

## UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 11-03-2024

### Yaounde Declaration

Ministers of Health from African countries with the highest burden of malaria recently signed the Yaounde Declaration with the objective of ending malaria deaths.



#### About Yaounde Declaration

It was signed by the health ministers of 11 African countries with the highest burden of malaria, committing to accelerated action to end deaths from the malaria disease.

It was signed at the Yaoundé conference, co-hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of Cameroon.

The conference gathered Ministers of Health, global malaria partners, funding agencies, scientists, civil society organizations, and other principal malaria stakeholders.

The 11 countries that signed the declaration are: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. These countries carry roughly 70% of the global malaria burden.

They pledged to sustainably and equitably address the threat of malaria in the African region, which accounts for 95% of malaria deaths globally.

They committed to provide stronger leadership and increased domestic funding for malaria control programmes; to ensure further investment in data technology; to apply the latest technical guidance in malaria control and elimination; and to enhance malaria control efforts at the national and sub-national levels.

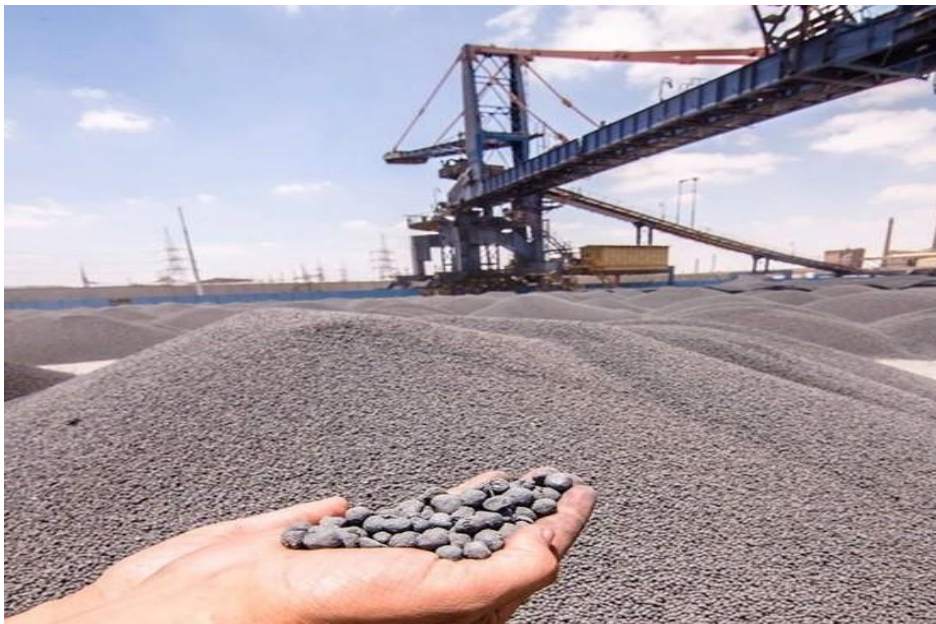
The ministers further pledged to increase health sector investments to bolster infrastructure, personnel, and programme implementation; to enhance multi-sectoral collaboration; and to build partnerships for funding, research, and innovation.

In signing the declaration, they expressed their “unwavering commitment to the accelerated reduction of malaria mortality” and “to hold each other and our countries accountable for the commitments outlined in this declaration.”

Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes. There are 5 parasite species that cause malaria in humans, and 2 of these species, Plasmodium falciparum and Plasmodium vivax, pose the greatest threat. It is common in tropical areas where it’s hot and humid. Children under 5 years of age are the most vulnerable group affected by malaria.

## Sponge Iron

The domestic sponge iron manufacturers fear a continuous shortage of iron ore may bring them to the brink of collapse



## About Sponge Iron

Direct-reduced iron (DRI), also called sponge iron, is produced from the direct reduction of iron ore (in the form of lumps, pellets, or fines) by a reducing gas produced from natural gas or coal.

The reducing gas is a mixture, the majority of which is hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) and carbon monoxide (CO), which act as reducing agents.

This process of reducing the iron ore in solid form by reducing gases is called direct reduction.

The process of sponge iron manufacturing involves the removal of oxygen from iron ore.

When that happens, the departing oxygen causes micropores in the ore body, turning it porous.

When the eventual product is observed under a microscope, it resembles a honeycomb structure, which looks spongy in texture. Hence the name sponge iron.

### **Significance:**

Its significance in the steel industry ranges from an alternative to scrap to boosting furnace efficiency.

It is used as a substitute for scrap in induction and electrical furnaces.

The reason for this is that melting scrap is expensive and also in short supply, so sponge iron is the perfect alternative when it comes to using it in the production of high-quality steel.

It is an iron source that is relatively uniform in composition, and virtually free from tramp elements.

India is the world's largest producer of sponge iron, most of which is produced primarily through the coal-based method of production. India produces 20% of the world's sponge iron with over 200 plants

Steel is an alloy of iron and carbon in which the carbon content ranges up to 2 percent (with a higher carbon content, the material is defined as cast iron). By far the most widely used material for building the world's infrastructure and industries, it is used to fabricate everything from sewing needles to oil tankers. The main reasons for the popularity of steel are the relatively low cost of making, forming, and processing it, the abundance of its two raw materials (iron ore and scrap), and its unparalleled range of mechanical properties.

## Inflection 2.5

Recently, Inflection AI company launched its latest LLM, Inflection 2.5, an upgrade to its model that powers its friendly chatbot Pi personal assistant.



### About Inflection 2.5

It is an “upgraded in-house model that is competitive with all the world’s leading LLMs.

The newly upgraded Large Language Model comes with its signature personality and uniquely empathetic fine-tuning.

It has made some stellar strides in areas of IQ such as coding and mathematics.

With the new upgrade, Pi has now been endowed with world-class real-time web search capabilities to ensure that users get access to high-quality and up-to-date information in real time.

The new LLM, users are talking to the Pi chatbot about a wider range of topics including discussing current events, getting local restaurant recommendations, studying for a biology exam, drafting business plans, coding, and even fun discussions on hobbies.

### What is PI chatbot?

Pi is an AI chatbot with which one can have deep and meaningful conversations.





To access the chatbot, one needs to log on to Inflection.AI, click on Meet Pi, and simply start talking to the chatbot right away.

It is more humane and has been promoted as a chatbot that has a personality.

It is more like a companion to humans and is free to use.

The chatbot comes with a voice, in six distinct voices, to choose from adding life to conversations.

The chatbot has been shown billions of lines of text on the open web.

This allows Pi to have conversations with users and answer a wide variety of questions, according to the company.

Large language model is a type of artificial intelligence algorithm that's trained to learn the patterns and structures of a given language. This not only allows it to understand and summarize information, but also generate and predict new content.

## **Election Commission of India (ECI)**

Election Commissioner Arun Goel resigned just days before the anticipated announcement of the schedule for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Commission of India (ECI)

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering electoral processes in India.

Formation:

The Election Commission was established on January 25, 1950.

Established under Part XV, Article 324 – 329 of the Indian Constitution, the ECI is mandated to ensure free and fair elections, uphold democratic values, and promote voter participation.

Article 324 provides for an Independent Election Commission.

Composition:

Originally a single-member body, the ECI became a multi-member body after the Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989.

The Commission consists of a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of Election Commissioners as the President may from time-to-time fix.

The President appoints the CEC and the Election Commissioners.



While the CEC heads the Commission, the other Election Commissioners assist him.

Their tenure and conditions of service are determined by the President, with their status and perks akin to Supreme Court judges.

### **Independence:**

The ECI is an independent body, free from governmental influence, and has been granted extensive powers to ensure free and fair elections.

The Chief Election Commissioner is removable only through a process similar to that of a Supreme Court judge.

### **Appointment & Tenure Of Commissioners**

The President appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.

They have tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.

The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office in like manner and on like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.

### **Functions:**

#### **The main functions of the Election Commission include:**

Conducting elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and offices of the President and Vice President of India.

Delimitation of constituencies.

Registration of political parties.

Monitoring the election campaign, ensuring a level playing field, and enforcing the Model Code of Conduct.

Supervising the work of electoral officers.

Conducting voter education programs.

Preparation and revision of electoral rolls,

Notification of election schedules,

Scrutiny of nomination papers,



Resolves disputes,

Supervises election machinery,

It advises on the disqualification of members and can cancel polls in case of irregularities.

### **Model Code of Conduct:**

The ECI enforces the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to ensure that political parties and candidates adhere to ethical standards during elections.

### **Voter Registration:**

The ECI is responsible for the registration of eligible voters and issuing voter identity cards.

### **Electoral Reforms:**

The Commission works towards improving the electoral process through various reforms, such as the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs), introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines, and initiatives to increase voter participation.

### **Powers:**

The ECI has the power to supervise elections, issue guidelines to political parties and candidates, and take necessary actions to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections.

### **State Election Commissions:**

In addition to the Election Commission of India, each state has a State Election Commission responsible for conducting elections to local bodies such as municipalities, panchayats, and municipal corporations.

The Election Commission of India plays a crucial role in upholding the democratic principles of the country by ensuring that elections are conducted freely, fairly, and impartially.

### **Electoral Reforms since Independence**

In 1988, the criteria for proposers in nomination papers for Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Council elections were adjusted to 10 percent of the electors of the constituency or ten such electors, whichever is lower.

The 61st Constitutional Amendment Act of 1988 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years for both Lok Sabha and assembly elections.



In 1989, provisions were made to adjourn or countermand elections in case of booth capturing.

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were first used in the general election in Kerala in May 1982. By 2004, EVMs were used in all 543 Parliamentary Constituencies in India.

Candidates contesting elections were classified into three categories to list their names.

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act disqualifies a person convicted for an offense from contesting elections to the Parliament and State Legislature for 6 years.

Nomination of a candidate in a Parliamentary or assembly constituency required subscription by 10 registered electors of the constituency as proposers if the candidate was not sponsored by a recognized political party.

Candidates were restricted to contesting from no more than two Parliamentary/assembly constituencies and Rajya Sabha/State legislative council seats.

In 1997, the number of electors as proposers and seconders for contesting elections to the office of the President was increased from 10 to 50 and the office of the Vice President from 5 to 20.

In 2003, the Election Commission ordered every candidate to disclose information on convictions, accusations, assets, and liabilities.

The Government was required to provide, free of cost, copies of electoral rolls and other prescribed material to candidates of recognized political parties for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2003.

Political parties had to report any contribution exceeding ₹20,000 to the Election Commission for any claim to income tax relief in 2003.

Under a 2003 provision, the Election Commission should allocate equitable sharing of time to recognized political parties, based on past performance, on the cable television network and other electronic media.

## **Issues in Indian Electoral Politics**

**Criminalization of Politics:** Many politicians in India have criminal backgrounds, which can undermine the democratic process and lead to criminal elements influencing policymaking.





**Money Power:** Elections in India often involve large amounts of money, leading to corruption and unequal access to political power. This can skew the electoral process in favour of wealthy candidates and parties.

**Dynastic Politics:** Many political parties in India are dominated by families, leading to concerns about nepotism and the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals.

**Election Commission Autonomy:** There are concerns about the autonomy of the Election Commission of India, with some critics alleging interference by the government in its functioning.

**Electoral Malpractices:** Issues such as booth capturing, voter intimidation and electoral fraud continue to be reported in Indian elections, raising questions about the fairness of the electoral process.

**Lack of Voter Awareness:** Despite efforts to increase voter awareness, many voters in India are still uninformed about the political process and the candidates, leading to low voter turnout and potentially uninformed voting choices.

**Political Polarization:** Indian politics is often characterized by strong ideological divisions and polarization, which can lead to a lack of consensus on important issues and hinder effective governance.

**Election Expenditure:** The cost of elections in India is high, leading to concerns about the influence of money in politics and the ability of candidates without significant financial resources to contest elections.

**Election Violence:** Election-related violence, including clashes between political parties, intimidation of voters, and attacks on candidates, is a significant issue in Indian electoral politics. This can create a climate of fear and hinder the democratic process.

**Caste and Religious Politics:** Identity-based politics, particularly along caste and religious lines, is prevalent in India. While these factors play a significant role in shaping political outcomes, they can also lead to divisions and tensions within society.

**Misuse of Government Machinery:** There are concerns about the misuse of government machinery and resources by incumbent parties during elections, giving them an unfair advantage over their opponents.

**Electoral Bonds:** The introduction of electoral bonds has raised concerns about transparency in political funding, as the identity of donors is not disclosed.



Critics argue that this could lead to increased influence of corporate interests in politics.

**Election Commission's Role:** While the Election Commission of India is tasked with ensuring free and fair elections, there have been criticisms of its effectiveness in curbing electoral malpractices and enforcing electoral rules.

**Political Polarization:** Indian politics is often characterized by deep-rooted ideological divisions, which can lead to a lack of constructive dialogue and compromise. This polarization can hinder the functioning of democratic institutions.

**Representation of Marginalized Groups:** Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, there are concerns about the underrepresentation of marginalized groups, such as women, Dalits, and tribal communities, in Indian politics.

**Political Accountability:** There are challenges in ensuring political accountability, with some elected representatives facing allegations of corruption and misconduct. Strengthening mechanisms for accountability is crucial for maintaining public trust in the political system.

### **Needed Reforms**

**State Funding of Elections:** Establish a system where the state covers election costs for political parties to reduce reliance on private donations and address corruption.

**Central Legislation:** Enact a law to prevent criminalization of politics and purify the political system, as per the Supreme Court's directive in the Public Interest Foundation & Ors. vs. Union of India 2018 case.

**Introduction of Fiscal Responsibility Legislation:** Implement a law akin to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003, to manage unsustainable populist measures by political parties.

**Reforming the Electoral System:** Replace the 'First Past the Post System' with a system that requires a minimum percentage of total votes polled for a candidate to win, reducing the chances of criminals getting elected.

**Simultaneous Polls:** Enforce simultaneous elections to decrease expenses for the Election Commission and political parties.

**Inclusion under RTI:** Bring political parties under the scope of the Right to Information Act, 2005, to enhance transparency.

**Audit of Party Accounts:** Conduct regular audits of political party accounts to ensure accountability.

**Self-Regulation of Money Use:** Ensure that political parties self-regulate their use of financial resources and prevent the infiltration of illicit funds into the election process.

**Equal Media Space:** Provide all parties with equal media coverage or airtime to ensure fair competition.

**Limit on Party Expenditure:** Establish a limit on party expenditure and make it public before elections to ensure transparency. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct campaigns to educate voters about candidates and their backgrounds prior to elections.

**Voter Education:** Educate voters about the importance of their vote and the necessity of making informed decisions, rejecting candidates who offer inducements.

## 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organization (WTO)



The World Trade Organization (WTO) held its 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi in the UAE.

### Details

**Location and Dates:** Held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, between February 26 and March 2, 2024.

**Attendance:** Attended by 166 member countries.

**Ministerial Declaration:** Adopted at the conclusion, setting a forward-looking, reform agenda for the WTO.



## Key Decisions

**Dispute Settlement System:** A renewed commitment to have a fully functioning system by 2024.

**Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT):** Resolved to improve its use for developing and least developed countries (LDCs).

## Challenges to the Multilateral Trading Order

**Inward Turn in Developed Economies:** Vocal movement seeking to move away from a globalized and harmonized tariffs approach.

**Conflicts and Sanctions:** Threatening supply chains and the smooth flow of goods and services worldwide.

**Development Disparities:** Highlighting the need to avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to norms.

## India's Approach

**Public Stockholding (PSH) Programme:** Focus on resolving concerns regarding food security.

**Fisheries Sector:** Advocated for developing countries to subsidize poor fishermen within their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

**E-commerce:** Pushed for an end to the moratorium on customs duties on cross-border e-commerce.

## Outcomes at MC13

**Agriculture:** First time in over two decades a text was agreed upon, signifying progress.

**Fisheries:** Consensus close to being reached by mid-year.

**E-commerce:** Disappointingly for India, the exemption from customs duties continues for at least two more years.

## Samudrayaan Project

The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) has completed a key test for India's first manned submersible mission called Samudrayaan, the earth sciences ministry said recently.

### About Samudrayaan Mission

It is India's first manned mission to explore the deep ocean.



It is aimed to develop a self-propelled manned submersible to carry three human beings to a water depth of 6,000 meters in the ocean with a suite of scientific sensors and tools for deep ocean exploration.

It is designed to study the deep ocean resources and conduct biodiversity assessments as well.

The mission will not disturb the ecosystem as the submersible is used solely for exploration purposes.

The project is part of the larger Deep Ocean Mission, which supports the Central Government's Blue Economy policy.

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)

### **What is MATSYA 6000?**

It is a manned submersible vehicle developed by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai.

It was developed under the Samudrayaan mission to facilitate humans in the deep ocean in exploring mineral resources.

It has an endurance of 12 hours of operational period and 96 hours in case of emergency.

It will allow scientific personnel to observe and understand unexplored deep-sea areas by direct interventions. Further, it will enhance the capability for deep-sea man-rated vehicle development.

Expected to be launched in 2024-25, it would make India only one among six countries (US, Russia, Japan, France, and China) to have piloted a crewed under-sea expedition beyond 5,000 metres.

### **Key Facts about Deep Ocean Mission**

It is a mission-mode project to support the Blue Economy Initiatives of the Government of India.

It has been launched as a Central Sector Scheme of Ministry of Earth Sciences.

It is a high-level, multi-ministerial, multi-disciplinary programme for a better understanding of the deep sea living and non-living resources of the Indian Ocean.

It aims to develop technologies to harness living and non-living resources from the deep oceans.





The estimated cost of the Mission will be 4077 crores for a period of 5 years (2021-26), to be implemented in a phase-wise manner.

**The Mission consists of six major components:**

Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining and Manned Submersible and Underwater Robotics;

Development of Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services;

Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity;

Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration;

Energy and freshwater from the Ocean;

Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology;