



Kashi Tamil Sangamam

❖ Context

- The month-long Kashi Tamil Sangamam begins in Varanasi.

Key highlights

- It is being organised by the **Ministry of Education**.
- It will celebrate the many aspects of the historical and civilisational connection between India's North and South.
- Some 2,400 people from Tamil Nadu will be taken to **Varanasi** in groups for visits that will last eight days and will include, besides an immersive local experience, trips to **Ayodhya and Prayagraj**.
- **BHU and IIT-Madras** are knowledge partners for the event, and the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, Railways, Textiles and Food Processing have been roped in as stakeholders, besides the government of Uttar Pradesh.

Connection between Kashi & Tamil region

- There are hundreds of Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu that bear the name of Kashi.
- The Pandyas had built the **Kasi Viswanathar Temple in Tenkasi** in southwestern Tamil Nadu for devotees who could not visit Kashi.

- **Adhivir Ram Pandyan**, after returning from a pilgrimage to Kashi, constructed another Shiva temple in Tenkasi in the 19th century.
- According to legends, **King Parakrama Pandya**, who ruled over the region around Madurai in the **15th century**, wanted to build a temple to Lord Shiva.
- He travelled to Kashi to bring back a lingam.
- While returning, he stopped to rest under a tree — but when he tried to continue his journey, the cow carrying the lingam refused to move.
- Parakrama Pandya understood this to be the Lord's wish, and installed the lingam there, a place that came to be known as **Sivakasi**.
- **Sant Kumara Gurupara from Thoothukudi district** had negotiated with the princely state of Kashi to get a place for the **consecration of Kedarghat and Vishvesvaralingam** in Varanasi.
- He also composed **Kashi Kalambagam**, a collection of grammar poems on Kashi.

Drug (Price Control Order) & NPPA

❖ Context

- The new **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)**, released by the Union Health Ministry in September, has now been brought under the **Drug (Prices Control) Order 2013**.

Key highlights

- The gazette notification, **Drug (Prices Control) Amendment Order 2022**, was issued by the **Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers**, in exercise of the powers conferred by **Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act**.
- The order **fixes ceiling prices based on average cost to retailers**.
- The ceiling price is **determined** by calculating the average price to retailers of all generics and branded generics with market share of more than 1% and then adding a small retailer margin to it.
- This current revision is likely to bring down the cost of newer therapies for **diabetes & cancer**.
- With the inclusions, the **NLEM has 384 drugs now**.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)

- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), is an attached office constituted in 1997 **under the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers**.
- It is responsible for **implementing the Drug (Price Control) order**.
- Its other important functions include -
 - To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps;
 - To collect/ maintain data on production, exports and imports, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations;
 - To undertake and/ or sponsor relevant studies in respect of pricing of drugs/ pharmaceuticals;
 - To render advice to the Central Government on changes/ revisions in the drug policy.

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RCS levy & VGF

❖ Context

➤ The **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA)** will increase the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) levy.

Key highlights

- The RCS levy, **introduced from Dec-2017**, is charged from airlines flying major routes in order to fund the country's regional connectivity programme **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)**.
- UDAN is a **self-financing scheme**.
- The levy will be towards **viability gap funding** for participating carriers, especially with new routes opening up.
- **Airlines in turn charge passengers ₹50 towards the levy**, as part of the total air fare along with other fare components like User Development Fee (paid to the airport) and Passenger Service Fee (paid to the CISF).
- The new levy will increase from ₹5,000, currently for every departure, to ₹10,000 beginning January 1, 2023, and up to March 31, 2023. From April 1, 2023, to April 30, 2027, the levy will further increase to ₹15,000 per departure.

What is Viability Gap Funding (VGF) ?

- Through the facility, the Government is supporting Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects in **infrastructure development which have long gestation periods** and thus are not financially viable on their own.

- **It can take various forms** including but not limited to capital grant, subordinate loans, O&M support grants or interest subsidy.
- A mix of capital and revenue support may also be provided.
- **Funding is disbursed contingent on agreed milestones**, preferably physical, & performance levels being achieved.
- **It is to be provided in instalments, preferably in the form of annuities.**
- 15% of the funding is to be disbursed only after the project is fully functional.

How an implementing agency is selected under VGF?

- The implementing agency must be selected through a transparent and open competitive process.
- The main criterion for selection will be the **extent of viability gap funding required by the private partner** to successfully implement the project.
- The extent of viability gap funding shall be **determined on the basis of the net present value** of the actual viability gap funding required.
- For this purpose and for all calculations under these guidelines, the **rate of discount shall be the rate of interest on 10-year gilts** on the date of submission of the bid.

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Vostro and Nostro Accounts

❖ Context

- Recently, the government announced that **nine special Vostro accounts** have been opened with two Indian banks after permission from the RBI to facilitate trade in rupee in the wake of sanctions on Russia by the US and European countries.

Key Highlights

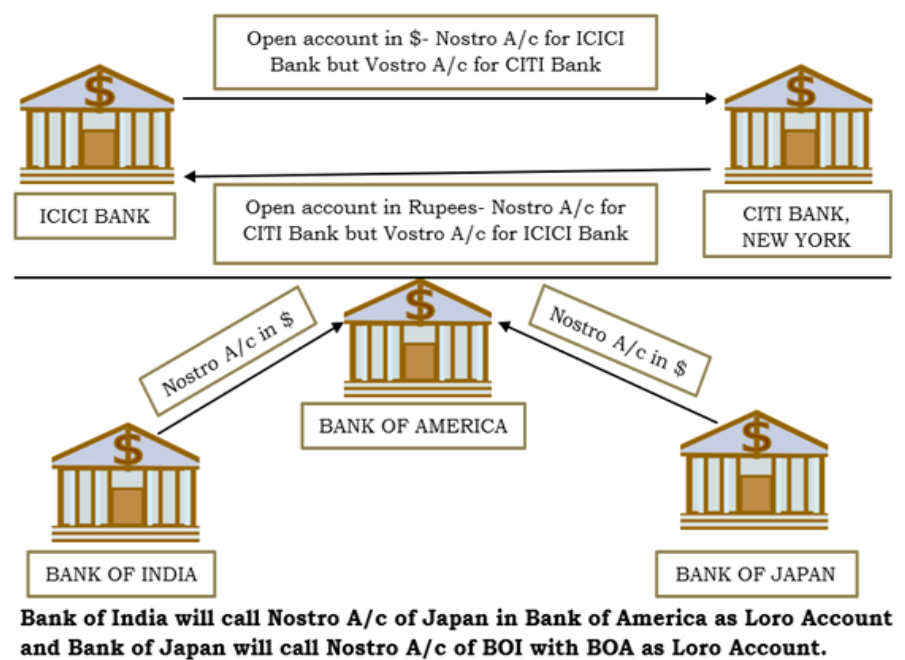
- **Russia becomes first country** to facilitate rupee-based export-import transactions.
- For Rupee trade to happen, India requires a balance of trade because it is not an international currency.
- **Balance of Trade (Net Export)**
 - It is the **difference** between the monetary value of a **nation's exports and imports** over a certain time period.

Vostro Accounts

- A Vostro account is **an account that a domestic bank holds for a foreign bank** in the domestic bank's currency — which, in the case of India, is the rupee.
- The RBI allowed nine such accounts, including **IndusInd Bank and Uco Bank**.
- **In the case of trade with Russia**, payments in rupee for the export and import of goods will go to these Vostro accounts.
- The owners and beneficiaries of this money will be the exporters and importers in both the countries.
- The banks will keep the record of money transferred.

Nostro Accounts

- Two kinds of accounts, Vostro and Nostro, are often mentioned together.
- **Both Vostro and Nostro are technically the same type** of account, with the difference being who opens the account and where.
- Literally, **Nostro means 'ours' and Vostro means 'yours' in Latin**.
- **Example-** The account opened by the Indian bank in the US will be a Nostro account for the Indian bank, while for the US bank, the account will be considered a Vostro account.



Artemis 1

❖ Context

- Recently, NASA's **Artemis 1 mission** launched from Launch Complex 39B of the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on November 16.

About Artemis 1 Mission

- NASA's Artemis mission is touted as the **next generation of lunar exploration**.
- It is named after the twin sister of Apollo from Greek mythology. Artemis is also the goddess of the moon.
- Artemis I is the **first of NASA's deep space exploration systems**.
- It is an **uncrewed space mission** where the **spacecraft will launch on Space Launch System (SLS)** — the most powerful rocket in the world.
- It will **travel 2,80,000 miles** from the earth for over four to six weeks during the course of the mission.

- Artemis 2 is the second scheduled flight of the Artemis program.
- The Artemis 2 launch date is tentatively set for 2024.
- **Aim of the Mission**
 - To **land humans on the moon by 2024**, and it also plans to **land the first woman and first person of color on the moon**.
 - To contribute to **scientific discovery and economic benefits** and **inspire a new generation of explorers**.
- NASA will **establish an Artemis Base Camp** on the surface and a **gateway in lunar orbit** to aid exploration by robots and astronauts.

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- The **Orion spacecraft** is going to remain in space without docking to a space station, longer than any ship for astronauts has ever done before.
- **The Space Launch System (SLS) Rocket-**
 - The SLS rocket has been designed for space missions beyond low-earth orbit and can carry crew or cargo to the moon and beyond.

- The gateway is a critical component of NASA's sustainable lunar operations and will serve as a **multi-purpose outpost orbiting the moon.**

Other Space Agencies Involved in the Mission

- **Canadian Space Agency**
 - It will provide advanced robotics for the gateway.
- **European Space Agency**
 - It will provide the International Habitat and the ESPRIT module, which will deliver additional communications capabilities among other things.
- **Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency**
 - It plans to contribute habitation components and logistics resupply.

News in Between the Lines

Regulatory Assets



❖ Context

- The **Ministry of Power** has asked all **State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs)** to liquidate all Regulatory Assets within 30 days and not to create more.

❖ Key highlights

- A regulatory asset is created when **state regulators defer costs incurred** by them to be recovered through future hikes in electricity tariffs.
- It is prohibited under the law except under exceptional circumstances.
- As per the Electricity Act 2003, and the Revised Tariff Policy 2016, the tariff is required to be cost effective.
- Often **SERCs do not increase tariffs to match the increasing costs of discoms, in order to shield consumers from tariff shocks** and instead keep deferring these costs.
- According to a media report, regulatory assets of discoms have cumulatively risen to **Rs 88,720 crore as of 30 June, 2022.**

Ministerial consultations on climate finance



❖ Context

- **India and Australia** will co-lead ministerial consultations on key outstanding issues for **climate finance** at the UN climate conference, COP27.

❖ Key highlights

- **Five ministerial groups** have been constituted to iron out outstanding differences on different negotiating tracks — **mitigation, adaptation, climate finance, loss and damage, and carbon markets.**
- Differences that remain unresolved by the negotiators are kicked up to the ministerial level to look for political solutions and compromises.
- These consultations are **informal in nature.**

The 2022 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change report

❖ Context

- A report by Lancet - "**Health at the Mercy of Fossil Fuels**", has traced in detail the intimate link between changing weather events and their impact on the health of people.

❖ Key highlights

- It points out that the world's reliance on fossil fuels **increases the risk of disease, food insecurity and other illnesses related to heat.**

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- The changing climate is affecting the spread of infectious disease, raising the risk of emerging diseases and co-epidemics.
- Higher temperatures threaten crop yields directly, with the growth season shortening for many cereal crops.
- A health-centred response to the coexisting climate, energy, and cost-of-living crisis provides an opportunity to deliver a healthy, low-carbon future.

Patan Patola



❖ Context

- Recently, Prime Minister of India gifted ‘Patan Patola Dupatta’ (scarf) to Italian PM Giorgia Meloni.

❖ Key Highlights

- The ancient art of double ikat or Patola woven in pure silk **dates back to the 11th century**.
- The Patola fabrics bear an **equal intensity of colors and design** on both sides.
- This peculiar quality has its origins in an **intricate and difficult technique of dyeing** or knot dyeing, known as ‘**bandhani**’, on the warp and weft separately before weaving.
- One of the major practitioners of the dwindling art form is the **Salvi family from North Gujarat**.

‘Shield’ Fund



❖ Context

- Recently, **G7 and the vulnerable 20 (V20) of 58 climate vulnerable economies** officially launched the Global Shield against Climate Risks at COP 27.

❖ Key Highlights

- It is an **initiative for pre-arranged financial support** designed to be quickly deployed in times of climate disasters.
- The Global Shield is among the **first concrete mechanisms for climate funding - money that was meant to flow from developed nations to developing** and at-risk countries but has largely been lacking.
- However, the new scheme is **structured in an insurance mechanism** that experts expressed skepticism over.
- Initial **contributions include around 170 million euros** from Germany and more than 40 million euros from other countries.
- In addition, a broad coalition of countries, multilateral institutions, non-state and private sector partners has underlined institutional commitment to Global Shield.
- The first recipients of Global Shield packages will include **Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Fiji, Ghana, Pakistan, the Philippines and Senegal**.

Action on Water Adaptation or Resilience (AWARe)

❖ Context

- Recently, **AWARe initiative was launched, at COP27**, to address water related challenges and solutions across climate change adaptation.

❖ Key Highlights

- This new partnership is between the **World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and Egyptian Presidency**.
- It is centered around embedding water management in national climate adaptation efforts.

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- This initiative is now open for governments to sign up.
- The initiative sets out **three priorities for governments**, namely
 - Decreasing water loss and waste and improving water access.
 - Collaborating on water-related climate adaptation.
 - Recognising the link between action on water and the delivery of key climate goals, as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.

Digital Shakti 4.0



❖ Context

- Recently, The **National Commission for Women (NCW)** has launched the fourth phase of **Digital Shakti Campaign** for digitally empowering and skilling women and girls.

❖ Key Highlights

- The **Digital Shakti 4.0** is focused on making women digitally skilled and aware to stand up against any illegal/inappropriate activity online.
- NCW launched the campaign in collaboration with **CyberPeace Foundation and Meta**.
- Digital Shakti **started in June 2018** to help women across the nation.
- Its objective is to raise the awareness level on the digital front, build resilience, and fight cyber-crime in the most effective way

Through this project, **over 3 Lakh women across India** have been made aware of cyber safety tips and tricks, data privacy and usage of technology for their benefits.

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