'Wheat waiver 'WTO

- One of the cardinal demands of India in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and rightly so has been to find a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding (PSH) of food to protect India's food security (PSH policy).
- India's PSH policy is based on procuring food from farmers at an administered price (minimum support price or MSP), which is generally higher than the market price.
- The PSH policy serves the twin objectives of offering remunerative prices to farmers and providing subsidized food to the underprivileged.
- However, under WTO law, such price support-based procurement from farmers is counted as a trade-distorting subsidy, and if given beyond the permissible limit, breaches WTO law.
- Currently, India has temporary relief due to a 'peace clause' that bars countries from bringing legal challenges against price support-based procurement for food security purposes.
- However, a permanent solution to this issue is still not in the offing.
- The WTO ministerial meeting in June at Geneva did precious little to address this issue.
- Paragraph 10 of the declaration on food security adopted at the Geneva ministerial states: "We recognize that adequate food stocks can contribute to the realization of Members' domestic food security objectives and encourage Members with available surplus stocks to release them on international markets consistently with WTO rules"
- India insists that it should also be allowed to export food, most notably wheat, from the pool of the food grain procured under the MSP
- WTO law proscribes countries from exporting food grain procured at subsidized prices.
- There is a sound economic rationale behind it.
- Allowing a country to export food grain procured at subsidized prices would give that country an unfair advantage in global agricultural trade.
- Paragraph 10 of the Geneva ministerial food security declaration, which states that countries may release surplus food stocks in the international market in accordance with WTO law.
- Debatably, the WTO may agree to a temporary waiver to allow the export of wheat from public stockholdings given the ongoing food crisis in some countries.

- In fact, before the WTO ministerial meeting, India reportedly requested such a waiver.
- As per Article IX.3 of the WTO Agreement, waivers can be adopted only in "exceptional circumstances".
- The WTO filibustered for two years acknowledging a once-in-a-century pandemic such as COVID-19 as an "exceptional circumstance" for the IP waiver.
- Thus, the possibility of it recognizing an ongoing war between two nations as an "exceptional circumstance" to adopt a waiver for permitting wheat exports from public stocks is profoundly remote.

THE HINDU

INSTC

- Last week, RailFreight.Com reported that two 40-ft containers of wood laminate sheets crossed the Caspian Sea from Russia's Astrakhan port, entered Iran's Anzali port, continued their southward journey towards the Arabian Sea, entered the waters at Bandar Abbas and eventually reach Nhava Shiva port in Mumbai.
- The journey signalled the launch of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200-km multi-modal transport corridor that combines road, rail, and maritime routes connecting Russia and India via central Asia and Iran.
- The legal framework for the INSTC is provided by a trilateral agreement signed by India, Iran, and Russia at the Euro-Asian Conference on Transport in 2000.
- Since then Kazakhstan, Belarus, Oman, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Syria have signed instruments of accession to become members of the INSTC.
- Once fully operational, the INSTC is expected to reduce freight costs by 30% and the journey time by 40% in comparison with the conventional deep sea route via the Suez Canal.
- India's investment in the INSTC is exemplified by its involvement in Iran's Chabahar port and the construction of a 500-km Chabahar-Zahedan railway line.
- Once completed, this infrastructure will allow India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia
- The India Ports Global Limited, a joint venture between the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Kandla Port Trust, will develop the port along with Iran's Aria Banader.
- IRCON International will contribute to constructing the railway line.
- For India, the INSTC achieves several things all at once.
- Firstly, India can now bypass Pakistan to access Afghanistan, central, Asia and beyond.
- Second, the INSTC can shape a north-south transport corridor that can

complement the east-west axis of the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

- India's founding role in both the INSTC and the Quad exemplify its departure from non-alignment to multi-alignment.
- The INSTC offers a platform for India to closely collaborate with Russia, Iran and Central Asian republics.
- That two of its partners are subject to Western sanctions hasn't prevented India from collaborating with the U.S., Japan, and Australia as part of the Quad to create and safeguard a free and open Indo-Pacific.

THE HINDU

Sec 295(A) OF IPC

- The closest equivalent to a blasphemy law is Section 295(A) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which punishes any speech, writings, or signs that "with premeditated and malicious intent" insult citizens' religion or religious beliefs with a fine and imprisonment for up to three years.
- The legality of Section 295(A) was affirmed by a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court.
- The court said that the punishment under Section 295(A) deals with aggravated form of blasphemy which is committed with the malicious aim of offending any religious sensibilities.
- Insulting a religion may be disputed but should not be legally outlawed.
- The reason for this is because hate speech laws are predicated on the critical distinction between criticising religion and encouraging prejudice towards individuals because of their faith.
- Blasphemy laws which prohibit, in general criticism in general are incompatible with the principles of a democratic society.

THE HINDU

HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLE

- In recent months, automakers Maruti Suzuki, Toyota and Honda have launched hybrid electric vehicles in India, offering car buyers more choices in the nascent electric vehicle market.
- These new hybrid electric vehicles from different automakers are relying on hybrid technology and its advantages over conventional internal combustion engine (ICE)-powered vehicles to change car buyers' minds.

What is a hybrid electric vehicle?

- A hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) uses an ICE (a petrol/diesel engine) and one or more electric motors to run.

- It is powered by the electric motor alone, which uses energy stored in batteries, by the ICE, or both.
- The powertrain of the HEV is more complex than a regular ICE-powered car as it has EV components and a conventional ICE.
- That means a typical HEV will have a low-voltage auxiliary battery, a traction battery pack to store electricity for the electric motor, an electric generator, an AC/DC converter, a power electronics controller, a thermal system to maintain working temperature, an ICE, a fuel tank, a fuel filler, a transmission and an exhaust system.
- A series-parallel HEV offers a combination of both models and allows to split power, wherein power is routed from the ICE alone or from the battery to the electric motor to drive the vehicle
- The efficiency of HEVs and EVs will in large part be determined by their ability to recover as much energy as possible while braking, with a higher degree of energy recovery lowering fuel consumption.
- The amount of recoverable energy depends upon factors like vehicle speed and stopping pattern.
- The adoption of regenerative braking technology in the auto industry is increasing on account of the operating efficiency of vehicles through reduced fuel consumption and the extended range of batteries.

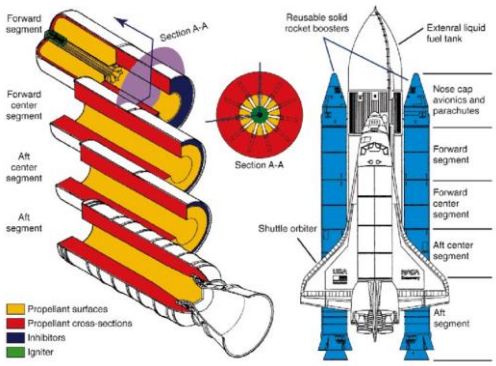
What are the different types of HEVs?

- The HEVs can be categorised into micro, mild and full hybrid vehicles, based on the degree of hybridisation.
- The hybrid variants of the Maruti Suzuki's Grand Vitara and the Toyota's Urban Cruiser Hyryder can be classified as full and mild hybrids.
- A full HEV will have a larger battery and a more powerful electric motor compared with a mild HEV. As a result, a full HEV can power the vehicle for longer distances using just electric mode,
- Whereas a mild HEV cannot drive using only the electric motor and uses the battery at traffic lights or in stop-and-go traffic to support the ICE.
- Micro hybrids do not offer electric torque assistance as they lack an electric motor, but they have an idle stop-start system and energy management functions.
- Full HEVs offer better fuel economy compared with the other two types of HEVs but they also cost more than them.

THE HINDU

BOOSTER ROCKET

- A Chinese booster rocket made an uncontrolled return to earth.
- The Solid Rocket Boosters (SRBs) operate in parallel with the main engines for the first two minutes of flight to provide the additional thrust needed for the Orbiter to escape the gravitational pull of the Earth.



THE HINDU