DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 24-02-2025

GS-2

1. **Lokpal's jurisdiction**
2. **PM-AASHA Scheme**

GS-3

3. **Dinesh Khara Committee**
4. **Majorana 1**
5. **Sumatran Rhino**

Lokpal's jurisdiction

Syllabus: GS-2; Polity

Context

- The **Lokpal** is India's apex anti-corruption ombudsman, established under the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**, to investigate corruption allegations against public officials.
- However, a recent controversy arose when the Lokpal attempted to bring **High Court judges** under its jurisdiction, leading to intervention by the **Supreme Court**.

1. Jurisdiction of Lokpal

The Lokpal has jurisdiction over:

A. Prime Minister

- Falls under Lokpal's jurisdiction **except** in cases related to:
  - International relations
  - National security
  - Public order
  - Atomic energy
  - Space
- A **full bench** of Lokpal must approve an inquiry against the Prime Minister, and a **two-thirds majority** of the members must agree.

B. Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs)

- Ministers in the **Union Government**
- MPs, but **not for** anything said or a vote cast in Parliament under **Article 105** of the Constitution

C. Group A, B, C, and D Government Officials

- Includes officers and employees of the **Union Government, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), and Autonomous Bodies**

D. Corporations, Trusts, and NGOs

- NGOs receiving **foreign contributions above ₹10 lakh per year**

- NGOs receiving **government funds of ₹1 crore or more**

E. High Court Judges Controversy

- On **January 27, 2025**, the Lokpal passed an order declaring **High Court judges** as public servants under its jurisdiction.
- The order was based on a complaint that an **Additional High Court judge** had influenced an **Additional District Judge** and later another **High Court judge** to decide in favor of a **private company**—a former client of the judge during their advocacy years.

2. Supreme Court's Stay on Lokpal's Order

On **February 20, 2025**, the Supreme Court **stayed** the Lokpal's order, calling its interpretation **"very disturbing"** and a threat to **judicial independence**.

Key Observations by the Supreme Court

- A **Special Bench** of Justices **B.R. Gavai, Surya Kant, and A.S. Oka** took suo motu cognizance of the matter.
- The court issued **notices** to the **Centre, the Lokpal Registrar, and the complainant**, scheduling a hearing for **March 18, 2025**.
- The **complainant** was prohibited from disclosing the **High Court judge's name** and ordered to keep the **complaint confidential**.
- **Solicitor General Tushar Mehta** clarified that **High Court judges do not fall within the Lokpal's jurisdiction**.
- Senior advocate **Kapil Sibal** argued that the **Supreme Court must lay down the law on this issue**.

3. Lokpal's Reasoning for Including High Court Judges

- The **January 27 order** argued that since **Indian High Courts pre-date the Constitution**, they were **not established under the Constitution** but under **British Parliamentary Acts** (Indian High Courts Act, 1861 & Government of India Act, 1935).
- The **Supreme Court, however, was entirely created by the Constitution** under **Article 124**.
- Lokpal claimed **High Court judges** fell under **Section 14(1)(f)** of the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**, which covers:

- **Any person who is or has been a chairperson, member, officer, or employee in any body established by an Act of Parliament** or controlled by the **Central government**.

4. Supreme Court's Opposition to Lokpal's Interpretation

- The **Supreme Court noted that all judges are appointed under the Constitution**, dismissing Lokpal's claim that **High Court judges are separate from the Supreme Court's judges**.
- The **January 3, 2025, Lokpal order** had already **excluded Supreme Court judges** from its jurisdiction.
- The **January 27 order** was deemed **"naive"** by the Supreme Court.
- The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** was consulted before launching a **preliminary inquiry**, but the Supreme Court found this approach problematic.

5. Exemptions from Lokpal's Jurisdiction

- **Judiciary (Supreme Court & High Court judges)** does not fall under Lokpal's purview.
- Cases involving **lower-level officials (Group C & D employees)** are referred to the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)**.

6. Powers of Lokpal

- **Superintendence over CBI** in corruption cases
- Power to **recommend prosecution** and **attach assets** acquired through corruption
- Can direct agencies like **CBI, CVC, and ED** to investigate cases

7. Lokayukta's Jurisdiction (State-Level Ombudsman)

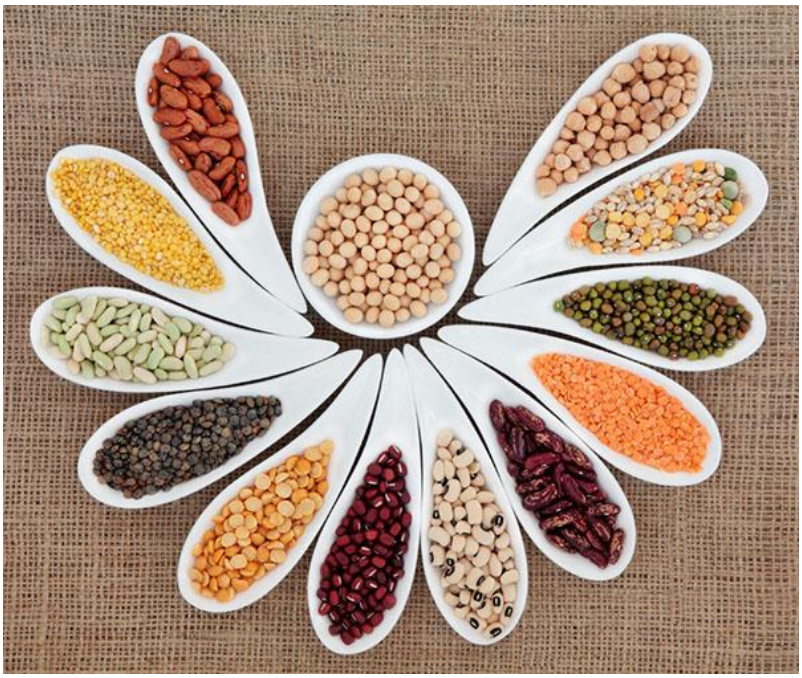
- Each state has a **Lokayukta**, which investigates corruption cases involving state officials, including **Chief Ministers, Ministers, and State Government Officers**.

PM-AASHA Scheme

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

- The Centre has approved the continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) scheme through the 15th Finance Commission cycle, extending its implementation until 2025-26.



About

- The **PM-AASHA (Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan)** is a government scheme launched in **2018** to ensure **remunerative prices to farmers** for their produce. It is aimed at strengthening the **procurement system** and ensuring **Minimum Support Price (MSP) realization** for agricultural products.

Key Components of PM-AASHA

PM-AASHA has three main components:

1. **Price Support Scheme (PSS)**
    - Implemented for **oilseeds, pulses, and copra**.
    - The **Central government** procures the produce directly from farmers through **NAFED, FCI, and other agencies**.
    - Procurement occurs at **MSP**.

   - The **state government** plays a role in procurement, ensuring farmers get fair prices.
2. **Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS)**
   - Implemented for **oilseeds**.
   - Farmers **sell their produce in the market**, and if the selling price is lower than MSP, the **difference is paid to them directly**.
   - **No physical procurement** is done under this component.
   - Modeled after **Madhya Pradesh's Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana**.
3. **Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS)**
   - Encourages **private sector participation** in procurement.
   - **Private agencies** procure crops at MSP under state government supervision.
   - The government pays a **service charge** to private players for procurement.
   - Implemented in **selected districts** for **oilseeds**.

Objectives of PM-AASHA

- Ensure **MSP reaches farmers** effectively.
- Reduce **distress sales** and protect farmers from **price fluctuations**.
- Strengthen the **procurement infrastructure**.
- Promote **crop diversification** by encouraging the production of oilseeds and pulses.

Significance of PM-AASHA

- **Enhances Farmers' Income**
  - Ensures **MSP realization** for farmers, protecting them from price volatility.
  - Reduces **distress selling**, ensuring fair compensation.
- **Strengthens Agricultural Procurement System**
  - Expands the reach of MSP beyond traditional crops like wheat and rice.
  - Focuses on **oilseeds, pulses, and copra**, promoting **crop diversification**.
- **Reduces Government's Burden of Physical Procurement**
  - **PDPS (Price Deficiency Payment Scheme)** reduces the need for large-scale government storage.
  - Encourages **private sector involvement (PPPS)** in procurement.
- **Supports Food Security and Self-Reliance**
  - Boosts domestic production of **pulses and oilseeds**, reducing import dependence.
  - Aligns with **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** goals in agriculture.
- **Encourages Market-Oriented Reforms**

- Shifts focus from **government-controlled procurement** to a **market-driven system**.
- Introduces **digital payments** to farmers, reducing middlemen interference.

- **Addresses Regional Disparities**
  - Extends MSP benefits to farmers in **non-traditional procurement regions**.
  - Aims to **support small and marginal farmers** who often lack access to procurement centers.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Limited procurement centers**, especially in remote areas.
- **Budget constraints** and delays in fund allocation.
- **PDPS implementation issues**, as many farmers still prefer physical procurement.
- **State government dependency** leads to variations in execution.

Dinesh Khara Committee

Syllabus: GS-3; Banking sector reforms

Context

- Irdai forms 7-member committee to review insurance sector reforms

Background of the Dinesh Khara Committee

- The Dinesh Khara Committee was constituted by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** in **2021**.
- The committee was formed to review the **working of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)** in India and suggest measures to improve their efficiency and transparency.
- The committee was chaired by **Dinesh Khara**, the Chairman of the **State Bank of India (SBI)**.

Key Objectives of the Committee

- **Review the functioning of ARCs**: Assess the role and performance of ARCs in resolving non-performing assets (NPAs) in the Indian banking system.
- **Enhance transparency and governance**: Suggest measures to improve governance, transparency, and accountability in ARCs.

- **Strengthen regulatory framework**: Recommend changes to the regulatory framework to make ARCs more effective in resolving stressed assets.
- **Improve recovery mechanisms**: Propose ways to enhance the recovery process and ensure better returns for banks and financial institutions.

Key Recommendations of the Committee

The Dinesh Khara Committee submitted its report in **2022**, and some of its major recommendations include:

- **Increase in minimum investment in Security Receipts (SRs)**:
  - ARCs should invest a minimum of **15%** in SRs (up from the current 5%) to ensure better alignment of interests between ARCs and banks.
- **Improvement in governance standards**:
  - ARCs should adopt higher governance standards, including the appointment of independent directors and strengthening of internal audit mechanisms.
- **Transparency in valuation**:
  - ARCs should follow transparent and standardized methods for the valuation of stressed assets.
- **Strengthening the regulatory framework**:
  - The RBI should have more powers to supervise and regulate ARCs effectively.
- **Focus on resolution rather than acquisition**:
  - ARCs should focus on resolving stressed assets rather than merely acquiring them.

Significance of the Committee

- The recommendations of the Dinesh Khara Committee are crucial for addressing the **NPA crisis** in India's banking sector.
- By improving the functioning of ARCs, the committee aims to ensure faster resolution of stressed assets, which will strengthen the financial health of banks.
- The committee's focus on transparency and governance aligns with the broader goals of financial sector reforms in India.

Key Terms to Remember

- **Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)**: Entities that acquire NPAs from banks and financial institutions and work towards their resolution.
- **Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)**: Loans or advances that are in default or are close to being in default.

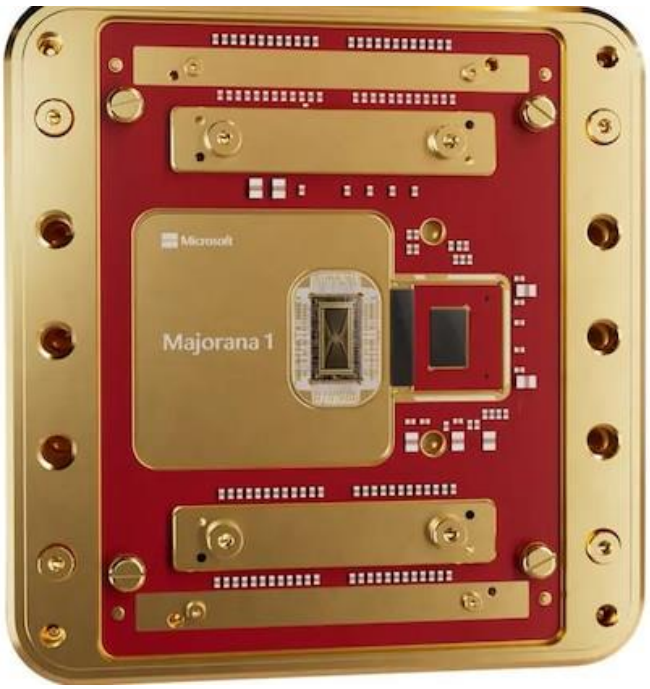
- **Security Receipts (SRs)**: Instruments issued by ARCs to banks as part of the acquisition of stressed assets.

Majorana 1

Syllabus: GS-3; Science & Technology

Context

- Microsoft has introduced Majorana 1, a groundbreaking quantum chip designed to bring industrial-scale quantum computing within reach in just a few years.



What is Quantum Computing?

- Imagine a computer that doesn't just think in 0s and 1s but explores infinite possibilities simultaneously. That's the power of **quantum computing**.
- Unlike classical computers, which rely on bits, quantum computers use **qubits**. These qubits can exist in multiple states at once (thanks to **superposition**) and are interconnected through **entanglement**, enabling them to perform calculations at unprecedented speeds.
- Quantum computing promises to revolutionize industries by solving problems that are currently beyond the reach of even the most advanced supercomputers.

- From cracking complex encryption codes to simulating molecular interactions for drug discovery, the potential applications are vast and transformative.

Majorana 1: The Quantum Chip of the Future

- At the heart of this quantum revolution is **Majorana 1**, the world's first quantum chip built on **Topological Core architecture**.
- This chip introduces a game-changing material: **topoconductors**, which stabilize and control **Majorana particles**—exotic quantum entities that enable error-resistant and scalable quantum operations.
- Microsoft likens this breakthrough to the invention of **semiconductors**, which laid the foundation for modern electronics.
- By harnessing Majorana particles, the company aims to build quantum computers with **one million qubits**, a threshold necessary to tackle real-world industrial and scientific challenges.

How Quantum Computing Could Transform Our Lives

Quantum computing isn't just about faster calculations—it's about solving humanity's greatest challenges. Here's how it could impact our daily lives:

- **Healthcare and Medicine**: Simulating molecular interactions to design life-saving drugs and personalized treatments.
- **Environment and Sustainability**: Developing self-healing materials and catalysts to break down plastic waste.
- **Agriculture and Food Security**: Creating better fertilizers to boost crop yields and combat global hunger.
- **Engineering and Manufacturing**: Designing advanced materials and products with precision, eliminating years of trial and error.

Sumatran Rhino

Syllabus: GS-3; Conservation strategies, poaching threats, IUCN Red List

Context

- Recent estimates indicate that the Sumatran rhino population has dwindled to fewer than **50 individuals**, underscoring an urgent need for intensified conservation efforts.

About

- The **Sumatran Rhino** (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is one of the world's most critically endangered rhino species. It is the smallest of the rhino species and is the only Asian rhino with two horns.

Physical Characteristics:

- **Size**: 1 - 1.5 meters tall, 2.5 - 3 meters in length.
- **Weight**: 500 - 800 kg.
- **Horns**: Two horns; the front horn is larger (about 25 cm), the second is smaller.
- **Appearance**: Covered with a reddish-brown coat of hair.
- **Lifespan**: About 30-40 years in the wild.

Habitat & Distribution:

- Native to **Sumatra (Indonesia), Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula**.
- Prefers dense tropical forests, swamps, and hilly areas.
- Now found mainly in **Indonesia (Sumatra and Borneo)**; extinct in Malaysia.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List**: **Critically Endangered**
- **CITES**: Appendix I (Trade strictly prohibited)
- **Wild Population**: Estimated fewer than **80 individuals**

Threats:

- **Habitat Loss** – Deforestation due to agriculture (palm oil plantations), logging, and human encroachment.
- **Poaching** – Hunted for its horn, which is used in traditional medicine.
- **Low Reproductive Rate** – Females breed infrequently, and habitat fragmentation makes breeding difficult.

Conservation Efforts:

- **Sumatran Rhino Rescue Program** – Captive breeding initiatives led by the Indonesian government.
- **Leuser Ecosystem and Way Kambas National Park** – Important conservation areas in Sumatra.

- **Collaboration with NGOs** – Organizations like WWF, International Rhino Foundation (IRF), and Global Wildlife Conservation support conservation efforts.
- **Artificial Reproduction** – Scientists are exploring assisted reproductive technologies like IVF to increase population.

Importance in Ecosystem:

- Helps in **seed dispersal** and maintaining forest health.
- Indicator species for **forest conservation**.

Comparison of Rhino Species

Rhino Species	Status (IUCN)	Habitat	No. of Horns	Population Estimate
Sumatran	Critically Endangered	Sumatra, Borneo	**Two**	< 80
Javan	Critically Endangered	Indonesia (Ujung Kulon)	**One**	< 80
Indian (Greater One-Horned)	Vulnerable	India, Nepal	**One**	4,000+
Black	Critically Endangered	Africa	**Two**	5,500+
White	Near Threatened	Africa	**Two**	16,000+