KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS

The President and the Prime Minister recently paid their tributes to the armed forces on Kargil Vijay Diwas, acknowledging their extraordinary valour and the victory achieved.

About Kargil Vijay Diwas:

- It is celebrated on **July 26 every year.**

- The day **commemorates the victory of the Indian armed forces in the Kargil War** fought against Pakistan.

- The day is observed to **pay tribute and honour the bravery and sacrifice of the soldiers** in the war of 1999.

- The year **2023 marks the 24th anniversary** of Kargil Vijay Diwas.

Key Facts about Kargil War:

- It was **fought between India and Pakistan at the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kargil district** of Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Surprise Attack:**

  o The Kargil War was an unexpected **intrusion by Pakistani forces into Indian territory.**

  o They **occupied key vantage points in the Kargil region**, leading to intense military engagements.

- **Codename Operation Vijay:** The Indian Army fought bravely and **recaptured the famous 'Tiger Hill' and other important posts around under 'Operation Vijay'** by evicting the Pakistani troops in the 1999 Kargil War.

- **High Altitude Warfare:** It was fought at **extreme altitudes**, with some of the battlegrounds **reaching heights of over 18,000 feet**.

- **Duration**: It lasted for approximately **three months.**

- **Armaments**:

  o The **Indian Army employed heavy artillery**, **air power** as well as major **infantry operations** during the Kargil War.

- o **In a first, the Indian side used the Bofors FH-77B howitzers** to shoot down enemy positions nested at top of the mountains.
- o **Israel provided their Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)** to India during the conflict.
- **Live on TV:** It was the **first ever war to be broadcasted live on TV** channels in India.
- **The End of Conflict:** The war came to an end on **July 26, 1999,** when **India successfully pushed back the Pakistani forces** from the occupied positions.
- **Casualties**: As per official figures, **around 500 Indian soldiers** laid down their lives while **at least 1,000 Pakistani troops** were also killed.
- It was the **last war that happened between India and Pakistan.**

WHAT IS PANAMA CANAL?

Panama Canal recently limited average crossings to 32 ships a day as a prolonged drought continues.

About Panama Canal:

- It is a **constructed waterway** that **connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans across the Isthmus of Panama.**
- It is one of the two most strategic artificial waterways in the world, the other being the Suez Canal.
- It is **approximately 80 kilometres long.**
- The canal was **built by the United States** between 1904 and 1914, and it was **officially opened on August 15, 1914.**
- It is **owned and administered by the Republic of Panama** since the **oversight of the Canal was transferred from the United States to Panama in 1999.**
- The Panama Canal **consists of a series of locks that raise and lower the water level** to facilitate the passage of ships through the continental divide.

What is an Isthmus?
- An isthmus is a **narrow strip of land connecting two larger land masses which is bounded by water on two sides.**

- The word has its origins from the **Greek word isthmós which means "neck."**
- **Two notable isthmuses are the Isthmus of Panama which separates the continents of North America and South America and the Isthmus of Suez which divides Africa from Asia.**

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE MANGROVE ECOSYSTEM 2023

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem is celebrated every year on July 26.

About International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem:

- It is celebrated every year on **July 26.**
- This International Day was **adopted by** the General Conference of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization **(UNESCO) in 2015.**
- **Purpose**: **To raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems** as "a unique, special and vulnerable ecosystem" and to promote solutions for their sustainable management, conservation and uses.

What are Mangroves?

- Mangroves are unique **coastal ecosystems found in tropical and subtropical regions** around the world.
- They are characterized by **dense, salt-tolerant trees and plants** that **thrive in the intertidal zones**, where land and sea meet.
- They are typically **found in sheltered coastal areas**, **estuaries, lagoons, and tidal flats**, where they play a crucial role in **maintaining the balance of the ecosystem**.
- **Some common species** of mangrove trees include the **Red Mangrove** (Rhizophora spp.), **Black Mangrove** (Avicennia spp.), **White Mangrove** (Laguncularia racemosa), and the **Buttonwood** (Conocarpus erectus).
- **Features**:

- o **Respiratory or knee roots:**
- ▪ They have specialized adaptations to cope with high salt levels in both the soil and water, such as **unique root systems called "prop roots**" or **"pneumatophores**" that **help with gas exchange in waterlogged soils.**
- ▪ **They project above the mud and have small openings** (lenticels) **through which air enters,** passing through the soft spongy tissue to the roots beneath the mud.
- o They can **survive extreme weather conditions** and require **low oxygen levels to survive.**
- o They **cannot survive freezing temperatures** and thus are **found mainly in tropical and subtropical latitudes.**
- o Mangrove forests **can store ten times more carbon per hectare than terrestrial forests.**
- o They can s**tore carbon up to 400 per cent faster than land-based tropical rainforests.**
- o Mangroves improve water quality by **filtering pollutants and trapping sediments from the land**, and they reduce coastal erosion.

Mangroves in India:

- India contributes to **nearly half of the total mangrove cover in South Asia**.
- According to the India State of Forest Report, 2021, the mangrove cover in India is **4,992 square km,** which **is 0.15 per cent of the country's total geographical area.**
- **West Bengal has the highest percentage** of mangrove cover in India, mainly **because it has Sundarbans**, the largest mangrove forest in the world. It is **followed by Gujarat and Andaman, and Nicobar Islands.**
- Other states that have mangrove cover are Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Kerala.

WHAT IS THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)?

India's G-20 Sherpa recently said that the Indian Prime Minister's proposal to make the African Union a permanent member of the G-20 has received an overwhelming response from the grouping.

About African Union (AU):

- The African Union (AU) is a **continental body** consisting of the **55 member states** that **make up the countries of the African Continent**.

- It was **officially launched in 2002 and replaced** its predecessor, **the Organization of African Unity (OAU)**, which was founded in 1963.

- **Primary Objective**: To p**romote unity, cooperation, and development among African nations** while advancing the continent's interests on the global stage.

- It **aims to strengthen political, economic, and social integration** among African countries, with a vision of achieving an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa.

- **Headquarters: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Structure:

o **Assembly**: It is the **highest decision-making body**, consisting of the **heads of state and government** of member countries.

o **Executive Council: Made up of foreign affairs ministers**, **handles policy matters and makes recommendations to the Assembly**.

o **AU Commission: Headquartered in Addis Ababa**, is the **administrative arm responsible for implementing the decisions** of the Assembly and the Executive Council.

o **The Peace and Security Council**: Responsible for **maintaining peace and security** on the continent.

o The **AU structure promotes the participation of African citizens and civil society through the Pan-African Parliament and** the Economic, Social & Cultural Council (**ECOSOCC**).

PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA

Over a third of hospitals empanelled under Ayushman Bharat are inactive, official data showed, in a worrying trend for the world's largest health insurance scheme aiming for universal health coverage.

Why in news?

- Out of 27,000 hospitals empanelled for Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) since its 2018 launch, only 18,783 remain active, the latest health ministry data showed.

About Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana:

- It is the world's **largest health insurance/ assurance scheme** fully financed by the government.
- The **households included** are based on the deprivation and occupational criteria of **Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 (SECC 2011)** for rural and urban areas respectively.
- It provides a **cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year** for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across public and private empanelled hospitals in India.
- It provides **cashless access to health care services** for the beneficiary at the point of service, that is, the hospital.
- There is **no restriction on the family** size, age or gender.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country i.e.; a beneficiary can visit any empanelled public or private hospital in India to avail cashless treatment.
- The scheme being implemented **by the National Health Authority.**

CANTONMENT BOARD

Recently, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has proposed to excise civil areas in 58 cantonments, with plans to merge them with State municipalities.

About Cantonment Board:

- It is an organization established to **administer and manage the civilian population living in cantonment areas.**
- It operates in accordance with the **provisions of the Cantonment Act of 2006** and falls under the jurisdiction of the Union Defence Ministry.
- The boards comprise **elected representatives** as well as ex-officio and nominated members as per the Cantonments Act, 2006.
- **Composition of the board**

- A cantonment board **consists of eight elected members**, three nominated military members, three ex-officio members (station commander, garrison engineer and senior executive medical officer), and one representative of the district magistrate.
- The station commander of the cantonment is the ex-officio president of the board and an officer of the Indian Defence Estates Service (IDES) or Defence Estates Organisation is the chief executive officer and member-secretary of the board.
- The boards have a term of five years.
- The boards are **classified into four categories** depending on their size and population.
- Category I cantonments are those with populations above 50,000;
- Category II between 10,000 and 50,000;
- Category III between 2,500 and 10,000,
- Category IV with populations below 2,500.
- There are a **total 66 cantonment boards** are present in India.
- A cantonment differs from a military station—the latter is exclusively devoted to the use and accommodation of military personnel and is established under an executive order.
- The cantonment, on the other hand, is an area that comprises both military and civilian populations.

MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME (MGNREGS)

Why in New?
- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), in a written reply to the Lok Sabha, informed that **names of over five crore workers have been deleted under the MGNREGS in the financial year 2022-23**.
- There has been a hike of 247% in the deletions during 2022-23 as compared to 2021-22.

What is MGNREGA/MGNREGS?
- The MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), also known as MGNREGS is an Indian legislation enacted in **2005**.

- **It provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment** in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work **at the statutory minimum wage**.
- **The MoRD, Government of India**, is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

Objectives of MGNREGS:

- **It aims to improve the purchasing power of the rural people** by giving people living below poverty line primarily semi or un-skilled work.
- **It attempts to bridge the gap** between the rich and poor in the country and **leads to women empowerment** as roughly one-third of the stipulated work force must be women.

Procedure to Enrol under the MGNREGS:

- **Adult members of rural households** submit their name, age and address with a photo to the Gram Panchayat.
- **The Gram Panchayat registers** households after making enquiry and issues a job card.
- **The job card** contains the details of the adult member enrolled and his/her photo.
- Registered person can submit an application for work in writing (for at least fourteen days of continuous work) either to Panchayat or to Programme Officer.
- The employment will be provided **within a radius of 5 km** and if it is above 5 km extra wage will be paid.

Key Facts about the MGNREGS:

- **Right to get unemployment allowance** in case employment is not provided within 15 days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- MGNREGS focuses on the economic and social empowerment of women.
- MGNREGS provides **"Green" and "Decent" work.**
- **Social Audit of works is mandatory**, which lends to accountability and transparency.
- **MGNREGS works address the climate change vulnerability** and protect the farmers from such risks and conserve natural resources.

- **The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers** to raise their voices and make demands.
- **It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat** which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGS and fix their priority.

Issues with the Implementation of the MGNREGS:

- **Delayed payment of wages:** This is mainly due to failed payment transfers arising from **inactive Aadhaar and closed, blocked, or frozen bank accounts.**
- **Delay in compensation:** In case of delay in payment of wages under MGNREGA, beneficiaries are entitled to compensation at the rate of 0.05% of unpaid wages per day for the duration of delay.
- **Unemployment allowance:** State governments determine the rate of this allowance. In 2019-20 and 2020-21, only Rs 12,000 and Rs 3,000 respectively was paid as unemployment allowance.
- **Poor implementation of social audits provision:** In 2020-21, only 29,611 Gram Panchayats were audited at least once and social audit reports are not publicly available.
- **Appointment of ombudsperson:** Under the Act, there should be an ombudsperson for each district who will receive grievances, conduct enquiries, and pass awards.
- **So far only 263 ombudsmen** have been appointed which shows poor coordination between central and state nodal agencies.