

Indian stamp bill 2023**Why in News?**

- The Centre has proposed repealing the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 and bringing in a new law for the stamp duty regime in the country.
- In this context, recently, the Ministry of Finance invited suggestions on the draft 'Indian Stamp Bill, 2023' from the public.

Stamp duty

- About
 - A stamp duty is essentially a govt tax, which is levied to register documents, like an agreement or transaction paper between two or more parties, with the registrar.
- Amount
 - Usually, the amount specified is fixed based on the document's nature or is charged at a certain percentage of the agreement value stated in the document.
- Levied on
 - Stamp duties can be levied on bills of exchange, cheques, promissory notes, bills of lading, letters of credit, policies of insurance, transfer of shares, debentures, proxies and receipts.
- Valid evidence in a court of law
 - Stamp duties are accepted as valid evidence in a court of law.
- Appropriation of stamp duties
 - Stamp duties are levied by the Centre but appropriated by the concerned states within their territories under Article 268 of the Constitution.

Indian Stamp Bill, 2023

- About
 - The Indian Stamp Bill, 2023 is a draft bill prepared by the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
 - The bill aims to replace the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 and align it with a modern stamp duty regime.
- Need for new bill
 - Several provisions of the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 have now become redundant or inoperative.
 - For instance, there was a lack of provisions for digital e-stamping in the 1899 Act.
 - Also, in earlier act, there was lack of uniform legislation for all Indian states regarding stamp duties.
 - The 1899 Act extended to 30 states and Union Territories combined while six states followed their own stamp acts and rules.
- Key features
 - In order to equip India for a seamless digital era, the bill includes provisions for digital e-stamping.
 - It defines an electronic stamp or e-stamp as an electronically generated impression denoting the payment of stamp duty by electronic means or otherwise.
 - There are also provisions for digital signatures.
 - Digital or electronic signature refers to the authentication of any electronic record by a subscriber through an electronic method or procedure.
 - The draft Bill also proposes to raise penalties.
 - It seeks to increase the maximum penalty amount from Rs 5,000 to Rs 25,000 for contravening any provisions of the law and impose Rs 1,000 per day for repeated offences.

Indian Stamp Act, 1899

- The Indian Stamp Act, 1899 is a fiscal or money-related statute that lays down the law relating to tax levied in the form of stamps on instruments recording transactions.
- Section 2 of the Act says that an instrument refers to any document that creates, transfers, limits, extends, ends, or records a right or liability.
- According to this Act, a "stamp" means any mark, seal, or endorsement made by a person authorized by the State Government.
- This definition also covers adhesive or impressed stamps used to charge duty under this Act.
- Section 3 of this Act prescribes that certain instruments or documents shall be chargeable with the amount indicated in Schedule 1 of the Act.
 - These include bills of exchange or promissory notes.

ECONOMY**RBI action against Paytm****Why in News?**

- The Reserve Bank of India barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd from accepting fresh deposits and making credit transactions from March 2024.
- This decision essentially bars Paytm Payments Bank from offering all its core services — including accounts and wallets.
- While the action is technically not a cancellation of Paytm Payments Bank's licence, it practically constricts the company's operations to a great extent.

Payments Bank

- Background
 - Based on the recommendations of the Nachiket Mor Committee, Payments Bank was set up by RBI in 2014.
 - It was set up to operate on a smaller scale with minimal credit risk.
- Objectives
 - The main objective is to advance financial inclusion by offering banking and financial services to the unbanked and under-banked areas.
 - It was set up to help the migrant labour force, low-income households, small entrepreneurs etc.
- Payments bank in India
 - India currently has 6 Payment Banks namely:
 - Airtel Payment Bank, India Post Payment Bank, Fino, Paytm Payment Bank, NSDL Payment Bank and Jio Payment Bank.
- Features
 - They are differentiated and not universal banks.
 - These operate on a smaller scale.
 - It needs to have a minimum paid-up capital of Rs. 100, 00, 00,000.
 - Minimum initial contribution of the promoter to the Payment Bank to the paid-up equity capital shall at least be 40% for the first five years from the commencement of its business.
- Activities that can be performed by the Payment Banks
 - A payments bank is a financial services company that cannot accept more than ₹2 lakh in deposits per account.
 - It is not allowed to lend directly but can sell loan products.
 - It can promote other third-party loan products.
 - Payments banks are permitted to make personal payments and receive cross border remittances on the current accounts.
 - It can issue debit cards.

News Summary: RBI action against Paytm

- RBI has asked Paytm Payments Bank to stop accepting money in any customer account, including wallets and other prepaid instruments such as FASTags, or any other instrument from March 1.
- RBI attributed its action to persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns warranting further supervisory action.

What does the RBI direction say?

- Barred Paytm Payments Bank from offering practically all of its key services
 - Paytm cannot accept deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Card (NCMC), etc. after February 29.
- Account to be terminated
 - RBI said that nodal accounts of parent company One97 Communications and Paytm Payments Services should be terminated at the earliest, and not later than February 29.
- Settlement of all pipeline transactions and nodal accounts
 - Settlement of all pipeline transactions and nodal accounts—in respect of all transactions initiated on or before February 29—should be completed by March 15, and no transactions shall be permitted thereafter.
- Customers are allowed to withdraw or use the money
 - Customers can withdraw or use the money from their Paytm accounts, including savings and current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, NCMC, etc., freely as long as they don't exceed their available balance.

Reasons behind this action

- Paytm Payments Bank has been facing RBI scrutiny since 2018.
- While the central bank did not specify the exact reasons for the latest action against Paytm, experts believe it could be due to the RBI's concerns on KYC compliance and IT-related issues.
- The central bank is against allowing any institution or banking entity to expose depositors' money to such risks.

- It has been discovered that Paytm Payments Bank and its parent company, One97 Communications, were investigated by the RBI because they did not have enough barriers to protect information within the group.
- Additionally, China-based entities, which indirectly owned a stake in the parent company, had access to data, which raised concerns.

PRELIM FACTS**1. Bharat 5G Portal**

- Recently, the Secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC), launched the “Bharat 5G Portal- an integrated portal” on the sidelines of ‘Bharat Telecom 2024.

About Bharat 5G Portal:

- It is a comprehensive platform serving the interests of startups, industry and academia in quantum, 6G, IPR and 5G domains.
- It also features the Future Tech-Experts registration portal in collaboration with PANIIT USA, aimed to help and advise the Indian Telecom ecosystem to advance the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- It acts as a one-stop solution for all quantum, IPR, PoCs/Pilot, 5G and 6G-related works, capturing academic R&D developments, industry standards, OEMs, startups/MSMEs, and subject matter experts.
- It aims to propel India's 5G capabilities, foster innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing within the telecom sector.

Other 5G related initiatives in India:

- Prime Minister of India in the India Mobile Congress, awarded 100 “5G Use Case Labs” to educational institutions across the countries to build competencies and engagement in 5G technologies for students & start-up communities.
- All the 100+ Labs/institutions are connected through a dedicated portal (Digital network of 100 5G Labs).
- It acts as a knowledge dissemination platform for the institutions/students/start-ups wherein 5G use cases are being tested/developed.
- Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) is an implementation agency for installation of 100 Labs and portal development.

2. Maratha Military Landscapes of India

- The “Maratha Military Landscapes of India” will be India’s nomination for recognition as UNESCO World Heritage List for the year 2024-25.

About Maratha Military Landscapes of India:

- The Maratha Military Landscapes of India, which developed between the 17th and 19th centuries, represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.
- This extraordinary network of forts, varying in hierarchies, scales and typological features, is a result of integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics distinctive to the Sahyadri mountain ranges, the Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats in the Indian Peninsula.
- The twelve component parts of this nomination are, Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Khanderi fort, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijay durg, Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.
- Among these, Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad and Gingee fort are hill forts, Pratapgad is hill-forest fort, Panhala is hill-plateau fort, Vijaydurg is coastal fort whereas Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg are island forts.
- The inception of the Maratha Military ideology dates back to 17th Century during the reign of the Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj by the 1670 CE and continued through subsequent rules until Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.
- UNESCO World Heritage List of India
 - At present in India there are 42 World Heritage sites, out of which 34 are cultural sites, seven are natural sites whereas one is mixed site.
 - In Maharashtra there are six World Heritage Sites, five cultural and one natural these are, Ajanta Caves (1983), Ellora Caves (1983), Elephanta Caves (1987), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018) and western Ghats of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala is serial property in natural category (2012).

3. Eravikulam National Park

- Eravikulam National Park (ENP), the natural habitat of the Nilgiri tahr, will soon be closed for the calving season of the species.

About Eravikulam National Park:

- Location: It is located along the Western Ghats in the Idukki district of Kerala.
- It was declared as National Park in 1978.
- The Park covers an area of 97 sq.km.
- The highest peak south of the Himalayas, the Anamudi (2695 meters), is situated on the southern side of the park.
- This is also the land of “Neelakurinji”, the flower that blooms once every twelve years.
- Climate: The park receives heavy showers during the southwest (June/July) and retreating (October/November) monsoons and is one of the wettest areas of the world.
- Vegetation: The major part of the park is covered with rolling grasslands, but several patches of shola forests are also found in the upper part of the valley.
- Flora:
 - Important flora includes Actinodaphnebourdilloni, Microtropisramiflora, Pittosporum tetraspermium, Sisygiumaronottianum, ChrysopogonZelanieus, etc.
 - The shola grasslands are exceptionally rich in balsams and orchids, including the long thought extinct variety Brachycorythiswightii.
- Fauna:
 - The Nilgiri Tahr, Gaur, Sloth Bear, Nilgiri Langur, Tiger, Leopard, Giant Squirrel, and wild dog are the common species.
 - Half the world population of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr lives here.
 - The Atlas moth, the largest of its kind in the world, is seen in this park.
 - 140 species of birds, of which 10 are unique to the Western Ghats. More than 100 varieties of butterflies have been recorded here.

4. Exercise- SadaTanseeq

- In a major boost of ties the militaries of India and Saudi Arabia are conducting their first Joint Military Exercise named as SadaTanseeq.

About Exercise SadaTanseeq:

- It is the inaugural edition of India-Saudi Arabia Joint Military Exercise ‘SADA TANSEEQ’ commenced at Mahajan, Rajasthan.
- The Exercise is scheduled to be conducted from 29th January to 10th February 2024.
- Aim of the Exercise is to train troops of both sides for Joint Operations in Semi Desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
- The Exercise will enable both the sides to share their best practices in the tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting operations in sub-conventional domain.
- It will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops from both sides.
- The Exercise will involve Establishment of Mobile Vehicle Check Post, Cordon & Search Operation, House Intervention Drill, Reflex Shooting, Slithering and Sniper Firing.
- The Exercise will provide an opportunity to both the contingents to strengthen their bond.

5. Snow Leopard

- The first scientific survey of the snow leopard in India shows the country is home to 718 of the elusive cats, the government said recently.

About Snow Leopard

- It is a large, long-haired Asian cat, classified as either *Panthera uncia* or *Uncia uncia* in the family Felidae.
- Geographic Range:
 - Snow leopards live across a vast area in northern and central Asia's high mountains, including the Himalayan region.
 - In the Himalayas, they live in high alpine areas, mostly above the tree line and up to 18,000 feet in elevation.
 - They are found in 12 countries, including China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Russia, and Mongolia.
 - In India, it is seen in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Features:
 - Measuring from nose to tail, the length of an average adult is 1000 to 1300 mm.
 - They have thick grey and yellow-tinged fur, with solid spots on their head, neck, and lower limbs and rosettes over the rest of the body.

- They also have very long, thick tails that they use for balancing on rocks and wrapping around their bodies for protection from the cold.
- Their short forelimbs and long hind limbs make them very agile, and they can jump as much as 50 feet in length.
- They are solitary, and the only prolonged social contact occurs while females are raising their cubs.
- Conservation status:
 - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule I

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Digital divide leads to inequality and disparity in society and leads to the problem of unequal access to education. Discuss.

Answer: The digital divide is the gap that exists between individuals who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who lack access.

Digital divides exist between developed and developing countries, urban and rural populations, young and educated versus older and less-educated individuals, and men and women.

In India the urban-rural divide is the single biggest factor in the digital divide.

Consequences of Digital Divide

- The Disadvantaged Bear the Brunt: Children belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS]/Disadvantaged Groups [DG] had to suffer the consequence of not having to fully pursue their education or worse drop out because of the lack of access to Internet and computer. They even run the danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.
- Unfair Competitive Edge: The poor will remain void of crucial information presented online concerning academia, and thus they will always lag, and this may be summed up by poor performance. Hence superior students who can access the internet have an unfair competitive edge over their less privileged counterparts.
- Disparity in Learning: The people in lower socio-economic classes are disadvantaged and have to undergo long hours of cumbersome studies in meeting the objectives of the course. While the rich can easily access schooling materials online and work on their programs in a flash.
- Decreased Productivity among the Poor: Most underdeveloped countries or the rural areas tend to produce half-baked graduates because of inadequate training due to limited research abilities as connectivity to the internet is limited besides having low cadre training equipment.

Initiatives taken to Promote Digital Education

- PM eVIDYA: A comprehensive initiative called PM eVIDYA was initiated as part of AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan in May, 2020, which unifies all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode access to education.
- SWAYAM PRABHA: The SWAYAM PRABHA is a group of 34 DTH channels devoted to telecasting high-quality educational programmes on 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite.
- Diksha Portal: It was launched for providing a digital platform to teachers giving them an opportunity to learn and train themselves and connect with the teacher community. It is built considering the whole teacher's life cycle - from the time student teachers enroll in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) to after they retire as teachers.
 - It also provides access to NCERT textbooks and lessons, following the regular school curriculum.
- PRAGYATA: The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) released guidelines on digital education titled PRAGYATA. Under the PRAGYATA guidelines, only 30 minutes of screen time per day for interacting with parents is recommended for kindergarten, nursery and pre-school. Schools can hold live online classes for a maximum of 1.5 hours per day for Classes 1-8, and 3 hours per day for Classes 9-12.

Way Forward

- Even though schools are now reopening gradually due to the receding curve of the pandemic, the “need to provide adequate computer-based equipment together with access to online facilities for children is of utmost importance”.
- Priority should be given to the less advantaged students who do not have access to e-learning.
- A solution has to be devised at all levels of the Government, State and Centre, to ensure that adequate facilities are made available to children across social strata so that access to education is not denied to those who lack resources.

MCQs

1. With reference to the Padma awards, consider the following statements:
 1. The awards come under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
 2. Padma Vibhushan is highest in the hierarchy of Padma Awards.
 3. All nominations received for the Padma Awards are placed before the Padma Awards Committee constituted by the Prime Minister every year.
 4. Government servants including those working with Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are eligible for these Awards.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - (a) Only one
 - (b) Only two
 - (c) Only three**
 - (d) All four
2. Which one of the following is the primary principle behind “Dynamic Wireless Charging (DWC)” technology for electric vehicles?
 - (a) Direct physical connection for charging
 - (b) Inductive charging while in motion**
 - (c) Solar energy conversion
 - (d) Battery swapping mechanism
3. The Report “Electricity 2024” was recently released by which of the following:
 - (a) International Energy agency**
 - (b) Ministry of Power
 - (c) National Power Training Institute
 - (d) Central power Research Institute
4. Regarding Leprosy Disease, consider the following statements:
 1. It is a chronic infectious disease caused by a type of bacteria.
 2. It is known to occur only to the newly born children.
 3. It is not an inherited disease but it is transmitted via droplets.
 How many of the statements given above are not correct?
 - (a) Only one**
 - (b) Only two
 - (c) Only three
 - (d) None
5. Regarding Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs), consider the following statements:
 1. They are a type of electric vehicle that runs solely on electric power stored in high-capacity batteries.
 2. They have a specially designed Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) that does not produce emissions.
 3. They use electric motors to drive the wheels, providing instant torque and smooth acceleration.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - (a) Only one
 - (b) Only two**
 - (c) Only three
 - (d) None
6. Regarding the University Grants Commission (UGC), consider the following statements:
 1. It became a statutory organisation of the Government of India in 2006.
 2. The commission operates under the Ministry of Education.
 3. The Chairman of the commission is chosen from the officers of the Central Government or any State Government.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - (a) Only one**
 - (b) Only two
 - (c) Only three
 - (d) None
7. With respect to defence, Lakshya, Nishant and Pushpak are:
 - (a) Medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile
 - (b) Transport Aircraft
 - (c) Indigenously developed light battle tank
 - (d) Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)**
8. Central empowered committee has been in the news in the context of environmental governance. It has been established under which of the following legislation?
 - (a) Forest Conservation Act, 1980
 - (b) Environment Protection Act, 1986**
 - (c) Biological Diversity Act, 2002
 - (d) Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
9. With reference to Blue Economy, consider the following statements:
 1. It refers to economic activities related to the sea and the coasts.
 2. Sustainable Development Goal 14 deals with the Blue Economy.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2**
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
10. With reference to Nano DAP (Diammonium Phosphate), consider the following statements:
 1. Nano DAP enables the fertiliser to enter easily inside the seed surface or through stomata and other plant openings.
 2. The adoption of Nano DAP can reduce the government’s subsidy burden.
 Which of the statements given above are incorrect?
 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2**