

1. Central Administrative Tribunal

Topic: Polity and Governance

In News: The Supreme Court said the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) has collapsed, in view of several vacancies in it.

More on the Topic:

- Vacancies in the CAT would impinge upon the citizens' right of access to justice, the exercise of jurisdiction of Article 142 is mandated.

About Tribunals:

- Tribunals are institutions established for **discharging judicial or quasi-judicial duties**. The objective may be to reduce case load of the judiciary or to bring in subject expertise for technical matters.
- The Supreme Court has ruled that tribunals, being quasi-judicial bodies, should have the same level of independence from the executive as the judiciary. Key factors include the mode of selection of members, the composition of tribunals, and the terms and tenure of service.
- In order to ensure that tribunals are independent from the executive, the Supreme Court had recommended that **all administrative matters be managed by the law ministry rather than the ministry associated with the subject area**.
- Later, the Court recommended creation of an independent National Tribunals Commission for the administration of tribunals. These recommendations have not been implemented.
- Whereas the reasoning for setting up some tribunals was **to reduce pendency of cases in courts**, several tribunals are facing the issue of a large case load and pendency.
- There is no hierarchy of tribunals in this country.

About Central Administrative Tribunal:

- The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) was **established in 1985** through the Administrative Tribunals Act.
- It was established under **Article 323 - A of the Constitution** for the purpose of resolving disputes and complaints relating to the recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services and posts in connection with the Union's affairs or other authorities under the Government's control.
- The Tribunal is guided by the principles of natural justice in deciding cases and is not bound by the procedure, prescribed by the Civil Procedure Code.
- The orders of Central Administrative Tribunal are challenged by way of Writ Petition under Article 226/227 of the Constitution before respective High Court in whose territorial jurisdiction the Bench of the Tribunal is situated.



Source: Indian Express

2. World Trade Organisation Waiver for Wheat Imports

Topic: Economy

In News: World Trade Organization rules may prove to be a hurdle to India's plan to export wheat from state-owned stocks.

More on the Topic:

- WTO rules make it difficult for a country to export grains from official stocks if they have been procured from farmers at fixed prices, which in India's case, is the minimum support price mandated by the Centre.
- India and other developing nations purchase and stockpile food grains to be distributed to people in need.
- Richer economies say such stockholding programmes are considered **trade-distorting when they involve purchases from farmers at prices set by governments**, such as India's minimum support prices.



WTO Peace Clause:

- The WTO currently has a **'peace clause'** that permits uninterrupted implementation of **India's food security programme** until a permanent solution is found.
- This allows India to procure and stock food grain for distribution to the poor without being penalised by WTO members.
- However, **the peace clause comes with several riders**, including the periodical submission of data on food procurement, stockholding, distribution, and subsidies. India has lagged on this aspect.
- It also allows India to continue public stockholding even when it has provided production level subsidies to farmers, something the WTO also frowns upon.

The Subsidy Debate:

- The issue of farm subsidy has locked India and other developing nations in a pitched trade battle against rich economies. Currently, the multilateral body in principle allows developing countries like India to provide farmers subsidies of up to 10 percent of the value of food production.
- Subsidies beyond the prescribed ceiling are seen as trade-distorting. But India often exceeds this subsidy cap and has to invoke the peace clause.
- It then has to establish that the subsidies are not trade-distorting, a process that has led to numerous acrimonious negotiations at the WTO headquarters in Geneva.

India's Suggestions:

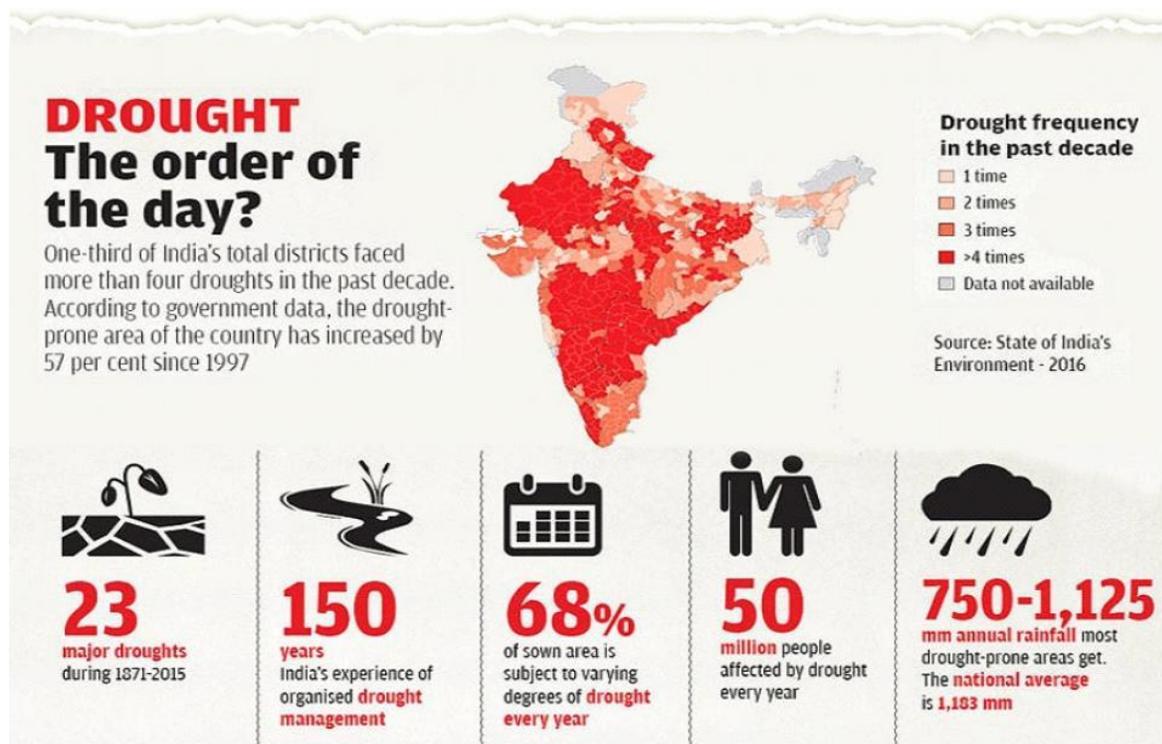
- India contends that the WTO's current farm subsidy rules are **skewed against developing countries**, which have a large number of poor farmers to support.

- As a case in point, India provides a subsistence amount of about \$260 per farmer per annum compared to over 100 times more in some developed countries.
- For a permanent solution to this debate, **India has proposed either amending the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap of 10 percent**, which is based on the reference price of 1986-88, **or allowing such schemes outside the purview of the subsidy cap.**
- The government said it has the diplomatic backing to get a waiver from the WTO, given that food grain supplies have become an even more sensitive geopolitical topic in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis.

Source: Indian Express

3. Drought in Numbers, 2022 Report

Topic: Environment and Ecology



In News: The Drought in Numbers, 2022 Report was released at the ongoing 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

More on the Topic:

- Following are the observations of the study:
- The frequency and duration of drought is increasing at an alarming rate across the world since the onset of the 21st century.

- The latest assessment analysed **droughts and impacts on life and livelihood over 122 years covering 196 countries**. It said an entire new generation is growing up being “water scarce”.
- India has featured in the assessment as **one of severely drought-impacted countries**. Nearly two-thirds of the country suffered drought during 2020-2022.
- The effect of severe droughts was estimated to have **reduced India’s gross domestic product by 2-5 per cent over the 20 years from 1998-2017**.
- India’s drought-prone area has increased by 57 per cent since 1997.
- **One-third of India’s districts have faced more than four droughts** over the past decade and 50 million people are affected by drought every year.
- Some 97.85 million hectares; nearly 30 per cent of the country’s land has undergone land degradation.
- **Drought impacts India’s dominantly rainfed agriculture** that accounts for 60 per cent of the sown area on average.

Drought Mitigation Programs worldwide:

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) **launched the Integrated Drylands Development Programme (IDDP)** with the overall goal to strengthen resilience by working on the twin vulnerabilities of poverty and unsustainable land management in the drylands.
- The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) developed a **Drought Risk Reduction framework** that takes an integrated development approach and provides a comprehensive framework for both higher-level and local action.
- **The Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP)** and its partners have adopted three pillars of drought management:
- **Drought monitoring and early warning systems** to determine drought status.
- **Vulnerability and impact assessment** to determine who and what are at risk and why.
- **Mitigation, drought preparedness, and response to set out actions** and measures to mitigate drought impacts and to prepare to respond to drought emergencies.

About Drought:

- Drought is a **temporary reduction in water or moisture availability** below the normal or expected amount for a specific period.
- **Meteorological Drought** is a situation where there is a reduction in rainfall for a specific period below a specific amount.
- Hydrological Drought is associated with reduction of water.
- Agriculture drought happens **when soil moisture and rainfall conditions are not adequate** enough to support the crops, thereby resulting in crop failures.
- Ecological Drought is when the **productivity of a natural ecosystem fails due to shortage of water** and as a consequence of ecological distress, damages are induced in the ecosystem.

Source: Indian Express

4. Pick-and-Choose Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

Topic: International Relations

In News: USA is designing pick and choose Economic framework where participating countries can join IPEF without necessarily joining all the four pillars of the framework.

More on the Topic:

- IPEF is a platform which has been initiated by the US. It is envisioned as the platform for negotiation on a variety of economic issues arranged through its four pillars.
- IPEF's four pillars include **fair and resilient trade** (including digital, labour, environmental and other standards); **supply chain resilience; infrastructure, decarbonisation and clean energy; and tax and anti-corruption.**
- India sees the framework in a “positive light”, and notes particular convergence when it comes to the **supply chain resilience pillar**, but it has sought flexibility in the framework to create incentives for countries to join it.
- India is understood to have concerns about some of the other pillars, **particularly trade**, and its implications.
- US's partnership with India was “critical” to progress on “clean energy and climate priorities, pandemic response, supply chain diversity and resilience, emerging technologies, investment screening, and other areas that are central” to IPEF.
- US considers India as a vital partner in our positive economic engagement in the region.

Source: Business Standard



5. RNA granules

Topic: Science and Technology

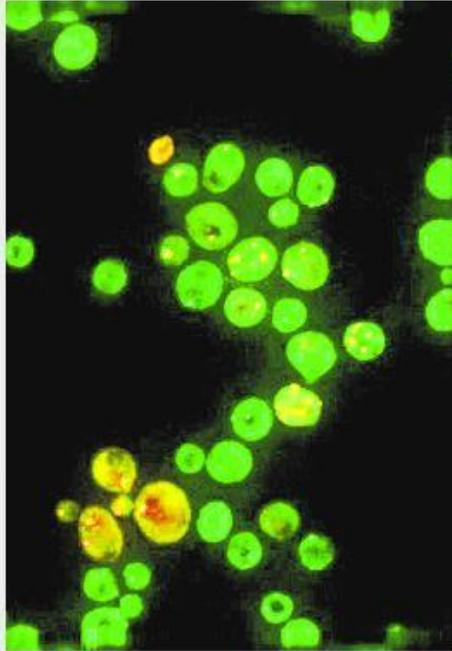
A protein to dissolve aggregates in the neurons

Knowledge obtained from yeast is very often applicable to humans

■ Researchers at IISc Bangalore have identified a protein in yeast cells that dissolves RNA-protein complexes, also known as RNA granules

■ This finding is critical for many neurodegenerative disorders such as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

■ These neurodegenerative disorders are characterised by the accumulation of aggregates that resemble RNA granules. These aggregates are believed to contribute to the disease



Naked: Unlike other structures in the cell, the RNA granules are not covered and confined by a membrane.

■ In yeast cells, a protein (Sbp1) promotes the disintegration of RNA granules. The protein dissolves only the P-bodies

■ The study found that the Sbp1 protein helps in reducing the aggregates of human proteins involved in neurodegenerative disorders

■ The next step is to experimentally test the effect of repeat sequences in genetically engineered mice

■ This study once again suggests that knowledge obtained from yeast is very often applicable to humans

In News: New studies have suggested that RNA granules may help in treating neurodegenerative disorders.

More on the Topic:

- The cytoplasm of any cell will contain structures made of messenger RNA (mRNA) and proteins known as RNA granules, in general.
- Unlike other structures in the cell (such as mitochondria), the RNA granules are not covered and confined by a membrane.
- This makes them highly dynamic in nature, thereby allowing them to constantly exchange components with the surrounding.
- Messenger RNAs are converted to proteins (building blocks of the cell) by the process of translation.

- **RNA granules determine messenger RNA (mRNA) fate by deciding when and how much protein would be produced from mRNA.**
- Protein synthesis is a multi-step and energy-expensive process.
- Therefore, a common strategy used by cells when it encounters unfavorable conditions is to shut down protein production and conserve energy to deal with a stressful situation.
- RNA granules help in the process of shutting down protein production.
- This property has implication in treating diseases like Alzheimer's.

Source: Hindu

6. Marsquake

Topic: Science and Technology

In News: The U.S. space agency's InSight lander, which has been studying Mars' deep interior has recorded a roughly magnitude 5 temblor, the largest Marsquake detected to date.

More on the Topic:

- A marsquake is a quake which, much like an earthquake, **would be a shaking of the surface or interior of the planet Mars** as a result of the sudden release of energy in the planet's interior, such as the result of plate tectonics,
- Just like earthquakes reveal information about our planet's interior structure, **Marsquakes can be used to probe what lies beneath Mars' surface.**

Source: Hindu

