2025

Daily Current Affairs

Daily Current Affairs of National and International Importance

En Kay

WannaBeHPAS

2nd February 2025

Table of Contents

SC Bans Manual Scavenging in Six Metropolitan Cities

Context:

The Supreme Court has ordered a complete ban on manual scavenging and hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks in six major metropolitan cities: **Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad**.

What is Manual Scavenging?

Manual scavenging refers to the **manual removal of human excreta** from dry latrines, open drains, sewers, and septic tanks. It is a **dehumanizing** practice, predominantly carried out by **Dalits** and other marginalized communities.

Status in India:

- **443 deaths** due to manual scavenging reported between **2018-2023** (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment).
- In **Delhi**, 94 deaths were recorded in the past 15 years, with only **one conviction**.
- As of **2024**, **97% of manual scavengers belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs):**
    - **42,594 SCs**
    - **421 Scheduled Tribes (STs)**
    - **431 Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**

Judicial Interventions:

- ***Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014):*** The Supreme Court mandated **₹10 lakh** compensation for families of workers who died cleaning sewers since 1993.
- The court has emphasized that **manual scavenging violates:**
    - **Article 17** (Abolition of Untouchability)
    - **Article 21** (Right to Life and Dignity)

Health Hazards:

- **Exposure to toxic gases** like hydrogen sulfide leads to **chronic illnesses** and premature deaths.
- Increased risk of **cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, and respiratory infections** due to direct contact with human waste.

Why Manual Scavenging Persists?

1. Weak Enforcement:

- Despite legal bans, municipalities and contractors bypass regulations, hiring workers on **contractual** or **informal** bases.

2. Caste Discrimination:

- Deeply **rooted in caste hierarchy**, trapping Dalits in this occupation due to **social stigma** and **lack of alternatives**.

3. Poor Sewage Infrastructure:

- Most Indian cities **lack modern sewage systems**, making **manual cleaning unavoidable** in congested areas.

4. Economic Dependence:

- Many manual scavengers are **unskilled and illiterate**, with **limited access to alternative livelihoods**.

5. Lack of Awareness:

- Many workers **do not know their legal rights** or **government schemes** designed for their welfare.

Challenges in Eradicating Manual Scavenging:

- **Health Risks:** Chronic illnesses due to direct contact with human waste.
- **Social Discrimination:** Workers face **exclusion and stigma**, limiting education and employment opportunities.
- **Legal Loopholes:** Poor enforcement of laws allows the practice to continue unchecked.
- **Technological Gaps: Limited mechanization** of sewer cleaning due to high costs.
- **Data Inaccuracy: Underreporting** of cases hinders policy implementation.

Laws and Government Initiatives:

1. Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013

- **Criminalizes** the employment of manual scavengers.
- **Mandates mechanization** of sewer cleaning.

2. Supreme Court Directives:

- In **2020**, the court **ordered stricter implementation** of mechanized sewer cleaning.

3. Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 17** – Abolishes untouchability.
- **Article 21** – Guarantees **Right to Life and Dignity**.
- **Article 23** – Prohibits **forced labor**.
- **Article 42** – Mandates **humane working conditions** for all workers.

4. Government Schemes:

- **NAMASTE Scheme (2023):**
  - Focuses on **mechanizing** sewer cleaning.
  - Provides **skill training** and **alternative employment** for sanitation workers.
- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan:**
  - Replaces **dry latrines** with modern sanitation facilities.
  - Promotes **mechanized cleaning equipment**.
- **Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS):**
  - Provides **₹40,000 financial assistance** and **skill training**.

Way Forward:

1. **Strict Enforcement:** Implement the **2013 Act** with **penalties for violations**.
2. **Rapid Mechanization:** Invest in **robots and modern equipment** to eliminate human involvement.

3. **Skill Development:** Provide **vocational training** and alternative job opportunities.
4. **Awareness Campaigns:** Educate manual scavengers about **their rights** and **government support**.
5. **Community Engagement:** Civil society and local communities must work to **end caste-based discrimination**.

Conclusion:

Manual scavenging is a **human rights violation** that continues due to **weak enforcement, caste discrimination, and poor infrastructure**. Despite **legal bans**, its persistence highlights the **failure of policy implementation**. The **Supreme Court's intervention** is a crucial step toward ensuring **dignity and equality for all**, but **urgent action and technological advancement** are necessary to **completely eradicate this inhumane practice**.

National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)** with an expenditure of ₹16,300 crore and an additional ₹18,000 crore investment from PSUs and the private sector.
- It was announced in the **Union Budget 2024-25** under the **Ministry of Mines**.

What is the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)?

- The NCMM is a strategic initiative aimed at **strengthening India's supply chain for critical minerals** through:
  - Domestic **exploration and mining**
  - Overseas **asset acquisition**
  - **Technological innovation**
- These minerals are **vital for renewable energy, electronics, semiconductors, and defense manufacturing**, helping **reduce import dependency** and foster **industrial growth**.

Objectives of NCMM

- **Accelerate Domestic Exploration & Mining:** Expand mineral exploration within India, including offshore reserves.
- **Regulatory Reforms:** Fast-track mining approvals for seamless extraction and processing.
- **Strategic Global Partnerships:** Facilitate overseas acquisition of mineral assets by PSUs and private companies.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Establish **mineral processing parks** and promote **recycling of critical minerals**.
- **Encourage R&D & Innovation:** Support research in **advanced mineral processing technologies** and set up **Centers of Excellence**.

Key Features of NCMM

- **Comprehensive Value Chain Development:** Covers exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, and recycling of critical minerals.

- **Financial Incentives:** Offers monetary support for mineral exploration and sustainable recovery.
- **Stockpile Strategy:** Develops a **national reserve of critical minerals** for long-term security.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Encourages **PSUs and private firms** to invest in global mining projects.
- **Legislative Backing:** Strengthened by the **2023 amendments** to the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957**.

What are Critical Minerals?

- **Definition:**
  - Critical minerals are **essential for economic development and national security**.
  - Their limited availability and **concentrated extraction in specific geographical locations** make supply chains vulnerable.
- **Applications:**
  - **Clean Energy:** Used in solar panels, wind turbines, and EV batteries.
  - **Advanced Manufacturing:** Critical for defense, electronics, and telecommunications.
  - **Medical Sector:** Platinum Group Metals (PGMs) are used in **cancer treatments, medical devices, and dental materials**.

Critical Minerals Covered Under NCMM

Mineral Name	Industry Used In
Lithium & Cobalt	EV batteries, electronics
Graphite & Nickel	Battery storage, alloys
Rare Earth Elements (REEs)	High-tech manufacturing, defense applications
Titanium & Tungsten	Aerospace, industrial applications
Vanadium & Molybdenum	Steel production, energy storage solutions

Government Initiatives to Secure Critical Mineral Supplies

- **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:**
  - Amended in **2023** to **increase exploration and mining** of critical minerals.
- **Exploration Projects by Geological Survey of India (GSI):**
  - **368 exploration projects** undertaken in the last three years.
  - **195 projects ongoing in FY 2024-25**, with **227 projects planned for FY 2025-26**.
- **KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd.):**
  - A joint venture under the **Ministry of Mines** for securing lithium and other critical minerals abroad.
  - Acquired **15,703 hectares in Argentina** for lithium exploration.
- **Customs Duty Exemptions:**
  - The **Union Budget 2024-25** eliminated **customs duties on critical minerals**, promoting **domestic processing facilities**.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Domestic Exploration:** Boost India's self-reliance and reduce import dependency.
- **Foster Global Partnerships:** Collaborate with **Africa, Australia, Argentina, Mongolia** for mineral security.
    - **Tanzania:** Access to **niobium and graphite**
    - **Zimbabwe:** Focus on **lithium**
    - **Congo & Zambia:** Acquisition of **copper and cobalt**
- **Support Clean Energy Transition:** Minerals like **lithium and cobalt** are crucial for India's **net-zero emissions** goal by **2070**.

PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana

Context

- The **Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy** announced that the **PM Surya Ghar scheme** has reached a milestone, with **8.5 lakh households (about 8.5%)** installing rooftop solar connections.
- The scheme was launched on **February 15, 2024**, under the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**.

What is PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana?

- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** aimed at **providing free electricity** to households by **subsidizing rooftop solar panel installations**.
- The scheme aims to:
    - Provide **up to 300 units of free electricity per month** to **one crore households**.
    - Lower **electricity expenses** for both **households and the government**.
    - Increase the **share of renewable energy** in India's energy mix.
    - Reduce **carbon emissions** and promote **sustainable development**.

Key Features of the Scheme

1. Subsidies & Financial Incentives

- The scheme provides **subsidies** for rooftop solar systems:
    - **60% of the cost** for systems up to **2 kW capacity**.
    - **40% of the additional cost** for systems between **2 kW and 3 kW capacity**.
    - **Subsidy cap at 3 kW**.
- At current benchmark prices, this translates to:
    - ₹30,000 for a **1 kW** system.
    - ₹60,000 for a **2 kW** system.
    - ₹78,000 for a **3 kW** system.

2. Financial Outlay

- **Total Budget:** ₹75,021 crore.
- ₹65,700 crore allocated for **Central Financial Assistance (CFA)** to residential consumers.
- ₹4,950 crore allocated for **incentives to DISCOMs**.

3. DISCOM Incentives

- **DISCOMs (Distribution Companies)** are designated as **State Implementation Agencies (SIAs)**.

- They receive **performance-based incentives** for exceeding the baseline rooftop solar installation levels.

4. Eligibility Criteria

To avail of the scheme, a household must:
✔ Be an **Indian citizen**.
✔ **Own a house** with a **suitable rooftop** for solar panel installation.
✔ Have a **valid electricity connection**.
✔ **Not have availed any other subsidy** for solar panels.

5. Targets for Solar Installation

- **March 2025: 10 lakh households**.
- **October 2025: 20 lakh households**.
- **March 2027: 1 crore households**.

6. Government & Consumer Savings

- **Consumer Savings:** Households can save up to **₹18,000 annually** on electricity bills.
- **Government Savings:** Expected to **save ₹75,000 crore annually** in electricity costs.

7. Model Solar Villages

- A **Model Solar Village** will be developed **in each district** to promote rooftop solar adoption in **rural areas**.

Potential Benefits of PM Surya Ghar Scheme

✅ **Energy Independence:** Enables households to generate their own electricity, reducing dependence on the national grid.
✅ **Lower Electricity Costs:** Directly benefits **middle- and lower-income households**.
✅ **Peak Load Reduction:** Reduces electricity demand during **peak hours**, easing the burden on **DISCOMs**.
✅ **Boost to Solar Industry:** Drives demand for **solar panels**, benefiting manufacturers and installers.
✅ **Strengthens India's Energy Security:** Supports India's goal of achieving **self-reliance in the energy sector**.

Challenges Faced by the Scheme

❌ **Slow Installations:** Only **8.5 lakh out of 1 crore** targeted households have installed solar connections so far.
❌ **Infrastructure Issues:** Efficient **grid integration** is required for widespread solar adoption.
❌ **Financial Accessibility:** Despite subsidies, **upfront installation costs** remain a barrier.
❌ **DISCOM Support:** Delays in execution due to **DISCOM inefficiencies**.
❌ **Public Awareness:** Wider outreach is needed for both **urban and rural adoption**.

Future Outlook

- The **MNRE** aims to **cover 12 lakh households** in **FY 2024-25**.
- India plans to **add 50 GW of new renewable capacity annually** in the coming years.
- The **tariff for grid-connected solar power** has significantly **declined over the past decade**, making solar energy **more affordable**.

- India is moving toward a **clean energy transition**, with the **PM Surya Ghar scheme playing a pivotal role**.

Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS-MSME)

Context

- The **Government of India** has introduced the **Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS-MSME)** to **ease credit constraints** and **propel growth in the manufacturing sector**.
- The scheme was recently approved and is being implemented by the **National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC)**.

About the MSME Sector

- The **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector** is the **backbone** of the Indian economy, contributing significantly to **employment, innovation, and economic growth**.
- The **manufacturing sector** within MSMEs plays a crucial role, **providing jobs to 27.3 million workers**.
- However, **access to finance remains a major challenge**, limiting the ability of MSMEs to **modernize, expand, and compete effectively**.

Key Features of MCGS-MSME

1. Guarantee Coverage

- Provides **60% guarantee coverage** to **Member Lending Institutions (MLIs)** on loans **up to ₹100 crore** sanctioned to eligible MSMEs for the **purchase of plant and machinery**.

2. Eligibility

- MSMEs must have a **valid Udyam Registration Number**.

3. Loan Amount & Usage

- The project cost **can exceed ₹100 crore**, but at least **75% of the cost must be utilized** for acquiring **equipment and machinery** to support **manufacturing capacity expansion**.

4. Repayment Terms

- **Loans up to ₹50 crore:** Maximum **8-year repayment period**, including a **2-year principal moratorium**.
- **Loans above ₹50 crore:** Longer **repayment and moratorium periods** may be considered.

5. Guarantee Fees

- **First Year:** No guarantee fee.
- **Subsequent Three Years: 1.5% per annum** of the **outstanding loan amount** as of **March 31st** of the previous year.

6. Scheme Duration

- The scheme will be in effect for **four years** from the date of the **issuance of operational guidelines** or until **cumulative guarantees of ₹7 lakh crore** are issued, whichever comes earlier.

7. Participating Lenders

- **All Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs).**
- **Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)** registered with **NCGTC.**

Impact on MSMEs & Manufacturing

✅ Supports the **'Make in India, Make for the World'** initiative by **boosting manufacturing output.**
✅ Helps **MSMEs scale up** by providing **easier access to large credit for expansion.**
✅ Strengthens **India's position in global supply chains.**
✅ Aims to **increase the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP from 17% to 25%.**
✅ Expanded MSMEs will **generate more employment opportunities.**

Other Key MSME Financial Support Schemes in India

1. Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for MSEs (CGTMSE)

- Offers **collateral-free loans up to ₹2 crore.**
- Provides **up to 85% guarantee coverage** to reduce lender risk.

2. Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS)

- An **online platform** that helps **MSMEs receive faster payments** from large companies.

3. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

- A **₹3 lakh crore relief package** introduced during **COVID-19.**
- **100% government-backed loan guarantee.**

4. RBI Measures to Boost MSME Lending

- **Priority Sector Lending (PSL):** Banks are **mandated** to allocate a **portion of their loans to MSMEs.**
- **One-Time Loan Restructuring:** MSMEs were allowed to **restructure loans** to prevent defaults.

Other Steps to Ease MSME Credit Access

✅ **Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) Program:**

- **₹6,000 crore investment** over **5 years** to boost MSME growth.

✅ **Priority Sector Lending (PSL) Norms:**

- All **bank loans to MSMEs** that meet prescribed conditions qualify as **priority sector lending,** ensuring **better credit access.**

China's Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST) Reactor Sets New Milestone

Context

- The **Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST) reactor** in China has **set a new record** by sustaining a **plasma state**

for over 1,000 seconds (17 minutes), marking a significant advancement in fusion research.

Understanding Nuclear Fusion

What is Nuclear Fusion?

- **Nuclear fusion** is the process where **two light atomic nuclei** combine to form a **heavier nucleus,** releasing an **immense amount of energy**—the same process that powers the **Sun and other stars.**

How Does Nuclear Fusion Work?

1. **High Temperature & Plasma Formation:**
   - Requires temperatures above **100 million degrees Celsius** to create a **plasma state,** where atoms **split into charged particles.**
2. **Magnetic Confinement:**
   - Plasma is confined using **strong magnetic fields** to prevent contact with reactor walls.
3. **Fusion Reaction:**
   - **Hydrogen isotopes** (Deuterium & Tritium) fuse to produce **helium and energy** in the form of heat.
4. **Energy Capture & Conversion:**
   - Future reactors aim to use this heat to **generate steam,** driving **turbines** to produce electricity.

Major Nuclear Fusion Experiments Worldwide

1. China's EAST Reactor (Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak)

- **Achievement:** Maintained plasma for **1,000+ seconds,** surpassing its **2023 record of 400+ seconds.**
- **Significance:** A critical step toward building a **full-scale fusion power plant.**
- **Location: Institute of Plasma Physics, Anhui Province, China.**

2. ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, France)

- **What is ITER?**
  - The **world's largest fusion experiment,** involving **35 nations,** including **India, the US, China, and the EU.**
  - **Location: Southern France.**
- **Key Features:**
  - ✅ **500 MW fusion power output** planned by **2039.**
  - ✅ Uses **Deuterium-Tritium fuel** to replicate **Sun-like conditions.**
  - ✅ Paves the way for **commercial fusion power plants.**

Difference Between Nuclear Fusion and Nuclear Fission

Aspect	Nuclear Fusion	Nuclear Fission
Process	Combines atomic nuclei	Splits heavy atomic nuclei
Fuel Used	Hydrogen isotopes (Deuterium &	Uranium-235 or Plutonium-239

Aspect	Nuclear Fusion	Nuclear Fission
	Tritium)	
Energy Output	Extremely high (1g of fuel = 8 tonnes of coal)	High but lower than fusion
Nuclear Waste	Minimal, no long-term radioactive waste	Produces hazardous radioactive waste
Safety	No risk of meltdown, self-regulating process	Risk of reactor meltdowns (e.g., Chernobyl, Fukushima)

Potential & Importance of Nuclear Fusion

✅ **Abundant Fuel Sources:** Deuterium (from seawater) and Tritium (from lithium) are **widely available** and long-lasting.
✅ **High Energy Output:** Produces **4 times more energy per kilogram of fuel** than fission and nearly **4 million times more energy than burning oil/coal**.
✅ **Safe & Sustainable:** No risk of **runaway reactions** or **meltdowns**.
✅ **Environmental Benefits:** No **carbon dioxide** or **greenhouse gas emissions**, making it a **low-carbon energy source**.

Challenges in Achieving Nuclear Fusion

1. Extreme Conditions Required

- **On Earth**, fusion requires **temperatures exceeding 100 million°C** and intense **pressure** to sustain the reaction.

2. Plasma Confinement & Stability

- Keeping plasma **stable and contained** long enough for a **net power gain** is a major challenge.
- Current experiments **need better plasma confinement and stability**.

3. Technological & Financial Barriers

- Fusion reactors need **complex and expensive technology**.
- **Securing funding** and overcoming **regulatory hurdles** remain challenges.

Latest Developments in China

- China is **building a large laser-ignited fusion research center**, which may also have **military applications** for thermonuclear weapons.
- **China's nuclear arsenal** has grown from **410 warheads (January 2023) to 500 (January 2024)**, with projections suggesting it may **match the US and Russia** in **intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) by the end of the decade**.

Implications of China's Nuclear Fusion Breakthrough

✅ **Nuclear Weapons:**

- Could improve **China's nuclear weapons design** without the need for **traditional nuclear tests**, allowing compliance with **international testing bans**.

✅ **Energy Production:**

- Advances in fusion research could contribute to **clean, limitless, and sustainable energy**.

✅ **Concerns for India:**

- China's fusion advancements could **widen the gap** between **India and China** in both **nuclear capabilities** and **clean energy production**.

Conclusion & Way Forward

- **Nuclear fusion** has the **potential to meet global energy demands for millions of years**, making it the **future of sustainable energy**.
- **China's recent breakthrough** marks a major milestone in **global fusion research**.
- **For India**, this poses both **a challenge and an opportunity**, urging the country to **accelerate its fusion research** and build **strategic partnerships** to stay competitive in future energy technologies.

Greenland's Crystal Blue Lakes Turned Brown

Context

- A study titled **'Abrupt transformation of west Greenland lakes following compound climate extremes associated with atmospheric rivers'** revealed that **more than 7,500 lakes** in **western Greenland** have turned **brown** due to extreme weather events.

Major Findings

1. Transformation of Greenland's Lakes

- Western Greenland is home to **tens of thousands of blue lakes**, which:
  - ✅ Provide **drinking water** to residents.
  - ✅ **Sequester carbon** from the atmosphere.
- In **2022**, these lakes began:
  - ✅ **Emitting carbon dioxide (CO_2)** instead of storing it.
  - ✅ Experiencing a **drop in water quality** due to extreme weather events.
- **Normally**, such changes take place **over centuries**, but in this case, they happened **within months**.

2. Key Drivers of the Transformation

a) Warmer Temperatures & Rainfall Instead of Snow

- Greenland typically experiences **snowfall** from **late August to late September**.
- However, in **2022**, due to **warmer temperatures**, the snow **turned into rain**.

b) Thawing Permafrost & Chemical Release

- **Permafrost** (frozen ground containing significant organic carbon) **thawed**, releasing:
  - ✅ **Carbon**
  - ✅ **Iron, magnesium, and other elements**
- Record levels of **rainfall washed these elements into the lakes**, leading to their **discoloration**.

c) Role of Atmospheric Rivers

- **Atmospheric Rivers (ARs)** played a crucial role in **raising temperatures and increasing rainfall** in **2022**.

What is an Atmospheric River?

- **Atmospheric rivers** are **long, narrow corridors in the atmosphere** that **transport large amounts of water vapor** outside of the tropics.
- **(Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - NOAA)**
- They are typically located within the **low-level jet stream**, ahead of a **cold front** in an **extra-tropical cyclone**.

Impact of Atmospheric Rivers

✅ **Essential for precipitation** but can cause **flooding and heat hazards**.
✅ Responsible for **70% of major floods in India (1985-2020)**, including:

- **2013 Uttarakhand floods**
- **2018 Kerala floods**

Impact of Greenland's Lake Transformation

1. From Carbon Sinks to Carbon Emitters

- **Western Greenland's lakes**, once **carbon sinks**, became **significant carbon sources**, with **CO_2 emissions increasing by 350%**.

2. Water Quality Decline

- The **introduction of iron and organic matter** led to a **decline in water quality**.

3. Disruption of Ecosystems

- **Reduction in light penetration** affected the **biodiversity of plankton**, impacting the **regional carbon cycle**.

Impact of Climate Change on Atmospheric Rivers

1. Increased Frequency

- **Global warming** could **increase the frequency** of Atmospheric Rivers (ARs) by **50-290%** in regions like **Greenland, North America,** and **East Asia** by the end of the century.

2. South Asian Monsoon

- **Warming** will enhance **moisture transport**, leading to more ARs making landfall in **India** and intensifying the **South Asian Monsoon**.

3. Indian Ocean Warming

- **Warmer sea temperatures** and an increase in **Vapour Pressure Deficit (VPD)** will raise **evaporation**, promoting the **formation of Atmospheric Rivers**.

4. Poleward Shift

- Atmospheric Rivers are shifting **6-10 degrees toward the poles** due to changes in **sea surface temperatures**.

5. La Niña Impact

- **La Niña** strengthens **Walker circulation**, expanding the **tropical rainfall belt** and steering Atmospheric Rivers **poleward**

PLACES IN NEWS

Kurdistan Region

Context:

- **India** has recently sent **humanitarian assistance** to support residents of the **Kurdistan region** in **Iraq**.

About the Kurdistan Region:

- **Geography:**
  The **Kurdistan region** is a **mountainous area** spanning parts of **eastern Turkey**, **northern Iraq**, **western Iran**, and smaller areas in **northern Syria** and **Armenia**.
- **Inhabitants:**
  The region is predominantly inhabited by the **Kurds**, an ethnic group that is the **fourth-largest** in the **Middle East**, yet they do not have their own nation-state.
- **Historical Context:**
  - **Post World War I:** Under the **Treaty of Sèvres**, Western powers promised the Kurds their own homeland.
  - **However**, this hope was dashed with the **Treaty of Lausanne in 1924**, which divided the Kurds among the newly formed nations of the **Middle East**.

Teesta River

- The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has **approved** the proposal to **rebuild the Teesta-III dam** located on the **main Teesta River**, despite concerns over the design and stability of the project.

About Teesta River:

- **Origin:** The Teesta River originates from **Tso Lhamo Lake** in **North Sikkim**.
- **Course and Flow:**
  - The river flows south through the **Siwalik Hills**, southeast via the **Sivok Khola pass**, into **West Bengal**.
  - It is a major right-bank tributary of the **Brahmaputra River**.
  - The **River Rangit** is a tributary of the Teesta.
- **Draining and Course Change:**
  - Originally, the Teesta drained directly into the **upper Padma River** (also known as the **Ganga**).
  - However, around **1787**, the river changed its course to flow eastward in **Bangladesh**, eventually joining the **Jamuna River**

Guantánamo Bay

Context: **US President** Orders Setting Up of Migrant Detention Center in **Guantánamo Bay**

About Guantánamo Bay:

- **Location:**
  Guantánamo Bay forms an inlet of the **Caribbean Sea**, indenting the southeastern part of **Cuba**.
- **Features:**
  - The bay is large, well-sheltered, and has a narrow entrance to a harbor.
  - It is capable of accommodating large vessels.
- **Ports:**
  - The ports of **Caimanera** and **Boquerón** are linked to the city of **Guantánamo**.
- **Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB):**
  - Established in **1903**, the NSGB is the **oldest overseas military installation** of the United States.
- **Jurisdiction:**
  According to the United States' lease with Cuba, the **U.S. retains jurisdiction** over the naval base, while **Cuba maintains sovereignty**.

Oman

Capital: Muscat

Context: Recently, **India and Oman** have agreed to amend the **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** to promote greater cooperation on taxation.

Political Features

- Oman occupies the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea.
- It is bounded by Yemen (Southwest), the Arabian Sea (South and East), the Gulf of Oman (North), the United Arab Emirates (Northwest), and Saudi Arabia (West).

Geographical Features

- **Climate:** Hot and humid along the coast; hot and dry interior; with a strong southwest summer monsoon (May to September) in the far south.
- **Coastal Plain:** The long, narrow coastal plain known as Al-Bāṭinah stretches along the Gulf of Oman.
- **Desert:** The Rub' al-Khālī desert is shared with Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- **Highest Point:** Mount Shams ("Sun Mountain").

THANK YOU