

➤ **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** in 2022 led Sweden along with Finland to apply for NATO membership.

⊕ In 2023, **Finland became the 31st NATO member**, followed by Sweden, making entire Nordic region the part of NATO.

➤ **Significance of NATO expansion:** Comprehensive defence capabilities, strategic influence over Baltic Sea and robust defence industry.

➤ NATO is a **transatlantic political and military alliance** established by the **North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty), 1949**.

⊕ **Headquarters:** Brussels, Belgium

⊕ **Original purposes:** Deterring Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe, and European political integration.

⊕ **Important NATO policies:**

◆ **Article 5:** It establishes a **system of collective defense**, stating that an attack against one member country is considered an attack against all member countries.

◆ **Article 10:** NATO membership is **open to any other European state** which can further Treaty principles and to **contribute to security** of North Atlantic area.

⊕ **12 Founding member countries:** Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, UK and USA.

◆ Since 1949, NATO's membership has **increased from 12 to 32 countries** through **10 rounds of enlargement**.

◆ **Countries aspiring for NATO membership:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine.



Indian Official delegation held talks with Afghan Authorities

➤ Delegation on a visit to Afghanistan discussed India's **humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan** and **use of Chabahar port (Iran) by Afghan traders**.

➤ **India – Afghan relations post-Taliban takeover (Aug 2021)**

⊕ **Technical Mission in Kabul:** Opened in June 2022, to facilitate and coordinate India's humanitarian assistance endeavors.

⊕ **Education:** India has continued **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarship scheme** for Afghan students.

⊕ **Trade & Commerce:** Ongoing unhindered including through Chabahar port.

➤ **Challenges**

⊕ **Ideological differences:** Extremist religious ideology of Taliban is at odds with India's democratic and secular values, which results in India's recognition dilemma of current Afghan regime.

⊕ **Humanitarian concerns:** Particularly women's rights and access to education and healthcare.

⊕ **Limited engagement:** Recent closure of Afghan Embassy in Delhi, strained relations over denial of visas to Afghan students, etc.

Regional geopolitics: Pakistan's desire to acquire strategic depth in Afghan without controlling territories.

➤ **Way Forward**

⊕ **Diplomatic pragmatism:** Engage Taliban both bilaterally and as part of regional grouping like SAARC, SCO, etc., to protect India's security and strategic interests.

⊕ **People-to-People contact:** India should continue to host Afghan students and capitalize on its strong goodwill among Afghan people.

Significance of Peace and Stability in Afghanistan for India

➤ **Regional connectivity:** Afghanistan is considered as gateway to Central Asian Region.

➤ **Energy and resources:** Stability in Afghanistan could pave way for TAPI pipeline.

➤ **Security:** Stable Afghanistan is essential to combat Pakistan-based terrorist groups.

Draft IRDAI (Protection of Policyholders' Interests and Allied Matters of Insurers) Regulations, 2024 released

- Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) framed these regulations in exercise of powers under **Insurance Act, 1938 and IRDA Act, 1999.**
- **Key highlights of regulation:**
 - ⊖ It brings together **8 separate regulations** into a unified and comprehensive framework.
 - ⊖ **Objective:** To ensure that the interests of **policyholders are protected** and insurers and distribution channel fulfil their obligations towards policyholders.
 - ⊖ **Key measures for protection of interest of policyholders:**
 - ◆ The **free-look period** (period for returning policy without any penalties) shall be 30 days from date of receipt of policy document.
 - ◆ For life insurance, compulsory gathering of **nominee information** at proposal stage.
 - ◆ Policies to be offered in **electronic format** with measures for safeguarding data privacy.
 - ◆ Insurers shall **prevent mis-selling** and unfair business practices.
 - ◆ Every insurer shall have a **system for registering and disposing of grievances** in each of its offices.
- **Challenges to insurance sector from policyholders' perspective include:**
 - ⊖ **Low insurance penetration** (4.2%) and insurance density (\$91).
 - ⊖ **Delays** in processing of claim settlement.
 - ⊖ **High premiums** with 18% GST on insurance premium.
 - ⊖ **Mis-selling** of products with lack of awareness and knowledge of coverage.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)

Statutory body formed under **IRDA Act, 1999.**

- **Purpose:** Overall supervision and development of the Insurance sector in India.
- **Key objectives:** Protecting the interest of policyholders, Speedy and orderly growth of the insurance industry, Speedy settlement of genuine claims.
- IRDAI is taking steps like **Bima Sugam, Bima Vahak and Bima Vistaar** amongst other to fulfil its vision of '**Insurance for All**' by 2047.

Trade Association (EFTA)

- Agreement comprises of 14 chapters with main focus on market access related to goods, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, investment promotion, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), etc.
- **Key highlights**
 - ⊖ EFTA committed to promote investments, with aim to increase **stock of foreign direct investments** by USD 100 billion (excluding Foreign Portfolio Investment) in India in next 15 years.
 - ⊖ For the **first-time in history of FTAs, legal commitment** made about promoting **target-oriented investment and creation of jobs.**
 - ⊖ EFTA's market access offer covers **100% of non-agri products** and **tariff concession on Processed Agricultural Products** (PAP).
 - ⊖ **Commitments related to IPR** in TEPA are at TRIPS level.
 - ⊖ **Services offered from EFTA** include better access through digital delivery of Services, commercial presence, and improved commitments and certainty for entry and temporary stay of key personnel.
 - ⊖ Provisions for **Mutual Recognition Agreements in Professional Services** like nursing, chartered accountants, architects etc.
- **Significance of TEPA**
 - ⊖ Foster **transparency, efficiency, simplification, harmonization and consistency of trade procedures.**
 - ⊖ Empower Indian exporters' access to **specialized inputs and create conducive trade and investment environment.**
 - ⊖ Give impetus to "**Make in India**" and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in sectors such as Manufacturing, Machinery, Pharmaceuticals, etc.

European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- **Present members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.**
 - ⊖ These countries are **not part of the European Union (EU).**
- Founded by **Stockholm Convention in 1960** with its **7 founding members** (Austria, Denmark, Great Britain, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and
- ⊖

Rajya Sabha's role part of Basic Structure of Constitution: Supreme Court (SC)

- ▶ In **Sita Soren vs. UoI Case**, noting the role of Rajya Sabha as part of Basic Structure, SC declared that **Rajya Sabha (RS) elections are within the remit of Article 194(2)**.
 - ⊕ **Article 194(2)** deals with Powers, Privileges, etc., of members of Legislature of a State.
 - ⊕ **Basic Structure doctrine** holds that certain fundamental features of the Constitution cannot be amended or abrogated by Parliament.
- ▶ **Rajya Sabha (Council of States)** is the upper House of Parliament, constituted under **Article 79 and 80**, represents state's interests in Parliament.
- ▶ **Significance of RS**
 - ⊕ **Check on hasty and ill-conceived legislation:** Providing an opportunity for scrutiny of legislative business.
 - ⊕ **Federal bicameralism:** Acts as conduit for States furthering principle of democratic decentralization and cooperative federalism.
 - ⊕ **Special powers:** Legislation by Parliament on State subjects listed under Schedule VII (Article 249), creation of new All India Services (Article 312), etc.
- ▶ **Issues with RS**
 - ⊕ **Representation:** Removal of State domicile criteria, in 2003, for election to RS adversely affects representation of States.
 - ⊕ **Legislative:** Bypassing of RS (e.g., Aadhaar Act passed as Money Bill), etc.
 - ⊕ **Accountability of Union Executive:** Instruments such as 'No-Confidence motion', 'Adjournment motion', etc., are not available with RS.

Recommendations related to RS [Punchhi Commission (2010)]

Equal representation of States in RS, irrespective of population size.

- ▶ **Parliament should restore territorial link** between RS members and the State that they represent.
- ▶

S.R. Bommai judgement (1994) by nine judge bench of Supreme Court (SC) completes 30 years

- ▶ It laid down the **scope of Article 356** of the Constitution and defined **certain restrictions** on its use.
 - ⊕ Under Article 356, **President's Rule can be imposed on any state on the grounds of the failure of the constitutional machinery.**
 - ⊕ Proclamation for President's Rule **must be approved** by both houses of Parliament **within two months, or it ceases to exist.**
 - ⊕ Further, such proclamation requires **approval every six months** for continuance.
- ▶ **Background of the case:**
 - ⊕ In 1989, Karnataka Governor had recommended to the President to impose President's Rule **after withdrawal of support to ruling party by 19 MLAs.**
 - ⊕ The case went to SC, which **also reviewed** similar cases in **Meghalaya, Nagaland, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.**
- ▶ **Key Highlights of the judgement**
 - ▶ **President's power to dismiss a state government is not absolute and subject to judicial review** on grounds of illegality, malafide, extraneous considerations, abuse of power, or fraud.
 - ◆ It overruled **State of Rajasthan Vs Union of India (1977)** judgement.
 - ▶ **President can dissolve the state legislative assembly only after approval of proclamation by the Parliament.**
 - ◆ Till then, **state Legislative Assembly can be suspended. Suspended government would be automatically reinstated**, if parliamentary approval is not obtained within 2 months.

Significance of the Judgement

Checks the power of the Governor in a state.


Upheld Federalism by drawing a redline for centre-state relationships.

- ▶ **The Assembly floor is made the testing ground for the majority of a government.**
- ▶

 PM inaugurated **Sabroom Landport in Tripura** located along **India-Bangladesh international border.**

- ▶ **About SLP**
 - It is **connected to Chittagong port** of Bangladesh through **Maitree Bridge on River Feni.**
 - It will facilitate **movement of passengers and cargo between India and Bangladesh.**
- ▶ **Land Ports**
 - ⊕ These are **areas on international border** including portions of national highways, State highways, etc., **notified as land customs station or immigration check post**, with **facilities for clearance and transport of passengers and goods** across the borders.
 - ⊕ Currently, there are **11 Land Ports operational in India** (excluding SLP).

Gorsam Kora Festival

 Recently, Gorsam Kora festival was concluded in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

- ▶ **About Gorsam Kora festival**
 - An **annual festival** held at **Gorsam Chorten**, a 93 feet tall Stupa, built during 13th Century CE by a **local monk- Lama Pradhar.**
- ▶ **Theme(2024): 'Zero Waste Festival'**
 - ⊕ Organized by **local community of Zemithang in collaboration with civil authorities.**
 - ◆ Zemithang Valley holds historical significance as **14th Dalai Lama found refuge upon his escape from Tibet in 1959.**
 - ⊕ **Devotees including Bhutanese nationals** visit during the festival to observe virtuous occasion during **last day of first month of Lunar calendar.**



Golden langur

- According to latest survey, there are around 7,396 Golden langurs in India.
- **About Golden langur**
 - ⊖ **Protection Status:**
 - ◆ IUCN: Endangered
 - ◆ CITES: Appendix I
 - ◆ Wildlife Protection Act: Schedule-I
 - ⊖ **Characteristics:**
 - ◆ Belong to a large group of Old World monkeys called the colobines (leaf-eating primates having a ruminant-like multi-chambered stomach).
 - ◆ Coat colour varies seasonally becoming cream colored in summer and dark golden in winter.
 - ◆ They are diurnal and arboreal in nature and live in troops (3-15).
 - ⊖ **Habitat:** Endemic to subtropical and temperate broadleaf forests in Assam (Brahmaputra River Valley) and Bhutan.



Sea Defenders-2024

- 'Sea Defenders-2024' is a maritime security exercise between the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) & United States Coast Guard (USCG), which recently culminated at Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty



- Blue Leaders High-Level Event on BBNJ urged nations to ratify BBNJ Treaty.
 - ⊖ Treaty will come into force after ratification by at least 60 countries but out of 88 signatories, only two have ratified it so far.
 - ⊖ India is yet to sign the treaty.
- **BBNJ or High Seas Treaty** was adopted in 2023.
 - ⊖ It is international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (High Seas).
 - ⊖ It sets up a procedure to establish large-scale marine protected areas in high seas, sharing benefits from marine genetic resources, and transfer of marine technology.



Parthenogenesis

- Scientists have genetically modified a fruit fly to reproduce asexually through Parthenogenesis.
- **About Parthenogenesis (PG)**
 - ⊖ It is an asexual reproduction in which a female can produce an embryo without fertilizing an egg with sperm.
 - ⊖ **Two forms of Natural PG**
 - ◆ **Automixis:** It, observed mostly in sharks, slightly shuffles mother's DNA to produce children who are close to but not identical clones of mother.
 - ◆ **Apomixis:** A type of genetic copy-and-paste where offspring generated are genetically identical clones of their parents. Plants are more prone to this type of parthenogenesis.



Sela Tunnel

- Prime Minister inaugurated strategically important Sela tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **About Sela tunnel**
 - ⊖ Constructed on road connecting Tezpur (Assam) to Tawang in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh by Border Road Organization.
 - ⊖ Constructed using New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM).
 - ◆ NATM is a support method to stabilize tunnel perimeter with the help of sprayed concrete and other support and uses regular monitoring to control stability of tunnel.
 - ⊖ World's longest bi-lane tunnel (~1.5 kms) to provide all-weather connectivity at an altitude above 13,000 ft.



Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) router

- India's fastest and indigenously developed Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) router launched in Bengaluru.
 - ⊖ It has been developed by Nivetti Systems of Bengaluru in collaboration with the Department of Telecom and CDOT. Router has a capacity of 2.4 terabits per second (tbps), and runs on
 - ⊖ India's first indigenous network operating system, Nivetti NiOS. MPLS is a telecommunications routing technique that guides data between nodes using labels instead of network addresses. Its main function is to speed up network connections by sending packets along predetermined network paths.



Lachit Borphukan (1622 - 1672)

- Prime Minister unveiled 125-foot-high statue of famous General of Royal Army of Ahom Kingdom of Assam Lachit Borphukan.
- **About Lachit Borphukan**
 - ⊖ Born in Charaideo district of Assam.
 - ⊖ United and brought together the tribal forces of Assam.
 - ⊖ Defeated Mughal Army in Battle of Saraighat (1671).
- **Recognition**
 - ⊖ National Defence Academy (NDA) gives Lachit Barphukan Gold Medal to best cadet since 1999.
 - ⊖ Lachit Divas (Lachit Day) celebrated in Assam every year on November 24.
 - ⊖ Prime Minister released the book - 'Lachit Borphukan - Assam's Hero who Halted the Mughals' in 2022.
- **Values:** Patriotism, Inspirational Leadership, Courage and fearlessness, etc.

