

- ▶ U.S. led resolution on **promotion of safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems** will benefit sustainable development for all. It was co-sponsored or backed by **more than 120 other Member States**.
- ⊕ This resolution helps to ensure that **benefits of AI reach countries from all regions** and at all levels of development and **focuses on capacity building and bridging digital divides**, especially for developing countries.

▶ **Key highlights of resolution**

- ⊕ **Encourages Member States** from all regions and countries within their respective roles including private sector, civil society, etc. to develop and support regulatory approaches related to safe AI system.
- ⊕ Recognizes **data is fundamental** to development and operation of AI systems.
- ⊕ **Human rights and fundamental freedoms** must be respected, protected and promoted throughout life cycle of AI systems. Encourages continued efforts by international community to **promote inclusive research, mapping and analysis** that benefit all parties on potential applications that AI systems can have in development of existing and new and emerging technologies. Promoting AI systems that advance, protect and preserve **linguistic and cultural diversity**.
- ⊕ **Other steps taken to promote AI:** European Union AI Act; Bletchley Declaration for AI; Global Partnership on AI New Delhi Declaration etc.

**United Nation General Assembly (UNGA)**

- ▶ **Established in 1945 under Charter of United Nations**, it occupies central position as chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of UN. Comprised of all **193 Members of UN**.
- ▶ It can grant **observer status** to non-member States.
- ▶ **Inter-governmental organisations can seek observer status** in UNGA.
- ▶ Permanent Observers may participate in sessions and workings of General Assembly and **maintain missions at UN Headquarters**.

**released**

- ▶ Report recognises water's critical role in ensuring peace and prosperity (refer to the box) but finds that there is **no conclusive evidence that the next wars will be over water**.

▶ **Key highlights of report**

**Current Status of water resources**

- ◆ **Agriculture** accounts for **70%** of freshwater withdrawals.
- ⊕ ◆ **Lake Chad** has **decreased** in size by **90%** over **60 years**.
- ◆ While cooperation over shared surface water appears to be gaining momentum, **groundwater resources remain grossly neglected**.
- Attaining SDG 6 (water for all by 2030) is challenging**
- ◆ **50% of the world's population experiences severe water scarcity** for at least part of the year.
- ◆ **Northwest India and North China** are among world's top three hotspots of **water-related risks to food production**.

⊕ **Prevalence of Water–Prosperity Paradox**

- ◆ **Developed water resource infrastructure can promote growth and prosperity**, however, **only richest countries can afford them**.

- ▶ **Key recommendations:** Sustainable management of water resources can be ensured by:

- ⊕ **Transboundary agreements**.
- ⊕ **Increased private investment** (universal access to water will require an annual investment of around US \$114 billion until 2030).
- ⊕ **Decoupling water and production in Industries**.
  - ◆ For example, **Tata Chemicals cut the use of groundwater by 99.4%** within a year through recycling and water management.

**Linkage of water with peace and prosperity**

**Water and peace:** Water scarcity may lead to

**an increase in local disputes** as being seen in the Sahel region. **Migration** that may increase **tension in settlement areas**. **heightened food insecurity**.

▶ **Water and prosperity:**

- ⊕ Water helps to maintain **environmental integrity**.
- ⊕ In low and lower-middle-income countries **around 70-80% of the jobs are water dependent**.
- ▶ **Water is critical for inclusivity (Girls and women are the first victims of water scarcity as it undermines their education, economic participation and safety)**.

⊕

## (FARM) Programme launched

### Key highlights of FARM

⊖ **About:** FARM, a one of the first such concerted efforts on a global scale, is a **\$379 million** initiative that will **realign financial incentives** to:

- ◆ **Prevent the use** of harmful inputs in food production.
- ◆ **Encourage the adoption** of low and non-chemical alternatives. ⊖

It will support:

- ◆ **Government regulation to phase out persistent organic pollutants (POPs)** -containing agrochemicals and agri-plastics and adopt better management standards.
- ◆ **Strengthening banking, insurance and investment criteria** to improve the availability of effective pest control, production alternatives and trade in sustainable produce.

⊖ **Members:** India, Ecuador, Kenya, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Uruguay and Vietnam.

⊖ **Implementing Agencies:** Led by **UNEP** and implemented by the ADB, UNDP, and UNIDO with execution carried out in-country by **FAO**.

⊖ **Tenure:** 5 Years

### Significance of FARM Initiative:

⊖ **Nearly 4 billion tons of pesticides and 12 billion kg of agricultural plastics** are used every year which has a harmful impact on health and environment.

⊖ **Highly hazardous pesticides and mismanaged agricultural plastics** release toxic POPs (chemicals which do not break down in the environment and contaminate air, water, and food).

- ◆ **However, currently farmers have little incentive to adopt better practices** as these chemicals are generally cheaper than sustainable alternatives.



Global Environment Facility (GEF)

HQ: Washington, D.C (US)

◆ **Genesis:** Established during 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

◆ **About:** GEF is a **unique partnership of 18 agencies** — including UN agencies, multilateral development banks, national entities and international NGOs **working with member countries** to address the world's most challenging environmental issues.

**Role:** Serves as **financial mechanism** for five international environmental conventions: **Minamata**

Convention on Mercury, **Stockholm**

⊖ Convention on POPs,

⊖ UN Convention on **Biological Diversity (UNCBD)**,

⊖ UN Convention to **Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** and UN

⊖ Framework Convention on **Climate Change (UNFCCC)**

⊖ **GEF Trustee: World Bank**

◆ **Member countries:** More than 180 countries (including India)

## Supreme Court Relooks Earlier Directions, considers lifting ban on transmission lines through Great Indian Bustard (GIB) habitats

◆ SC constituted an **expert committee** to examine **feasibility** and extent of installing **overhead and underground powerlines** in **GIB habitats**.

In April, 2021, **SC had ordered power companies in Rajasthan and Gujarat to make the high-tension power lines underground**

⊖ so that GIB do not get caught in the web.

◆ Committee is headed by Director, **Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun** and is required to submit its report to Court on or before July 31, 2024.

### Reasons for reconsidering the earlier direction

Areas is critical to protection of GIB

⊖ ◆ With the exception of some areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat, **90% of GIB's habitat has vanished**.

- ◆ Due to their **lack of frontal vision**, birds are **unable to see overhead powerlines** in front of them from a distance and are **too heavy to move around them in close quarters**.

Area falling in GIB habitat is also  
⊖ **crucial for development of solar energy sector and undergrounding power lines are difficult as:**

- ◆ It will **put huge fiscal burden** (around ₹55,000 crore).
- ◆ Underground cable would pass through **agricultural fields** which is a **safety concern** as the cable might get punctured due to agricultural activities.

### About Great Indian Bustard



◆ **Habitat include arid and semi-arid grasslands**, open country with thorn scrub, tall grass interspersed with cultivation. It avoids irrigated areas.

◆ **Rajasthan has the highest population** and it is endemic to Indian Sub-continent.

◆ **IUCN Status: Critically Endangered**

◆ **Important Sites:** Desert National Park Sanctuary (Rajasthan)

## Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS), 2024

- MHI has proposed to **implement EMPS 2024 after end of tenure of Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME-II)** on 31st March 2024.
- **Key highlights of EMPS, 2024**
  - ⊖ **Nodal Ministry:** MHI.
  - ⊖ **Aim:** Faster adoption of **electric two wheeler (e-2W)** and **three wheeler (e-3W)** to provide impetus to green mobility and development of Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturing ecosystem in country.
  - ⊖ **Tenure:** 4 months (1st April 2024 till 31st July 2024).
  - ⊖ **Components of Scheme**
    - ◆ **Subsidies:** Demand incentives for **e-2W and e-3W**.
    - ◆ **Administration of Scheme** including IEC (Information, Education & Communication) activities and fee for Project Management Agency.
  - ⊖ **Conditions to avail Demand Incentives:**
    - ◆ **Original Equipment Manufacturer** is required to be **registered with MHI** and each of their EV models will need to be approved by MHI
    - ◆ Each vehicle model needs to **satisfy minimum technical eligibility criteria** with regard to vehicles efficiency.
  - ⊖ **Eligibility:** Vehicles which are **registered as Motor Vehicle as per Central Motor Vehicle Rules** as well as
    - ⊖ **Vehicles fitted with only advanced batteries.**
  - ⊖ **Project Implementation and Sanctioning Committee** headed by Secretary (Heavy Industries) constituted for **overall monitoring, sanctioning and implementation of EMPS.**

## Bhutan

- **Key highlights of visit**
  - ⊖ Prime Minister of India became the **first foreign government leader to receive Bhutan's highest civilian award, 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo'**.
  - ⊖ India will **provide Rs.10,000 crore as financial support** to Bhutan over next five years to bolster cooperation in areas like energy, space etc.
  - ⊖ Establishing two rail links including **Kokrajhar-Gelephu** and **Banarhat-Samtse to improve connectivity.**
  - ⊖ Both sides look forward to commissioning of **1020 MW Punatsangchhu-II hydropower project** in 2024.
- **Challenges in India-Bhutan Relationship**
  - ⊖ Issues in **Hydropower trade**, i.e. not able to fairly negotiate power tariff.
  - ⊖ Bhutan acting as **Hideout for militants in North-East.**
  - ⊖ Increased financial burden on Bhutan as India moved away from 60:40 model (60% grant, 40% loan) to 30:70 model.
  - ⊖ **Delay in completion of projects** by India e.g. Punatsangchhu II.
- **Implications of increasing China's role in Bhutan for India**
  - ⊖ Bhutan-China negotiated **Dhoklam border deal will have Security implications for India**, due to its close proximity to Siliguri Corridor.
  - ⊖ Improved relationship with China can **impose threat to India's Economic and Energy trade relationship** with Bhutan.
  - ⊖ Close ties with China can **impact traditional pro-India foreign policy of Bhutan.**

## Also in News

### Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

#### Startup Forum


 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the SCO Startup Forum was organized in New Delhi. ➤

The initiative focused on broadening

#### Startup interactions among the SCO Member States,

- ⊖ Fostering an environment conducive to **innovation, Promoting job creation**, and inspiring young talent to develop innovative solutions.
- The creation of a **Special Working Group for Startups and Innovation (SWG)** at the Summit of SCO Heads of State in Samarkand (Uzbekistan), in September 2022, was a **key step in the development of the SCO Startup Forum.**
- ⊖ The SWG is **permanently chaired by India.**
- ⊖ It is created with the vision of **promoting collaboration among SCO Member States** and accelerating regional economic development.

### Bima Sugam

 Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) approved the setting up of Bima Sugam.

#### About Bima Sugam

- It is formed under **Section 8 of Companies Act, 2013** as a **not-for-profit company.**
- ⊖ It is an **insurance e-market** with open standards and an interoperable platform.
- ⊖ Act as a **one-stop solution for all Insurance stakeholders** vis-a-vis customers, insurers, intermediaries, or insurance intermediaries.
- ⊖ **Available free of cost** to consumers.
- ⊖ **Enables insurance companies to validate and authenticate data** from multiple touchpoints in real time.
- ⊖ It aims to achieve the vision of **"Insurance for all by 2047"**.



## Postal ballots

- **Election Commission has notified** Postal ballots for essential services workers.
- Postal ballots or vote by post **allow eligible voters to exercise their franchise** when they are unable to cast their votes in person.
- **Eligible voters** for Postal ballots are
  - ⊕ **Service voters** (member of armed forces, Armed Police Force of a State, government employees, etc.)
  - ⊕ **Absentee voters** (senior citizens, person with disability, etc.)
  - ⊕ Electors on **election duty** or under **preventive detention**.
- **Paper used in Postal Ballot is different from the one used in the EVM.**



## Earth Hour

- Earth Hour" is set to be observed on **March 23 from 8.30pm to 9.30pm (IST).**
- **Earth Hour**
  - ⊕ Earth Hour was famously started as a **lights-out event in Sydney, Australia in 2007.**
  - ⊕ It is a global event observed **annually on the last Saturday of March.**
  - ⊕ It is organized by the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF).**
  - ⊕ It is symbolic to **raise awareness about climate change and promote energy conservation.**
  - ⊕ Beyond the hour, Earth Hour **inspires people to take further action for a sustainable future.**



## Shiva and Shakti: Building blocks of Milky Way

- European Space Agency's astrometry satellite Gaia have discovered the earliest building blocks of Milky Way, named them Shiva and Shakti.
- ⊕ Shiva and Shakti appear to be the **remnants of two galaxies that merged between 12 and 13 billion years ago to form Milky way.**
- ⊕ **Shakti stars orbit a little further from Milky Way's centre and in more circular orbits than Shiva stars.**
- By studying these, scientists can gain insights into Milky Way's formation process.



## Sher Singh Shah (1912-1991)

- ⊕ **About Sher Singh Shah**
  - ⊕ He was a freedom fighter born in **Rudraprayag district of Uttrakhand.**
  - ⊕ His father's name is **Padam Singh Shah**, and his mother's name is Devki Devi.
- **Contribution**
  - He secretly **spreading awareness** about the freedom struggle.
  - He took an **oath in the Lalita Mai temple** in Nala, declaring that he would serve his country for his entire life. He led **Quit India movement(1942)** from **Kedar Ghati(Uttrakhand)**
  - He fought against the British regime at **Kasaragod and Barmwadi**
- **Awards:** Government of India honoured him with a Copper Plate in 1972.
- **Values:** Courage,Patriotism,Perseverance etc.



## Conference of Parties (COP) Presidencies' Troika

- COP Presidencies' Troika announced to **cut emissions in line with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.**
  - ⊕ It is aligned with **Nationally-Determined Contributions (NDCs)** under Paris Agreement by early 2025.
- **UAE, Azerbaijan, and Brazil** are the members of triokia who are the **Presidencies of COP28, COP29 and COP30 respectively.**
- **Troika will focus on** Catalyzing the mobilization and provision of technical and financial resources to further stimulate ambition in NDCs.



## Environmental Clearance (EC) for extracting earth

- SC struck down notification exempting green clearance for extraction of ordinary earth for linear projects like laying of roads and pipelines.
  - ⊕ **Exemption notification** was issued by Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change in 2020.
- About Judgement**
- Exemption was termed "**Completely Unguided**" and Extraction of earth in an indiscriminate manner is wholly **arbitrary and violative of Article 14 of Constitution.**
  - ⊕ Notification was **non-compliant with Environmental Protection Rules.**
  - ⊕ SC observed that "**linear projects**" **have not been defined** and thus making it vague and exploitative.
  - ⊕ Now, projects shall require prior EC from concerned regulatory authority.



## Black Panther

A black panther was recently spotted in Munnar (Kerala). **About Black Panther**

- ⊕ Black panthers are **not a distinct species**, but 'melanistic' **members of the genus Panthera** (lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and snow leopards).
  - ◆ Genetic mutation is the cause of such **melanin.**
- ⊕ In practice, the term **black panther only really applies to leopards and jaguars**, as fully black individuals don't occur in the other species.
- IUCN red list:**
  - ◆ *Panthera pardus* (vulnerable)
  - ◆ *Panthera onca* (Not threatened)