

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**CONTEXT:**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently hosted the 2023 Regional Cooperation and Integration (RCI) Conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, where India exhibited its PM GatiShakti National Master Plan.

About Asian Development Bank:

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a regional development bank founded in 1966 with the goal of fostering social and economic development throughout Asia and the Pacific.
- It has 68 members, 49 from Asia and the Pacific and 19 from elsewhere. India is a founder member of the organization.
- ADB provides loans, technical support, grants, and equity investments to its members and partners in order to promote social and economic development.
- ADB's five largest owners as of December 31, 2022 are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares), China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).
- Its headquarters are in Manila, the Philippines.

About ADB Conference:

- Theme of the 2023 ADB Conference: Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration through Economic Corridor Development (ECD).

Objective:

- Investigate methods for integrating spatial transformation/area-centric approaches with the ECD and strengthening regional collaboration through a broader perspective.
- Sharing of knowledge on how to apply the ECD framework and operational rules for investable projects.

India's Role:

- At the RCI Conference, India offered ADB and South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries its indigenously created GIS-based technology in exchange for information sharing in order to improve socioeconomic planning and regional cooperation.

What is PM GatiShakti National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity?

- It is a Made in India initiative, a transformative 'whole-of-government' approach to integrated planning of multimodal infrastructure connectivity to economic nodes and social infrastructure, resulting in improved logistics efficiency.
- The ideas of PM Gati Shakti include socioeconomic area-based development as part of regional connectedness.
- PM GatiShakti was launched in October 2021.
- The Gati Shakti scheme absorbed the Rs. 110 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline, which was announced in 2019.
- PM GatiShakti National Master Plan is a digital platform based on Geographic Information System (GIS) data that includes over 1400 data layers and 50+ tools.
- It depicts trunk and utility infrastructure, land use, existing structures, soil quality, occupancy, tourism locations, forest sensitive areas, and so on.
- The program is also being carried out to improve connectivity with regional partners. Some relevant instances include:
- The Indo-Nepal Haldia Access Controlled Corridor (eastern Indian states and Nepal) Regional Waterways Grid (RWG) project will provide multimodal connectivity to growth centers and border locations.

Government of India's Other Initiatives for Logistics Sector:

- National Logistics Policy (NLP)
- Multimodal Transportation of Goods Act, 1993.
- Multi Modal Logistics Parks
- LEADS Report
- Dedicated Freight Corridor
- Sagarmala Projects
- Bharatmala Project
- Digital Initiatives:
 - Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)
 - Logistics Data Bank (LDB)

GOVERNANCE**CONTEXT:**

The Reuters Institute's recently published 2023 Digital News Report has unveiled significant shifts in online news consumption patterns across the globe.

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is committed to investigating the global future of journalism via debate, interaction, and research.

Key highlights of the report
Shifting Patterns in Online News Consumption in India:

- Indians are increasingly turning to search engines and mobile news aggregators (43%), rather than traditional news websites, as their primary sources of online news.
- Only 12% prefer reading news from direct sources, such as newspapers, while 28% prefer reading news on social media.
- Prefer to watch or listen to news instead than reading it.

Regional Differences in Online News Engagement:

- Scandinavian countries continue to connect directly with established news companies.
- For news, Asia, Latin America, and Africa rely significantly on social media.

Diverse Preferences Across Countries:

- Reading dominates in Finland and the UK (80%).
- India and Thailand prefer watching news online (40%).
- The Philippines leads with 52% favouring video news.

The Impact of Covid-19 on News Consumption:

- In India, both reading and sharing of news are declining at an alarming rate. According to the data, access to internet news dropped by 12% between 2022 and 2023.
- Television viewing has also dropped by 10%, particularly among younger and urban people.
- The fall in news engagement can be attributed in part to the Covid-19 pandemic's declining influence with the relaxation of lockdown measures in April 2022.

Trust in News:

- Trust in news in India has remained stagnant at 38% between 2021 and 2023, ranking among the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.
- In countries such as Finland (69%) and Portugal (58%), trust levels are higher.
- On the other hand, countries with higher degrees of political polarization such as the United States (32%), Argentina (30%), Hungary (25%), and Greece (19%) have lower trust levels.

Challenges Faced by India Due to Changes in News Consumption Patterns
Misinformation and Fake News:

- The shift away from traditional news sources and growing dependence on search engines and social media may help disseminate disinformation and fake news.
- This can cause public misunderstanding, incorrect beliefs, and even social instability.

Quality of Journalism:

- A decreased preference for traditional news websites and newspapers could impact the quality of journalism.
- Independent and credible journalism may face financial challenges, potentially leading to a decline in investigative reporting and in-depth analysis.

Democracy and Polarization:

- The influence of social media as a news source can contribute to political polarization. People may be exposed to biased information, which can ultimately affect the democratic process.

Media Trust:

- India's persistently low trust in news is concerning for a healthy democracy.
- Rebuilding trust in the media is essential for informed citizenship.

Youth Disconnect:

- The drop in television viewership among younger people suggests a disconnect between traditional news mediums. Engaging and informing the younger generation through reliable news sources is essential for their civic education.

Dependence on Algorithmic Feeds:

- When people rely on search engines and social media for news, they are exposed to content determined by algorithms. This may limit exposure to different points of view and crucial news articles.

Initiative to curtail fake news in India:

- Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:
- Proposes that social media platforms must delete content labeled false by the Press Information Bureau's fact-check unit.
- Rule aims to curb the spread of fake news and misinformation on social media platforms.

IT Act 2008:

- Section 66 A of the IT Act 2008 regulates offences related to electronic communication.
- This includes punishing individuals who send offensive messages through communication services or social media platforms. This act can be used to penalize those who spread fake news through electronic communication.

Indian Penal Code of 1860:

- It governs news that incites rioting and material that incites defamation. This statute can be used to hold someone accountable for spreading false information that incites violence or slanders someone's character.

Related Authorities:

- Press Council of India (PCI)
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)
- News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA)
- Broadcasting Content Complaint Council (BCCC)
- Indian Broadcast Foundation (IBF)

Way Forward

- Promote media literacy initiatives in schools and communities to help people evaluate news sources critically and recognize disinformation.
- To discover and correct erroneous information, encourage collaboration between fact-checking organizations, government agencies, and social media platforms.
- India could consider passing legislation akin to Australia's that requires internet platforms to compensate local media outlets for using their content.
- This can aid the struggling news sector by ensuring fair compensation for content creators and encouraging them to provide authentic and original information.

ECONOMY

CONTEXT

The RBI announced I-CRR as a temporary measure to absorb excess liquidity from the banking system. The level of surplus liquidity in the system surged because of the return of Rs 2,000 banknotes to the banking system, RBI's surplus transfer to the government, pick up in government spending and capital inflows.

What has RBI said?

- The RBI stated that following a study, it has decided to phase out the I-CRR.
- "Based on an assessment of current and evolving liquidity conditions, it has been decided that the amounts impounded under the I-CRR would be released in stages so that system liquidity is not subjected to sudden shocks and money markets function in an orderly manner," the RBI stated in a statement.

When was I-CRR introduced?

- After releasing the monetary policy on August 10, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das stated that banks must maintain an I-CRR of 10% on any growth in their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) between May 19, 2023 and July 28, 2023. It went into force on August 12 for a fortnight.

Why was I-CRR needed?

- The RBI announced I-CRR as a temporary measure to absorb excess liquidity from the banking system. The level of surplus liquidity in the system surged because of the return of Rs 2,000 banknotes to the banking system, RBI's surplus transfer to the government, pick up in government spending and capital inflows. The daily absorption of liquidity by the RBI in July was Rs 1.8 lakh crore.

What was the impact of I-CRR on liquidity conditions?

- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had said the I-CRR measure will absorb above Rs 1 lakh crore of excess liquidity from the banking system.
- The banking system's liquidity turned deficit for the first time in the current fiscal on August 21 after the RBI's I-CRR mandate. The tight liquidity condition was also contributed by outflows on account of goods and services tax (GST) and the selling of dollars by the central bank to stem the rupee's fall. The liquidity, as reflected by the amount of money injected by the RBI into the system, stood at Rs 23,644.43 crore on August 21.
- However, the banking system liquidity again turned to surplus from August 24. On September 8, the RBI absorbed Rs 76,047 crore of surplus liquidity from the system.

What is CRR?

- The Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) is the minimum amount of the total deposits which banks have to maintain as cash reserve with the Reserve Bank of India. It is an essential tool to maintain the health of the banking system. Banks cannot use this amount for lending or for any investment purposes. Currently, CRR stands at 4.5 per cent.

PRELIMS FACTS

1. Fujianvenator prodigiosus

CONTEXT

Scientists recently said they unearthed in Fujian Province the fossil of a Jurassic Period dinosaur they named Fujianvenator prodigiosus.

About:

- Fujianvenator is a member of a grouping called avialans that includes all birds and their closest non-avian dinosaur relatives.
- Despite their modest beginnings, birds survived the asteroid strike 66 million years ago that doomed their non-avian dinosaur comrades.

Features

- Its lower leg bone - the tibia - was twice as long as its thigh bone - the femur.
- Such dimensions are unique among theropods; it also had a long bony tail.
- The forelimb is generally built like a bird's wing but with three claws on the fingers, which are absent from modern birds. So you can call it wing.

Key facts about the Jurassic Period

- It is the second of three periods of the Mesozoic Era.
- Time period: Extending from 201.3 million to 145 million years ago.
- It immediately followed the Triassic Period(251.9 million to 201.3 million years ago) and was succeeded by the Cretaceous Period (145 million to 66 million years ago).
- It was a time of significant global change in continental configurations, oceanographic patterns, and biological systems.
- During this period, the supercontinent Pangea split apart, allowing for the eventual development of what is now the central Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

2. Virus Varicella Zoster

CONTEXT

Scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology discovered the existence of the Clade 9 strain of varicella-zoster virus (VZV) for the first time in the country.

About:

- The varicella-zoster virus causes chickenpox, a common pediatric infection.
- It is a human-only virus that belongs to the -herpesvirus family.
- It is found all across the world and is extremely contagious.
- Infections can proceed to invade the central nervous system and cause severe consequences.

About Chickenpox

- It is an extremely contagious disease.
- Symptoms include an itchy, blister-like rash, among other things.
- The rash develops first on the chest, back, and face, then spreads throughout the body.
- The virus spreads through:
 - Contact with someone infected with chickenpox.
 - Inhaling air from a sick individual who sneezes or coughs.
 - Contacting fluids from an infected child's eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Chickenpox has an incubation period of 10 to 21 days.
- It can be dangerous, particularly during pregnancy, in babies, teenagers, adults, and persons with compromised immune systems (a reduced ability to fight viruses and disease).

3. Meniere's Disease

CONTEXT

Hong Kong singer Jacky Cheung recently collapsed on stage during a concert recently, which was later attributed to Meniere's disease, which causes dizzy spells, also known as vertigo.

About

- It is a rare inner ear disorder.

Cause:

- It is the result of a build-up of fluid in the inner ear, called labyrinth. It contains the organs of balancing and hearing.
- The fluid build-up in the labyrinth interferes with the normal balance and hearing signals between the inner ear and the brain.
- It can lead to severe dizziness (vertigo), ringing in the ears (tinnitus), hearing loss, and a feeling of fullness or congestion in the ear.
- It usually affects only one ear.
- Ménière's disease can develop at any age, but it is more likely to happen to adults between 40 and 60 years of age.

Major Symptoms: Vertigo is the most debilitating symptom and is a severe spinning sensation that can cause:

- Severe nausea;
- Vomiting;
- Sweating;
- Other symptoms may include:
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears);

- Loss of hearing or muffled hearing;
- Loss of the ability to hear low frequencies;
- Pressure in the affected ear;
- Loss of balance;
- Left untreated, Ménière's disease symptoms get worse over time and may cause permanent hearing loss and ongoing balance problems.
- Treatment: There is no cure, but lifestyle tips and medical treatments can help ease the symptoms.

ANSWER WRITING

Q) How can e-governance initiatives help in increasing farmers' income? Illustrate.

Solution:

A simple and straightforward question where in the candidate needs to illustrate how e-governance initiatives can help in increasing farmers' incomes with suitable examples and substantiation.

Introduction

Agriculture's importance in India is difficult to overemphasize where it accounts for about 13 percent of the country's GDP and employs about 45 percent of its workforce. Digital applications can play a critical role in improving yields — as well as reducing costs and increasing the market value of crops — by making it easier for farmers to obtain finance, optimize agricultural inputs, and increase direct access to markets.

Body

- A Centrally Sponsored Scheme namely National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGPA) was initially launched in 2010-11, which aims to achieve rapid development in India through use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) for timely access to agriculture related information. In 2014-15, the scheme was further extended for all the remaining States and 2 UTs.
- Realizing the significance of new digital & emerging technologies, the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income (DFI) has recommended further expanding and augmenting of the digital agriculture initiatives of Government of India.
- The report focused on modern management of agriculture viz. Remote Sensing; Geographical Information System; Data Analytics and Cloud Computing; Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning; Internet of Things; Robotics, Drones & Sensors and Block-chain.
- E-governance initiatives helping in increasing farmers' income can be seen from the following points
- Enabling digital financing and insurance pay-outs by facilitating consolidated information, credit scoring models, and yield forecasting models using satellite and weather data. For example, Digital applications are making crop insurance system faster and more accurate.
- The timely availability of right information: The timely information and practical solutions of the agricultural problems allows the farmers to adopt good agricultural practices, make better choices of inputs and to plan the cultivation properly. Its proper utilisation is indispensable for agriculture. Ex: Kisan Call Centres, M-Kisan etc.
- Introducing precision agriculture using data analytics, with an integrated agricultural data platform across all existing and new data sources. This initiative could raise farm productivity by 15 to 20 percent. For example, Real-time agricultural data can help to increase yields and decrease costs.
- Implementing online agricultural marketplaces linked to a unified, nationwide market with a set of institutional market facilitators and common assaying and grading standards. Such e-marketplaces could cover 40 to 60 percent of agricultural produce sold in India, leading to 15 percent farmers' price gains, as demonstrated by pilots. For example, Technology is bringing transparency to India's agricultural markets.
- The e-Choupal model has been specifically designed to tackle the challenges posed by the unique features of Indian agriculture. 'e-Choupal' also unshackles the potential of Indian farmer who has been trapped in a vicious cycle of low risk-taking ability > low investment > low productivity > weak market orientation > low value addition > low margin > low risk-taking ability.
- Government Initiatives –
- Kisan Suvidha, a Digital India initiative, is a mobile app providing information to farmers. Farmers can be informed on the weather alerts, market prices, availability of seeds and fertilisers, agro advisories etc.
- Pusa Krishi is an app designed for farmers to use in the fields. It provides information on the weather so that farmers can take measures to save crops.
- MKISAN is a mobile based advisory service linked to call centres connected to research centres. Knowledge is disseminated to farmers that is timely, specific, and holistic and needs based.
- Soil Health Card promotes integrated nutrient management through the use of chemical fertilizers and organic manures. Provides soil test based recommendations and ensures quality control of fertilisers.
- National Agriculture Market (eNAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal creating a national market for agricultural commodities through a government platform. It includes commodity arrival and prices.
- AgMarknet provides agricultural market information and price trends through a government platform.

Conclusion

It is essential to mobilise States and UTs to own and target stipulated goals with the help of concerted and well-coordinated efforts in terms of e-governance initiatives and their implementation for the Country to achieve the goal of doubling farmers' income by the year 2022.

MCQs

- What is the primary goal of dark patterns in user interface design?
 - To provide users with a seamless and intuitive experience
 - To encourage users to make informed decisions
 - To trick or manipulate users into taking certain actions**
 - To protect user privacy and data
- What is the primary cause of Ménière's Disease, recently seen in the news?
 - A viral infection affecting the inner ear
 - A buildup of fluid in the inner ear called labyrinth**
 - Genetic factors passed down through generations
 - Exposure to loud noises over an extended period
- Fujianvenator prodigiosus dinosaur, which was recently seen in the news, belongs to:
 - Jurassic Period**
 - Triassic Period
 - Cretaceous Period
 - Mesozoic Period
- Consider the following statements regarding Chickenpox:
 - It is caused by bacteria.
 - It can spread through fluids from an infected person.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only**
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the Swachh Vayu Survekshan (Clean Air Survey) 2023, consider the following statements:
 - The Swachh Vayu Survekshan was conducted by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
 - The survey provides ranks to cities on the basis of air quality and implementation of activities approved under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
 - Municipal solid waste burning has not been included as the criteria on which basis the cities performance was assessed.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two**
 - All three
 - None
- Consider the following statements with respect to 'Global Fintech Fest (GFF)':
 - It has been organized by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), Payments Council of India (PCI), and Fintech Convergence Council (FCC).
 - Its aim is to provide a singular platform for fintech leaders to foster collaborations and develop a blueprint for the future of the industry.
- The theme of GFF' 2023 is "Global Collaboration for a Responsible Financial Ecosystem".

How many of the above statements are correct?

 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three**
 - None
- Consider the following statements:
 - A population bottleneck is when a population sharply decreases in size due to environmental events or human activities that kill or prevent reproduction of many individuals.
 - FitCoal is a tool that can identify significant population bottlenecks and speciation events in human evolution, which are challenging to detect from the fossil record.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following pairs:

(Place)	(Country)
1. Quito	Guatemala
2. Orkney Islands	Scotland
3. Aswan	Afghanistan

 How many of the pairs given above are correctly matched?
 - Only one**
 - Only two
 - All three
 - None
- With reference to the European Sky Shield Initiative, consider the following statements:
 - It aims to create a European air and missile defence system through the common acquisition of air defence equipment and missiles by European nations.
 - All the European Countries are part of this initiative.
 - The initiative was pioneered by France.
 How many of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
 - Only one**
 - Only two
 - All three
 - None
- With reference to the Cloud Seeding, consider the following statements:
 - It is a weather modification technology to create artificial rainfall that can work without pre-existing clouds in the atmosphere.
 - These 'seeds' of rain can be the iodides of silver or potassium.
 Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only**
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2