Prelims Exam Topics

SIMLA AGREEMENT (1972)

Context:

The **Simla Agreement** completed **54 years**.

About Simla Agreement (1972)

- Signed on **2 July 1972** after the **1971 India–Pakistan War**.
- Signed by **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi** of India and **President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** of Pakistan.
- Objective: To establish **lasting peace** and normalize bilateral relations.
- Both countries agreed to resolve all disputes **through bilateral negotiations**, without third-party mediation.
- The **ceasefire line in Jammu & Kashmir** was redesignated as the **Line of Control (LoC)**, with both sides agreeing not to alter it unilaterally.

MANAS INITIATIVE

Context:

The **MANAS Initiative** is strengthening India's efforts against **drug abuse** by enabling citizens to report narcotics-related activities and access rehabilitation services.

About MANAS Initiative

- **MANAS (Madak Padarth Nishedh Asoochna Kendra)** is the **National Narcotics Helpline**, launched in **2024**.
- **Implemented by: Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)** under the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**, in collaboration with the **Digital India Corporation (DIC)**.
- A **technology-enabled platform** for:
  - Reporting **drug-related offences**.
  - Seeking **counselling**.
  - Accessing **de-addiction and rehabilitation** services.
- **Accessible through: Helpline 1933**, **official portal**, **email**, and the **UMANG app**.

GAIT ANALYSIS

Context:

In a recent **Pune murder case**, investigators used **forensic gait analysis** to help identify suspects.

About Gait Analysis

- **Gait analysis** is the **scientific study of human locomotion**, especially **walking and running**.
- It examines the **coordination of muscles, bones, joints, and the nervous system** during movement.
- Every individual has a **distinct gait pattern**, which can serve as a **biometric identifier**.
- **Applications:** Used in **forensic investigations**, **sports science**, **rehabilitation**, and **medical diagnosis**.

MECON LIMITED & MINIRATNA CATEGORY-I STATUS

Context:

The **Ministry of Steel** has granted **Miniratna Category-I** status to **MECON Limited**.

About Miniratna Status

- Granted by the **Department of Public Enterprises (DPE)** to **profit-making CPSEs**.
- **Introduced in: 1997** to provide greater **financial and operational autonomy**.
- Classified into **Category-I** and **Category-II**.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Category-I:** Profit in the **last 3 consecutive years**, **pre-tax profit of at least ₹30 crore** in one of those years, and **positive net worth**.
- **Category-II:** Profit in the **last 3 consecutive years** and **positive net worth**.

PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR (PMRBP)

Context:

The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** has invited nominations for the **Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP) 2026**.

About Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP)

- India's **highest national award** recognizing the exceptional achievements of children.
- **Conferred by: President of India** every year on **Veer Bal Diwas (26 December)** in **New Delhi**.

- **Eligibility:** Children aged **5–18 years**.
- **Award Categories (6): Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture and Science & Technology**
- **Nominations:** Can be submitted by **citizens, schools, institutions, organizations**, or through **self-nomination**.
- **Award Includes:** A **medal, certificate, and citation**.

Veer Bal Diwas

- **Observed on: 26 December** every year.
- Commemorates the martyrdom of **Sahibzada Zorawar Singh** and **Sahibzada Fateh Singh**, the younger sons of **Guru Gobind Singh**, the **10th Sikh Guru**.
- Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh were martyred at Sirhind on the orders of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor of Sirhind, after they refused to renounce their faith.
- They chose **martyrdom over renouncing their faith**, symbolizing **courage, sacrifice, and unwavering conviction**.

MATCHA TEA

Context:

Chota Tingrai Tea Estate in **Assam**, produced and sold **India's first commercially grown Matcha tea**.

About Match Tea

- **Matcha** is a **finely powdered green tea** made from **shade-grown leaves** of ***Camellia sinensis***.
- Unlike regular green tea, **the entire tea powder is consumed**, providing higher levels of **antioxidants, nutrients, and caffeine**.
- **Origin:** The practice originated in **China during the Song Dynasty** and was introduced to **Japan** by the Zen monk **Eisai** in the **12th century**, where it evolved into the traditional Japanese tea culture.
- Tea plants are **shade-grown for 3–4 weeks** before harvest, increasing **chlorophyll** and **L-theanine**, which enhance the tea's **bright green colour** and **umami flavour**.
- China is the world's largest matcha producer.

LOKOS PLATFORM

Context:

The **LokOS Platform** has expanded across India, accelerating the **digital transformation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** and other community institutions.

About LokOS Platform

- **LokOS (Lok = People; OS = Operating System)** is a **web and mobile platform** under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**.
- It provides an **end-to-end digital system** for managing **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**, **Village Organizations (VOs)**, **Cluster Level Federations (CLFs)**, and their members.
- Generates **Aadhaar- and bank-linked digital IDs** and maintains **digital records** of savings, loans, repayments, and other financial transactions.

SPECIALISED INVESTMENT FUND (SIF)

Context:

Specialised Investment Funds (SIFs) have witnessed rapid growth, with their **Assets Under Management (AUM)** crossing **₹13,814 crore**.

About Specialised Investment Fund (SIF)

- **SIF** is a new investment product introduced by the **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**.
- Designed to **bridge the gap** between **Mutual Funds** and **Portfolio Management Services (PMS)**.
- Introduced through amendments to the **SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996**.
- **Minimum investment: ₹10 lakh** per investor.
- Can be **open-ended, close-ended, or interval-based**.
- **Investment Strategies Equity-oriented, Debt-oriented and Hybrid**

Eligibility for Asset Management Companies (AMCs)

- **Route 1:** Minimum **3 years of operation** with an average **AUM of ₹10,000 crore** over the preceding three years.
- **Route 2:** Appointment of a **Chief Investment Officer (CIO)** with **10+ years' experience** managing **₹5,000 crore+ AUM**, along with an additional fund manager having **3+ years' experience** managing **₹500 crore+ AUM**.

NAMERI TIGER RESERVE

Context:

The tiger population in **Nameri Tiger Reserve**, Assam, has **quadrupled over the last three years**.

About Nameri Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Assam; shares its northern boundary with **Pakke Tiger Reserve** in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Major Rivers: Jia Bhoroli**
- **Jia Bhoroli River** is renowned for the **Golden Mahseer fish**, also known as the **"Tiger of Indian Rivers."**

Mains Exam Topics

THE RISE OF QUICK COMMERCE IN INDIA

Context:

Quick commerce is rapidly transforming India's retail landscape through hyper-local delivery and digital innovation. While it enhances consumer convenience and employment opportunities, it also raises concerns over competition, kirana stores, and gig-worker welfare, highlighting the need for a balanced regulatory framework.

What are the key opportunities associated with the growth of quick commerce in India?

1. **Transforming Urban Retail:** Quick commerce is reshaping urban consumption by enabling rapid access to daily essentials, supporting increasingly time-constrained lifestyles.
    a. **E.g.,** Platforms such as **Blinkit**, **Zepto**, and **Swiggy Instamart** have mainstreamed near-instant delivery of groceries, medicines, and household essentials.
2. **Generating Platform-Based Employment:** The rapid expansion of quick commerce has created large-scale employment opportunities for delivery partners, warehouse personnel, and logistics workers, contributing to India's platform economy.
    a. **E.g.,** The **NITI Aayog** projects India's gig workforce to reach **23.5 million by 2029–30**, with logistics and delivery services forming a significant share.
3. **Accelerating Technology and Logistics Innovation:** The sector is driving investment in AI-driven demand forecasting, predictive inventory management, and micro-fulfilment networks, strengthening India's logistics capabilities.
    a. **E.g., Zepto** employs AI and machine learning to optimise inventory and delivery routes.
4. **Strengthening Hyperlocal Supply Chains:** Dense dark-store networks improve last-mile logistics and enhance the rapid distribution of essential goods during emergencies.
    a. **E.g.,** Quick-commerce platforms supported essential deliveries during the **COVID-19 pandemic** and the **2024 Bengaluru water crisis**.
5. **Catalysing Startup and Investment Ecosystems:** Quick commerce has emerged as a major destination for venture capital, encouraging innovation in retail technology and logistics.
    a. **E.g., Zepto** achieved unicorn status despite a slowdown in broader startup funding.
6. **Building a Platform Economy:** Beyond retail, quick commerce is creating digital infrastructure where logistics, consumer data, and retail media become valuable economic assets.

7. **Future Expansion Beyond Metros:** As digital infrastructure and purchasing power improve, quick commerce has the potential to expand into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities through region-specific business models.

What are the key issues associated with the quick commerce landscape?

1. **Labour Precarity in the Gig Economy:** Platform-based delivery work often lacks stable incomes, formal employment protection, and comprehensive social security despite algorithm-driven performance targets.
2. **Competitive Pressure on Independent Retail:** Platform scale, logistics efficiency, and pricing strategies intensify competitive pressures on neighbourhood **kirana** stores and other independent retailers.
    a. **E.g.,** The **Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT)** has highlighted declining sales among urban kirana stores.
3. **Platform Concentration and Vertical Integration:** Increasing control over algorithms, consumer data, and preferred-seller networks enables platforms to influence market access while competing with third-party sellers through private labels.
4. **Urban Infrastructure and Environmental Externalities:** High-frequency deliveries increase congestion, packaging waste, and last-mile emissions, placing additional pressure on urban infrastructure.
    a. **E.g.,** Large delivery fleets contribute to congestion in cities such as **Bengaluru** and **Mumbai**.
5. **Metro-Centric Growth Model:** The economics of dark stores require high population density and frequent ordering, limiting rapid expansion into many Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
6. **Consumer Protection and Regulatory Gaps:** The absence of dedicated standards for pricing transparency, product quality, and grievance redressal creates accountability challenges.

Way forward

1. Ensure Fair Competition and Platform Neutrality

Competition policy should prevent dominant platforms from abusing market power through predatory pricing, self-preferencing, algorithmic discrimination, and anti-competitive vertical integration while preserving a level playing field.

- **E.g.,** Strengthen enforcement by the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** under the **Competition Act, 2002**, with faster scrutiny of preferred-seller arrangements and abuse of dominant position.

2. Build a Distinct Social Protection Framework for Platform Workers

Rather than reclassifying gig workers as conventional employees, India should strengthen the existing framework under the **Code on Social Security, 2020** by guaranteeing minimum social protection while retaining labour-market flexibility.

- **E.g.,** Provide portable social security, accident insurance, algorithmic transparency, and platform-funded welfare contributions that are **periodically reviewed and transparently calibrated** to minimise excessive cost pass-through to workers, consumers, or small sellers.

3. Build Trusted Digital Markets

Strengthen consumer confidence through robust data governance, transparent pricing, and efficient grievance redressal.

- **E.g.,** Effectively implement the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, alongside transparent pricing disclosures, standardised refund policies, and time-bound online dispute resolution.

4. Promote Inclusive Digital Commerce

Expand competitive market access for MSMEs, Kirana stores, and local producers through interoperable digital infrastructure.

- **E.g.,** Scale the **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** alongside digital capacity-building, logistics support, and easier access to working capital.

5. Enable Sustainable Urban Logistics

Internalise the environmental and infrastructure costs of high-frequency deliveries while allowing innovation in logistics models.

- **E.g.,** Promote EV-based delivery fleets, sustainable packaging, and scientific zoning of dark stores through outcome-based environmental standards.