophy, Christianity, and science.
- Social reform became a prominent element of Vivekananda's thought, and he joined the **Brahmo Samaj.**
- He later became the **most-notable disciple of Ramakrishna**, who demonstrated the essential unity of all religions.
- He was an activating force in the movement to promote **Vedanta philosophy** in the United States and England.
- In 1893, he **appeared in Chicago at the World's Parliament of Religions** where a newspaper account described him as "**an orator by divine right and undoubtedly the greatest figure at the Parliament."**
- Vivekananda **founded the Ramakrishna Mission** at the monastery of Belur Math.
- He adapted and made relevant to the 20th century the **very highest ideals of the Vedantic religion.**

Indian Skimmers



❖ Context

- Around **250 Indian Skimmers were sighted in Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary** in a day during the Asian Waterbird Census-2023.

❖ Key Highlights:

- The Indian skimmer or Indian scissors-bill **(Rynchops albicollis)** is **one of the three species** that belong to the skimmer genus Rynchops in the family Laridae.
- **Characteristics**
  - They are very brightly marked in black, white & orange, making them difficult to miss.
- **Distribution and Habitat**
  - It is found on large rivers and lakes, swamps and coastal wetlands such as estuaries.
  - It is most common in freshwater, particularly during the breeding season.
  - In India, the **species can be sighted near the Chambal rive**r in Central India, in a few parts of Odisha and in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN Red List- Endangered.**
  - In 2020, **Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)** has initiated a **'Guardians of the Skimmer'** programme, which is a community-based conservation initiative.

New Dust Control Technology

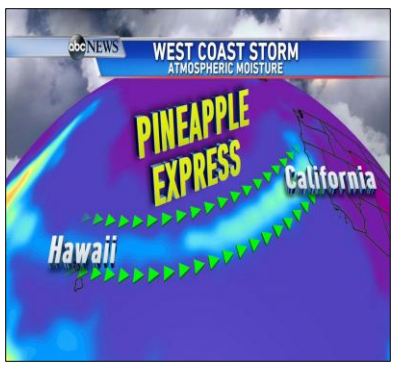
❖ Context

- CMPDIL Invents New Dust Control Technology.

❖ Key Highlights:

- In order to minimize and control the fugitive dust in mining areas, Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (CMPDIL), Ranchi has invented a "**System and Method for Controlling Generation and Movement of Fugitive Dust".**
- They have and **obtained patent** for the same in December, 2022.
- This system can be used **in mines, thermal power plants, railway sidings, and ports**, construction sites wherein coal or fugitive materials are stored under open sky.
- Apart from reducing the dust generation from open sources**,** it will also provide noise attenuation.
- **Fugitive dust is a form of particulate matter** that contributes to air pollution that is generated from various sources which are exposed to air and **not discharged into the atmosphere through a confined flow stream.**
- The present invention relates to the **synchronized application of windbreak** (WB) and **vertical greenery system (VGS)** for reducing generation and dispersion of fugitive dust.

Pineapple Express



❖ Context

- Over the past two weeks, California and other parts of the West Coast have been hit with a series of what meteorologists call atmospheric rivers.
- Forecasters said the rain arriving in California is being **caused by a "true Pineapple Express".**

❖ Key Highlights:

- True Pineapple Express is a **specific example of a common atmospheric phenomenon that resembles a conveyor belt for moisture**.
- It is **long, narrow regions in the atmosphere** that transport most of the water vapor outside the tropics.
- These rivers in the sky occur often on the West Coast but can happen in other locations, including the eastern United States, where they often channel moisture from the Caribbean.
- They **carry a lot of moisture** — enough water vapor to equal or sometimes exceed the average flow of the Mississippi River at the point where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico.
- When this moisture begins to interact with land, it can fall as rain or snow.
- Often, as is the case lately in California, the precipitation is abundant because these atmospheric rivers provide a continuous flow of moisture.

BIS Standards

❖ Context

- Central Consumer Protection Authority **issues notices to e-commerce** entities for selling toys that violate compulsory BIS Standards**.**

❖ Key Highlights:

- CCPA issued notices to e-commerce entities**, Amazon, Flipkart and Snapdeal for sale of toys in violation to standards.**
- **CCPA has sought response from the e-commerce entities within 7 days** from issuance of notice, failing which necessary action may be initiated against them under the provisions of the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019.**
- CCPA has **expanded the country-wide campaign** to prevent sale of spurious and counterfeit goods that violate Quality Control Orders.
- **Section 17 of the BIS Act, 2016 prohibits** any person to manufacture, import, distribute, sell, hire, lease, store or exhibit for sale any such goods or article for which direction (QCO) **of compulsory use of Standard Mark been published by the Central Government.**

Golden Globe Award

❖ Context

- Recently, The **song Natu-Natu from SS Rajamouli's film RRR** has won the Golden Globe Award.

❖ Key Highlights:

- The Golden Globe Awards are accolades **bestowed by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA)** starting in January 1944.
- It recognizes excellence in both American and international film and television.
- Within the entertainment industry, the Golden Globes are considered second in importance both to the Academy Awards (for film) and to the Emmy Awards (for television).

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