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## Current Affairs - 16 November 2024

### PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACCELERATED INNOVATION AND RESEARCH (PAIR) INITIATIVE



- It is an initiative of the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**.
- **Objectives:**
  - **Stimulate scientific innovation in institutions** with limited research in a **mentorship mode** by leveraging the knowledge and expertise of top-ranking institutions.
  - **Support internationally competitive research** with substantial impact and outcome.
  - Foster successful and productive collaborative networks between diverse institutions.
  - Propel the advancement of institutions by (i) upscaling and building advanced research infrastructure and capabilities, (ii) enhancing the quality of research, and (iii) facilitating the infusion of best practices and research culture.
- While being **aligned with** the objectives set by the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, the PAIR programme will **cultivate research excellence in central and state public universities by fostering collaborations with top-tier institutions via a mentorship-driven hub and spoke model**.
  - The **hubs will guide emerging institutions (spokes) in research activities**, and **provide access to harness their resources and expertise**, thus bridging the gap between institutions and nurturing a robust research ecosystem in India.
  - **In the first phase, the Hub institutions** would include the **top 25 National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) overall ranking** as well as **Institutions of National Importance within the top 50 NIRF overall ranking**.

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- The **spoke institutions** will include, **Central and State Public Universities** and **select NITs and IITs**.
  - Eligibility conditions would be expanded to include other universities and institutions in the subsequent phases.
- **Each PAIR network** would consist of **one hub and up to seven spoke institutions**.
- Only one proposal per hub institution is allowed, with a mandatory involvement of multi-departmental faculty teams from spoke institutions.
- Regional diversity among participants will also be ensured.
- The programme would help stimulate innovation in emerging institutions by leveraging mentorship from high-ranking institutions.

### Key Facts about Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):

- The ANRF has been established with the **ANRF 2023 Act**.
- The ANRF aims to **seed, grow, and promote** research and development (**R&D**) and foster a **culture of research and innovation** throughout India's universities, colleges, research institutions, and R&D laboratories.
- ANRF will act as an **apex body to provide high-level strategic direction of scientific research** in the country as per recommendations of the **National Education Policy (NEP)**.
- With the establishment of ANRF, the **Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB)**, established by an act of Parliament in 2008, has been subsumed into ANRF.

ANRF will **forge collaborations among the industry, academia, and government departments** and research institutions and create an interface mechanism for the participation and contribution of industries and state governments in addition to the scientific and line ministries

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### WHAT IS THE ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC)?



- It is a **regional economic forum** established in 1989 with the purpose of **promoting free trade and investment** and enhancing cooperation in social and development areas to advance prosperity, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth in the region.

#### What Does APEC Do?

- APEC ensures that **goods, services, investments**, and people move easily across borders.
- Members facilitate this trade **through faster customs procedures** at borders, more **favorable business climates** behind the border, and **aligning regulations and standards** across the region.
- APEC has contributed to the **reduction of barriers to trade** in the region over time, leading to the expansion of economic growth and international trade.

#### Member Countries:

- Currently, APEC has **21 members**. The 21 members are **not necessarily 21 countries**.
- **Each member is considered an “economy”** since APEC is primarily concerned with trade and economic dealings.
- The grouping's **current members** are **Australia, Brunei, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan**.
- The 21 APEC member economies account for nearly 40 percent of the global population, almost half of the global trade, and approximately 60 percent of global GDP.
- APEC holds **annually the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting**, attended by the **heads of government** of all APEC members.



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- **Decisions** made within APEC are reached by **consensus**, and **commitments** are undertaken on a **voluntary basis**.
- APEC's activities are coordinated by the **APEC Secretariat located in Singapore**.
- In 2021, the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting endorsed the **Putrajaya Vision 2040**, providing a future direction for APEC which focuses on 3 priorities:
  - open trade and investment;
  - innovation and digitalization;
  - sustainable and inclusive economic growth;

### EXERCISE POORVI PRAHAR



The Indian Army is conducting a high-intensity tri-service exercise, '**Poorvi Prahar**', in the forward areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

- It aims to **hone the combat effectiveness of the Army, Navy, and Air Force** in executing Integrated Joint Operations in the challenging mountainous terrain of the region, enhancing inter-service coordination and operational readiness.
- It brings together a wide spectrum of cutting-edge military platforms and systems, showcasing India's advancements in modern warfare technology.
- A key feature of this exercise is the integration of innovative technologies that are reshaping the future of military operations.
- Troops are operating and **refining skills with Swarm Drones, First Person View (FPV) Drones, Loitering Munitions**, and cutting-edge technologies that dramatically enhance situational awareness, precision strikes and operational flexibility.
- The incorporation of these tools into the exercise reflects the military's commitment to leveraging next-generation technologies to bolster defence capabilities.
- It serves as a platform for further **absorption and integration of advanced technological** tools and joint command structures that improve collaboration across services.



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- One of the core components of the exercise is the development of a **Common Operating Picture (COP)** through joint control structures that optimise coordination between ground, air, and naval forces.
  - By conducting Ex Poorvi Prahar, the Indian Armed Forces are enhancing their ability to execute seamless, multi-domain operations across land, air, and sea, reinforcing India's strategic deterrence capabilities.
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### AI-ENABLED E-TARANG SYSTEM



- It is a unique software, developed in collaboration with **Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N)**.
- It will improve planning for the **interference-free operation of defence equipment** during both wartime and peacetime.
- It will enable automated, efficient planning and management of Defence Spectrum, as well as support the development of newer technologies in **higher frequency bands**.
- It is set to support rapid decision-making, thereby allowing seamless integration of newer technologies critical for modern defence applications.

### Key facts about the BISAG-N

- It is an Autonomous Scientific Society of the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)**, Government of India.
  - It undertakes technology development and management, research and development, facilitation of National and international cooperation, capacity building, and support of technology transfer and entrepreneurship development in geospatial technology.
  - The Organisation has three main domain areas: **Satellite Communication, Geo-informatics and Geo-spatial technology**.
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### CHALLENGES IN URBAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has flagged significant concerns about the health of urban local bodies (ULBs) in 18 states, which cater to 241 million residents.

The report reveals systemic weaknesses in financial management, staffing, and functional autonomy, undermining the goals of the **74th Constitutional Amendment**.

#### What is the 74th Constitutional Amendment?

- **About:** The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of **1992** gave constitutional status to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and established them as the **lowest unit of governance in cities and towns**.
- **Deals with:** It established a **framework for urban governance** in India by **decentralisation** of powers and authority.
- **Constitutional provisions:**
  - **The amendment added Part IX-A to the Constitution**, which deals with municipalities and is made up of **Articles 243-P to 243-ZG**.
  - The amendment mandates the devolution of 18 functions to ULBs [**Schedule 12 (Article 243W)**], including urban planning, public health, and water supply.

#### Need for Robust ULBs:

- With 50% of India's population expected to reside in urban areas by 2050, strong urban governance systems are essential.
- Empowered ULBs can play a **pivotal role in ensuring economic, environmental, and democratic vibrancy in cities**.

#### Key Findings from the CAG Report on ULBs:

- **Incomplete devolution of powers:**
  - The 1992 amendment aimed to decentralise 18 functions to ULBs, but **only 4 functions have been devolved with complete autonomy** after 30 years.

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- **Financial gaps and dependency:**
  - Urban local bodies face a 42% gap between their resources and expenditure.
  - Only 32% of revenue is internally generated, with the rest coming from Union and state government funding.
- **Limited expenditure on development:**
  - Insufficient investment in civic programs **hampers urban growth and quality of life.**
- **Staffing issues:**
  - Urban bodies face an average 37% vacancy rate in sanctioned staff positions.
  - Recruitment powers are restricted, with ULBs in 16 states having limited or no control over staffing.

### Call for Strengthening ULBs:

- **Recommendations by CAG:**
  - **Enhance financial autonomy:** Grant ULBs control over taxation and user charges.
  - **Improve revenue collection mechanisms:** Streamline property tax and other revenue sources.
  - **Focus on fund utilisation:** Ensure optimal use of allocated funds for development.
  - **Strengthen decentralisation:** Revive the agenda of empowering ULBs politically and administratively.

### Conclusion:

- The CAG's findings emphasise the urgent need to revamp the financial and administrative structures of ULBs.
  - Empowering these "first-mile governments" is critical for sustainable urban governance and achieving the goals of the 74th Constitutional Amendment.
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### BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

- Bandhavgarh National Park, located in the Umaria district of Madhya Pradesh, is one of the country's most renowned wildlife reserves.
- Known for its high density of **Bengal tigers** and **rich biodiversity**, the park is a major attraction for wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists.

#### **Geography and Terrain:**

- **Location:** Situated in the Vindhya Hills of Madhya Pradesh.
  - **Area:** Covers an area of approximately **1,536 square kilometres**, including its buffer zones.
  - **Landscape:** Features a mix of rugged hills, dense forests, grasslands, and meadows, with the Bandhavgarh Fort perched atop a prominent hill.
  - **Water Bodies:** The park has several perennial streams and waterholes, ensuring a consistent water supply for its wildlife.
  - **Flora:**
    - Predominantly covered with **Sal forests**, along with grasslands and bamboo stretches.
    - The park also boasts medicinal plants and diverse tree species such as Dhobin, Tendu, and Saja.
  - **Fauna:**
    - **Tigers:** Bandhavgarh is famous for its tiger population, with one of the highest densities in the world.
    - **Other Mammals:** Includes leopards, sloth bears, wild boars, jackals, and various species of deer like sambar and chital.
    - **Birds:** Home to over 250 bird species, including Indian rollers, crested serpent eagles, and paradise flycatchers.
    - **Reptiles:** Houses various snakes, lizards, and other reptiles.
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### NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL (NGT)

- It was established in 2010 under the **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010**.

#### **Objectives:**

- Effective and expeditious disposal of cases that are related to the protection and conservation of the environment, forests, and other natural resources.
- To give relief and compensations for any damages caused to persons and properties.
- To handle various environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- After Australia and New Zealand, India became the third country in the world to establish a specialized environmental tribunal.
- An order/decision/award of the Tribunal is executable as a decree of a civil court.

#### **Mandate of NGT:**

- The NGT has the power to hear all civil cases relating to environmental issues and questions that are linked to the implementation of laws listed in Schedule I of the NGT Act. These include the following:
    - Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
    - Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
    - Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
    - Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
    - Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
    - Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991
    - Biological Diversity Act, 2002
  - This means that any violations pertaining only to these laws, or any order/decision taken by the Government under these laws can be challenged before the NGT.
  - An appeal against order/decision/award of the NGT lies to the Supreme Court, generally within ninety days from the date of communication.
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