UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 03-04-2025

Navika Sagar Parikrama-II Expedition

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance.*

Why in news?

Recently, INSV Tarini entered Cape Town, South Africa, completing the 4th leg of the Navika Sagar Parikrama II (NSP) expedition.

- It is ***global circumnavigation mission*** of Indian Navy.
- **Flagged off in** – October 2024.
- **Undertaken by** – ***2 women officers*** of the Indian Navy.
- **Onboard vessel** – Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (***INSV Tarini***).
- **Objectives** – To *cover more than 23,400 nautical miles* in 8 months, with a scheduled return to Goa in May 2025.
- To further marine and scientific researches.
- To promote *women empowerment in the Indian Armed Forces* and is to motivate many young women to join the Services and Indian Navy in particular.
- **Coverage** – It will unfold in 5 legs with *stop overs at 4 ports* for replenishment and maintenance, as required.
- The broad contour of voyage will be as follows
    - Goa to *Fremantle, Australia*
    - Fremantle to *Lyttleton, New Zealand*
    - Lyttleton to *Port Stanley, Falkland (UK)*
    - Port Stanley to *Cape Town, South Africa*
    - Cape Town to Goa
- **4th stopover in South Africa** – It is at Royal Cape Yacht Club in for 2 weeks, for scheduled maintenance and repairs.
- It exhibits the growing relations between India and South Africa and how India stands committed to strengthen its maritime cooperation with the friendly countries in the Indian Ocean Region.

  In the recent past, Indian Naval Ship Talwar participated in the 8th edition of ***Exercise IBSAMAR*** *in October 2024 in South Africa. In January 2025, the latest stealth frigate of Indian Navy INS Tushil made a port call at Durban and engaged with the South African Navy and the Indian community in Kwa-Zulu Natal.*

- **Significance** – It symbolises India's maritime endeavours, showcasing nation's prominence in global maritime activities and Indian Navy's commitment to excellence and women empowerment.

- It is a significant step in fostering maritime consciousness, embodying the *spirit of Sashakt and Saksham India (Strong and Abled India).*
- It is 1st ever circumnavigation of the globe onboard a sailing vessel by Indian women in double handed mode.

*The indigenously built **INSV Tarini** is a 56-foot sailing vessel, which was inducted in the Indian Navy in 2018 and has participated in many such expeditions earlier. The vessel is a true testament of 'Make in India' and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative of the Government of India.*

Reference

PIB| INSV Tarini in South Africa as a part of NSP 2nd Edition

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Prelims – *Current events of national and international importance | General issues on Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change*

Mains – *GS-III (Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment)*

Why in news?

The 13th meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is discussing controversial amendments that could dilute benefit-sharing provisions.

- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, also called as *Plant Treaty*.
- **Objective** – Conservation and sustainable use of all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use.
- It is in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity, for sustainable agriculture and food security.
- It is *signed by many countries including India*.
- **Multilateral System (MLS)** – It is *administered by the ITPGRFA*.
- It is a global system facilitating access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) and ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing among countries.
- It is the International Treaty's truly innovative solution to access and benefit-sharing, which includes *64 of the world's most important crops*.

Proposed Amendments & Concerns

- The Proposed Change *Allow all plant species to be included* if they have traits useful for food/forage breeding.

Implications on Developing Countries

- **Loss of Sovereignty** – Developing countries, rich in biodiversity, fear losing sovereign rights over their plants.
- The proposal could force them to share everything under a Standard Material Transfer Agreement, reducing their say.
- **Unfair Benefits** – The current system ensures benefits return to providers. Expanding access might dilute this, favouring richer nations or corporations.
- **Bio piracy Risk** – Free access could lead to exploitation, including "digital bio piracy," where genetic data is used without permission.
- **Food Security Threat** – Instead of protecting food crops for global hunger, this might weaken local farmers and seed systems.

Reference

Down to Earth | Plant Treaty

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

Prelims (GS – I) – *Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.*

Mains (GS - II & III) – *GS II (Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation) | GS III (Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment)*

Why in news?

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing (April 2, 2025) on the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, Adivasi rights groups and environmental organizations have urged the Tribal Affairs Ministry to defend the law.

- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** – Also known as Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.
- The Act aims to *legally recognize and protect the rights of tribal communities* and other traditional forest dwellers over the forest land and resources they have traditionally used.
- **Key Provisions**
- **Individual Forest Rights (IFR)** – Land titles for cultivation/habitation.
- **Community Forest Rights (CFR)** – Rights over forest resources and management.
- **Gram Sabha's Role** – Primary authority to initiate and verify claims.
- **Legal challenges** – In 2008, Wildlife First, an NGO challenged the FRA in the Supreme Court, arguing that it led to forest encroachments.
- The court later ordered the eviction of people whose FRA claims were rejected (2019).
- After protests, the Tribal Affairs Ministry intervened, pointing out wrongful rejections due to procedural flaws.

- The SC stayed the eviction order and asked for a review of rejected claims.

Current Concerns

- **Improper Review of Rejected Claims** – States conducted arbitrary reviews, leading to repeated rejections.
- **Undermining Gram Sabhas** – Gram Sabhas (village councils), which are supposed to be key decision-makers under FRA, were side-lined in many cases.
- Higher authorities such as Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) overruled Gram Sabha approvals (e.g., Gujarat: 98% approved by Gram Sabhas, but only 62% accepted by SDLC).
- **Over-Reliance on Satellite Imagery** – States like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh relied heavily on satellite images to verify claims *without ground verification*, leading to wrongful rejections.
- The Tribal Affairs Ministry had raised concerns about *misuse of technology*, as it bypasses the FRA's evidence requirements (e.g., community records, historical proof).

Reference

The Hindu | Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

Frankincense

Prelims – *Environmental Ecology & Climate Change, International Relations.*

Mains – *GS-III (Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment).*

Why in news?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has recently issued a warning, highlighting the extinction risk faced by Frankincense-producing trees (Boswellia species).

- **Frankincense** – Is a fragrant resin obtained from various species of trees belonging to the Boswellia genus.
- The five main species of Boswellia are:
    1. Boswellia carterii
    2. Boswellia serrata (Indian Frankincense)
    3. Boswellia sacra
    4. Boswellia frereana
    5. Boswellia papyrifera

Significance

- Historically famous as *one of the three gifts* (along with gold and myrrh) brought to the infant Jesus.
- Used for centuries in *perfumes and incense*.

- Research suggests *potential medicinal benefits* due to its *anti-inflammatory properties* (for conditions like ulcerative colitis, IBS, bronchitis, sinusitis) and possible use in reducing asthma risk.
- Frankincense was once considered more valuable than gold and was reserved for royalty.
- Frankincense remains *deeply embedded in Dhofari culture*, symbolizing warmth, respect, and hospitality.

> ***Dhofari culture****, found in the Dhofar region of Oman, is a rich tapestry woven from influences of the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and the Indian subcontinent.*

- It played a significant role in *cultural exchange between Oman and India*.
- **IUCN Red List Update** – Multiple Boswellia species on Yemen's Socotra Island have recently been moved to more threatened conservation status categories (Endangered/Critically Endangered).

Causes of Decline

- **Overgrazing** – Goats graze on saplings, exacerbated by the decline of traditional rotational grazing and larger herd sizes.
- **Climate Change Impacts** – Prolonged droughts hinder sapling survival, while more frequent and intense cyclones, floods, and landslides damage or uproot mature trees.

Way forward

- Building fences to protect young trees from goats.
- *Promoting frankincense honey production* for alternative income.
- Emphasizing the *need for local action* to combat extreme weather impacts.

References

1. Down to Earth | Frankincense
2. Mint | Frankincense

Banking Laws (Amendment) act, 2024

Prelims – Current events of national and international importance.

Mains – *GS III* (Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment | Government Budgeting)

Why in news?

Recently, Parliament passed the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

- The *Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024* was introduced in Lok Sabha on August 9, 2024.
- The bill was passed in Rajya sabha on March 26, 2025.
- It amends *five acts* including:

1. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934.
2. Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
3. State Bank of India Act, 1955.
4. Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970.
5. Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1980.

Key features of the act:

- **Definition of Fortnight for Cash Reserves** – Currently, banks maintain cash reserves based on a *14-day period (Saturday to the second Friday).*
- The Bill changes the definition of fortnight to *1st day to 15th day of each month* or *16th day to the last day of each month*.
- **Tenure of Directors in Co-operative Banks –** Directors (except chairman/whole-time director) can serve *10 years instead of 8 years.*
- **Common Directors in Co-operative Banks –** Directors of *central co-operative banks* can also serve on the *board of state co-operative banks.*
- **Change Substantial Interest in a Company** – Substantial interest in a company refers to holding shares of over five lakh rupees or 10% of the paid-up capital of the company, whichever is less.
- This may be held by an individual, his spouse, or minor child, either individually or collectively.
    - **New rule** – The threshold in the substantial interest in a company has been *increased from five lakh rupees to 2 crore rupees*.
- **Nomination Rules** – The Current Rule allows single nominee for bank deposits/lockers.
- The Amendment allows up to 4 nominees successive/simultaneous).
- Nominations can be *simultaneous* (divided in a set proportion) or *successive* (priority-based).
- **Unclaimed Amounts & Investor Education Fund** – Money unclaimed for **7 years** will be transferred to the *Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF).*
- **Remuneration of Bank Auditors** – Instead of RBI fixing auditor salaries, *banks* will now decide their *auditors' remuneration.*

Reference

1. The Business Standard | Banking Laws (Amendment) act, 2024
2. PRS India | Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024

One Liners 03-04-2025
Geography

Zojila Pass

Border Road Organization (BRO) has recently opened Zojila Pass in record time after a mere closure for 32 days.

• **Located on** – Srinagar-Kargil-Leh highway (NH-1) at a height of 11,650 feet, which *connecting Kashmir Valley to Ladakh*.
• It is one of the most critical and challenging ***high-altitude passes in the world.***
• It remains *closed for almost half of the year* due to heavy snowfall.
• **Historical background** – It was the site of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1947-48.
• **Operation Bison** – The pass itself was captured by the Indian Army on 1st November 1948.

Japan's Nankai Trough Megaquake Warning

Japan has recently issued warnings regarding a potential "megaquake" in the Nankai Trough, Japan.

• **Megaquake magnitude** – It indicating a *magnitude of 8 or greater*.
• **Location** – The Nankai trough is located off Japan's southwest Pacific coast, extending approximately 900 km.
• It's a *subduction zone* where the Philippine Sea Plate is subducting beneath the Eurasian Plate.

*A **subduction zone** is a geological area where 2 tectonic plates collide, with one plate sliding beneath the other.*

Polity & Governance

Drug Quality Control in India

India Strengthens Pharmaceutical Quality Control through various measures.

• **Drug and Cosmetics Act, 1940** – It *empowers drugs inspectors* to randomly sample drugs for quality checks.
• **CDSCO drug alerts** – The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) publishes lists of Substandard, spurious, misbranded, or adulterated drugs under *Drug Alert*.
• **SUGAM (System for Unmanned Gateways Approval of Manufacturers) Labs portal** – It automates the entire workflow for *testing of Medical Products* (Drugs, Vaccine, Cosmetics & Medical devices).

Sahakar Pragya Scheme

Cooperatives are benefitted all over the country under Sahakar Pragya Scheme.

• **Launched in** – *2020*.
• **Launched by** – Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
• **Nodal Ministry** – Ministry of Cooperation.
• **Objective** – To focuses on *developing professionalism in primary cooperatives* in agriculture and allied sectors.
• It designs and conducts need-based programmes for personnel of assisted cooperatives and its own officials.

Stray Dogs

The Animal Birth Control (ABC) Programme are being implemented by the local bodies.

• **Nodal Ministry** – Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
• **ABC Programme** – To regulate the population of stray dogs.
• It is the *only rational and scientific solution* to the overpopulation of the street dogs and controlling incidence of Rabies.
• **Article 246(3)** – It outlines the preservation, protection & improvement of livestock, as well as the prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice, fall under the *jurisdiction of State Governments*.
• **Articles 243(W) & 246** – Local bodies are *mandated to control the stray dog population*.

Agriculture

AI & IoT (Internet of Things) in Indian Agriculture

• **Kisan e-Mitra** – A *voice-based AI chatbot* providing support for the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme in 11 regional languages, handling daily queries and assisting millions of farmers.
• **National Pest Surveillance System** – It utilizes *AI and Machine Learning* to detect pest infestations.
• **Crop mapping & monitoring** – AI-based analytics using *field photographs and satellite data* enables precise crop mapping and crop-weather matching.

Environment

India's Decarbonisation in Steel Sector

Recent measures of Indian Government to decarbonise the steel sector.
• **Green Steel Taxanomy** – The Ministry of Steel has established a Taxonomy for Green Steel, defining standards for *low-emission steel production.*
• **National Green Hydrogen Mission** – It is a pilot projects using *hydrogen in steel production*.
• **National Solar Mission** – It promotes *solar energy use* and reducing carbon emissions.
• **Vehicle Scrapping Policy** – It is associated with rules that facilitate the *dismantling and recycling* of End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs) and recovering valuable materials.
***End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs) Rules, 2025**, mandates Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for vehicle producers.*
• **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)** – It provides a *market-based mechanism* for carbon emissions reduction.

Science

Anemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) Strategy

Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare has recently updated about the status of Anemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) Strategy.
• **Objective** – To *combat anemia in children and women*, including pregnant and lactating mothers.
• **Methods to combat anemia –** Using a life-cycle approach and *6 interventions* includes,
- Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, deworming, intensified behavioral change communication, anemia testing & treatment, IFA-fortified food provision, and addressing non-nutritional causes.
• **Financial support** – The government *distributes fortified rice*, enriched with iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12, through various welfare schemes nationwide.
***6X6X6 strategy** aims to reduce anemia among 6 beneficiaries age groups through implementation of 6 interventions and 6 institutional mechanisms.*

SAFE Agromet Project

The ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) has recently appreciates ISRO and other space agencies for the successful implementation of the SAFE Agromet Project.
• **AFSIS** – It is a *project led by Thailand*, with support from ASEAN, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.
• It aims to *develop satellite-derived Agromet data* in comparison with in-situ data.
• **SAFE (Space Applications for Environment)** – It is a *multilateral project*, led by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).
• **Aim** – To provide *high-quality space-based agrometeorological (agromet) information* including extreme events such as flood or drought for end-users to evaluate rice crop growth.

Miscellaneous

BSNL's Customer Service Month: "Connecting with Care"

BSNL announces April 2025 as Customer Service Month.

• **Objective** –To focus on enhanced *customer experience* across India.

• It prioritizes improving mobile network quality, FTTH (Fiber to the Home)/ broadband reliability, leased circuits/MPLS (Multiprotocol Label Switching) reliability, billing transparency, and faster grievance redressal.

• **Customer engagement** – BSNL will *actively collect feedback through its website*, social media, customer forms, and direct outreach.

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