UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 24-03-2025

Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

Why in news?

Parliamentary Standing Committee has recently suggested to the Ministry of Finance for waiving off GST from MPLADS to enhance the effectiveness of the scheme.

- **MPLADS** – Also known as *MP Local Area Development Scheme*, is a *Central Sector Scheme* through which each Member of Parliament (MP) in India receives *Rs5 crore annually*.
- The scheme was *launched in 1993* and is *fully funded by the central government*.
- **Ministry** – Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.
- **Implementation** – The funds are *routed to the district authorities*, who implement the work.
- **Role of MPs** – They identify the works for creating durable community assets for their respective constituencies.

  *The **Rajya Sabha MPs** can recommend works in one or more districts in the State from where he/she has been elected.*

  *The **Nominated Members** of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select any one or more Districts from any one State in the Country for implementation of their choice of work under the scheme.*

- **Sectors** – The funds can be utilised across *11 specific sectors*, including infrastructure, education, health and others.

Issues with MPLADS

- **e-Sakshi portal** – The committee also observed that members are facing *several issues in the e-Sakshi* portal and it needs improvement.

  ***eSAKSHI portal** was launched on April 1, 2023 to provide an end-to-end solution for efficient and transparent implementation of the MPLAD scheme.*

- **Significant Decline in Funds** – The total funds released during the 17th Lok Sabha were Rs4,510 crore, a *65.2% decrease* compared to the previous Lok Sabha.
- This decline is largely attributed to the freezing of MPLADS funds for two years due to

the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **GST** – The committee believes the 18% GST imposed on work done under the MPLADS *significantly reduces the scheme's effectiveness*.
- **Inadequate Capital** – The amount allotted is *insufficient to address all the problems*, as districts have numerous and diverse requirements.
- **Disparity in sectors** – Funds are mainly disbursed for developing facilities like Railways, roads, pathways, and bridges and other *public facilities including education received less amount relatively*.

References

1. Business Standard | calls for GST relief on MPLAD fund
2. MPLAD website | About MPLAD
3. Business line | Decrease in MPLAD Fund

A Recent Discovery on Life under Antarctic Ice Shelf

Why is in News?

Scientists have discovered potential new species on the Antarctic seafloor exposed by the A-84 iceberg's (detached from the George VI Ice Shelf) breakaway.

- **Ice shelves-** These are floating tongues of ice that extend from grounded glaciers on land.
- **Formation -** They are formed by the *accumulation and compaction of snow*, which, over time, turns into ice.
- Ice shelves are ***common around Antarctica***, and the largest ones are the Ronne-Filchner, Ross and McMurdo Ice Shelves.
- These are crucial for understanding climate change and sea level rise.
- **Role -** Ice shelves stabilize land-based glaciers, acting as a ***"buttress"*** against the ocean.

Key Highlights

- **Unveiling a Hidden Ecosystem -** Following the breakaway of the *A-84 iceberg*, a *remotely operated submersible (ROV)* recently explored the newly exposed Antarctic seafloor.
- The team of scientists conducted *deep-sea exploration* at depths of up to *1,300 metres* beneath the ice.
- They discovered a *thriving ecosystem* with an abundance of marine species, including
    - *Icefish and Octopi* – Adapted to extreme Antarctic conditions.
    - *Giant Sea Spiders* – Deep-sea arthropods that have evolved in isolation.
    - *Large Corals and Sponges* – Supporting complex underwater habitats.
    - *Giant Phantom Jelly* – A rare jellyfish species that can grow up to *one metre wide*.
    - *Vase-shaped Sponges* – Some of these specimens could be *hundreds of years old*.

Scientific Significance

- The discovery was *unexpected as these deep-sea environments* were assumed to lack sufficient nutrients for complex ecosystems.
- Normally, deep-sea life relies on *organic material from photosynthetic organisms* falling from the ocean surface.
- However, the *150-metre-thick ice shelf* covering this area for centuries *blocked access to surface nutrients*, making the existence of rich biodiversity surprising.
- Scientists speculate that essential nutrients might be transported by
    - *Ocean Currents* – Carrying organic matter from distant areas.
    - *Glacial Meltwater* – Potentially introducing nutrients trapped in ice.
    - *Unknown Biological or Chemical Processes* – Yet to be fully understood.

Global Research Initiative

- The expedition was part of *Challenger 150, a UNESCO-endorsed global deep-sea research initiative.*
- Conducted by an international team of scientists, the mission aimed to *explore the world's least-studied marine environments.*
- The research will provide *crucial insights into climate change*, ice shelf dynamics, and deep-sea ecosystem functioning.
- Previous signs of bottom-dwelling life under Antarctica's ice shelves were only *reported in 2021*, making this discovery a major advancement in marine science.

Reference

The Indian Express - Life under Antarctic ice shelf

Incentive Scheme for Promotion Of Low-Value BHIM-UPI Transactions (P2M)

Why is in News?

The Union Cabinet recently approved an incentive scheme for promoting low-value BHIM-UPI transactions (P2M) in FY 2024-25, offering a 0.15% incentive on UPI payments up to Rs2,000 for small merchants.

BHIM-UPI
• BHIM is a mobile app developed by the *National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)* that facilitates digital payments using the *UPI platform*. • **Direct Bank Payments -** BHIM allows users to make direct bank payments to anyone on UPI using their UPI ID or by scanning their QR code. • **Easy Transactions -** It enables simple, quick, and easy transactions using the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). • **Financial Inclusion -** The app aims to promote financial inclusion and make India a digitally empowered society.

- **Aim -** To boost digital payments, expand UPI adoption in rural areas, and ensure a robust payment infrastructure.

- **Key Highlights of the Scheme - Transaction Limit –** Covers only UPI (P2M) transactions up to Rs2,000 for small merchants.
- **Incentive Structure**
  - Small Merchants - 0.15% incentive per transaction for payments up to Rs2,000.
  - Large Merchants - No incentive for any transaction.
  - Transactions Above Rs2,000 - No incentive for any merchant category.
- **Reimbursement Structure**
  - 80% of claims by acquiring banks will be disbursed unconditionally.
  - Remaining 20% will be reimbursed upon fulfilling certain conditions.
- **Objectives of the Scheme**
  - Promote the Indigenous BHIM-UPI Platform
  - Strengthen Digital Payment Infrastructure
  - Ensure System Reliability.
  - **Expand UPI in Rural Areas** – Increase penetration in tier 3-6 cities via innovative solutions like
    - UPI 123PAY (Feature phone-based payments)
    - UPI Lite & UPI LiteX (Offline payments)

Reference

PIB - Incentive scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions

Sonic Weapons

Why in News?

Protesters in Serbia are accusing the government of using a sonic weapon to disperse and intimidate them during a recent anti-government rally in Belgrade.

- Sonic weapons or sound cannon are devices that deliver ***very loud sounds*** over long distances.
- This technology is used for ***crowd-control purposes*** by emitting loud and painful levels of noise.

- These weapons fire sound waves instead of bullets to emit extremely loud noises.
- These devices can also be used to act like ***voice amplifiers*** to deliver voice messages or other sounds.
- The acoustic signals from sound cannon can be heard loudly up to a kilometer (0.62 miles) away, because the sound waves are fired at a high-pressure rate.
- **Types**

LRAD (Long Range Acoustic Device) brand	The Mosquito	Infrasonic Weapon

It has a range of 8,900 meters for intelligible speech and a maximum output of 162 decibels at one meter. It can cause pain (110-130dB) at 20 meters.	A high-pitched sound weapon that is audible and painful to younger people, while leaving older people (30s and older) unaffected.	This newer technology is under investigation. It would deliver very low frequency sounds that would be inaudible but could cause pain and disorientation.

> *A normal conversation takes place at roughly 60 decibels, while a crying baby can crack 80 or even 100 decibels.*

- **Working -** These weapons usually comprise hundreds of modern transducers, an electronic device that converts energy from one form to another.
- It creates highly concentrated and amplified sound can focus on specific targeted areas.
- The sound is designed to be controlled by police officers who can alter the frequency, level, quality, and duration of the alarm.
- **Effects on Humans -** Sounds higher than 90 or 100 decibels are uncomfortable to hearing people.
- The sound waves hit the eardrum at high pressure and can cause significant damage as a result.
- Permanent hearing damage or tinnitus can also occur after short exposure.
- Psychological damage can also occur.
- It also has fatal consequences when the sound waves rupture internal organs, including the lungs, in people within the immediate vicinity of the blast.

Reference

NDTV - Sonic Weapon

Textile export increase reported by Ministry

Why in News?

The Ministry of Textiles reported a 7% increase in textile and apparel exports, including handicrafts, from April to December 2024, compared to the previous year.

- **Status of India in Textiles** - India continues to rank among the ***top textile-exporting nations*** in global textiles and apparel exports.
- It boasts a robust raw material base comprising natural fibres like cotton, silk, wool, and jute, alongside man-made fibres.
- **Key export markets for Indian textiles** - USA, European Union, and UK.

Government initiatives to boost textile sector

- To strengthen India's position in the global textile market.
- **PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks Scheme -**

Aimed at building world-class textile infrastructure.

- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme -** Focusing on MMF fabric, apparel, and technical textiles, seeks to boost large-scale manufacturing.
- **Scheme For Capacity Building in Textile Sector (SAMARTH) -** A capacity-building program designed to provide placement-oriented skilling in the textile sector.
- **Minimum Support Price –** Given annually to ensure the ***steady supply of cotton*** and encourage its cultivation.
- **National Technical Textiles Mission (2020-2026)** - Focuses on cutting-edge research in specialty fibres and application-based textiles such as geotextiles, medical textiles, and sports textiles.
- The mission also promotes research into biodegradable textiles using unconventional natural fibres like milkweed and bamboo.
- The Ministry of Textiles conducted various innovation challenges in collaboration with Startup India and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- **International Agreements -** India has signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) to enhance its export potential.
- **Reducing Custom Duties -** The custom duty on Extra-Long Staple (ELS) cotton was *reduced to zero* from 2024.
- It allows duty-free ELS cotton imports under the ***India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)***.
- The *Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) scheme and the Remissions of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) program* supports by enhancing competitiveness and promoting zero-rated exports.
- To curb the import of low-quality knitted fabrics, the government imposed a Minimum Import Price (MIP) on relevant Harmonized System of Nomenclature (HSN) codes.
- Various Quality Control Orders (QCOs) have been implemented to safeguard domestic producers from the influx of substandard goods.

Reference

DD News - Government implements schemes to boost sector

One Liners 24-03-2025

Social Issues

Purple Fest

• **Organised by** – Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
• **Objectives** – To raise *awareness about different disabilities* and their impact on people's lives.
• To promote understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of persons with disabilities within society.
• **2025 Fest** – Various activities like sports, workshops on digital inclusion & entrepreneurship, Abilympics, creative extravaganza and cultural fest were organised during the day for the visitors.

International Relations and Issues

Central Asian Youth Delegation to India

• **Hosted by** – Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.
• **Umbrella programme** - International Youth Exchange Programme (IYEP).
• **Aim** – To *promote youth collaboration, cultural exchange* and strengthen diplomatic ties between India and the Central Asian nations (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).
• **2025 edition** – *3rd edition* from 22nd to 28th March 2025.
• The *100-member delegation* will engage in diverse activities, exploring India's historical, educational, and cultural landmarks while interacting with local youth leaders and key stakeholders.

Economy

Coal Production in India

• **Production** – It had *surpassed 1 billion tonnes (BT)* on March 20, in the fiscal year 2024-25.
• **Factors for higher production** – Tireless efforts of coal PSUs, private players, and dedicated workforce of around 5 lakh mine workers across more than 350 coal mines.
• Opening of coal sector to private players through commercial auctioning of blocks.
• **India's Energy reliance on coal**
  - For approximately 55% of its energy mix.
  - About 74% electricity is generated by coal-based power plants.

Additional Working Days in MGNREGA

• **MGNREGA** - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.
• **Mandate** - Providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
• **Additional 50 days of wage employment** – To *every Scheduled Tribe Household in a forest area*, provided that they have no other private property except for the land rights under Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.
• **Another 50 days of wage employment** – In *drought/natural calamity-affected* notified rural areas.
• **Section 3(4)** – Allows *State Governments to make* provision for providing additional days of employment beyond the period guaranteed under the Act from their own funds.
  - This provision has been in practice since 2009.

Agriculture

Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)

• It is a *central sector scheme* of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
• **Launched in** – 2020-21.
• **Aims** – To bridge gaps in post-harvest management by supporting farm gate storage, logistics, and processing infrastructure.
• **Facilitates** – An aggregate loan worth Rs1 lakh crore from lending institutions with a 9% interest cap, operational until 2032-33.
• Loans up to Rs2 crore receive a 3% annual interest subvention for 7 years.
• Credit guarantee coverage under CGTMSE is available for loans up to Rs2 crore, with the government bearing the fee.
Credit Guarantee Trust Fund for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) is a joint initiative by MSME Ministry and SIDBI to provide institutional credit to micro and small enterprises.

Environment

Indian Railways Innovative Measures to Protect Elephants and Wildlife on Tracks

• **AI-enabled Intrusion Detection System (IDS)** - For detecting presence of elephants on Railway tracks using Distributed Acoustic Sensors (DAS).
• **Immediate action post accidents** – Zonal Railways to investigate the matter in close coordination with Forest department.
• **Infrastructure development** – Construction of underpasses and ramps for the movement of elephants at identified locations.
• Provision of fencing along the track and LED lights.
• **Deployment of elephant trackers** – For timely action by alerting station master and loco pilots, are taken.
• **Awareness** – Provision of signage boards at all identified elephant corridors to pre-warn the loco pilots.
• **Decline in elephant deaths** – Because of above measures, elephant deaths have reduced *from 26 nos. in 2013 to only 12 nos. in 2024* i.e. reduction of more than 50%.

Security

Medevac Operation

Recently, Indian navy and coast guard carried out daring medevac operation out at sea.
• *Indian Navy* successfully carried out a critical *Medical Evacuation* (MEDEVAC) operation.
• **Operation** – From *MV Heilan Star*, a Panama-flagged bulk carrier, located about 230 nautical miles West of Goa.
• **Helped by** - INS *Vikrant* and *Deepak went to render aid.*
• **Significance** - It underscores the Indian Navy's and the Indian Coast Guard's unwavering commitment to life-saving efforts and swift response to humanitarian assistance, despite challenging circumstances, even beyond national maritime boundaries.

Science

WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre

• It is a knowledge hub for evidence-based Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) on a global scale.
• **Established in** – *2022* with foundational support from India.
• **GTMC** – It is a *WHO Headquarters department*, in the Division of Universal Health Coverage and Life Course.
• **Located in** – Jamnagar, Gujarat, India.
• **Focuses on** – Advancing research, facilitating knowledge exchange, conserving biodiversity, and fostering partnerships to catalyze ancient wisdom and modern science for the health and well-being of people and planet.

National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM)

• **Nodal Ministry** - Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
• It is a Central Sector Scheme.
• **Aim** – To promote scientific beekeeping for holistic growth of beekeeping sector to enhance agriculture production.
• **Sub-schemes** – Mini Mission I, II and III.
• **Mini Mission-I** – Projects for production and productivity improvement of various crops through pollination assisted by adoption of scientific bee keeping are given.
• **Mini Mission-II** – Post harvest management of bee keeping is supported.
• **Mini Mission-III** – Research and technology generation is provided.

Miscellaneous

Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize 2024

• *22 books were selected* for the award.
• **Selection basis** - Based on recommendations made by the Selection Committees of 3 members each in t



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering