PADMA AWARDS

- The **Padma Awards** were established in **1954** alongside the **Bharat Ratna**.
- Initially, Padma Awards had **three classes**: Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg, and Tisra Varg.
- These were **renamed** in **1955** via **Presidential Notification** as: Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri

Padma Awards Categories

- **Padma Vibhushan**: Awarded for **exceptional and distinguished service**.
- **Padma Bhushan**: Conferred for **distinguished service of a high order**.
- **Padma Shri**: Recognises **distinguished service in any field**.

Eligibility Criteria

- **All persons**, regardless of **race, occupation, position or gender**, are **eligible** for the award.
- **Government servants**, including employees of **Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)**, are **not eligible**, **except doctors and scientists**.
- Awards are **normally not conferred posthumously**, but in **highly deserving cases**, exceptions are allowed.
- A **minimum 5-year gap** is required for conferring a **higher category Padma award** upon a previously awarded individual. However, this can be **relaxed by the Awards Committee** in exceptional cases.
- **Nominations are open to the public**, and **self-nomination** is also allowed.

Selection Process

- All nominations are evaluated by the **Padma Awards Committee**, which is **constituted annually by the Prime Minister**.
- The Committee is **headed by the Cabinet Secretary**.

- Its recommendations are **submitted to the Prime Minister and President** for final approval.
- The awards are **presented by the President**, usually in **March or April**.
- Awardees receive a **Sanad (certificate)** signed by the President and a **medallion**.

Other Key Features

- The **total number of Padma awards per year** is capped at **120, excluding**:
  - **Posthumous awards**
  - Awards to **NRIs**, **foreign nationals**, and **Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs)**
- The award **does not constitute a title** and **cannot be used as a prefix or suffix** to the awardee's name.
- **Disciplines covered**: Awards span across **art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service**, among others.

NATIONAL SUPERCOMPUTING MISSION (NSM)

- The **National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)** is a **flagship initiative** launched in **2015** by the Government of India to strengthen the nation's **High-Performance Computing (HPC)**
- It aims to **enhance India's computational capacity** in sectors like **science, technology, academia, research, and industry**, making the country **self-reliant** in supercomputing technologies.
- The mission is **jointly steered** by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** and the **Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY)**, and is **implemented** by **C-DAC, Pune** and **IISc, Bengaluru**.
- The key goal is to **position India globally** among top nations in supercomputing by enabling **research**, reducing **technological import dependence**, and creating a robust **indigenous HPC ecosystem**.

Key Achievements

- **34 supercomputers** have been deployed with a total **computational capacity of 35 Petaflops** across top institutes like **IITs, IISc, and C-DAC**, including institutions in **Tier II and Tier III cities**.
- More than **1 crore computing jobs** have been completed and over **1,500 research papers** published, reflecting substantial **research productivity**.

Indigenisation Milestones

- **"Rudra" HPC servers**, developed indigenously, are the **first HPC-class servers** built in India, matching global standards.
- Supercomputers like **PARAM Rudra** (Pune, Delhi, Kolkata) have been dedicated for **advanced research** in **physics, cosmology, and earth sciences**.
- The **Trinetra** high-speed network (developed under NSM) boosts **data transfer rates** up to **200 Gbps** and is being rolled out in phases – **PoC**, **Trinetra-A** (**100 Gbps**), and **Trinetra-B (200 Gbps)**.

AI Supercomputing: AIRAWAT

- The **AIRAWAT project** is India's **AI-focused supercomputing initiative** under NSM, offering a **common AI computing platform** for start-ups, researchers, and innovation hubs.
- The **Proof of Concept (PoC)** system of AIRAWAT features **200 petaflops** of AI processing power, scalable to **790 AI petaflops**.
- **AIRAWAT secured 75th rank** in the **Top 500 Global Supercomputing List** (ISC 2023, Germany), placing India among the **top AI supercomputing nations**.

Institutional Milestones

- **PARAM Shivay** (2019) at **IIT-BHU** was the **first indigenous supercomputer** under NSM.
- **PARAM Pravega** (2022) at **IISc Bengaluru** is among the **largest academic supercomputers** in India, with **3 petaflops** processing power.

CENTRAL CONSUMER PROTECTION AUTHORITY (CCPA)

- The move is aimed at **protecting consumer rights** and **preventing undue pressure** on consumers to **pay additional charges** during service availing.
- As per law, **no hotel or restaurant** can **force consumers to pay a service charge**, nor can a **service charge** be **collected under any alternative name**.

About Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

- **The CCPA was established under Section 10** of the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**.
- **The Consumer Protection Act, 2019**, which **replaced the 1986 Act**, was **notified on August 9, 2019**, and **came into force on July 20, 2020**.
- **Nodal Ministry**: **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**.

Functions and Powers of CCPA

- **The CCPA protects, promotes, and enforces the rights of consumers** as a class under the Act.
- It **prevents unfair trade practices** and **curbs false or misleading advertisements**.
- The CCPA ensures that **no one publishes or disseminates false or misleading advertisements**.
- **The CCPA can initiate class-action suits**, including **recalls**, **refunds**, and **cancellation of licenses**, when necessary.
- **The CCPA can conduct inquiries and investigations** through its **Investigation Wing**, headed by a **Director-General**.
- **Composition of CCPA: A Chief Commissioner heads the CCPA** and has **two other commissioners**:
  - One commissioner deals with **goods-related issues.**
  - The other commissioner handles **service-related complaints.**

WHAT IS GAVI, THE VACCINE ALLIANCE?

Gavi, the international vaccine alliance, is trying to convince President Donald Trump's administration to maintain vital funding for the body by arguing that a donation would boost the US vaccine industry.

- It is an **independent public-private partnership** that was **created in 2000** to **improve access to new and underused vaccines for children living in** the world's **poorest countries.**

- Based in **Geneva, Switzerland,** Gavi brings together public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to vaccines for children, wherever they live.

- It **brings together developing country and donor governments,** the **World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank**, the **vaccine industry, research and technical agencies, civil society** organizations, and **private philanthropists.**

- Gavi's main activities include supporting low- and middle-income countries' access to new and underused vaccines for vulnerable children through **financial support, technical expertise, and market-shaping efforts**, such as **negotiating with manufacturers,** to **help lower the cost of procuring vaccines**.

- By bringing the key stakeholders in global immunisation together around one mission, Gavi combines the technical expertise of the development community with the business know-how of the private sector.

- Since its beginnings, Gavi has vaccinated more than 1.1 billion children and saved an estimated 18.8 million lives (2023 figures).

- Gavi was **one of the organizations leading COVAX**, a **multilateral effort** that supported the equitable development, procurement, and **delivery of COVID-19 vaccines globally** that began in 2020 and ended in 2023.

TRENDS IN WORLD MILITARY EXPENDITURE REPORT 2024

- It is an **annual report** published by the leading **Swedish think tank, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute** (SIPRI).

- It provides a comprehensive analysis of military spending across the globe.

Highlights of 2024 Report:

- The **global defence expenditures** reached **$2.46 trillion in 2024**, an increase from $2.24 trillion in the previous year, bringing the average defence spending to **9% of global GDP,** up from 1.6% in 2022 and 1.8% in 2023.

- **Military spending in Europe (including Russia)** rose by 17 percent to $693 billion and was the **main contributor to the global increase** in 2024.

- **Military spending by the USA rose by 5.7 percent** to reach **$997 billion**, which was **66 percent of total NATO** spending and **37 percent of world military spending** in 2024.

- Military expenditure in the Middle East reached an estimated $243 billion in 2024, an increase of 15 percent from 2023, with Israel and Lebanon emerging as the biggest spenders in the region.

- **60 percent** of the **world's military spending** came from only **five countries** – the **USA (37 percent), China (12 percent), Russia (5.5 percent), Germany (3.3 percent) and India (3.2percent).**

- **India**, the fifth biggest military spender in the world in 2024, increased its spending to **$86.1 billion**, **up by 1.6 percent** from 2023 and by **42 percent from**

- India's military spending in 2024 was nearly **nine times that of Pakistan's**

- China's military spending rose by 7.0 percent to an estimated USD 314 billion, marking three decades of uninterrupted growth. **China alone accounted for half** of the **defence spending across Asia and Oceania.**

THE POST OF DEPUTY SPEAKER IS NOT SYMBOLIC OR OPTIONAL

- The **Office of the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha**, enshrined within the Constitution of India, **holds far more than ceremonial significance.**
- However, **a disturbing trend has emerged in recent years, the persistent vacancy of this vital office**, posing serious questions about constitutional adherence and democratic resilience.

Constitutional Mandate and Historical Significance

- **Constitutional Mandate**
  - Article 93 of the Indian Constitution unequivocally demands **that the House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker.**
  - The language used, particularly the phrase as soon as may be, **implies urgency and necessity, not discretion.**
  - Furthermore**, Article 94 reinforces the continuity of the Deputy Speaker's office until resignation**, removal, or disqualification.
  - Thus, **the framers intended for no disruption in leadership, safeguarding the stability of parliamentary proceedings**.

- **Historical Significance**
  - The **roots of this office extend back to colonial India**, when it was known as the Deputy President of the Central Legislative Assembly.
  - **Sachidanand Sinha's appointment in 1921 marked the institutional beginning of this role.**
  - **Notably, M.A. Ayyangar's seamless transition to Acting Speaker following Speaker G.V. Mavalankar's sudden demise in 1956 demonstrated the practical necessity** and importance of the Deputy Speaker as a ready and capable leader.

Role and Relevance in Parliamentary Functioning

- While the Speaker is the primary presiding authority, **no individual can personally oversee every minute of legislative business.**

- As constitutional expert S.C. Kashyap observed, **the Speaker's responsibilities are too vast to allow for continuous chairing of sessions.**

- The **Deputy Speaker, therefore, plays an indispensable role** in maintaining the continuity of legislative work.

- Moreover, **the Deputy Speaker's responsibilities extend beyond substitution.**

- **They preside over committees, oversee crucial debates,** and serve as neutral arbiters during sensitive discussions.

- Once elected, **the Deputy Speaker, like the Speaker, is expected to act impartially**, setting aside partisan loyalties to uphold parliamentary decorum.

- **An equally important convention has been the informal practice** of offering the Deputy Speaker's post to a member of the Opposition.

- Although not legally mandated, **this tradition has served to develop bipartisanship, moderation, and trust across the political aisle**, values critical to the health of a parliamentary democracy.

Conclusion

- The **election of a Deputy Speaker must no longer be treated as a procedural afterthought**.

- It is **a litmus test of Parliament's commitment to rule-based governance**, institutional robustness, and constitutional fidelity.

- At a time when democratic institutions globally are under stress, **India's Parliament must lead by example, by reaffirming its respect for constitutional norms** and promptly restoring the dignity and functionality of the Office of the Deputy Speaker.

- The **Constitution demands it. Democracy deserves it. The nation awaits it.**

TAX EXEMPTION FOR NATIONAL MISSION FOR CLEAN GANGA (NMCG)

- **Namami Gange Programme** is **an integrated conservation mission**, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government in **2014** with budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crores.

- It is administered by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**'s Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, **to accomplish the twin objectives of** -
    - Effective abatement of pollution,
    - Conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.

- The program would be implemented by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga** (NMCG), and its state counterpart organisations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
    - **NMCG is the implementation** wing of National Ganga Council (NGC), which replaced the National Ganga River Basin Authority.

- In order to implement the programme, **a three-tier mechanism** has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of:
    - A high-level task force chaired by **Cabinet Secretary** assisted by NMCG at the national level,
    - State level committee chaired by **Chief Secretary** assisted by SPMG at the state level, and
    - District level committee chaired by the **District Magistrate.**

- Its implementation has been divided into -
    - Entry-Level Activities (for immediate visible impact),
    - Medium-Term Activities (to be implemented within 5 years of time frame) and
    - Long-Term Activities (to be implemented within 10 years).