

JSI-WTO

❖ Context

- **India, South Africa and Namibia** have jointly voiced concerns on the **plurilateral talks** on e-commerce, investment facilitation, services domestic regulation and MSMEs, are **gathering pace at the WTO**, despite many **developing country members staying out** of it.

❖ Key Highlights

❖ What are the joint initiatives?

- At the **11th Ministerial Conference in December 2017**, like-minded groups of members issued joint statements on advancing discussions on.
 - **e-commerce**,
 - developing a multilateral framework on **investment facilitation**,
 - launching a working group on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (**MSMEs**).
 - Advancing ongoing talks on domestic regulation in **services trade**.
- In 2020, new initiatives were launched on **trade and environmental sustainability** and on **plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade**.
- These groups are **open to all members**.

❖ What is JSI on e-commerce?

- In **January 2019**, 76 WTO members confirmed in a joint statement their intention to commence negotiations on e-commerce.
- The JSI on e-commerce is **co-convened by Japan, Australia, and Singapore**.

❖ India's objection

- The initiatives **mostly concern with the developed countries**.
- India has refused to be part of the JSI discussions as it believes that **members need to first focus on mandated areas for negotiations**, including a permanent solution for **food procurement subsidies**.
- If new areas of discussions are brought into the WTO's agenda plurilaterally, there will be no interest to sort out pending issues that have a direct bearing on livelihoods of the poor.
- India, SA and Namibia have argued that new rules cannot be introduced without fulfilling the **multilateral body's mandate of reaching an agreement by consensus**, as enshrined in the Marrakesh Agreement.
- It is relevant as the **proponents** of the initiative are **trying to have an outcome at the 12th WTO ministerial conference** in June 2022.

UNEA-5

❖ Context

- The fifth session of the **United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA 5)** is expected to come up with an agreement containing measures to tame the global plastics menace.

❖ Key Highlights

- Hosted by the **UN Environment Programme**, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) brings together representatives of the **193 Member States of the UN, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders** to agree on policies to address the world's most pressing environmental challenges.
- The overall **theme** for UNEA-5 is "**Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**".
- Due to restrictions related to COVID-19, members decided to organise the session in two parts - **UNEA 5.1 (virtual) & UNEA -5.2 (Nairobi, Kenya)**.
- Immediately after UNEA-5.2, the Assembly will hold a **Special Session of the Assembly** devoted to the **50th anniversary** of the creation of the UN Environment Programme in 1972 (**UNEP@50**).

❖ About UNEP

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established by **Maurice Strong**, its first director, after the **United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972**.
- As a **member of the United Nations Development Group**, UNEP aims to help the world meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- UNEP hosts the **secretariats of several multilateral environmental agreements** and research bodies, including.
 - The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
 - The Minamata Convention on Mercury.
 - The Convention on Migratory Species.
 - The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- In **1988**, the **World Meteorological Organisation and UNEP established** the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**).
- UNEP is also one of several **Implementing Agencies** for the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** and the **Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol**.
- It is **not one of the 15 Specialised agencies of the UN**.

Face to Face Centres



IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report

❖ Context

- Recently, a report curated by the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** rang alarm that several disasters induced by climate change are likely in the next two decades even if greenhouse gas emission is reduced.

❖ Key Highlights

- The latest warnings from the second part of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report talks about the **impact of climate change, vulnerabilities and risks, and adaptation options.**
- The **first part**, centered around climate change' scientific basis, was released last August.
- The **third installment**, set to come out in April, will look into the possibilities of reducing emissions.

❖ Major Findings of The Report

- **Irreversible impact of climate change:**
 - The report says, if the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold is breached, even if temporarily, there are likely to be **"additional severe impacts"**, some of them irreversible.
- **Increased climate risks for coastal areas:**
 - Risks for society will increase, including to infrastructure and low-lying coastal settlements," the IPCC report says.
- **Interlinking and multiplying hazard:**
 - **Multiple climate hazards** will occur simultaneously, and multiple climatic and non-climatic risks will interact, resulting in compounding overall risk and risks cascading across sectors and regions.
- **Reduced resilience and adaptation capacity:**
 - Capacity to adapt to the rising temperatures was already getting weaker, for living beings as well as natural systems, and it **would reduce further with rising temperatures.**
- **Existing adaptation gap:**
 - There are **large gaps in the adaptation** actions that are being taken and the efforts that are required. It says these gaps are a result of **"lack of funding, political commitment, reliable information, and sense of urgency.**

❖ New Features of The Report

- For the first time, it has **assessed climate change's regional and sectoral impacts.**
- It has included vulnerabilities of, and risks to, mega-cities across the world.
 - It has warned that Mumbai was at high risk of a sea-level rise and flooding, while Ahmedabad faced a serious heatwave danger.
- For the first time, the report has **looked at its health impacts.**
 - It has found that **climate change led to higher vector- and water-borne diseases such as dengue or malaria, especially in Asia's sub-tropical regions.**
 - Deaths related to respiratory, circulatory, diabetic, and infectious diseases, and **infant mortality are likely to go up** with a rise in temperature.

❖ About IPCC

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the **United Nations body** for assessing the science related to climate change.
- **Established in 1988** by the **WMO and UNEP.**
- IPCC assessments **provide a scientific basis for governments** at all levels to **develop climate related policies.**
- It **does not conduct original research** nor **monitor climate change**, but rather undertakes a periodic, systematic review of all relevant published literature.

News in Between the Lines

Bilateral Swap Arrangements



❖ Context

- Recently, **India and Japan** renewed their bilateral swap arrangements to the extent of \$75 billion.

❖ Key Highlights

- The BSA was negotiated between India and Japan during the Indian prime minister's visit to Japan in **2018.**
- Consequently, the swap arrangement was signed to the tune of \$75 billion in October 2020, to bring greater stability to foreign exchange.

❖ About BSA

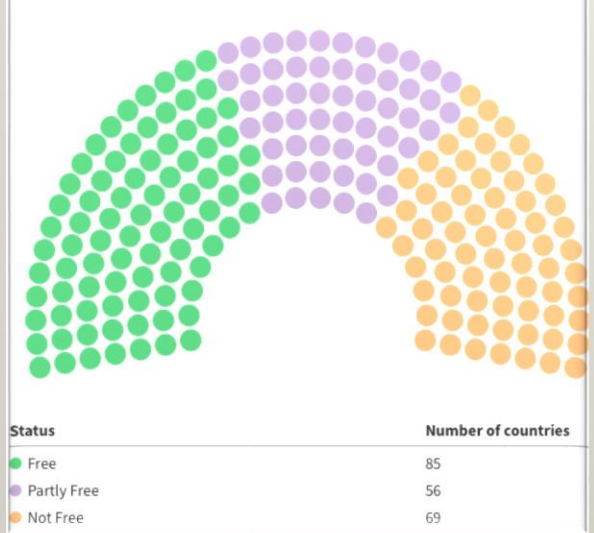
- BSA is a **two-way arrangement where both authorities can swap their local currencies** in exchange for dollars.
- This means, **India can acquire dollars from Japan in exchange for rupees.** And, conversely, Japan can also seek dollars from India in exchange for yen.

Face to Face Centres



Freedom of the World Report

Proportion of countries that are free, partly free and not free in 2022



❖ Context

- According to the findings in the **Freedom of the World report**, India, for the second consecutive year, continues not to be completely free country,

❖ Key Highlights

- This year, **India has dropped a point to score 66 on 100**, compared to 2021.
 - India's freedom scores are similar to that of **Bolivia, Hungary and Albania**.
- While the reports until 2020 have called India a free country, the **scores are consistently dropping since 2017**.
- While **half a decade ago, India scored 77 on 100**, the score dropped to 75 in 2019 and 71 in 2020.
- Previously, India's status was marked as **partially free, from 1992 to 1998**.
- **Finland, Sweden and Norway have achieved a perfect 100**, besides **New Zealand, Canada, Uruguay, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and Denmark**.

❖ About Freedom in the World Report

- **Published by-** US-based non-profit organization **Freedom House**, funded by the US government.
- It is an annual global report on **political rights and civil liberties**,
- It is composed of **numerical ratings and descriptive texts** for each country and a select group of territories. The 2022 edition covers developments in **195 countries and 15 territories** from January 1, 2021.
- Countries are declared as **"free", "partly free" or "not free"**.

Rashtriya Vayoshree Yojana



❖ Context

- The Ministry of **Social Justice and Empowerment** will distribute 4,800 daily living aids and assistive devices among 895 senior citizen beneficiaries under **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)**.

❖ About Rashtriya Vayoshree Yojna

- **Launched in 2017**.
- **Implemented by** - Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (**ALIMCO**), a PSU Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **Type-** It is a central sector scheme
- It is **funded from the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund** which was notified in the year 2016.
 - All unclaimed amounts from small savings accounts, PPF and EPF are transferred to this fund.
- **Aim**
 - To provide **Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices** for Senior citizens belonging to BPL category.
 - The aids and assistive devices, viz walking sticks, elbow crutches, walkers/crutches, tripods/quad pods, hearing aids, wheelchairs, artificial dentures and spectacles are provided to eligible beneficiaries.

Montreux Convention

❖ Context

- **Turkey** officially recognised **Russia's attacks on Ukraine** as a **"state of war"** and said it was implementing the convention.

❖ Key Highlights

- The **1936 Montreux Convention** governs the **free movement of commercial ships in peacetime** through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits and grants **Turkey the right to block warships in wartime** if threatened.
- Ships of both the countries would be blocked by Turkey.
- Ukraine had earlier officially asked Turkey to close the Dardanelles strait - and thus access to the Black Sea - to Russian ships.
- Turkey has strong relations with both Russia and Ukraine



❖ Bosphorus strait

- The Bosphorus strait, also known as the **Strait of Istanbul**, is a narrow, natural strait dividing Turkey by separating Anatolia from Thrace.
- It forms part of the continental boundary between Asia and Europe.
- It is the **world's narrowest strait used for international navigation**.
- It connects the **Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara**.

❖ Dardanelles strait

- The strait connects **Aegean Sea with Sea of Marmara**.
- Both the Bosphorus & Dardanelles strait are known as Turkish straits.

BPKP scheme



❖ Context

- The Centre is planning to **enhance the subsidy on "natural farming"** by **50 per cent** by **re-launching** the scheme on a **mission mode** in select blocks.

❖ About the scheme

- **Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Padhati (BPKP)** was introduced as a **sub-scheme of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) in 2020-21**.
- The scheme aims to promote **traditional indigenous practices**.
- It mainly emphasises on **exclusion of all synthetic chemical inputs** and promotes **on-farm biomass recycling** with major stress on **biomass mulching**; use of **cow dung-urine formulations**; **plant-based preparations** and time to time working of **soil for aeration**.
- Under the scheme, Centre releases about **₹12,200/hectare for a period of three years for cluster formation**, capacity building and continuous hand holding. In the **2022-23 Budget**, both the **BPKP and PKVY** have been **subsumed under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)**.

❖ Food security and Natural & Organic Farming

- **Srilanka** had earlier **banned chemical fertilisers** in order to become the **world's first 100% organic country**. However, the consequent upon the resultant **food crisis**, Srilanka had to partially **uplift the ban** and announce a **compensation package** of \$200 MN to rice farmers.
- According to **India's parliamentary standing committee report**, about **290 districts in India** account for consumption of **85 % of fertilisers** used in the farm sector.
- While promoting organic and natural farming, the **government may not touch these districts** initially as they also contribute to the overall food production. Instead, initially, the focus would be on those **areas which have been practising natural farming** and there is **potential to achieve the target** at the earliest.

Hit & Run Solatium



❖ Context

- The compensation to the kin of **hit-and-run victims** will be increased sharply by eight-fold to Rs 2 lakh in case of death from **April 1**, according to a notification by the **Road Transport and Highways Ministry**.
- The solatium to a person sustaining grievous injuries in a **hit-and-run case** will increase to Rs 50,000 from the current Rs 12,500.

❖ Key Highlights

- The scheme may be called the '**Compensation to Victims of Hit and Run Motor Accidents Scheme**', **2022** and the **Solatium Scheme, 1989** will be superseded by this new scheme from April 1, 2022, onwards.
- Under the scheme, the ministry has come up with the procedure for detailed investigations of road accidents, **Detailed Accident Report (DAR)** and its reporting along with timelines for different stakeholders for quick settlements of claims. The government will set up a Motor Vehicles Accident Fund, which will be used for providing compensation in case of hit and run accidents and treatment for accident victims.

