1. Supreme Court Upholds Gig Workers' Rights as 'Employees' Under New Social Security Code,   Source: The Hindu

Context: In a landmark judgment, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India today ruled that gig workers associated with app-based aggregators qualify as 'employees' for social security benefits. The verdict came in response to a batch of petitions filed by gig worker unions against major platform companies. The court interpreted the provisions of the Code on Social Security, 2020, broadly, stating that the nature of control exercised by platforms over workers, including performance ratings, payment processing, and deactivation policies, creates a de facto employer-employee relationship.

Significance:

- This judgment has monumental implications for India's burgeoning gig economy, which employs an estimated 15 million people.
- It mandates that platform companies like ride-hailing services, food delivery apps, and e-commerce logistics providers must contribute to social security funds, including the provident fund (PF) and employee state insurance (ESI), for their workers.
- This provides a crucial social safety net for a workforce that has long operated in a regulatory grey area, lacking job security, fixed income, and benefits.
- The ruling sets a powerful legal precedent and could trigger similar demands across various sectors of the platform economy.

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Analysis:

- The verdict is a significant victory for labour rights and social justice, aligning India with a global trend of providing greater protection to gig workers.
- While it will improve the welfare of millions, it poses a major challenge to the business models of aggregator platforms, which are built on the flexibility and low overheads of an independent contractor workforce.
- Companies may face substantially increased operational costs, which could be passed on to consumers through higher prices or result in revised incentive structures for workers.
- The implementation will require close monitoring by labour ministries and the development of new, technology-driven compliance mechanisms to handle the scale and fluidity of the gig workforce.
- The decision strikes a crucial balance between fostering innovation and ensuring equitable labour practices in the 21st-century economy.

UPSC Syllabus:

 GS Paper 2: Social Justice; Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

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2. India and ASEAN Announce 'Indo-Pacific Maritime Code of Conduct'
Source: Indian Express

Context: On the sidelines of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in Vientiane, Laos, India and the ASEAN bloc jointly announced the finalization of the 'Indo-Pacific Maritime Code of Conduct' (IPMCC). The announcement was made by India's External Affairs Minister and the ASEAN Secretary-General. The IPMCC is a non-binding framework aimed at promoting freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes, and sustainable use of marine resources in the Indo-Pacific. It builds upon the principles of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine.

Significance:

- The IPMCC is a major diplomatic achievement that solidifies India's role as a net security provider and a leading power in the Indo-Pacific.
- It presents a direct, ASEAN-centric alternative to the ongoing and contentious negotiations for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which has been criticized for being heavily influenced by China.
- By creating a broader framework for the entire Indo-Pacific, India and ASEAN are emphasizing a rules-based order that respects international law, particularly UNCLOS.
- This strengthens the strategic partnership between India and ASEAN and provides a common platform for cooperation on maritime security, anti-piracy operations, and disaster management.

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Analysis:

- The IPMCC is a subtle but firm counter-narrative to China's increasing assertiveness in the region.
- By being non-binding, it encourages wider participation without forcing nations into hard alliances, making it more inclusive. However, its effectiveness will depend on the commitment of signatory nations to adhere to its principles.
- Challenges remain, as China may view this as an attempt to contain its influence and may pressure certain ASEAN members to distance themselves from it.
- The success of the IPMCC will hinge on its ability to translate principles into practical cooperation, such as joint patrols, information sharing through India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), and capacity-building initiatives for smaller coastal states.
- It marks a maturation of India's 'Act East' policy into a more proactive 'Act for Indo-Pacific' strategy.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 2: India and its Neighborhood - Relations; Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

3. Cabinet Approves Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Recycling
Source: Economic Times

Context: The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, today gave its approval for a new Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme focused on the recycling and "urban mining" of Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) batteries. With an initial outlay of ₹7,500 crore over five years, the scheme aims to build a robust domestic ecosystem for recovering critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, and manganese from used batteries. This complements the existing PLI scheme for ACC battery manufacturing, which was launched in 2021.

Significance:

- This policy is a crucial step towards creating a circular economy for India's rapidly growing electric vehicle (EV) and electronics sectors.
- India is currently almost 100% import-dependent for these critical minerals. Establishing a domestic recycling industry will reduce this dependency, enhance national security by securing supply chains, and minimize the environmental impact of battery waste.
- The scheme is expected to attract significant investment in recycling technology, create green jobs, and help India meet its climate goals by reducing the carbon footprint associated with mining and importing raw materials.
- It positions India to become a global hub for battery recycling.

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Analysis:

- The PLI scheme for recycling is a forward-thinking policy that addresses the end-of-life challenge for batteries, a problem that will become acute as the first wave of EVs sold in India approaches retirement.
- The success of the scheme will depend on several factors: the efficiency of collection and reverse logistics networks for used batteries, the development of cost-effective and environmentally friendly recycling technologies, and the creation of standards for recovered materials.
- The government will need to work closely with state urban local bodies to manage battery waste collection.
- While the financial incentive is a strong driver, regulatory support in the form of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) mandates will be equally critical to ensure a steady supply of used batteries to recycling plants.
- This move aligns perfectly with India's long-term self-reliance (Aatmanirbhar Bharat) and sustainable development objectives.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Infrastructure: Energy.

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4. Parliamentary Committee Report on Himalayan Ecology Urges Moratorium on New Hydropower Projects
Source: Hindustan Times

Context: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science, Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change today tabled its report titled "Ecological Fragility of the Indian Himalayan Region: A Ticking Time Bomb" in Parliament. The report paints a grim picture of the region's vulnerability due to climate change and unregulated development. Its most significant recommendation is a complete moratorium on the approval of new large-scale hydroelectric projects in the upper reaches of the Himalayas until a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary carrying capacity assessment is completed.

Significance:

- This report is a strong official acknowledgment of the severe risks facing the Himalayas, which have been highlighted by recent disasters like the Joshimath land subsidence and glacial lake outburst floods.
- The call for a moratorium on hydropower projects is a major policy recommendation that, if implemented, would significantly alter the development trajectory of Himalayan states.
- It prioritizes ecological preservation over energy generation in these fragile zones.
- The report also calls for a new, empowered Himalayan Development Authority to oversee and regulate all infrastructure projects in the region, ensuring they adhere to stringent environmental and geological safety norms.

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Analysis:

- The committee's report brings the long-standing 'development vs. environment' debate in the Himalayas to the forefront of national policy discourse.
- While hydropower is promoted as clean energy, the report argues that the ecological and social costs of large dams in a seismically active and climate-sensitive region are unacceptably high.
- The recommendation for a moratorium will likely face resistance from the power ministry and state governments, who view these projects as vital for revenue and energy security.
- However, the increasing frequency and intensity of climate-induced disasters lend significant weight to the committee's findings.
- The path forward will require a difficult political and policy balancing act, potentially shifting focus towards smaller, run-of-the-river projects and decentralized renewable energy solutions like solar and wind in the Himalayan region.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

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5. Government Launches 'Cyber Suraksha Kavach': A New National Cyber Security Strategy
Source: PIB (Ministry of Home Affairs)

Context: The Union Home Minister launched 'Cyber Suraksha Kavach', India's new National Cyber Security Strategy 2025-2030, at a high-level event in New Delhi. The strategy aims to create a "safe, secure, trusted, resilient, and vibrant cyberspace for India." It replaces the previous strategy of 2013 and is designed to address the modern, sophisticated cyber threats faced by the nation, including ransomware attacks, critical infrastructure sabotage, and state-sponsored cyber espionage. The strategy proposes a multi-stakeholder approach involving government, industry, and academia.

Significance:

- The new strategy is a much-needed update to India's cyber defence posture. It establishes a central apex body, the National Cyber Security Coordinator's Office (NCSCO), with greater powers for inter-agency coordination.
- Key features include the creation of a dedicated 'Critical Information Infrastructure (CII) Defence Force', a national repository of malware signatures, and a framework for public-private partnerships on threat intelligence sharing.
- It also mandates regular cyber audits for all government departments and CII entities and introduces a 'Cyber Swachhta Abhiyan' to promote cyber hygiene among citizens.

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Analysis:

- 'Cyber Suraksha Kavach' acknowledges that cybersecurity is no longer just a technical issue but a core component of national security and economic stability.
- Its success will depend on effective implementation. A major challenge is the acute shortage of skilled cybersecurity professionals in India, which the strategy aims to address through new curricula and training programs.
- The framework for public-private partnership is crucial, as the private sector owns and operates a significant portion of the country's critical infrastructure.
- However, building trust to enable seamless information sharing will be key.
- The strategy's focus on proactive threat hunting and defensive capabilities, rather than just reactive measures, marks a significant and necessary shift in India's approach to protecting its digital frontiers.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 3: Basics of cyber security; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

6. Government Launches National Mission on Climate-Resilient Agriculture (NM-CRA)
Source: PIB (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare)

Context: The Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare launched the National Mission on Climate-Resilient Agriculture (NM-CRA) with a dedicated fund of ₹15,000 crore. The mission aims to mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation strategies into the Indian agricultural sector. It will subsume and expand upon the earlier National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) project. The mission will focus on promoting climate-resilient crop varieties, advanced irrigation techniques, crop diversification, and precision farming technologies.

Significance:

- The NM-CRA is India's most ambitious attempt to shield its agricultural sector and the livelihoods of over 600 million people from the vagaries of climate change, such as erratic monsoons, droughts, and heat waves.
- It marks a policy shift from a reactive, relief-centric approach to a proactive, resilience-building one.
- The mission will create a national network of 'Climate-Smart Villages' as demonstration hubs for new technologies.
- A key component is the integration of digital tools, including AI-based weather forecasting and satellite imagery for crop health monitoring, delivered to farmers via a revamped mobile app.

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Analysis:

- This mission is both timely and critical. Indian agriculture is highly vulnerable to climate shocks, which threaten food security and rural incomes.
- The success of NM-CRA will depend on its implementation at the grassroots level, which requires strong coordination between central and state governments, agricultural universities, and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs).
- A major challenge will be to ensure that the benefits reach small and marginal farmers, who are the most vulnerable but often have limited access to technology and credit.
- The mission's focus on linking farmers to carbon credit markets for adopting sustainable practices is an innovative financing mechanism that could provide an additional income stream.
- The NM-CRA is a vital investment in the long-term sustainability of Indian agriculture.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 3: Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country; e-technology in the aid of farmers; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies.

7. GST Council Meeting Ends in Deadlock Over Inclusion of Petroleum Products
Source: Economic Times

Context: The 55th GST Council meeting, held in New Delhi, concluded today without reaching a consensus on the contentious issue of bringing petroleum products (petrol, diesel, ATF) under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime. While the Union Finance Minister and several industrial states argued for its inclusion to curb inflation and benefit industries through input tax credit, many states strongly opposed the move, citing massive potential revenue losses.

Significance:

- The deadlock highlights the persistent fault lines in India's fiscal federalism.
- For states, taxes on petroleum and alcohol are the largest sources of their tax revenue, and they are reluctant to cede this fiscal autonomy to the GST Council, where the Centre holds significant sway.
- The opposition underscores the lack of a mutually agreed-upon compensation formula that would protect states' revenues in the long term.
- The non-inclusion of petroleum products in GST remains a major structural flaw in the indirect tax system, leading to a cascading effect of taxes and higher fuel costs for consumers and businesses.

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Analysis:

- This issue is a classic example of the conflict between national economic efficiency and state-level fiscal sovereignty.
- The Centre's push is driven by the logic of a unified market and the potential to tame inflation.
- However, the states' resistance is rooted in genuine fiscal fear. A viable solution would require the Centre to propose a generous and legally guaranteed compensation mechanism, perhaps for 7-10 years, to allay the states' concerns.
- The debate is also political, with opposition-ruled states often wary of the Centre's intentions.
- Until a political consensus is forged, this critical reform will remain stalled, preventing the GST from reaching its full potential as a "one nation, one tax" system.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 2: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.
GS Paper 3: Government Budgeting.

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8. Ministry of Culture Launches 'Digital Mandir' Project for 3D Digital Preservation of Ancient Temples
Source: PIB (Ministry of Culture)

Context: The Union Minister of Culture launched the 'Digital Mandir' project, an ambitious initiative to create high-resolution 3D digital twins of India's most significant ancient and medieval temples. The project's first phase, launched today, will cover 50 Centrally Protected Monuments, including the Sun Temple at Konark, the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram, and the temples at Khajuraho. The project will use a combination of LiDAR scanning, drone photogrammetry, and AI-based reconstruction technologies.

Significance:

- The '**Digital Mandir**' project is a landmark initiative in cultural heritage preservation. It creates a permanent, high-fidelity digital archive of these architectural marvels, safeguarding them from natural decay, disasters, and human-induced damage.
- These digital models will be invaluable for researchers, architects, and conservationists for study and restoration work.
- Furthermore, the project aims to make this heritage accessible to a global audience through virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) experiences, boosting cultural tourism and education.

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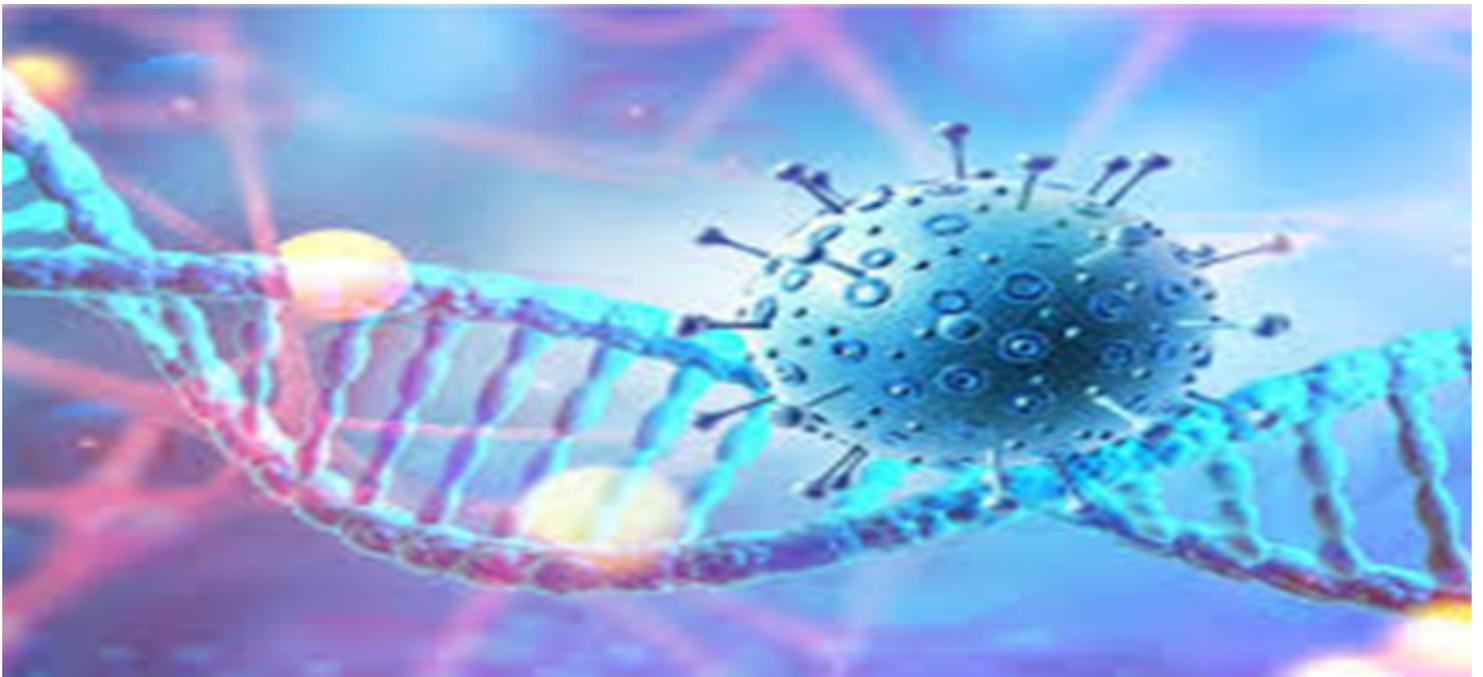🌐 www.prashikshanias.com   ✉ prashikshaniasofficial@gmail.com

Analysis:

- This project represents a fusion of ancient heritage with cutting-edge technology.
- The primary challenge lies in the sheer scale and complexity of the task, requiring specialized equipment and highly skilled personnel.
- Ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the digital models is paramount.
- The data generated will be massive and will require robust digital infrastructure for storage and dissemination.
- Beyond preservation, the project has immense potential for education and tourism, allowing people to virtually 'visit' and explore these sites in unprecedented detail.
- It aligns with the global trend of digital humanities and positions India as a leader in leveraging technology for cultural preservation.

9. India Rolls Out National Genomic Surveillance Network 2.0 to Track Endemic Pathogens
Source: The Hindu

Context: The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare today launched the National Genomic Surveillance Network 2.0 (NGSN 2.0). Expanding on the success of the INSACOG network created during the COVID-19 pandemic, NGSN 2.0 will shift focus from an emergency pandemic response to a permanent, institutionalized system for tracking a wide range of endemic and emerging pathogens. This includes influenza viruses, tuberculosis bacteria, dengue, and chikungunya viruses.

Significance:

- This initiative marks a paradigm shift in India's public health surveillance capabilities. By integrating genomic sequencing into routine disease monitoring, health authorities can track the evolution of pathogens in near real-time.
- This will enable early detection of drug-resistant strains (like in TB), identify new and more virulent variants of viruses, and provide crucial data for developing more effective vaccines and diagnostics.
- It moves India's public health system from being reactive to being predictive and proactive.

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Analysis:

- The establishment of NGSN 2.0 leverages the infrastructure and expertise built during the COVID-19 crisis.
- The key challenge will be to sustain the funding and political will now that the pandemic's urgency has faded.
- It will require seamless coordination between the national network of sequencing labs, state surveillance units, and hospitals to ensure the timely collection and transport of samples.
- Data sharing protocols and ethical considerations regarding patient privacy will be critical.
- If implemented successfully, NGSN 2.0 will become a cornerstone of India's health security architecture, making the country better prepared for future epidemics and more effective in managing existing infectious diseases.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 2: Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
GS Paper 3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

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10. Cabinet Committee on Security Clears Procurement of 120 'Prachanda' Light Combat Helicopters
Source: Hindustan Times

Context: The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), in a major boost to indigenous defence manufacturing, today cleared the procurement of 120 'Prachanda' Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The deal is valued at approximately ₹48,000 crore. These helicopters will be split between the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force, augmenting the initial batch of 15 LCH already inducted.

Significance:

- This is one of the largest single orders for an indigenous defence platform, providing a massive boost to the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative in the defence sector.
- The Prachanda LCH is the world's only attack helicopter designed specifically for high-altitude operations, a critical requirement given the ongoing border tensions in the Himalayas.
- The large order will enable HAL to establish a streamlined production line, achieve economies of scale, and potentially lower unit costs.
- It also enhances India's defence export potential for this advanced platform.

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Analysis:

- The procurement of 120 Prachanda helicopters is a clear statement of India's intent to rely on domestic solutions for its critical military needs.
- The helicopter's capabilities—including its armour, firepower, and performance in extreme conditions—will significantly enhance the armed forces' combat power, particularly in mountainous terrain.
- This large, sustained order ensures the viability of the entire manufacturing ecosystem, including numerous MSMEs that supply components to HAL.
- The challenge for HAL will be to adhere to the delivery timelines and maintain stringent quality control.
- This move strengthens military preparedness while simultaneously bolstering the domestic defence industrial base.

UPSC Syllabus:

GS Paper 3: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

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