

CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY CONSOLIDATION

MARCH 2024

1. Digital Governance in India

Context:

2. Recently, the Prime Minister of India and Bill Gates discussed the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for digital governance in key focus areas like health, agriculture and education.

About the Digital Governance:

3. It is the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information, communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between government-to-customer (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G), and also back-office processes and interactions within the entire government framework.
4. Data Governance is a crucial aspect of digital governance. The launch of India's Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a consent management tool, has generated both excitement and concern among stakeholders.
5. It is important that the tool is implemented in a transparent, consistent, and secure manner.

Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Digital Governance:

6. AI plays a pivotal role in Indian election campaigns by leveraging technology to overcome language barriers, marking a shift towards progressive politics empowering linguistic diversity and inclusive engagement.
7. AI is also being used to drive economic growth and improve the lives of citizens.

2. United Nations on Global Food Waste

Context:

Recently, the United Nations released the report, titled 'Think Eat Save: Tracking Progress to Halve Global Food Waste'.

Key Highlights of the Report:

Scale of Food Waste: In 2022, the world wasted 1.05 billion tonnes of food, amounting to one-fifth (19%) of food available to consumers being wasted at the retail, food service, and household level.

Households were responsible for 631 million tonnes of food waste, equivalent to 60% of the total food wasted in 2022.

Food Insecurity: Food waste occurs while 783 million people are hungry and a third of humanity faces food insecurity.

Global Problem: Food waste is not just a 'rich country' problem.

High-income, upper-middle income, and lower-middle income countries differ in observed average levels of household food waste by just 7 kg/capita/year.

Urban-Rural Disparities: Middle-income countries display variations between urban and rural populations, with rural areas generally wasting less.

3. DIGITA – Digital India Trust Agency

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is considering establishing a Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) to combat the proliferation of illegal lending apps and curb growing cyber fraud.

4. World's first Om-shaped temple inaugurated

Recently, the world's first Om-shaped temple, 'Om Aakar', inaugurated in Jadan, Rajasthan's Pali district, spans 250 acres.

5. Mushk Budiji –

A recent study unveils the secrets behind the unique aroma of Mushk Budiji, a native rice variety from the Kashmir Himalaya. Initially threatened by extinction due to low yield and rice blast disease, a revival initiative by SKUAST scientists since 2007 has led to its slow resurgence. In August 2023, Mushk Budiji was granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. This niche crop thrives under specific climatic conditions, securing its place in Kashmir's agricultural heritage.

6. India recently applied to the International Seabed Authority (ISBA) for rights to explore the Afanasy Nikitin Seamount (AN Seamount)

in the Indian Ocean. AN Seamount is a 400 km-long and 150 km-wide feature rich in cobalt, nickel, manganese, and copper. It lies 3,000 km from India's coast, rising 1200 m above the ocean floor. Seamounts, formed through volcanic activity near mid-ocean ridges, are hotspots for marine life, with potential for active resource extraction.

7. The 2nd Employment Working Group (EWG) meeting

led by Brazil, convened in Brasilia with India's participation. Ms. Sumita Dawra, Secretary of Labour & Employment, India, co-chairs alongside Brazil and South Africa. The meeting's focus includes quality employment, just transition amidst digital transformations, technology's role in enhancing life quality, and gender equity in workplaces. The Indian delegation emphasized inclusivity, advocating for equal representation and empowerment irrespective of demographics.

8. Leaders from 34 countries convened in Brussels for the Nuclear Energy Summit on March 21. Organized by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Belgium,

the summit aimed to explore strategies for leveraging nuclear power in achieving net-zero emissions and sustainable development goals. Following COP28, where over 20 countries pledged to increase nuclear energy use, the summit emphasized practical steps for deployment and financing. Technical panels delved into maximizing nuclear energy's potential.

9. A 900-year-old Kannada inscription from the Kalyana Chalukya dynasty was unearthed in Gangapuram, Telangana.

The Chalukyas governed central India's Deccan plateau from the 6th to 12th centuries, comprising three distinct dynasties: Badami, Kalyani, and Vengi.

The Kalyani Chalukyas, primarily Kannadiga, ruled from their capital, Kalyani (modern-day district, Karnataka, under the Rashtrakuta Empire's suzerainty).

10. Despite conservation efforts, Kashmir's hangul deer, also known as the Kashmir stag, faces extinction.

This shy and sensitive species, the only surviving Asiatic sub-species of the European red deer, is Jammu and Kashmir's state animal. Endemic to Kashmir's hills, particularly in Dachigam National Park, it suffers from habitat loss and poaching. Critically endangered according to IUCN and listed in CITES Appendix I, urgent measures are needed to save it from disappearing.

11. In parts of Jaipur, Rajasthan, a unique Holi tradition unfolds on March 25: the throwing of colors through "Gulaal Gota,"

small lac balls filled with dry gulaal. Crafted by Muslim lac makers known as Manihaars, this tradition dates back 400 years, cherished by the erstwhile Jaipur royal family. Gulaal Gotas represent a cultural fusion, highlighting the rich heritage and communal harmony in the region.

12. India and Mauritania held their 1st Foreign Office Consultations in Nouakchott, discussing bilateral, regional, and global issues.

Talks covered political cooperation, economic partnership, and cultural exchanges. Bilateral trade surged to \$378 million in 2022-23 from \$108 million in 2021-22. India's Resident Mission, opened in June 2021, has bolstered relations. The meeting highlighted the enduring friendship and collaboration between the two nations.

13. US surgeons successfully transplanted a genetically modified pig kidney into a 62-year-old patient, marking a historic breakthrough at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

Unlike previous attempts, where pig kidneys were temporarily transplanted into brain-dead donors, this marks the first time a pig kidney has been implanted into a living person, with the patient showing promising signs of recovery.

14. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced 'Operation Indravati'

On microblogging site X to evacuate stranded Indians from violence-hit Haiti to the Dominican Republic. 12 citizens were safely relocated. Around 75 to 90 Indians reside in Haiti, with 60 registering for repatriation. India lacks a diplomatic mission in Haiti, handling affairs through its mission in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the neighboring country.

15. New Zealand bans disposable e-cigarettes and vapes following the repeal of a law targeting tobacco smoking.

The government imposes higher fines, up to NZ\$100,000 for retailers and NZ\$1,000 for individuals, for selling to minors under 18. This move reflects efforts to curb underage vaping and maintain public health standards.

16. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made history by being the first non-Bhutanese to be honoured with Bhutan's highest civilian award, the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo'.

During his two-day state visit to Thimphu, he received the prestigious award from Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. This lifetime achievement award is the apex of Bhutan's honor system, with only four individuals, including Modi, having received it since its establishment.

17. INS Tir and INS Sujata join India Mozambique Tanzania (IMT) Tri Lateral Exercise

IMT TRILAT began in Oct 22 with INS Tarkash. The current edition's harbour phase (Mar 21-24) involves joint training in Damage Control, Fire Fighting, Visit Board Search and Seizure, Medical Lectures, and more in Zanzibar and Maputo. The sea phase focuses on countering threats, maneuvers, firing exercises, and joint EEZ surveillance. Joint debrief at Nacala concludes the exercise.

18. Shehbaz Sharif was elected as the Prime Minister of Pakistan

by the country's National Assembly.

19. A group of researchers from Brazil have identified a new contender for the titles of world's smallest frog and smallest known vertebrate

The adult male 'Brazilian flea toad', belonging to the Brachycephalus genus.

20. India's Environment Ministry secured Cabinet approval to institute an International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) headquartered in New Delhi.

21. In a surprising turn of events, Election Commissioner Arun Goel tendered his resignation on March 9, 2024,

just days before the anticipated announcement of the Lok Sabha election schedule. New election commissioners – Gaynesh Kumar & Sukhbir Singh Sandhu have taken charge .

22. Recently, India signed a landmark free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA),

a bloc consisting of Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Iceland.

23. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that Indian educator, author, and philanthropist Sudha Murty has been nominated to the Rajya Sabha

by President Draupadi Murmu. The nomination, which coincides with International Women's Day.

24. Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented the inaugural National Creators Award at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

The awards were given to recognize young talent across 20 categories, including storytelling, social change advocacy, environmental sustainability, education.

25. Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for Sikkim's first railway station at Rangpo.

The prime minister emphasized that the station's design will draw inspiration from the rich culture, heritage, and architecture of the Himalayan state.

26. The Indian Navy has taken a significant step towards enhancing its operational capabilities and maritime domain awareness

in the strategically important Lakshadweep islands with the commissioning of INS Jatayu at Minicoy Island on March 6, 2024.

27. Jharkhand introduces “India’s first – widow remarriage incentive scheme”

In a groundbreaking initiative, the state of Jharkhand has become the first in the country to launch the ‘Vidhwa Punarvivah Protsahan Yojana’ (Widow Remarriage Incentive Scheme).

28. Recently, core loading in core loading activities for India’s first indigenous prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR) in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu

took place and the event was witnessed by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi.

29. Recently, India Post has pitched in to promote the central government’s rooftop solar scheme that provides subsidies to households installing photovoltaic systems.

This rooftop solar initiative was highlighted in the 2023 budget to accelerate India’s renewable energy adoption.

30. Legendary golfer Tiger Woods has been named the winner of the prestigious Bob Jones Award,

the highest honor bestowed by the United States Golf Association (USGA).