



# IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

**JANUARY 2021**

Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute  
Economic Survey 2020-21  
Climate Change and India in 2021  
COVID-19 Vaccination drive

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## PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website [www.iasbaba.com](http://www.iasbaba.com) will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?'

This is the 68<sup>th</sup> edition of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **JANUARY 2021** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

### VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Must Read and Connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.
- Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

**Must Read Articles:** We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

***"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."***

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## HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

### Place in news: Ramateertham temple

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

**In news**

- The 16th century Ramateertham temple was recently seen in news due to the vandalism of the idol of Lord Rama at the Kodandarama Swamy temple.



### **Important value additions**

- The idol of Lord Rama atop the historic Ramateertham temple, located 12 km from Vizianagaram, was vandalised on December 29.
- It is located in Andhra Pradesh.
- Ramateertham is one of the places made sacred by a traditional connection with Lord Sree Rama.
- The famous ancient temple of Ramachandra Swamy can be found here.
- The idols of Lord Ramachandra Swamy, Sita and Lakshmana in Silver kavachas can be seen at this temple.

### Makar Sankranti being celebrated all over India

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

**In news**

- The Vice President of India greeted fellow citizens on the eve of the festivals of Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Pongal, Bhogali Bihu, Uttarayan and Paush Parbon.
- These festivals are celebrated in diverse yet similar ways, across India.

**Key takeaways**

- Makar Sankranti is a festival day in the Hindu calendar, in reference to deity Surya (sun).
- Makar Sankranti is observed according to solar cycles.
- It is held normally on the 14th of January, or a day before or after.
- In certain regions celebrations can go on for even four days and vary a lot in the rituals.
- It marks the – first day of sun's transit into the Makara (Capricorn), marking the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of longer days.
- It is also celebrated as a harvest Festival.

**Do you know?****Different names of the same festival**

- Makar Sankranti - Odisha, Maharashtra-Goa, Andhra-Telengana, Kerala and most of the north India
  - Paush Parbon - Bengal
  - Pongal - Tamil Nadu
  - Bhogali Bihu - Assam
  - Lohri - Punjab and Jammu
  - Maghi - Haryana and Himachal
  - Khichdi Parwa - parts of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh
-



### [Jallikattu: Pride & Politics](#)

**Context:** With Assembly polls round the corner in Tamil Nadu, the Pongal festival and Jallikattu, the traditional bull-taming sport, have caught the attention of the Political Parties.

In their present efforts to celebrate these cultural symbols ahead of elections, the two national parties have attacked each other over their past stands.

#### **What is Jallikattu?**

- A tradition over 2,000 years old, Jallikattu is a **competitive sport as well as an event to honour bull owners** who rear them for mating.
- It is a violent sport in which **contestants try to tame a bull** for a prize; if they fail, the bull owner wins the prize.

- In an age when the farm sector is largely mechanised, there are no major monetary benefits for bull owners in breeding Jallikattu bulls other than the prizes they get during the Jallikattu events.
- Traditionally, these used to be a dhoti, a towel, betel leaves, bananas and a cash prize of Rs 101. Over the last two decades, the prizes have included grinders, a fridge and small furniture.
- The bull-taming sport is popular in Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul districts — known as the Jallikattu belt.
- Jallikattu is celebrated in the **second week of January**, during the Tamil harvest festival, Pongal.
- It is a **controversial sport** which has faced long legal battles over **cruelty to animals**, and which at the same time is a **symbol of Tamil culture**.

#### Why is Jallikattu important in Tamil culture?

- **Preservation of Native Breeds:** Jallikattu is considered a traditional way for the peasant community to preserve their pure-breed native bulls.
- **Prevents Slaughtering:** At a time when cattle breeding is often an artificial process, conservationists and peasants argue that Jallikattu is a way to protect these male animals which are otherwise used only for meat if not for ploughing.
- **Pride associated with rearing premium breeds:** Kangayam, Pulikulam, Umbalachery, Barugur and Malai Maadu are among the popular native cattle breeds used for Jallikattu. The owners of these premium breeds command respect locally.

#### Why has Jallikattu been the subject of legal battles?

- In India, legal battles surrounding animal rights issues emerged in the early 1990s.
- A notification from the Environment Ministry in 1991 banned the training and exhibition of bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs, which was challenged by the Indian Circus Organisation in the Delhi High Court.
- In 1998, dogs were excluded from the notification.
- **Jallikattu first came under legal scrutiny in 2007** when the Animal Welfare Board of India and the animal rights group PETA moved petitions in the Supreme Court against Jallikattu as well as bullock cart races.
- The Tamil Nadu government, however, worked its **way out of the ban by passing a law in 2009**, which was signed by the Governor.
- In 2011, the UPA regime at the Centre added bulls to the list of animals whose training and exhibition is prohibited.
- In May 2014, days before the BJP was elected to power, the **Supreme Court banned the bull-taming sport**, ruling on a petition that cited the 2011 notification

#### So, is it legal or banned now?

- That is the subject of a **case pending in the Supreme Court**. The state government has legalised these events, which has been challenged in the court.
- In January 2017, months after the death of Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, massive protests erupted across Tamil Nadu against the ban, with Chennai city witnessing a **15-day-long Jallikattu uprising**.
- The same year, the Tamil Nadu government released an ordinance amending the central Act and allowing Jallikattu in the state; this was later ratified by the President. PETA challenged the state move, arguing it was unconstitutional.

- The main question to be resolved is whether the **Jallikattu tradition can be protected as a cultural right** of the people of Tamil Nadu which is a fundamental right.
- **Article 29 (1)** mandates that “any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same”.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court referred the **Jallikattu case to a Constitution Bench, where it is pending now.**

#### Value Addition

- Like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka too passed a law to save a similar sport, called Kambala. A similar attempt by Maharashtra, too, was challenged in court, before it was passed as a law.
- Except in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where bull-taming and racing continue to be organised, these sports remain banned in all other states including Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra due to the 2014 ban order from the Supreme Court.

#### Connecting the dots

Do you think banning the age old tradition of Jallikattu is interference in religious matters of a particular community and hence violative of the Constitution? Critically examine.

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### [Temple in news: Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Art & Architecture

#### In news

- Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple in Gavipuram was in news recently.
- For the first time in 50 years, sun’s rays didn’t fall on idol on Sankranti day.

#### Important value additions

- Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple is also known as Gavipuram Cave Temple.
  - It is an example of Indian rock-cut architecture.
  - This cave temple is dedicated to Shiva and cut into a monolithic stone.
  - It is located in Bangalore, Karnataka.
  - It was built in the 16th century by Kempe Gowda I, the founder of the city.
  - The temple is famous for its mysterious stone discs in the forecourt and the exact planning allowing the sun to shine on shrine in certain time of the year.
  - Lakhs of devotees come in mid January every year on Makar sankranti Day to this temple.
  - This is a special day when the sun's rays fall on the Shivalinga for one hour as it passes between the horns of the Nandi.
- 

### [Kalaripayattu to be taught at Kerala Tourism’s Vellar Crafts Village](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

#### In news

- Kalaripayattu is set to see a surge in popularity with the establishment of an academy in the Kerala capital.

### Key takeaways

- Lessons in Kalaripayattu will now be taught at Kerala Tourism's Vellar Crafts Village en route to Kovalam.
- The 3,500 Sq. Ft. academy in the village is scheduled to be completed in two months.
- Kerala Chief Minister released the syllabus of the Kalaripayattu Academy recently during the inauguration of the renovated Crafts Village.

### Important value additions

#### Kalaripayattu

- It is also known as Kalari.
- It is an Indian martial art and fighting style that originated in Kerala.
- It is considered to be among the oldest martial arts still in existence, with its origin dating back to at least the 3rd century BC.
- It includes strikes, kicks, grappling, preset forms, weaponry and healing methods.
- Practitioners of Kalaripayattu also possess intricate knowledge of pressure points on the human body and healing techniques that incorporate the knowledge of Ayurveda and Yoga.
- Unlike other parts of India, warriors in Kerala belonged to all castes.
- Women in Keralite society also underwent training in Kalaripayattu, and still do so to this day.



### Related articles:

- Indigenous Games to be a part of Khelo India Youth Games 2021: [Click here](#)

## [New Anubhava Mantapa](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

### In news

- Karnataka Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the 'New Anubhava Mantapa' in Basavakalyan.
- It is the place where 12th century poet-philosopher Basaveshwara lived for most of his life.

### Key takeaways

- The ₹500 crore project would be completed within two years.
- The project would highlight the teachings of Basaveshwara.
- Basavakalyan is an important pilgrim centre for Lingayats.
- The New Anubhava Mantapa, will be a six-floor structure in the midst of the 7.5 acre plot and represent various principles of Basaveshwara's philosophy.
- It will showcase the 12th Century Anubhava Mantapa (often referred to as the "first Parliament of the world") established by him in Basavakalyan, where philosophers and social reformers held debates.
- The building will adopt the Kalyana Chalukya style of architecture.

### Important value additions

#### Basaveshwara

- He was born in Bagevadi (of undivided Bijapur district in Karnataka) during 1131 AD.
- He was the 12th century philosopher and social reformer who gave a unique spiritual path to mankind.
- He is the founding saint of the Lingayat sect.
- His spiritual discipline was based on the principles of:
  - Arivu (true knowledge),
  - Achara (right conduct),
  - Anubhava (divine experience)
- His practical approach and act of establishment of 'Kalyana Rajya' (Welfare state) brought a new status and position for all the citizens of the society, irrespective of class, caste, creed and sex.
- He established the Anubhava Mantapa, which was a common forum for all to discuss the prevailing problems of socio, economic and political areas.
- It was the first and foremost socio-religious Parliament of India.
- On 14th November 2015, the Prime Minister of India also inaugurated the statue of Basavanna along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.

### Volcanic eruption at Mount Semeru

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography

#### In news

- Indonesia's Mount Semeru has erupted, pouring ash an estimated 5.6km (3.4 miles) into the sky above Java, the country's most densely populated island.

### Important value additions

- Semeru - also known as "The Great Mountain" - is the highest volcano in Java and one of the most active.
- It is located in the subduction zone, where the Indo-Australia plate subducts under the Eurasia plate.
- It is also one of Indonesia's most popular tourist hiking destinations.
- The volcano previously erupted in December, when about 550 people were evacuated.

**Do you know?**

- Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" where tectonic plates collide, causing frequent volcanic activity as well as earthquakes.
- Within the last week, Indonesia has endured multiple landslides, a deadly earthquake on Sulawesi island, and the loss of a Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737 with 62 people on board.

**Related article:**

- About Sulawesi: [Click here](#)



## [The India Meteorological Department \(IMD\) may introduce new monsoon models](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography

**In news**

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) may introduce new monsoon models in 2021 to better forecast changes in rainfall.

**Key takeaways**

- There were three different models that could be tested this year.
- Two of them were dynamical models and one a statistical model.
- In the former, the climate on any particular day is simulated on supercomputers and meteorologists observe the changing daily output.
- The other is the traditional statistical model that equates relationships of physical parameters, such as for instance sea surface temperatures, snowfall, the temperature of landmass etc, with the actual observed rainfall in the past.
- The three models under consideration are:
  - 12 global circulation models (dynamical) whose outputs would be combined into a single one;

- a model that gauges rainfall based on the sea surface temperature in the tropics (developed by Professor Sumant Nigam, University of Maryland, U.S.) and
- the statistical model based on climate variables observed during the pre-monsoon.
- All of them are smaller models which are combined to arrive at an average value.
- The traditional statistical model would continue to be used this year.

#### Do you know?

- The monsoon that concluded in 2020 was unique, in that with monsoon 2019, it was only the third time in a century that India saw back-to-back years of above normal rainfall.
- In both years, the IMD failed to forecast the magnitude of the excess and only indicated that the monsoon would be “above normal”.

#### Related articles:

- Subdued Northeast Monsoon: [Click here](#)
- Why predicting monsoons in India is a tricky job? [Click here](#)

### [Birthday of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose to be celebrated as Parakram Diwas](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Modern History

#### In news

- Government of India has decided to celebrate birthday of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on the 23rd day of January every year as ‘PARAKRAM DIWAS’.

#### Key takeaways

- Government of India has decided to celebrate the 125th Birth Anniversary year of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in a befitting manner at national and international level, beginning from 23rd January 2021.
- A High Level Committee, headed by the Prime Minister has been constituted for deciding the programs, and to supervise and guide the commemoration.
- **Objective:** To remember Netaji’s indomitable spirit and selfless service to the nation and to inspire people of the country, especially the youth, to act with fortitude in the face of adversity as Netaji did.

#### Important value additions

- Subhash Chandra Bose was twice elected President of the Indian National Congress, (1938-Haripur and 1939-Tripuri).
- Owing to political differences, he resigned from the Congress Presidentship in 1939 and organised the All India Forward Bloc a faction within the Congress in Bengal.
- In Calcutta, Bose organised mass protests and was arrested.
- He was later put under house arrest from where he escaped.
- He went to Germany via Afghanistan.

- However, in 1943 Bose lost hope that Germany could be of any help in gaining India's independence.
- He then turned to Asia where he finally came at the helm of the Indian National Army (INA).
- INA found support among expatriate Indians and Bose formed the Azad Hind government which came to produce its own currency, postage stamps, court and civil code.
- It was recognised by Axis states.
- During the final two years of the war, Bose with considerable Japanese backing- led the forces of the Indian National Army into battle against the British.
- The I.N.A. was essentially non-communal, with Muslims quite prominent among its officers and ranks, and it also introduced the innovation of a women's detachment named after the Rani of Jhansi.

### [Tripura government planning to promote Risa as the signature textile](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims

**In news**

- Tripura government is now eyeing to promote Risa as the signature textile of Tripura nationally.



#### **Important value additions**

- Risa is a customary handwoven cloth used by Tripura's indigenous tribal communities.
- It is used as a head gear, stole, female upper cloth or presented to honour a distinguished recipient.
- The Risa also plays a host of crucial social utilities.
- Adolescent Tripuri girls are first given risa to wear when she reaches 12-14 years in an event called Risa Sormani.
- It is also used in religious festivals like the Garia Puja, a customary festival of the tribal communities, or as a head turban by male folks during weddings and festivals.

#### **Do you know?**

- Risa is one of the three parts of a customary Tripuri female attire, the other two being the Rignai and Rikutu.
- It is primarily used to cover lower part of the body and literally translates into 'to wear'.
- The Rituku covers the upper half of the body, wrapping it all around.

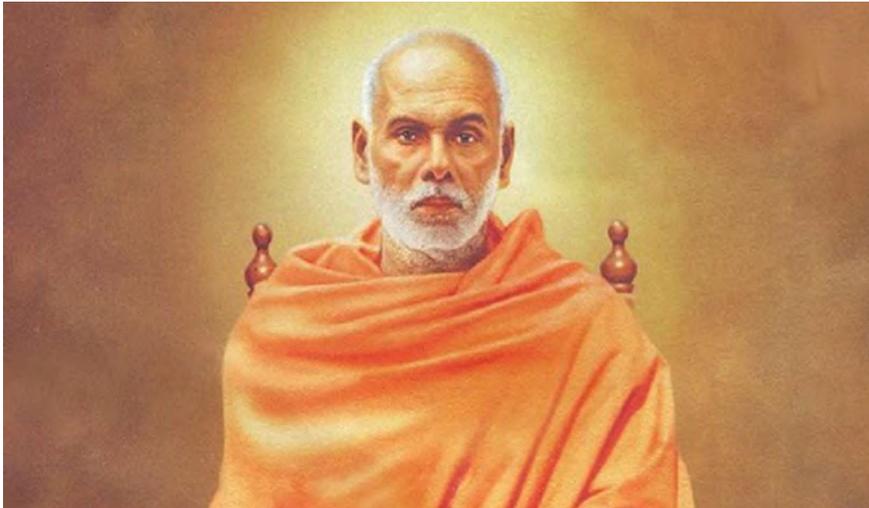
- However, it is also used like a 'chunri' or a 'pallu' of the Indian saree.
- It is also used to cover the head of newly married Tripuri women.

## English translation of poems of Sree Narayana Guru launched

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- I – History; Culture

**In news**

- Vice President of India launched a book of poems, "Not Many, But One" (Two Volumes), an English translation of poems of Sree Narayana Guru by Prof G.K. Sasidharan.



### **Important value additions**

- Narayana Guru (1855 – 1928) was a philosopher, spiritual leader and social reformer in India.
- He was born into a family that belonged to the Ezhava caste.
- He led a reform movement against the injustice in the caste-ridden society of Kerala in order to promote spiritual enlightenment and social equality.
- **Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam** (also known as SNDP Yogam) is an Indian spiritual organization that was formally founded by Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu in 1903, with the guidance of Shri Narayana Guru.
- The main aim of SNDP Yogam was to spiritually uplift the people of the Ezhava/Tiyyar communities.
- **Vaikom Satyagraha** (1924–25) was a social protest in erstwhile Travancore against untouchability and caste discrimination in Hindu society of Kerala.
- Sree Narayana Guru involved himself with the Vaikom Satyagraha and extended much co-operation.
- He published 45 works in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil languages which include Atmopadesa Śatakam, a hundred-verse spiritual poem and Daiva Dasakam, a universal prayer in ten verses.

### **Related article:**

- Centre to revive Narayana Guru spiritual circuit plan: [Click here](#)

## Tributes being paid to Indian Bodo social activist

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- I – Culture

### **In news**

- Tributes are being paid to Shri Upendra Nath Brahma by opening an institute in his name.

### **Important value additions**

- Upendranath Brahma (1956 – 1990) was an Indian Bodo social activist and the former president of All Bodo Students' Union.
- The title of Bodofa (Guardian of Bodos) was posthumously conferred upon Brahma on 8 May 1990 in recognition of his vision and leadership.
- His life is celebrated each year on the anniversary of his death, which is now called Bodofa Day.

### **Bodos**

- The Bodo is the largest ethnolinguistic group in the Assam.
- They are concentrated mainly in the Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.
- The Bodo are a Tibeto-Burmese-speaking ethnic group.
- The Bodo people speak the Bodo language, a Tibeto-Burman language recognized as one of twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian Constitution.
- The Bodo people are recognized as a plains tribe in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

### **Related articles:**

- Bodoland University develops fungal powder to boost immunity: [Click here](#)
- Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC): [Click here](#)

## Dhannipur Mosque project launched

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

### **In news**

- The Dhannipur mosque project was formally launched on Republic Day at the five-acre plot in Dhannipur village of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

### **Key takeaways**

- The plot was allotted by the Uttar Pradesh government on the directions of the Supreme Court in the Babri Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi title suit.
- The Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF) is overseeing the construction of the mosque.
- The project would take around 30 months to be completed.
- **The project comprises three parts:** a mosque based on a modern design; a multi-speciality 200-bed hospital and community kitchen; and an Indo-Islamic Cultural Research Centre.

### **Related articles:**

- Ram Temple History & Significance: [Click here](#)



Image source : [Click here](#)

## [Manjamma Jogati : Padma Shri awardee who popularised rural folk arts](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

**In news**

- Manjamma Jogati is a Padma Shri awardee who is a transgender from Karnataka.
- She has over the past many decades practised and single-handedly popularised rural folk arts.

**Key takeaways**

- Overcoming personal odds, Manjamma Jogati popularised these art forms, especially the Jogati Nritya and Janapada songs, practiced in rural Karnataka, Maharashtra, and parts of Andhra Pradesh.
- She began to identify as a woman in her teens.
- She was made a part of a transgender community in rural Deccan that reveres the fiery Goddess Renuka Yellamma.
- Members of this community are considered married to the goddess.
- The community's lifestyle and the plight of its members were highlighted in the national award-winning 2009 Marathi movie Jogwa.



Image source: [Click here](#)

## Patharughat Uprising in Assam

**Context:** Nearly Twenty five years before the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre (1919), more than a hundred peasants fell to the bullets of the British on January 28, 1894 in Assam. The unarmed peasants were protesting against the increase in land revenue levied by the colonial administration, when the military opened fire.

### **What led to the Patharughat uprising?**

- **Assam Annexation and Survey of Land:** After the British annexation of Assam in 1826, surveys of the vast lands of the state began. This was primarily intended to make accurate assessment of land so as to increase the land revenues from the region.
- **Levying of Land taxes:** On the basis of such surveys, the British began to impose land taxes, much to the resentment of the farmers.
- **Increase of Taxes:** In 1893, the British government decided to increase agricultural land tax reportedly by 70- 80 per cent.
- **Raij Mels across Assam:** Up until 1893, peasants would pay taxes in kind or provide a service in lieu of cash. Across Assam, peasants began protesting the British move of increasing taxes by organising Raij Mels, or peaceful peoples' conventions
- **Repression by British:** Despite these gatherings at Raij Mels being democratic, the British perceived them as "breeding grounds for sedition". So whenever there was a Raij Mel, the British used to come down on it with a heavy hand to disperse them.
- **January 28, 1894 firing at Patharughat Protest:** When the British officers were refusing to listen to the farmers' grievances, things heated up and there was a lathi charge, followed by an open firing which killed many of the peasants who were gathered at Patharughat, a small village nearly 60km northeast of Guwahati.
- **High Casualties:** Official placed the casualties in the Patharughat incident as 15 killed and 37 wounded, however it is estimated by eyewitnesses that close to 140 people were killed.

### **Significance of the Incident:**

- **Inspirational for Assamese Community:** For the larger Assamese community, Patharughat comes second only to the Battle of Saraighat, when the Ahoms defeated the Mughals in 1671. It was considered extremely inspirational for the Assamese community, like a national awakening.
- **Mass protest against British:** It was one of the few occasions in the history of the pre-Congress, pan-Indian anti-imperialist movement, when, in the absence of a well defined leadership, the masses organised themselves to resist the autocratic designs of the British.

### **Critical Analysis of incident:**

- **Means adopted:** While many often refer to the episode as the "Patharughat Ron" or the "Battle of Patharughat", it is a "misnomer." The mass protest was a peaceful one and a precursor to the Civil Disobedience movement, which was later propagated by Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Doesn't feature in Mainstream Historical Discourse:** The incident is considered as one of the most tragic and inspiring episodes in the saga of the Indian freedom movement. However, it rarely features in mainstream historical discourse of the freedom struggle.



#### Honouring Partharughat Upsiring:

- **Martyr's Column:** In memory of farmer martyrs of the historic Patharughat uprising, a "martyrs column" stands where the incident took place. This helps recall the sacrifice and valour of the farmers in fighting against the colonial rulers.
- **Krishak Swahid Diwas:** Every year on January 28, the government and local people pay respects to the martyrs of the incident (Krishak Swahid Diwas) in an official function. On January 29, the Indian Army pays its respects in military style.
- **Popular Culture:** Over the years, films, theatre, folktales and, serials have been made on the subject which is how it's slowly entering popular imagination.
- **Skill Development Centre:** On January 28, 2021, Assam CM inaugurated an Integrated Training and Skill Development Centre for the farmers near the site that will be equipped to teach farmers new skills and technology.

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## POLITY/GOVERNANCE

### FSSAI slashes limit for trans fat levels in foods

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II- Governance

#### **In news**

- FSSAI has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.
- The FSSAI notified the amendment on December 29, more than a year after it issued a draft on the subject for consultation with stakeholders.
- The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.

#### **Key takeaways**

- While the regulation comes into effect immediately, industry players were made to take a pledge back in 2018 that they would comply with WHO's call for action to reduce TFA by 3% by 2021 allowing them three years to comply with the latest regulation.
- It was in 2011 that India first passed a regulation that set a TFA limit of 10% in oils and fats, which was further reduced to 5% in 2015.
- Trans fats, or trans-fatty acids, are a form of unsaturated fat. They come in both natural and artificial forms.
- Trans fats are associated with increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease.
- As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids. The WHO has also called for global elimination of trans fats by 2023.

### COVID-19 Vaccine Dry Run

**Context:** With two vaccine candidates — Covishield from the Pune-based Serum Institute of India and Covaxin of Bharat Biotech — at final stages of emergency use authorisation (EUA) in India, several States and Union Territories conducted a dry run for a COVID-19 vaccination programme.

#### **India's Immunization Experience**

- Under India's 'Expanded Programme on Immunization', which was initiated in 1978, the country has gathered experience in administering essential vaccines to children and pregnant women.
- In 1985, the programme was renamed 'Universal Immunisation Programme', under which about 12 different vaccines are provided through the government health system.
- Other than inoculation, there is a three-tier system at the district, State and national levels to monitor coverage and adverse events and to ensure that the vaccines adhere to quality norms.
- Roughly 9 million immunisation sessions are conducted annually in India, according to the UNICEF. Despite that, only about 60% of eligible children are fully immunised, with wide variations among States.

#### **Why was it necessary?**

- Because a COVID-19 vaccine will involve two jabs spaced at least four weeks apart, and will need to be administered to potentially over a billion Indians, it requires more planning, personnel and logistical arrangements.
- India's priority list of beneficiaries includes healthcare workers, municipal workers, police personnel, those over 50 years of age, and younger people with identified co-morbidities.
- This, the government has calculated, works out to **300 million people**, and given the pace of vaccine production and administration, it will be August till all on the priority list are inoculated.
- With at least two vaccines on the EUA list, the whole exercise involves an **unprecedented level of digitisation (Co-WIN Application)**.
- The purpose of the dry run was to **assess operational feasibility** of using Co-WIN application in field environment, to test the linkages between planning, implementation and to identify the challenges and guide way forward prior to actual implementation.
- This is also expected to **give confidence** to programme managers at various levels

#### What has been the experience of the trial run?

- The Punjab government successfully completed the exercise at 12 sites in two districts.
- Health officials in Assam said they focused on "software efficacy" and would be carrying out the physical part of the drill involving 300 people in two districts.
- The two-day exercise in Andhra Pradesh was conducted at five session sites, including public and private medical institutions, with 25 dummy beneficiaries (healthcare workers) at each site.

#### Following the dummy run, are actual vaccines ready to be rolled out?

- So far, only two vaccine candidates — Covishield, developed by the Serum Institute-Pune and based on the AstraZeneca 'Oxford' vaccine, and Covaxin, developed by Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) — have been cleared by an expert panel of the Drug Controller General of India.
- A formal approval by the DCGI is imminent, which will then allow the companies to supply doses to the government for distribution.
- The SII has said it has already **stockpiled 50 million doses** and will have another 50 million ready by next week.

#### Challenges Ahead

- The dummy runs are useful as a warm-up exercise, but they will reveal little about the toughest parts of the vaccination process, namely the actual inoculation, reactions, severe adverse reactions and potential hospitalisation.
- So far, as part of vaccine trials in India, thousands of people have been administered test vaccines in hospital settings.
- Many future inoculations are expected to be conducted in rural settings, where necessary healthcare infrastructure is absent.
- The United States, which has approved the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, had expected to vaccinate 20 million people within a month, but has barely progressed to 2.8 million.

### [Supreme Court on Central Vista Project](#)

**Context:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave its nod to the Central Vista redevelopment project in a 2:1 verdict.

#### A Brief Background

- The project aims to renovate and redevelop 86 acres of land in Lutyens's Delhi, in which the landmark structures of the Indian government, including Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan, India Gate, North Block and South Block, etc. stand.
- A batch of petitions had challenged the plan for demolition of old structures and new construction, including a brand new Parliament, on approximately 86 acres of land in the national capital.

#### What was under challenge, and what has the court held?

- **Procedures Adopted:** Broadly, the change in land use and the manner and procedure adopted for making the changes in the Central Vista precincts were challenged.
- **Clearances given:** The petitioners argued that there were irregularities in the process that involved approval of design, clearance on monetary allocations and the tendering processes, and other regulatory clearances on environment and from local municipal bodies.
- **Heritage Approval:** The petitioners had argued that the government failed to consult Heritage Conservation Committee, which is an expert body in matters involving heritage structures and ought to have been consulted from the stage of conception of the project, even before the design is agreed upon
- **Hasty Decision:** The petitioners highlighted that the whole process involving multiple local bodies was completed in just three months — between December 2019 and March 2020 — during which public consultation was held, objections were invited, considered and overruled.

#### How was the Master Plan modified?

- The central government and the Delhi Development Authority are given the power to modify the Master Plan of Delhi that was notified in 2007 to guide the direction of development of the National Capital Territory until 2021.
- This was modified in March 2020 to include the Central Vista project. Sections of land are assigned for specific purposes such as recreation, government, public and semi-public, which were modified to accommodate the Central Vista project.

#### How has the court ruled on this?

- In its 2:1 verdict, the court has held that there are no infirmities in the approvals granted.
- Justices A M Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari held that the central government's change of land use for the project in the Master Plan of Delhi 2021 is also **a lawful exercise of its powers**.
- The court said the change is a "**case of minor modification**" and "it is incomprehensible as to how the proposed changes could be termed as substantial enough to alter the basic identity of the plan
- The court's view is based on the understanding that the **changes will have to be looked at keeping in mind the whole plan** and not just the zones in which the changes will be effected.
- For example, the proposed new Parliament is set to come up in Plot Number 2 of the Central Vista precincts which is **currently a park**. The land use for the plot was changed from recreation to government use.
- However, the court took the view that since the park has anyway been closed to the public for security reasons, the change in land use **will not have any actual reduction of area available for public use**.
- The ruling also noted that to compensate this change, the proposed change in land use provides for **recreational space at three different locations** in the neighbourhood.

- The court held that “taking legitimate steps/actions swiftly and as per the timelines because of the nature of the proposal cannot be termed as having been done in haste”.

#### What does the dissenting opinion say?

- Justice Sanjeev Khanna, the third judge on the Bench, penned a note of dissent. His disagreement from the majority verdict primarily relates to the issue of change in land use in the Master Plan of Delhi.
- Justice Khanna was of the view that the change in land use must be struck down on both **procedural and substantial grounds**.
- On procedure, the judge noted that it was initiated without a consultation process.
- He held that the central government did not give adequate thought to the concerns of the public and not enough time for those who raised objections to make their case. He said that the permissions given by the Central Vista Committee **appear pre-determined**.
- Justice Khanna also disagreed with the majority view that the modification was substantial and **not a “minor change”**.

#### Critical Analysis

- **Court limited to Legality of case:** The Supreme Court’s approval has cleared the decks for the Union government’s ambitious Central Vista project. The court has been sober and circumspect in limiting itself to the legality of the case.
- **Sanctity of participative processes:** Quoting the Supreme Court’s 2019 verdict in *Hanuman Laxman Aroskar v Union of India*, Dissenting Judge Justice Khanna notes, “Public consultation is not a mere formality... Decisions which affect lives of people must factor in their concerns”
- **Transparency in public institutions:** “The primary grievance of the petitioners,” the dissenting note points out, is “the lack of information and details”. Unless complete and relevant information is placed in public domain, the public would be ill-equipped to engage with the Government in a meaningful manner

### [Supreme Court clarifies the position of law on vertical and horizontal reservations](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Judiciary

#### In news

- The Supreme Court clarified the position of law on vertical and horizontal reservations recently.
- The decision in Saurav Yadav Vs. State of Uttar Pradesh dealt with issues arising from the way different classes of reservation were to be applied in the selection process to fill posts of constables in the state.

#### Key takeaways

- The court ruled that if a person belonging to an intersection of vertical-horizontal reserved category had secured scores high enough to qualify without the vertical reservation, the person would be counted as qualifying without the vertical reservation, and cannot be excluded from the horizontal quota in the general category.
- It argued that if both vertical and horizontal quotas were to be applied together then the overall selection would have candidates with lower scores.

**Important value additions**

- Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes is referred to as vertical reservation.
- It applies separately for each of the groups specified under the law.
- Horizontal reservation refers to the equal opportunity provided to other categories of beneficiaries such as women, veterans, the transgender community, and individuals with disabilities, cutting through the vertical categories.
- The horizontal quota is applied separately to each vertical category, and not across the board.
- The interlocking of the two types of reservation throws up a host of questions on how certain groups are to be identified.
- For example would an SC woman be put in the category of women or SC?

**G Kishan Reddy Committee formed**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Intervention

**In news**

- The Central Government has decided to form a committee to protect the language, culture and land of Ladakh and ensure citizen's participation in the Union Territory's development.

**Key takeaways**

- The Committee will be headed by the Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy.
- It will include elected representatives from Ladakh, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, central government, and the Ladakh administration.
- The decision to form the Committee was taken after meeting a 10-member delegation from Ladakh who expressed their views about the need to protect Ladakh's unique cultural identity.

**SC's order on Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals (Care And Maintenance Of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Judiciary

**In news**

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to delete its three-year-old law.
- The law under question is the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017 notified on May 23, 2017.
- The rules were framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- It allowed seizure and subsequent confiscation of livestock from people who depended on these animals for a livelihood, even before they were found guilty of cruelty towards them.

**Key takeaways**

- The SC warned the government that it would “stay” the implementation of a 2017 law, which allowed authorities to seize cattle on a mere suspicion that they suffered cruel treatment at the hands of their owners or were being primed for slaughter.

- According to the law, these animals would then be lodged in gaushalas as case property to await the court's verdict.
- Thus, a farmer, a livestock owner or a cattle trader loses his animals before being found guilty of the charge of cruelty.
- SC ruled that these rules are contrary to Section 29 of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, under which only a person convicted of cruelty can lose his animal.

#### Do you know?

- The 2017 Rules allow a Magistrate to forfeit the cattle of an owner facing trial under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
- The animals are then sent to infirmaries, gaushalas, pinjarapole, etc.
- These authorities can further give such animals for "adoption".

### Centre Merges J&K Cadre Officers With AGMUT

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

#### In news

- Recently, the Centre has merged J&K cadre for all India Services - IAS, IPS and IFoS officers - with that of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT), also called the Union Territory cadre, through an ordinance.

#### Key takeaways

- The President has promulgated an ordinance to amend J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 and make IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service officers of existing cadre of J&K a part of AGMUT cadre.
- The move will allow officers posted in these states and UTs to work in J&K and vice versa.
- It will also help tackle the shortage of All India Services Officers in J&K owing to an earlier rule fixing the ratio of direct recruits in Civil Services to promotees from J&K State Civil Services (Kashmir Administrative Service) at 50:50 instead of 67:33 formula followed in other states.

#### Related articles:

- MARCOS being deployed in the Eastern Ladakh: [Click here](#)
- DAY-NRLM Special Package for J&K and Ladakh: [Click here](#)

### Bagasara Prant: A new district to be created in Gujarat

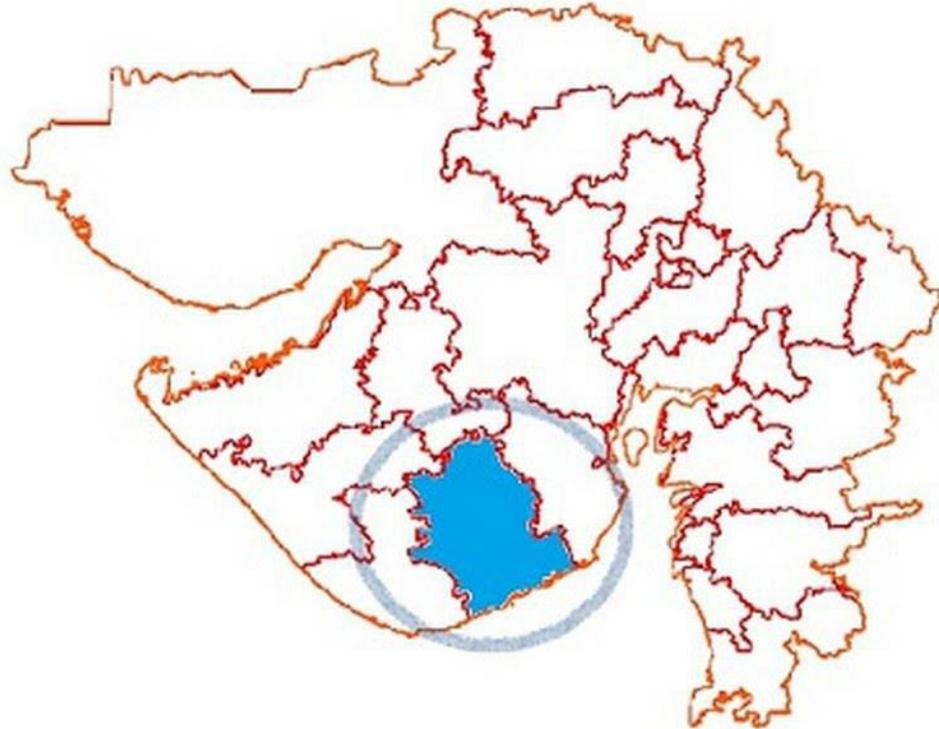
**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

#### In news

- Gujarat Chief Minister has decided to create a new Bagasara Prant in Amreli district.

# Amreli

# GUJARAT



## Key takeaways

- This will take the state's revenue services nearer to the people and provide services faster.
- The newly created Bagasara Prant would come into effect on 26th January, which includes Bagasara and Vadiya talukas in it.
- Since the districts with larger geographical areas cause inconvenience to the people, the state government has been reorganizing smaller districts and talukas for administrative convenience, faster development, reducing workload as well as saving the people's time.

## Do you know?

- Prants are traditional names for parts of historical regions, such as the original ten regions of Kathiawad on Saurashtra peninsula in Gujarat.

## [Power tussle in Puducherry: Between Lt. Governor and Chief Minister](#)

**Context:** The recent three-day-long protest, led by Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, under the banner of the Secular Democratic Progressive Alliance, against Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi.

### Why is CM of Puducherry protesting against Lt. Governor?

- **Interference in Day-to-day affairs:** The ruling alliance has accused the lieutenant governor of interfering in the day-to-day affairs of the government and impeding its development plans.

- **Appointment to State Election Commission:** They have been at loggerheads over many matters, most recently on the appointment of the State Election Commissioner, an office critical to holding elections to local bodies in the Union Territory.
- **Implementation Mode of Welfare Scheme:** The council of Ministers headed by CM prefers to distribute rice, clothes and other freebies to the beneficiaries through fair price shops and other government agencies. While Lt. Governor Bedi insists on the DBT mode for implementing government welfare schemes.
- **Democratic Participation:** The police asked the director of higher and technical education to issue an advisory to all students to refrain from participating in the protest against the lieutenant governor. Earlier police allegedly used force to disperse students taking part in a protest organised by the Congress, demanding that the Centre sanction 10% reservation for government school students in MBBS course.
- **Demand of the Agitation:** The agitation was meant to highlight the demand of the Congress and its allies for the recall of the Lt Governor. The elected government accuse Lt. Governor Ms. Kiran Bedi of “functioning in an autocratic manner” and adopting an “obstructionist attitude” in ensuring the progress and welfare of people.

#### What is the argument by Lt. Governor?

On her part, Ms. Bedi has advised CM to refrain from misleading the public about the Centre and her office. She has even attributed his “anguish and disappointment” possibly to the “diligent and sustained care” exercised by the Lt Governor’s secretariat “in ensuring just, fair and accessible administration following the laws and rules of business scrupulously”.

#### Previous instances of Power Tussle between CM and Lt. Governor

- **Nominated Members in Legislative Assembly:** In July 2017, members of the Congress protested against the induction of three nominated members of the BJP into the Assembly by the Centre without the approval of the chief minister.
- **Governance & Policy Making:** In 2018, Lt. Governor Bedi announced that the government’s free rice distribution scheme to villagers would be made conditional to the certification that the village is free from open defecation, garbage and plastic. The CM claimed Bedi’s move was against the NFSA, 2013 and that the lieutenant governor cannot issue an order and implement it without his consultation
- **Public Sector Undertakings:** In 2019, a similar protest was staged by the CM demanding reopening of closed industrial units and public sector undertakings.
- **New Year Celebration amidst Pandemic:** On December 31, 2020, Bedi objected to the government’s move to allow New Year celebrations in view of the pandemic and urged the government to ban it. However, CM was firm on his decision and said no one had the power or authority to ban New Year celebrations, adding that the UT is linked intrinsically with French culture and has a separate identity.

#### Critical Analysis of the ongoing protest

- **Political reasons:** With the Assembly election likely in April or May, CM leading the protest against the Lt Governor can be an act of political mobilisation and seems to be his strategy to ward off any criticism against his government’s “non-functioning” by laying the blame at the doorstep of the Lt Governor.

- **LG can be Accommodative:** The Centre itself did not see any great virtue in the DBT mode when it decided to give additional food grains (rice or wheat) free of cost at five kg per person a month to ration cardholders during April-November 2020 as a relief measure during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Common Man Impacted:** The power tussle between LG and CM slows down the daily administrative activities whereby the public will have to bear the cost of not getting proper services which he is entitled to.
- **Need for Centre's Intervention:** With the near breakdown of communication between the Lt Governor and the Chief Minister, the Centre should step in, in the interest of smooth administration.

#### What are the powers of LG of Puducherry?

- **Government of Union Territories Act, 1963** provides for a Legislative Assembly of Pondicherry, with a Council of Ministers to govern the "Union Territory of Pondicherry". It states that the UT will be administered by the President of India through an Administrator (LG). It also has following provisions.
- **Extent of legislative power** - MLAs "may make laws for the whole or any part of the Union Territory with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the State List or the Concurrent List".
- **Council of Ministers** – The Council of Ministers headed by a Chief Minister will "aid and advise the Administrator in the exercise of his functions in relation to matters with respect to which the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory has power to make laws".
- **Discretion of LG:** Section 44 of the Union Territories Act, 1963, allows the LG to "act in his discretion" in the matter of law-making, even though the Council of Ministers has the task of aiding and advising him.
- **In case of a difference of opinion between the LG and his Ministers** on any matter, the Administrator is bound to refer it to the President for a decision and act according to the decision given by the President.
- However, the Administrator can also claim that the matter is urgent, and take immediate action as he deems necessary.
- **Relation with CoM:** The manner in which the LG functions vis-à-vis the elected government (Council of Ministers) is also spelt out in the Rules of Business of the Government of Pondicherry, 1963, issued on June 22, 1963.
- The Administrator exercises powers regulating the conditions of service of persons serving in the UT government, in consultation with the Chief Minister.
- In case the LG has a difference of opinion with the Chief Minister, he can refer the matter to the central government for the decision of the President.

#### Value Addition

- Both Delhi and Puducherry has an elected legislature and government but the powers of the LG of Puducherry are different from the ones of the LG of Delhi.
- The LG of Delhi has "**Executive Functions**" that allow him to exercise his powers in matters connected to public order, police and land "in consultation with the Chief Minister, if it is so provided under any order issued by the President under Article 239 of the Constitution".
- While the LG of Delhi is also guided by the Government of **National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991**, and the Transaction of Business of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Rules, 1993, the LG of Puducherry is guided mostly by the **Government of Union Territories Act, 1963**.

- **Articles 239 and 239AA** of the Constitution, as well as the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, clearly underline that Delhi is a UT, where the Centre, whose eyes and ears are the LG, has a much more prominent role than in Puducherry.
- Under the constitutional scheme, the Delhi Assembly has the power to legislate on all subjects except law and order and land.
- However, the Puducherry Assembly can legislate on any issue under the Concurrent and State Lists. If the law is in conflict with a law passed by Parliament, the law passed by Parliament prevails.
- Simply put, the LG of Delhi enjoys greater powers than the LG of Puducherry.

## [SC sets up Farm Laws Committee](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Judiciary

**In news**

- The Supreme Court has put a stay on the implementation of the three farm laws until further orders.
- It has also set up a committee of agricultural experts to facilitate talks between the Centre and farmers' unions to resolve the impasse.

**Key takeaways**

- The members include: (1) Bhupinder Singh Mann, the national president of the Bhartiya Kisan Union and All India Kisan Coordination Committee; (2) Dr Parmod Kumar Joshi, an agricultural economist who is also the Director for South Asia, International Food Policy Research Institute; (3) Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices; (4) Anil Ghanwat, the chief of Shetkari Sanghatana, who in articles written in the media have expressed views in favour of the farm laws.
- The Chief Justice said that the committee will not pass an order or punish and submit a report to the Supreme Court.
- The SC has said the committee is the judicial process in this case.

**Related articles :**

- Your views on farm laws: [Click here](#)
- Failed negotiations on farm laws: [Click here](#)

## [Manipur 4th Sate to undertake Urban Local Bodies Reforms](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Urban Local Bodies

**In news**

- Manipur has become the 4th State in the country to successfully undertake “Urban Local Bodies (ULB)” reforms
- The reforms were stipulated by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance in its letter to the States dated 17th May, 2020.

### Key takeaways

- Manipur has now become eligible to mobilise additional financial resources of Rs.75 crore through Open Market Borrowings.
  - It has now joined the three other States namely, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana, who have completed this reform.
- Reforms in the Urban Local Bodies and the urban utilities reforms are aimed at financial strengthening of ULBs in the States and to enable them to provide better public health and sanitation services.
- Economically rejuvenated ULBs will also be able to create good civic infrastructure.

### Do you know?

- The State will notify (a) floor rates of property tax in ULBs which are in consonance with the prevailing circle rates (i.e. guideline rates for property transactions) and (b) floor rates of user charges in respect of the provision of water-supply, drainage and sewerage which reflect current costs/ past inflation.
- The State will put in place a system of periodic increase in floor rates of property tax/ user charges in line with price increases.

## Publication Of Notice Of Marriage Not Mandatory

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Society & GS-II – Judiciary

### In news

- The Allahabad High Court has ruled that the provision of publication of notice of intended marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, is not mandatory.

### Key takeaways

- The court said making such publication mandatory “would invade the fundamental rights of liberty and privacy, including within its sphere the freedom to choose for marriage without interference from state and non-state actors, of the persons concerned”.
- While giving notice under Section 5 of the Act, it shall be optional for the parties to the intended marriage to make a request in writing to the marriage officer to publish or not to publish a notice under Section 6 and follow the procedure of objections as prescribed under the Act.
- In case the parties do not make such a request, the officer “shall not publish any such notice or entertain objections to the intended marriage and proceed with the solemnisation of the marriage”.

## Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA)

### Provisions

- The Act stipulates that no project can be sold without project plans being approved by the competent authority and the project being registered with the regulatory authority, putting to an end the practice of selling on the basis of deceitful advertisements.
- Promoters are required to maintain “project based separate bank accounts” to prevent fund diversion.
- The mandatory disclosure of unit sizes based on “carpet area” strikes at the root of unfair trade practices.
- The provision for payment of “equal rate of interest” by the promoter or the buyer in case of default reinforces equity.

### Benefits

- These and many other provisions have empowered consumers, rectifying the power asymmetry prevalent in the sector.
- RERA has infused governance in a hitherto unregulated real estate sector.
- Along with demonetisation and GST, it has, to a large extent, cleansed the real estate sector of black money.
- It has transformational provisions, conscientiously addressing issues which have been a constant bane for the sector.

### Cooperative Federalism

- RERA is a seminal effort in cooperative federalism.
- Though the Act has been piloted by the Central government, the rules are to be notified by state governments, and the regulatory authorities and the appellate tribunals are also to be appointed by them.

### Conclusion

- RERA is to the real estate sector what SEBI is to the securities market.

## IBC’s Section 32A

**Context:** The Supreme Court recently held that the successful bidders for a corporate debtor under the [Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code \(IBC\)](#) would be immune from any investigations being conducted either by any investigating agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) or other statutory bodies such as Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

### Brief Background

- IBC was enacted on May 28, 2016 to effectively deal with insolvency and bankruptcy of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals, in a time bound manner.
- It has brought about a paradigm shift in laws relating to insolvency resolution to
  - Promote entrepreneurship

- Maximize value of assets
- Providing a robust insolvency resolution framework
- Differentiating between impropriety and business debacle.
- The predominant object of the Code is resolution of the Corporate Debtor.
- IBC is a transformational piece of legislation and has been amended four times to resolve problems hindering objectives of the Code.
- Prior to insertion of section 32A (introduced by IBC(Second Amendment) Bill, 2019) a successful Resolution Applicant faced the hassle of prosecution and liabilities before courts and tribunals for prior acts of Corporate Debtor
- Section 32A provides that Corporate Debtor shall not be prosecuted for an offence committed prior to commencement of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) once Resolution Plan has been approved by Adjudicating Authority (AA).

#### What did the Supreme Court say in its judgment?

- **Upheld Section 32A of IBC:** In its judgment, the apex court, while upholding the validity of Section 32 A of IBC, said it was important for the IBC to attract bidders who would offer reasonable and fair value for the corporate debtor to ensure the timely completion of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP).
- **Protection granted:** Such bidders, however, must also be granted protection from any misdeeds of the past since they had nothing to do with it. There is thus extinguishment of criminal liability of corporate debtor.
- **Protection extended to assets of debtor:** Such protection, the court said, must also extend to the assets of a corporate debtor, which form a crucial attraction for potential bidders and helps them in assessing and placing a fair bid for the company, which, in turn, will help banks clean up their books of bad loans.
- **Conditions for Immunity:** The protection to successful bidders and the assets of a corporate debtor are provided by the rules under Section 32A of the IBC. The apex court has, however, also said that such immunity would be applicable only if there is an approved resolution plan, and a change in the management control of the corporate debtor
- “The new management cannot be the disguised avatar of the old management. It cannot even be the related party of the corporate debtor. The new management cannot be the subject matter of an investigation which has resulted in material showing abetment or conspiracy for the commission of the offence and the report or complaint filed thereto,” the apex court held.

#### Why is the SC upholding Section 32A important?

- **Time taken for resolution:** Since the IBC came into being in 2016, the implementation of resolution plan of several big ticket cases has been delayed because of various challenges mounted by its own agencies and regulators
- **Example of Bhushan Power and Steel:** The debt-laden company, admitted into insolvency in 2017, owes more than Rs 47,000 crore to banks and other financial institutions, and another Rs 780 crore to its operational creditors. After a prolonged bidding battle, JSW Steel won the rights to take over Bhushan Power with a bid of Rs 19,700 crore.
- However, before the Sajjan Jindal-led company could move to take over Bhushan Power, the ED swooped in, and attached assets worth Rs 4,000 crore citing alleged fraud in a bank loan taken by the company’s former owners and other cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

### Merits of SC Judgement

- **Quick Resolution of Insolvency Cases:** The SC judgement bring clarity into Section 32A of IBC and ensures the timely completion of corporate insolvency resolution process. With the Supreme Court upholding the validity of Section 32 A, the cases such as that of Bhushan Power are expected to be completed soon.
- **Boosts Confidence in IBC:** Experts also said that this will give confidence to other bidders to proceed with confidence while bidding on such disputed companies and their assets
- **Helps new management make clean Start:** The extinguishment of the criminal liability of the corporate debtor is apparently important to the new management to make a clean break with the past and start on a clean slate.

### Republic Day Violence

**Context:** The Delhi Police has detained 200 people in connection with the violence during the Republic Day tractor rally. More than 300 policemen were injured in the violence which took place mostly in and around Red Fort.

#### What exactly happened?

- **Background of incident:** For nearly two month farmers primarily from Punjab had been camping on the outskirts of New Delhi protesting [against the new farm laws](#). Multiple rounds of negotiations between the government and the farmers' unions have failed.
- **Tractor Rally Planned:** Protesting farmers had planned for tractor rally towards New Delhi on Republic day so as to express their demands and make their voices heard. It was a historic parade by lakhs of farmers and tractors.
- **Rally Took Violent Turn:** While the tractor rally initially began peacefully, a section of protesters broke through police barricades and entered parts of the national capital not permitted for their protest. Clashes between the police and protesters took place at various places that left nearly 400 police personnel injured.
- **Deviation from agreed path & time:** The path taken by unruly section reportedly deviated from the route that farmers' unions had agreed upon in their talks with the Delhi Police. Also, farmers decided to enter the capital ahead of the permitted time, resulting in police launching tear gas and baton attacks on them.
- **Religious Flag at Red Fort:** Defying elaborate security arrangements in place for the Republic Day military parade, the protesters entered the Red Fort, where the predominantly Sikh farmers also installed a religious flag.
- **Law and Order Control measures:** The massive protests forced the shutting down of several metro stations, while internet services were suspended in many areas of the capital and its adjoining areas. Police lathicharged and used tear gas to control the situation by night.
- **Cases registered:** The police have filed FIRs naming a number of senior farm leaders who had held talks with the government and who signed an undertaking promising to follow the conditions set for the parades.

#### Critical Analysis of the incident

- **Fatigued Agitators:** The chances of fatigued agitators breaking loose were high as were the possibilities of vested interests triggering violence. Therefore, the leaders of protests should have been more conscious about this.

- **Massive Protest badly coordinated by farm leadership:** The leadership, itself an association of disparate individuals and organisations, should have been more realistic about its capacity to manage such a gathering.
- **Violent deviation by a handful:** The chaos and mindless violence unleashed on the national capital by a section of protesting farmers on Republic Day were abhorrent. It is plausible that agents provocateurs infiltrated the farmers' march and derailed the entire plan leading to violence.
- **Restraint by Police:** In the end, unruly elements took over the streets of Delhi. They broke barricades, thrashed, and tried to mow down police personnel. The police resorted to lathi charge and used tear gas, but, given the circumstances, showed restraint by not going for firing & other harsh measures.
- **Change in plans for protesting farmers:** Two farmer unions withdraw from agitation against farm laws over R-Day violence. The unions have cancelled their plans to march to Parliament on February 1, when the Union Budget will be presented, but have vowed to continue their agitation in a peaceful manner.
- **Can alter negotiations with government:** The violence that was unleashed during tractor rally has brought disrepute to the agitating farmers and there are efforts made to discredit their movement & demands. In due course of time, it can alter the way government engages with protesting farmers for negotiation.

#### Way Ahead

- **Proper Investigation:** The Delhi police must investigate and hold to account individuals and groups responsible for the violence. Farmer leaders have the unenviable task of cooperating with the police in the investigation.
- **Preventing Communal Overtones:** False friends and real enemies of the agitators have painted them with a communal brush (hoisting of religious flag). Bringing the culprits to book is essential not only to salvage the reputation of an agitation that had remained largely peaceful for nearly two months but also to nip in the bud a dangerous communal slant before it slips out of control.
- **Maximalist position of protestors needs change:** The agitators want the laws to go lock, stock, and barrel but their maximalist approach is unhelpful. They must discontinue the protest for now and disperse, while reserving the option of restarting it later. They should consider options short of a complete repeal of the laws.
- **Centre must continue with negotiations:** The Centre must consider more concessions, including the suspension of the laws until a broader agreement can be arrived at. It must make more efforts to allay the fears of those most affected by these reforms.

#### Conclusion

The Centre has said it would continue to engage the protesters in negotiations. The offer of the government to keep in abeyance for up to 18 months the three controversial farm laws that are at the heart of the current face-off remains an opportunity for the leaders to seek a negotiated settlement

#### Connecting the dots

- Why farmers are protesting against farm laws: Click [here](#) and [here](#)
- Why earlier government negotiations have failed: Click [here](#)
- What is the long term solution advocated by experts: Click [here](#)

## Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute

**Context:** Recently, Maharashtra CM released a book titled Maharashtra-Karnataka Boundary Dispute: Struggle and Pledge. The book is a collection of articles, news, and other material on the demand that Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka should be integrated into Maharashtra.

### In News

- Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray saying his government is committed to incorporating areas of Karnataka where Marathi-speaking people are in majority into his state has added fuel to a controversy that has been simmering for the last six decades.
- Belgaum or Belagavi, which has a large Marathi-speaking population, is currently part of Karnataka and is claimed by Maharashtra.
- While Maharashtra has gone to the Supreme Court over this land dispute, Karnataka has declared Belagavi its second capital



Image Source: [News Minute](#)

### Origin of the Problem

- **Multi-lingual Population in border district:** Belgaum, which was later renamed Belagavi, is located in the northern part of today's Karnataka and shares a border with Maharashtra's Kohlapur district. Belgavi district has both Kannada and Marathi speakers.
- **Colonial Times:** During the British Raj, the Belgaum region was **part of the Bombay Presidency**, which included Karnataka districts such as Vijayapura, Belagavi, Dharwad and Uttara-Kannada.
- **1881 Census data:** As per 1881 census, Belgaum had 864,014 people of which 556,397 were Kannada-speaking (64.39%), while 225,008 were Marathi-speaking (26.04%). However, in 1948, the Belgaum Municipality that was dominated by Marathi speaking politicians requested the Centre that the district be incorporated into the proposed Maharashtra state.

- **Post-Independence Reorganisation:** The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 made Belgaum and 10 talukas of Bombay State a part of the then Mysore State (which was renamed Karnataka in 1973). While demarcating borders, the Reorganisation of States Commission sought to include talukas with a Kannada-speaking population of more than 50 per cent in Mysore.
- **Objection Raised by Maharashtra:** Maharashtra objected to this by claiming that that in 1956, Marathi-speakers outnumbered Kannada-speakers in those areas. It submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs, demanding 7,000 sq km that included 814 villages, and three urban settlements of Belagavi, Karwar and Nippani (all were part of Bombay Presidency in British Raj), to be added to Maharashtra.
- **Demands by Karnataka:** On the other hand, Karnataka has sought areas in Kolhapur, Sholapur and Sangli districts from Maharashtra, and Kasargod from Kerala to be included in its state.

#### Talks to Resolve the Dispute

- **Committee Formation:** As the dispute was raging on, both states decided to resolve the matter through talks. In 1960, both states decided to set up a four-member committee with two members from each state, to study and submit a report.
- **Offer to exchange of areas:** During this process, Maharashtra offered to transfer 260 Kannada-speaking villages in return for its demand for 814 villages and three urban settlements.
- **Lack of Consensus:** However, both states could not come to any consensus following the findings of the committee. In the years that followed, several talks were held between the two governments, which ended without a resolution

#### The Mahajan Commission

- **Commission Formed by Union Government:** Following the protest from Maharashtra government, in 1966, the central government formed Commission under former chief justice Mehr Chand Mahajan to look into the issue. It was also asked to look into Karnataka's demand for integration of Kannada-speaking areas in Kasargod in Kerala. Commission submitted report to the Union government in 1967 and was placed in Parliament in 1972.
- **Recommendation of Commission:** The commission rejected Maharashtra's claim over Belagavi city while recommending the transfer of about 260 villages in the border to Maharashtra and about 250 villages in Maharashtra to Karnataka.
- **Kasargod Issue:** The Mahajan Commission also upheld Mysore's claims for the areas in Kerala and recommended the transfer of the entire Kasargod taluk in Kerala, minus eight villages lying south of the Chandragiri river to Mysore

#### Response to Mahajan Commission Report:

- **Maharashtra:** The Maharashtra government rejected the report and termed the findings of the reports as biased and self-contradictory because the "formula" applied for Kasargod was not applied for Belgaum. Maharashtra Government insisted that the report is against the "wish of people" of Belgaum.
- **Kerala:** The Kerala government refuted the recommendations of the report and refused to hand over Kasargod to Karnataka.
- **Karnataka:** The Karnataka government welcomed the report and continued to press for the implementation of the report or maintaining status quo.
- **Centre:** Despite demands from Karnataka, the Centre never implemented the recommendations of the report. Rather it has been non-committal on resolving the border dispute.

#### Case in Supreme Court

- In 2004, the Maharashtra government moved the Supreme Court under Article 131(b) of the Constitution.
- In its petition, the Maharashtra government claimed that the Marathi-speaking population in Karnataka was being sidelined and that there was a feeling of 'insecurity among them.'
- Maharashtra asked that 814 villages in Belgaum, Karwar, Bidar and Gulbarga districts in Karnataka be moved under their jurisdiction since it had a majority of Marathi-speaking people.
- That case is still being heard by the Supreme Court.

#### Maharashtra's Arguments:

- Maharashtra's claim to seek the readjustment of its border was on the basis of contiguity, relative linguistic majority and wishes of the people.
- If the claim over Belagavi and surrounding areas was based on Marathi-speaking people and **linguistic homogeneity**, it laid its claim over Karwar and Supa where Konkani is spoken by citing Konkani as a **dialect of Marathi**.
- Its argument was based on the theory of village being the unit for calculation and enumerated linguistic population in each village.
- Maharashtra also points out the historical fact that the **revenue records** in these Marathi-speaking areas are also kept in Marathi.

#### Karnataka's Arguments:

- Karnataka points out that when Congress, which redrew its circles on linguistic basis in 1920, included Belagavi in the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee. Besides, the States Reorganisation Commission vested Belagavi with Karnataka.
- Karnataka holds the view that the settlement of boundaries as per the States Reorganisation Act is final. It has argued that the boundary of the State was neither tentative nor flexible.
- The State argues that the issue would reopen border issues that have not been contemplated under the Act, and that such a demand should not be permitted.
- As the legal battle continues, Karnataka declared Belagavi its second capital, changed the name of Belgaum to Belagavi and also holds its winter session at the newly constructed Vidhan Soudha in Belgavi.

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## SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

### Migrant workers engaged in Honey Mission

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

**In news**

- Responding to the Prime Minister's call for Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) engaged hundreds of migrant workers in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar with its flagship scheme like Honey Mission.
- The distressed migrant workers who were engaged with KVIC's Honey Mission in Uttar Pradesh in the month of August, have reaped their first honey harvest and are awaiting a bumper yield.

**Important value addition**

**Honey Mission**

- **Aim of the Honey Mission:** Creating employment for farmers, Adivasis, women and unemployed youth by roping them with beekeeping and increasing India's honey production.
- **Launched by:** KVIC 3 years ago
- Under the Honey Mission, KVIC provides training and 10 bee boxes with live colonies to beneficiaries including farmers, beekeepers and unemployed youth.
- KVIC also runs beekeeping training programmes and courses.

**The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)**

- It is a statutory body formed in April 1957 (as per an RTI) by the Government of India, under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.
- It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- **Vision** – To plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- In April 1957, it took over the work of former All India Khadi and Village Industries Board.
- **Head office:** Mumbai
- **Six zonal offices:** Delhi, Bhopal, Bangalore, Kolkata, Mumbai and Guwahati.

### Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) Wave-1, India Report released

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Society

**In news**

- Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) Wave-1, India Report was recently released.
- **Released by:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

**Key takeaways**

- LASI will provide an evidence base for national and state level programmes and policies for elderly population.
- A unique feature of LASI is the coverage of comprehensive biomarkers.
- No other survey in India collects detailed data on health and biomarkers together with information on family and social network, income, assets, and consumption.
- LASI is a full-scale national survey of scientific investigation of the health, economic, and social determinants and consequences of population ageing in India.
- The LASI, Wave 1 covered a baseline sample of 72,250 individuals aged 45 and above and their spouses including 31,464 elderly persons aged 60 and above and 6,749 oldest-old persons aged 75 and above from all States and Union Territories (UTs) of India (excluding Sikkim).
- It is India's first and the world's largest ever survey that provides a longitudinal database for designing policies and programmes for the older population.
- The evidence from LASI will be used to further strengthen and broaden the scope of National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly.
- It will also help in establishing a range of preventive and health care programmes for older population and most vulnerable among them.

**Do you know?**

- In 2011 census, the 60+ population accounted for 8.6% of India's population, accounting for 103 million elderly people.
- Growing at around 3% annually, the number of elderly age population will rise to 319 million in 2050.
- 75% of the elderly people suffer from one or the other chronic disease.
- 40% of the elderly people have one or the other disability and 20% have issues related to mental health.

**[Period Room Set Up For Menstruating Women in Thane district, Maharashtra](#)**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Society

**In news**

- In a bid to help the women residing in congested slums during their menstruation days, a 'period room' has been set up at a public toilet in Maharashtra's Thane city.

**Key takeaways**

- Equipped with several basic facilities, the period room aims to facilitate menstrual hygiene among women dwelling in slums.
- The facility is set up keeping in mind the women living in small houses, who do not have a separate bathing section.
- Many times they find it difficult to change during periods.
- This facility will be a boon for such women and go a long way in promoting good hygiene.
- Claimed to be the first-of-its-kind initiative, the much-needed facility has been set up by the Thane Municipal Corporation in collaboration with an NGO, at a slum in Shanti Nagar locality of Wagle Estate area in Thane.
- The 45,000 rupees low-cost facility will be replicated in all 120 community toilets in the city.

**Related articles:**

- Menstruation and associated stigma: [Click here](#)
  - Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill: [Click here](#)
- 

### [Third Phase Of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana \(PMKVY 3.0\) launched](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Skill Development

**In news**

- The third phase of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 3.0) launched recently in 600 districts across all states of India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

**Key takeaways**

- Spearheaded by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), this phase will focus on new-age and COVID-related skills.
- Skill India Mission PMKVY 3.0 envisages training of eight lakh candidates over a scheme period of 2020-2021 with an outlay of Rs. 948.90 crore.
- The 729 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs), empanelled non-PMKK training centres and more than 200 ITIs under Skill India will be rolling out PMKVY 3.0 training to build a robust pool of skilled professionals.

**Important value additions****Skill India Mission**

- Skill India Mission is an initiative of the Government of India, launched by the Prime Minister on the 16th of July 2015 with an aim to train over 40 crore people in India in different skills by 2022.
  - It includes various initiatives of the government like
    - National Skill Development Mission,
    - National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015,
    - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)
    - Skill Loan scheme
- 

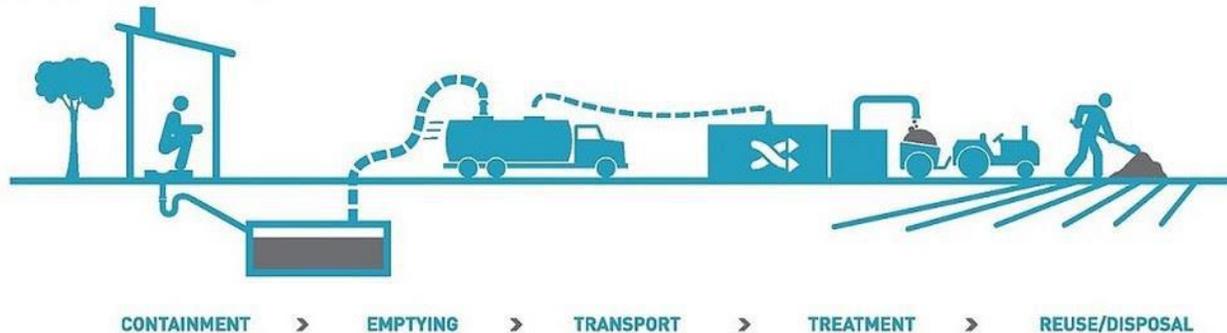
### [Faecal Sludge And Septage Management \(FSSM\)](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- I – Social Issues

**In news**

- NITI Aayog released a book on faecal sludge and septage management (FSSM) in urban areas.

### Sanitation Value Chain



#### Key takeaways

- Jointly developed with National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (NFSSM) Alliance, the book presents 27 case studies across 10 states and various service and business models adopted by Indian cities while implementing FSSM initiatives.
- About 60% of urban households rely on onsite sanitation systems, which require dedicated planning for management of waste collected in these systems' containment structures.
- Accordingly, FSSM planning prioritizes human excreta management, a waste stream with a high potential for spreading diseases.

#### Do you know?

- Considering the importance of FSSM solutions, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs came up with the national policy on FSSM in 2017.
- More than 24 states have adopted it and 12 of them have come up with their own policies.
- Universal access to toilets was achieved in urban India with the construction of 66 lakh household toilets and more than 6 lakh community and public toilets.
- After achieving the target of 'Open-Defecation-Free' (ODF), India has now moved towards becoming ODF+ and ODF++.
- These targets go beyond the concept of access to sanitation and aim for safely managed sanitation systems, with adequate treatment and safe disposal of toilet waste.

### A new framework around caste and the census

**Context:** The Census of India, one of the largest exercises of its kind, enumerates and collects demographic and socio-economic information on the Indian population.

#### About Census in India

- The **decennial census** provides information on size, distribution and socio-economic, demographic and other characteristics of the country's population. The first synchronous census in India was held in 1881. Since then, censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every ten years.
- **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)**, which collected the first figures on caste since 1931, is the largest exercise of the enumeration of caste. SECC supplies data to differentiate the socio-economic status of households based on housing, educational status, landholding, differently abled, occupation, possession of assets, SC/ST households, incomes etc.

#### What is the difference between Census and SECC?

- The Census and the SECC have different purposes.
- Since the Census falls under the Census Act of 1948, all data are considered confidential
- Whereas according to the SECC website, “all the personal information given in the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) is open for use by Government departments to grant and/or restrict benefits to households”.
- SECC methodology defines poverty through deprivation, instead of consumption.
- **The Census thus provides a portrait of the Indian population, while the SECC is a tool to identify beneficiaries of state support.**
- This difference is significant since it influences not only the methods of collection but also the use and potential for misuse of data.

### Benefits of Census (Decennial and SECC)

- **Evidence based Policy Making:** Enumerating, describing and understanding the population of a society and what people have access to, and what they are excluded from, is important not only for social scientists but also for policy practitioners and the government.
- **Ensures Equity in Governance:** Since Independence, aggregated Census data on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on certain parameters such as education have been collected. This data will help government to remedy inequalities present in the society.
- **Delimitation Exercise:** Delimitation Commission sets up boundaries of electoral constituencies based on the data obtained from decennial census
- **Developmental Purposes:** Businesses use census data to decide where to build factories, offices and stores, and this creates jobs. Developers use the census to build new homes and revitalize old neighborhoods.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Central government funds, grants and support to states and local governments consider population totals and breakdowns by sex, age, caste and other factors.
- **Civic Participation in Governance:** Commenting on the 1941 Census, Census Commissioner Yeatts observed that, “Thanks to the acute interest in community figures, practically all communities this time were census-conscious and took pains to see that their houses were in the list and that they themselves were counted.” Census thus ensures that Democracy is participative in nature.

### Criticism of Census

- **Unsuited for specialised inquiry:** W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941 Census, had pointed out that, “the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument unsuited for specialised enquiry”
- **Cannot provide comprehensive understanding of Society:** Few scholars consider Census as both a data collection effort and a technique of governance, but not quite useful enough for a detailed and comprehensive understanding of a complex society.
- **Complexity of Caste Census:** This large administrative exercise of capturing caste and its complexities is not only difficult, but also socially untenable. It is argued that counting caste may be context-specific, and thus difficult to measure
- **Political and social repercussions of a Caste census:** There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities which hinders development of National identity.
- **Time lag and planning:** Nearly a decade after the SECC for instance, a sizeable amount of data remains unreleased. Data delay has important repercussions to understanding social change since data may remain un-released or released only in parts.

### Way Ahead

- **Need for better collaboration:** While the Census authorities present documents on methodology as part of a policy of transparency, there needs to be a closer and continuous engagement between functionaries of the Census and SECC, along with academics and other stakeholders concerned.
- **Learning from Past Census:** Before another SECC is conducted, a stocktaking of the previous exercise, of what has been learnt from it, and what changes are necessary, beyond changing exclusionary criteria for beneficiaries of state support, are crucial to enable the Census to facilitate effective policy work and academic reflection.

### Connecting the dots

- Tamil Nadu Commission for Caste-wise Data: Click [here](#)
- NPR [and Census](#)

### Troubling trends: On widening inequality

**Context:** The world economy is slowly recovering from the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but that is only partial solace.

#### Issues:

- **Uneven Recovery:** The recovery is uneven among countries, and within countries. For example: The U.S. and China are expected to grow by 5% and almost 11%, respectively but Turkey's economy is projected to grow by 0.4%.
- **Rising Inequality:** In spite of differential economic recovery across the world, the emerging universal truth is that economic inequality is rising sharply in all countries.
- **Rich have been able to recover faster:** A new report by Oxfam has revealed that the 1,000 richest people worldwide recovered their losses from the pandemic within nine months as opposed to the world's poorest who might take a decade to limp back to their pre-pandemic standing.
- **Inequality in India:** Inequality in India has risen to levels last seen when it was colonised. The additional wealth acquired by India's 100 billionaires since March when the lockdown was imposed is enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest ₹94,045, according to the report.
- **Impact on Unskilled worker:** An unskilled worker in India would take three years to earn what the country's richest person earned in one second last year, the report calculates.
- **Disproportionate impact:** The worsening inequality in income and opportunities impacts some sections disproportionately due to discrimination based on gender, caste and other factors. The poorer people were worst affected by the disease itself.
- **Normalisation of Inequality:** The focus on growth had led politicians and policy makers to accept rising inequality as inevitable for decades. Inequality came to be seen as a benign outcome of economic growth that led to reduction of absolute poverty.
- **Ideological issue with inequality:** Concerns about inequality could also be easily dismissed as being informed by socialism. There is an increasing push towards adoption of liberalism & capitalism across the world. Any opposition to it was viewed with scepticism in the mainstream of development debates
- **Labour-Capital relation widening inequality:** There is now universal agreement among economists that the distribution of new wealth between capital and labour has become so one-sided that workers are constantly being pushed to penury while the rich are getting richer.

- **Environmental Impact:** The environmental costs of a development model that hinges on higher and higher growth are also obvious. The burden of degradation of environment is felt the most the poorer sections of society.

### Conclusion

- The theme of the World Economic Forum at Davos this week is ‘the Great Reset’ which it says is a “commitment to jointly and urgently build the foundations of our economic and social system for a more fair, sustainable and resilient future.
  - Lip service is not enough to tackle inequality; one has to take concrete measures to stem the growing inequality in society.
- 

## Economic Survey 2020-21: Education

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Education

### In news

- The Economic Survey 2020-21 states that online schooling took off in a big way during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Key takeaways

- The percentage of enrolled children from government and private schools owning a smartphone increased enormously from 36.5% in 2018 to 61.8% in 2020 in rural India.
- **PM eVIDYA** is a comprehensive initiative to unify all efforts related to digital/online/on-air education to enable multi-mode and equitable access to education for students and teachers.
- Around 92 courses have started and 1.5 crore students are enrolled under **Swayam MOOCs** which are online courses relating to NIOS.
- **PRAGYATA** guidelines on digital education have been developed with a focus on online/blended/digital education for students who are presently at home due to closure of schools.
- The **MANODARPAN** initiative for psychological support has been included in Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- India has attained a literacy level of almost 96% at the elementary school level.
- As per National Sample Survey (NSS), the literacy rate of persons of age 7 years and above at the All India level stood at 77.7 per cent.

### Related articles:

- Steps taken by the Government to ensure quality education: [Click here](#)
- 

## Economic Survey 2020-21: Skill Development

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Skill development

### In news

- The Economic Survey 2020-21 states that only 2.4% of the workforce of age 15-59 years has received formal vocational/technical training and another 8.9% of the workforce received training through informal sources.

**Key takeaways**

- Out of the 8.9% workforce who received non-formal training, the largest chunk is contributed by on-the-job training (3.3 per cent), followed by self-learning (2.5 per cent) and hereditary sources (2.1 per cent) and other sources (1 per cent).
- Among those who received formal training, the most opted training course is IT-ITeS among both males and females.
- The Unified Skill Regulator- National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) was operationalized recently.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 was rolled out in 2020-21 with a tentative target to skill 8 lakh candidates including migrants.

**Related articles:**

- Third Phase Of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 3.0) launched: [Click here](#)

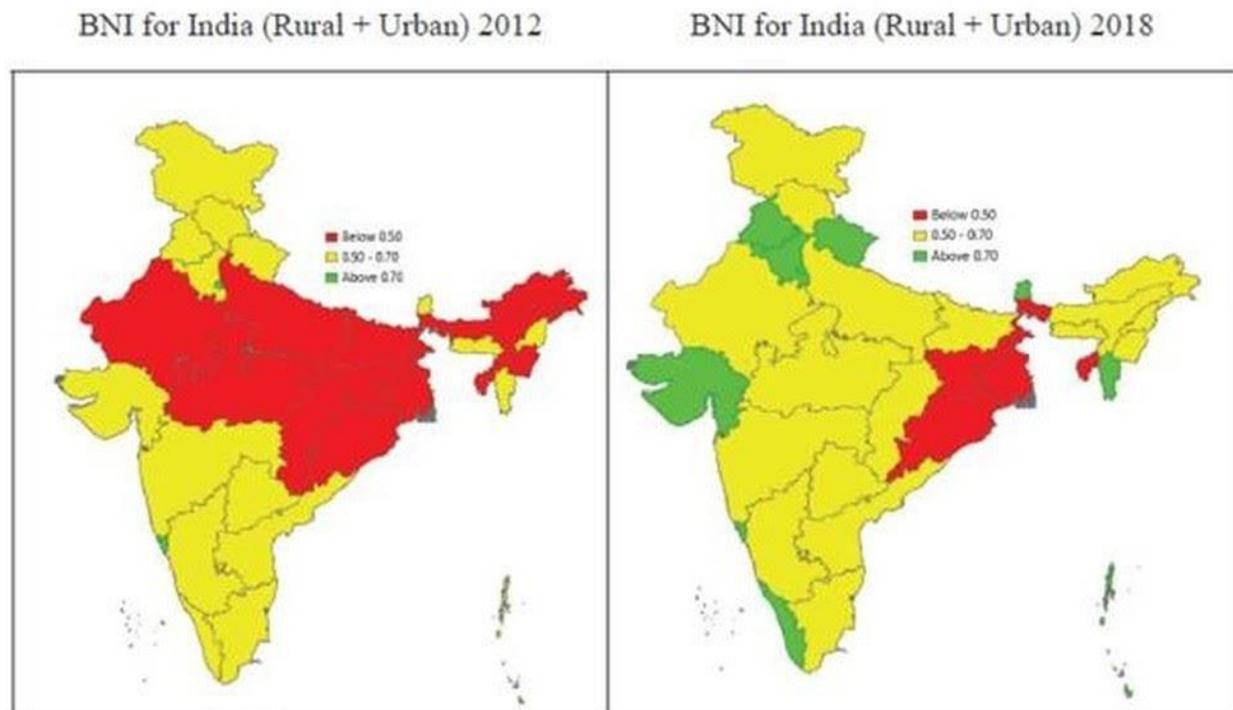
**Economic Survey 2020-21: Bare Necessities**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- I – Society

**In news**

- Economic Survey 2020-21 constructs a Bare Necessities Index (BNI) at the rural, urban and all India level.

**Figure 1: Improvement in the Bare Necessities Across India (Rural + Urban) from 2012 to 2018**

**Key takeaways**

- The BNI summarises 26 indicators on five dimensions viz., water, sanitation, housing, micro-environment, and other facilities.
- The BNI has been created for all States for 2012 and 2018 using data from two NSO rounds viz., 69th and 76th on Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition in India.
- In most of the States the access to the Bare Necessities for the household in 2018 is significantly better compared to 2012.
- Access to drinking water to households in most of the States has improved in 2018 compared to 2012 in rural as well as urban areas.
- Regional disparity in access to sanitation has declined as the States having low access to sanitation in 2012 have gained more.
- Survey observes improvement in Housing Index and reduction in inter-States disparities with disproportionate benefits for the lowest income group in 2018 vis-à-vis 2012.
- The economic Survey also notes improvement in micro environment for all States in 2018 except for Assam in rural and Odisha and Assam in urban areas as compared to 2012.
- Survey also points to a positive correlation between access to bare necessities and better health and education outcome. It observes improvement in child survival, decline in still births, malnutrition, and infant mortality with improved access to sanitation and clean drinking water.



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## WOMEN ISSUE

### Wages for Housework

**Context:** In the context of the forthcoming State Assembly election in Tamil Nadu, Political Party led by veteran actor Kamal Haasan, has made an eye-catching election promise to recognise housework as a salaried profession and assured payment to homemakers for their work.

The promise bears close examination as it flags off an important issue and one that has had an interesting, if chequered significance in the history of women's movements.

#### **Origin of the demand for Wages for housework**

- A report by International Labour Organization in 2018 shows that, globally, **women perform 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work**, more than three times as much as men. In Asia and the Pacific, this figure rises to 80%.
- The demand for 'wages for housework' arose in the context of struggle and consciousness-raising associated with the Second Wave of the women's movement in North America and Europe (During 1970s)
- The **International Wages for Housework Campaign started in Italy in 1972** under Selma James. It was based on the premise that housework was the basis of industrial work and should be duly paid for. The movement further spread to Britain and America.
- Alongside other demands for social and political equality, women's rights campaigners made visible and also **politicised women's everyday experience of housework** and child care in the 'private' realm of the household.
- For leading women's rights activists of the 1960s and 1970s, it was important to bust the myth that women's work at home was a personal service with no links to capitalist production.

#### **What are the in favour of Wages for Housework?**

- **More Accurate National Income Accounting:** Regardless of the hours of the day women put in to this domestic labour, the work is often dismissed as a set of daily chores (doesn't generate products and services for the market). As a result, it is not accounted for in either the GDP or the employment metrics. Neglecting to include it would thus mean underestimating GDP of the economy.
- **Makes Woman Autonomous:** Housework had come to define the very nature of a woman which disallowed woman from seeing it as 'real work' or as a social contract. For the advocates of 'wages for housework', the wage that the state ought to pay women would make them autonomous of the men on whom they were dependent.
- **Housework has Capitalistic Production Link:** The woman working at home produced 'the living human being — the labourer himself.' By providing free services in the home, women made possible the survival of working-class households at subsistence-level wages, with obvious benefits for industry and capital
- **Redefines the role of Women:** More fundamentally, the very demand for a wage was a repudiation of housework as an expression of women's nature. It was a revolt against the assigned social role of women. Therein lay the radical nature of the demand for wages, not in the money itself.
- **Welfare of large Segment of Population:** According to the Census in 2011, people engaged in household duties have been treated as non-workers, even when 159.9 million women stated that "household work" was their main occupation.

- **Recognition as first step to Equality:** Recognition is one of the most central processes in empowerment. It gives them a claim to equality within the patriarchal Indian household that only recognises the work done by men.
- **It moves us towards a more holistic understanding of labour:** Labour isn't purely tied to the exchange value of a service on the market, and recognises an extremely intimate form of labour that has proved essential to keeping the unit of the family intact and functional
- **Gender Justice:** Once recognised as work, this arena of unpaid domestic labour that is dominated almost entirely by women can become one where women can demand some degree of parity in terms of the time and energy expended on it.
- **Helps Control Domestic Violence:** In 2014, Giulia Bongiorno, an Italian lawyer and ex-parliamentarian, proposed that homemakers should be paid a salary as a way of addressing the debate on domestic violence. She argued that most women continue in an abusive relationship because they don't have a way out, as they are financially dependent on their partner.

### Challenges

- **Ghettoise Women:** It is argued by some that wages for housework would only imprison women further within the household, increase their social isolation and dissuade men from sharing housework.
- **Misled Goal of Feminist Movement:** Others argue that the goal of the women's movement must be, to not ask for wages, but to free women from the daily drudgery of routine domestic chores and enable them to participate fully in all spheres of social life, including paid employment outside the household.
- **Puts additional stress on the economy:** There is still debates on who would pay for the housework done by women, if it is to be done by State then this will put additional fiscal burden on government finances.

### Conclusion

Needless to say, women constitute almost half the population and their needs and issues have to be addressed. A homemaker doesn't need any favours. She is already contributing to the economy. A salary for her work at home would be a tool towards her empowerment, give her a life of dignity.

## Punitive Responses To Sexual Violence Need Rethink

**Context:** On Human Rights Day 2020, the Maharashtra cabinet approved the Shakti Bill, enlarging the scope of harsher and mandatory sentences — including the death penalty — for non-homicidal rape, to purportedly deter sexual offences.

### Do You Know?

- The Shakti Bill comes amid the recent legislative trend to invoke the death penalty for sexual offences, beginning with the introduction of the death penalty for child rape in 2018.
- In 2020, the Andhra Pradesh government passed the Disha Bill, pending presidential assent, that provides the death penalty for the rape of adult women.

### Criticisms of the Shakti Bill

#### 1. Doesn't address reporting and investigating mechanism

- The death penalty is the last phase of a criminal trial while rape survivors face serious obstacles much earlier, especially at the time of registration of the complaint.
- The most severe gaps in the justice delivery system are related to reporting a police complaint.

- The focus of the criminal justice system, therefore, needs to shift from sentencing and punishment to the stages of reporting, investigation and victim-support mechanisms. The bill does not address these concerns.

## 2. Counter-Productive

- Second, harsh penalties often have the consequence of **reducing the rate of conviction for the offence.**
- For instance, a study published in the Indian Law Review based on rape judgments in Delhi shows a lower rate of conviction after the removal of judicial discretion in 2013.
- Introducing harsher penalties does not remove systemic prejudices from the minds of judges and the police, who might refuse to register complaints, or acquit offenders in cases they do not consider as “serious” enough to warrant a mandatory minimum

## 3. Ignores Empirical Evidence

- Third, studies on child sexual abuse have shown that in the few cases of convictions, the minimum sentence was the norm and the award of the maximum punishment was an exception.
- Moreover, crime data from the National Crime Records Bureau shows that in **93.6 per cent of these cases, the perpetrators were known to the victims.**
- Introducing capital punishment would deter complainants from registering complaints. The Shakti Bill ignores crucial empirical evidence on these cases.

## 4. Issue relating to Consent

- The other anti-women assertion in the bill is the **move away from the standard of affirmative consent** in cases involving adult victims and offenders.
- Significant advocacy from the women’s movement led to the introduction of an **affirmative standard of consent**, rooted in unequivocal voluntary agreement by women through words, gestures or any form of verbal or non-verbal communication.
- In a sharp departure, the bill stipulates that valid consent can be presumed from the “conduct of the parties” and the “circumstances surrounding it”.
- The vaguely worded explanation in the bill holds dangerous possibilities of expecting survivors to respond only in a certain manner, thus **creating the stereotype of an “ideal” victim**
- It also overlooks the fact that perpetrators are known to the survivors in nearly 94 per cent of rapes, which **often do not involve any brutal violence.**

## Conclusion

- The Shakti Bill, while serving the populist agenda of making the public believe that the state is doing “something”, does not achieve more than that.
- Tackling crimes against women and children requires broader social reforms, sustained governance efforts and strengthening investigative and reporting mechanisms, instead of merely enhancing punishment.
- Punitive responses to sexual violence need serious rethinking, given the multitude of perverse consequences and their negligible role in addressing the actual needs of rape survivors.

## Women with disabilities

**Context:** Many women in general and those with disabilities in particular have to face poverty, poor health conditions, little or no income, lower education levels and isolation.

With resources being scarce, women usually get the short end of the stick, more so if they suffer from some form of disability.

#### Issues faced during Pandemic times

- **Access to essential items:** Those with locomotor disabilities were not able to visit stores to access food and the virus acted as an impediment to getting delivery of essential services.
- **Access to [Arogya Setu App](#):** Many with sight disabilities were not able to access the Arogya Setu app as it does not factor in their requirements.
- **Access to Digital Payments:** Many payment apps are not accessible to the visually challenged and many online courses too are not tailored to their needs.
- **Access to Digital Work Platforms:** While work from home could be to the advantage of women with disabilities, there are several challenges in being able to access video calls and voice calls and, of course, there is lack of connectivity in many areas.
- **Access to Support:** Social distancing and fear of the virus has led to many of them losing whatever little physical support they had in the form of attendants. The pandemic has also curtailed the possibilities of many disabled women being able to get physical and psychological support.
- **Vulnerable to Abuse:** Trapped at home, they are also vulnerable to abuse and face barriers in being able to register a complaint with the police or bring this to the notice of a civil society organisation.

#### Way Ahead

- **Create a database** of those with disabilities, especially of female gender. This will help understand their medical needs and tweak schemes accordingly
- **Leveraging grassroots system:** Government could use its robust grassroots systems with its health workers to create awareness in families about the need to not compromise on health and education for women with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Skill training:** Skill development, one of the flagship programmes of the government, should include courses and training specifically for women who are disabled in consultation with them.
- **Political Participation:** Some of these women should be inducted into local decision-making bodies so that they can participate in processes, which build their skills.
- **Disability friendly Grievance Redressal System:** Set up a functioning telephone network, accessible to women with disabilities so that they can convey their needs to a relevant person in the local governance system.

#### Conclusion

- Women with disabilities have been on the margins for far too long.
- The pandemic has been particularly cruel to them but also offers an opportunity to enable them to become more independent and productive if the government makes a concerted effort.

## HEALTH ISSUE

### Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG) launched

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

**In news**

- Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG) was recently launched.
- Coordinated by: Department of Biotechnology (DBT) along with MoH&FW, ICMR, and CSIR

**Key takeaways**

- The consortium will ascertain the status of new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the country.
- INSACOG will have a high level Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee.
- It will have a Scientific Advisory Group for scientific and technical guidance.
- Aim: To monitor the genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 on a regular basis through a multi-laboratory network.
- This vital research consortium will also assist in developing potential vaccines in the future.
- The consortium will also establish a sentinel surveillance for early detection of genomic variants with public health implication, and determine the genomic variants in the unusual events/trends (super-spreader events, high mortality/morbidity trend areas etc.).

**Do you know?**

- A new variant, which was found in the UK, especially in the London region, is defined by multiple mutations in the Spike region, as well as mutations in other genomic regions.
- As per DBT, these mutations are rapidly increasing the number of variants of the virus.
- This variant is significantly more transmissible than previously circulating variants, with an estimated potential to increase the reproductive number with an estimated increased transmissibility of up to 70%.

### Status of Kala Azar in Four States reviewed

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

**In news**

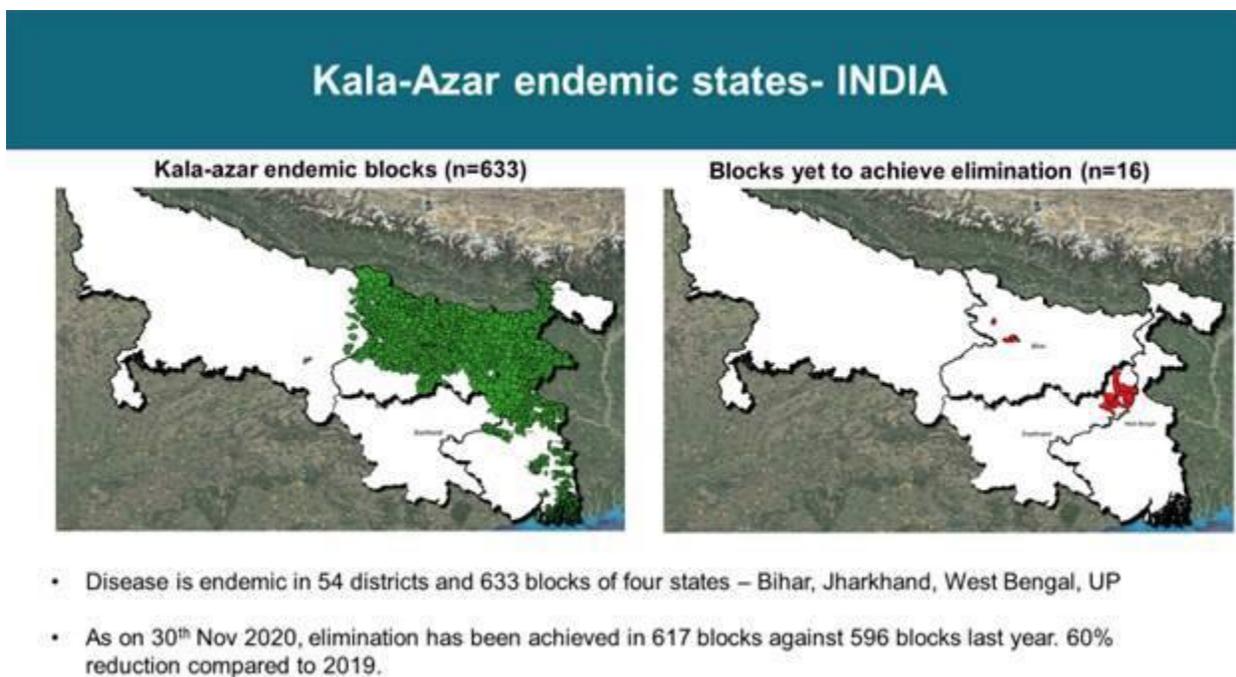
- Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare recently reviewed the status of the disease Kala-Azar in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

**Key takeaways**

- There are 54 districts in these four states that are currently affected by Kala-azar with sporadic cases in other states like Assam, HP, J&K, Kerala, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand.
- A risk based stratified approach needs to be formulated with clear activities and responsibilities that come with measurable monitoring indicators.
- Kala Azar disproportionately impacts the people at lower socio-economic strata of society whose houses are not sprayed often.
- In addition, they are unable to apply for pucca houses since they don't own land.

The Central government has underlined the importance of the following activities to target the elimination of the disease:

- Development of a plan for the “unreached poorest” or underprivileged sections in endemic areas.
- Leveraging of Kala-azar elimination programme within POSHAN Abhiyaan for maximum benefit at community level.
- Exploration of the opportunity of providing improved housing under the flagship program of the Prime Minister Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G).
- Exploration of the opportunity of providing improved housing under State Schemes.
- Involvement of Rural Health Practitioners (RHPs)
- Co-ordination with the rural development department and engage with Panchayati Raj functionaries for awareness, community engagement, environment management and social empowerment.



### Important value additions

#### Kala Azar

- A disease caused by infection with leishmania parasites.
- Visceral leishmaniasis is spread by sandfly bites.
- This type of leishmaniasis affects the internal organs, usually the spleen, liver and bone marrow.
- Some people have no symptoms.
- For others, symptoms may include fever, weight loss and swelling of the spleen or liver.
- Medication exists to kill the parasites.
- If left untreated, severe cases are typically fatal.

**Do you know?**

- Kala Azar is the 2nd largest parasitic killer in the world after Malaria.
- It results in a 95% fatality rate if the patients are not treated.
- Up to 20% of the patients who are correctly treated and cured, develop a skin condition called Post-Kala-Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL) which surfaces within months to years after treatment.
- These patients can contain large amounts of parasites in their skin lesions, making them an important source of transmission.

## ZyCoV-D: India's first indigenously developed DNA vaccine candidate against COVID-19

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- India's first indigenously developed DNA vaccine candidate against COVID-19, ZyCoV-D has been approved by Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), for conduct of the Phase III clinical trials.

**Key takeaways**

- The candidate has been supported by the National Biopharma Mission (NBM) under the aegis of BIRAC and the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India.
- Zydus Cadila completed Phase-I/II clinical trials of this DNA Vaccine candidate, in India, in more than 1,000 participants.
- Interim data has indicated that the vaccine is safe and immunogenic when three doses were administered intradermally (in the skin).
- The DCGI has accorded permission for conducting Phase-III clinical trial in 26,000 Indian participants.

**Important value additions**

**National Biopharma Mission (NBM)**

- It is an industry-academia collaborative mission for accelerating biopharmaceutical development in the country.
- **Launched in:** 2017 at a total cost of Rs 1500 crore.
- It is 50% co-funded by World Bank loan.
- **Implemented by:** Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).
- Under this Mission, the Government has launched **Innovate in India (i3) programme** to create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the biopharma sector.
- It has a focus on following four verticals: (1) Development of product leads for Vaccines , Biosimilars and Medical Devices that are relevant to the public health; (2) Upgradation of shared infrastructure facilities; (3) Developing human capital by providing specific training; (4) Developing technology transfer offices to help enhance industry academia inter-linkages.

## Status of Avian Influenza in the country

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

**In news**

- After confirmation of positive samples from ICAR-NIHSAD, Avian Influenza has been reported from the following States (at 12 epicentre): (1) Rajasthan(crow); (2) Madhya Pradesh(crow); (3) Himachal Pradesh (migratory birds); (4) Kerala (poultry-duck)
- **Measures suggested:** (1) Strengthening the biosecurity of poultry farms; (2) disinfection of affected areas; (3) proper disposal of dead birds/carcasses; (4) timely collection and submission of samples for confirmation and further surveillance, etc.
- Coordination with forest department for reporting any unusual mortality of birds was also suggested to the States.
- The other states are requested to keep a vigil on any unusual mortality amongst birds and to report immediately to take necessary measures.

### Important value additions

#### Avian Influenza (AI)

- **Caused by:** Avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses.
- These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.
- Avian flu viruses do not normally infect humans.
- Avian Influenza (AI) viruses have been circulating worldwide for centuries with four known major outbreaks recorded in the last century.
- India notified the first outbreak of avian influenza in 2006.
- Infection in humans is not yet reported in India though the disease is zoonotic.
- There is no direct evidence that AI viruses can be transmitted to humans via the consumption of contaminated poultry products.
- Implementing management practices that incorporate bio security principles, personal hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection protocols are effective means of controlling the spread of the AI viruses.
- In India, the disease spreads mainly by migratory birds coming into India during winter months i.e. from September – October to February – March.
- The secondary spread by human handling (through fomites) may also be possible.

### [PM to launch Pan India Rollout of COVID-19 Vaccination drive](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

#### In news

- Indian Prime Minister will launch the pan India rollout of COVID-19 vaccination drive on 16th January, 2021.

#### Key takeaways

- This will be the world's largest vaccination program covering the entire length and breadth of the country.
- A total of 3006 session sites across all States and UTs will be virtually connected during the launch.
- Around 100 beneficiaries will be vaccinated at each session site on the inaugural day.
- This vaccination programme is based on the principles of priority groups to be vaccinated.

- Health Care workers, both in government and private sectors including ICDS workers, will receive the vaccine during this phase.
- The vaccination programme will use Co-WIN, which will facilitate real time information of vaccine stocks, storage temperature and individualized tracking of beneficiaries for COVID-19 vaccine.
- This digital platform will assist programme managers across all levels while conducting vaccination sessions.
- A dedicated 24x7 call centre – 1075 – has also been established for addressing the queries related to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Adequate doses of both COVISHIELD and COVAXIN have already been delivered across the country to all States/UTs with the active support of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

**Do you know?**

- COWIN is an online digital platform developed by Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

### [Framework For Telemedicine Use In Management Of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease And Stroke In India](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

**In news**

- Recently, Union Health Minister released the Framework for Telemedicine use in Management of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke in India.

**Key takeaways**

- Telemedicine with its components of tele-consultation, tele-monitoring, tele-triage can be integrated to build continuum of care model for major Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- The increasing burden of NCDs in India requires multipronged interventions that can address promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative aspects of NCD care and management.
- Telemedicine can bridge and link all these aspects.
- It can be adapted and used by medical practitioners from primary to tertiary health care level in India, through the national teleconsultation network and other similar platforms.”

### [National Non-Communicable Disease Monitoring Survey \(NNMS\)](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

**In news**

- Union Health Minister released the 'National Non-communicable Disease Monitoring Survey (NNMS)', the largest comprehensive national Survey on risk factors and health systems preparedness of NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE (NCDs).

**Key takeaways**

- While two in five adults have three or more risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCD) in India, the status of health system in responding to the disease burden is also underscored.
- **Overweight or obese:** More than 1 in every 4 adults and 6.2% adolescents
- **Raised blood pressure:** Almost 3 out of 10 adults
- **Raised blood glucose:** 9.3%.
- **Insufficient physical activity:** More than 2 in 5 adults and 1 in 4 adolescents
- One in every three adults and more than one-fourth proportion of men used any form of tobacco and consumed alcohol in past 12 months respectively.

#### Do you know?

- Conducted during the period of 2017–18, the purpose of the survey was to collect reliable baseline data on key indicators (risk factors, select NCDs and health systems response) related to the National NCD monitoring framework and NCD Action Plan.
- This is the first of its kind of a comprehensive survey on NCDs using standardised tools and methods, covering the age groups of 15-69 years, males and females residing in urban and rural areas of the country.

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### [Ayu Samvad: Largest public awareness campaign program](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

#### In news

- “AYU SAMVAD” (My Health My Responsibility) is one of the largest public awareness campaign program being organised on AYURVEDA and COVID 19 PANDEMIC.

#### Key takeaways

- **Organized by:** All India Institute of Ayurveda New Delhi, as envisioned & supported by Ministry of AYUSH.
  - More than 5 lac lectures will be organized across the nation by Ayurveda Physicians for citizens of India.
  - **Main objective:** To create awareness through Lecture series to make common people aware about the theme “Ayurveda for COVID 19 Pandemic”.
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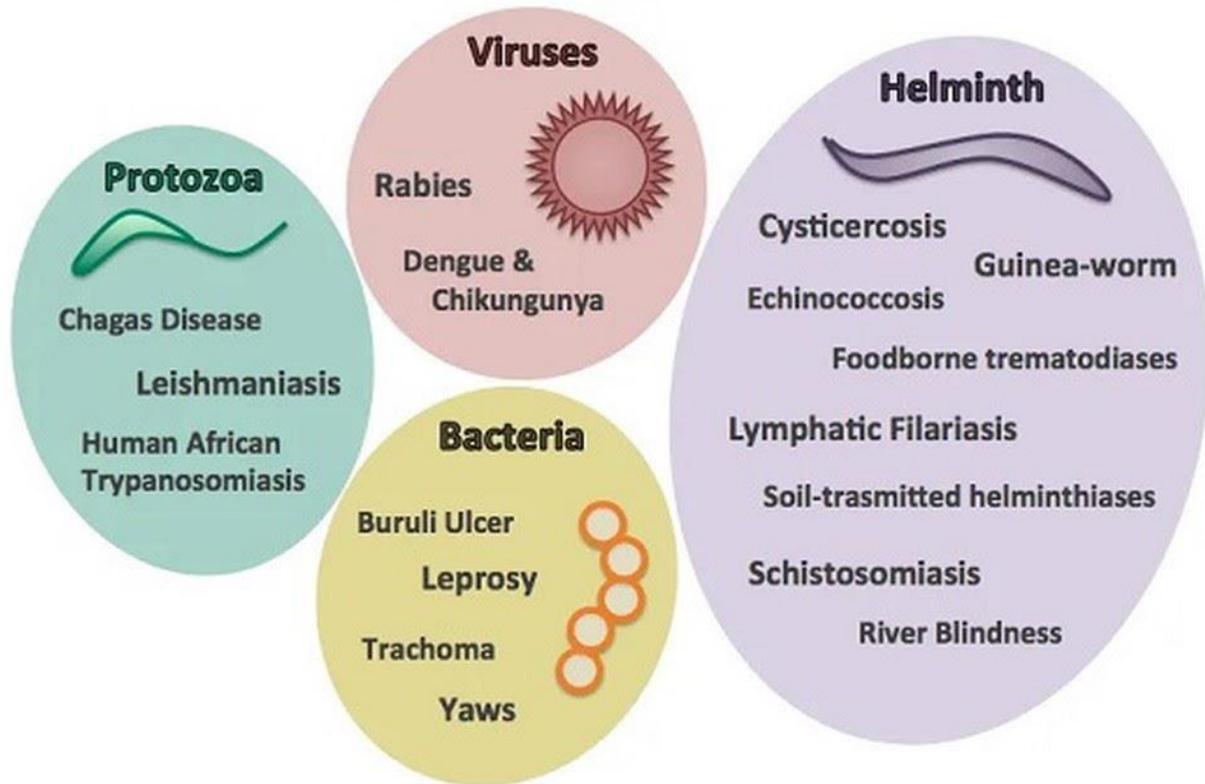
### [World Neglected Tropical Diseases \(NTD\) Day](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

#### In news

- January 30, 2021 will mark the second annual World Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Day, highlighting the global community’s commitment to ending Neglected Tropical Diseases.

## Neglected Tropical Diseases



### Key takeaways

- On World NTD Day, more than 50 landmarks representing 25 nations across the world will be lit up to celebrate how far we have come together in beating NTDs.
- India too will join these countries, by illuminating UNESCO world heritage site Qutub Minar.
- **Background:** Originally announced by the Crown Prince Court of Abu Dhabi at the 2019 Reaching the Last Mile Forum, hundreds of partners signed up to mark World NTD Day and demand action to Face NTDs and End The Neglect.

### Do you know?

- Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of tropical infections which are common in low-income populations in developing regions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas.
- They are caused by a variety of pathogens such as viruses, bacteria, protozoa and parasitic worms (helminths).
- They include dengue, rabies, blinding trachoma, Buruli ulcer, endemic treponematoses (yaws), leprosy (Hansen disease) etc.
- These diseases are contrasted with the big three infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria), which generally receive greater treatment and research funding.
- 1 in 5 people around the world are affected by NTDs.
- India is home to the world's largest absolute burden of at least 11 of these major neglected tropical diseases.

## 1st PPP Research Reactor For Production Of Nuclear Medicines

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health & GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), the premier research organization of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), has evolved a design for the first PPP Research Reactor for production of Nuclear Medicines.

**Key takeaways**

- In the proposed partnership, the private entities will get exclusive rights to process and market the isotopes produced in the research reactor, in lieu of investing in the reactor and processing facilities.
- **Background:** In May 2020, Union Finance Minister announced establishment of a Research Reactor in PPP mode for production of medical isotopes as a part of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat initiatives for DAE.
- This project will be a major step towards making India self-reliant in key radio isotopes used in medical and industrial applications.
- Globally, nuclear medicine is a USD 6 Billion market and is expected to grow rapidly to reach USD 30 Billion by 2030. India produces all major isotopes in the country under the aegis of BARC.

## Economic Survey 2020-21: Health

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

**In news**

- The Economic Survey 2020-21 has strongly recommended an increase in public spending on healthcare services from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP, as envisaged in the National Health Policy 2017.

**Healthcare under spotlight**

- To respond to pandemics, health infrastructure must be agile
- Emphasis on National Health Mission should continue
- Increase in public healthcare spend from **1% to 2.5-3%** of GDP can decrease Out of Pocket Expenditure from **65% to 35%** of overall healthcare spend

**Key takeaways**

- It notes that this can significantly reduce the Out-of-Pocket-Expenditure (OOPE) from 65% to 35% of the overall healthcare spend.
- The Survey has recommended that the National Health mission (NHM) should be continued in conjunction to with Ayushman Bharat Yojana.
- Drawing from the lessons learned during the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19, the Economic Survey makes a strong case for complete adoption of telemedicine for meeting the last-mile challenges of healthcare delivery in the country.



## PRELIMS EXCLUSIVE PROGRAMME (PEP) - 2021

### PRELIMS STRATEGY CLASSES BY **SUNIL OBEROI** - Retd. IAS

Has worked on civil services reforms in India with UNDP and DOPT. Was associated with induction training of new entrants of civil services and in-service training of senior civil servants.



## GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

### School Bag Policy, 2020

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Education

**In news**

- The Directorate of Education has issued a circular asking schools to follow the new 'School Bag Policy, 2020' released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

**Key takeaways**

- According to the circular, schoolteachers should inform the students in advance about the books and notebooks to be brought to school on a particular day.
- They should frequently check their bags to ensure that they are not carrying unnecessary material.
- The weight of the school bags, as per the policy, should be: **(i)** 1.6 to 2.2 kg for Classes I and II students, **(ii)** 1.7 to 2.5 kg for Classes III, IV and V, **(iii)** 2 to 3 kg for Classes VI and VII, **(iv)** 2.5 to 4 kg for Class VIII, **(v)** 2.5 to 4.5 kg for Classes IX and X and **(vi)** 3.5 to 5 kg for Classes XI and XII.
- The teachers should take the responsibility of checking the weight of school bags of the students every three months on a day selected for the whole class.
- Any information about heavy bags should be communicated to the parents.
- To reduce the weight of the school bag, the school management should provide quality potable water in sufficient quantity to all the students in the school.

**Do you know?**

- Heavy school bags are a serious threat to the health and well-being of students.
- The heavy school bag can cause damage to vertebral column and knees of the growing children.

### Place in news: IIM Sambalpur

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Education

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the permanent campus of IIM Sambalpur recently.

**Important value additions**

**Sambalpur**

- Sambalpur is a city in Odisha, located on the banks of river Mahanadi.
- Sambalpur is one of the ancient places of India, with recorded settlements in the prehistoric age.
- It is known for Sambalpuri Saree which is known for their incorporation of traditional motifs like shankha (shell), chakra (wheel), phula (flower). It is made from fabric woven on a hand-loom.
- Hirakud Dam, the longest earthen dam in the world and the largest artificial lake of Asia, is at Sambalpur.

- Sambalpur derives its name from the Goddess Samalei who is regarded as the reigning deity of the region.

## Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) successfully completes 5 Years of operations

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

**In news**

- Crop Insurance Scheme- The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) successfully completes 5 Years of operations on 13th January 2021.

### **Important value additions**

- The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) was launched in 2016.
- It is an insurance service scheme for farmers for their yields.
- It aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim for the full insured sum.
- It was formulated in line with One Nation–One Scheme theme by replacing earlier two schemes National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).
- The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).
- **Implemented by:** Empanelled general insurance companies.
- **Administered by:** Ministry of Agriculture
- The scheme is compulsory for loanee farmers availing Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops and voluntary for others.

## Regulatory Compliance Portal launched

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy

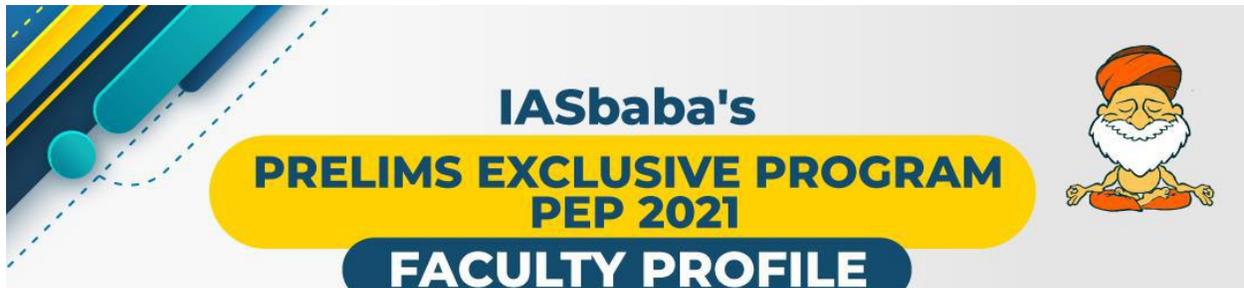
**In news**

- Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched a Regulatory Compliance Portal to minimize Regulatory Compliance Burden for Businesses and Citizens.

### **Key takeaways**

- **Objective:** To act as a bridge between citizens, industries and the Government in order to minimize burdensome compliances.
- It will also act as a first-of-its-kind central online repository of all Central and State-level compliances.

- All Central Ministries/Departments and States/UTs would examine laws/regulations/rules under their purview and implement an Action Plan to rationalize and simplify all the processes and remove burdensome compliances.
- These details would be captured and tracked on the Regulatory Compliance Portal.
- Industry stakeholders from Trade bodies such as CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM would also be able to submit compliances and proposed recommendations.
- This will be assessed by concerned Government authorities and suitable action would be undertaken to minimize the regulatory compliance burden.



## IASbaba's

# PRELIMS EXCLUSIVE PROGRAM PEP 2021

## FACULTY PROFILE

 <p><b>Prelims Strategy Classes by SUNIL OBEROI</b> Retd. IAS</p>	 <p><b>CSAT by MANJUNATH BADAGI</b> MBA Renowned Mental Ability Expert Known for his book - Mental Ability</p>
 <p><b>Geography by ATYAB ALI ZAIDI</b> B. Tech, NIT, Allahabad. Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Polity by SUDEEP T</b> B. Tech Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>
 <p><b>Economics by SUMANTH MAKAM</b> MA Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Economics by SPHURAN B</b> B.Tech, MS (US) Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 5 Years</p>
 <p><b>History by ABHISHEK CHAHAR</b> BA (Hons), LLB Involved with teaching and mentoring students since 6 Years</p>	 <p><b>Environment &amp; Science &amp; Technology by VIPIN MISHRA</b> B.Tech, M.Tech Involved with teaching and teaching and mentoring students since 5 years</p>

## INTERNATIONAL

### Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

#### In news

- Iran has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency that it intends to produce uranium enriched to up to 20 percent purity, well beyond the threshold set by the 2015 Vienna accord (also known as JCPOA).

#### About JCPOA

- Commonly as the Iran nuclear deal or Iran deal, is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States— plus Germany) together with the European Union.
- Under JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years.
- For the next 15 years Iran will only enrich uranium up to 3.67%. Iran also agreed not to build any new heavy-water facilities for the same period of time.
- Uranium-enrichment activities will be limited to a single facility using first-generation centrifuges for 10 years. Other facilities will be converted to avoid proliferation risks.
- To monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities.
- The agreement provides that in return for verifiably abiding by its commitments, Iran will receive relief from U.S., European Union, and UNSC nuclear-related sanctions.
- On 5 January 2020, in the aftermath of the Baghdad Airport Airstrike that targeted and killed [Iranian general Qassem Soleimani](#), Iran declared that it would no longer abide by the limitations of the deal but would continue to coordinate with the IAEA, leaving open the possibility of resuming compliance.

### GIBRALTAR (UK-Spain Deal)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II- International Affairs

#### In news

- Hours before the Brexit transition period ended on New Year's Eve, Spain announced it had struck a deal with the UK to maintain free movement to and from Gibraltar
- Gibraltar is a small portion of land on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula that Britain controls but Spain claims as its own.

#### About the deal

- Officially remaining a **British Overseas Territory**, Gibraltar will now be part of the Schengen zone and follow EU rules, thus ensuring that a hard border does not separate it from the rest of Europe
- The result of the 2016 Brexit referendum gave rise to the possibility of a hard border coming up between Gibraltar and the rest of Europe, despite 96 per cent of the vote in **Gibraltar being in favour of remaining in the EU**.

- Gibraltarians **mainly voted 'Remain'** because the territory's economy depends on an open border with Spain, which sends over 15,000 workers and 200 trucks there daily.
- However, free movement will now continue thanks to the Spain-UK deal, as **Gibraltar is being placed in the Schengen area**, with Spain acting as a guarantor.
- The Schengen passport-free zone includes 22 countries from the EU, and four others –Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The UK has never been a part of this zone
- The EU will now place Frontex border guards for the next four years to ensure free movement to and from Gibraltar, and the territory's port and airport would become the external borders of the Schengen area.
- The deal would mean the EU's fair competition rules in areas such as the labour market and the environment would continue to apply to Gibraltar.
- Although the deal covers free movement, it **does not address the sovereignty dispute between Spain and the UK**. Britain has called the deal a "political framework" for a separate treaty that it wants to sign with the EU concerning Gibraltar.



Source: [Britannica](#)

About Gibraltar

- Gibraltar, with an area of just 6.8 sq km and a population of around 34,000 people, has been the subject of intense dispute between Spain and Britain for centuries. This is mainly because of its **strategic location**.
- The territory, which is **connected to Spain by a small strip of land and** surrounded by sea on three sides, serves as the only opening from the Atlantic Ocean into the Mediterranean Sea, making it a key location on the shortest sea route between Europe and Asia via the Suez Canal.
- Gibraltar **fell into British hands after a war in 1713**, and has since remained with Britain despite several attempts by Spain to retake it.
- Due to its strategic importance, Gibraltar came to be highly fortified by Britain since the 18th century, thus earning its commonly known name– “the Rock”.
- Even during World War II, Gibraltar’s port was critically important for the Allies, and it continues to be a key base for NATO.
- When Britain joined the EU in 1973, Gibraltar was a “crown colony”, but was reclassified as a British Overseas Territory in 2002.
- In **two referendums**, one in 1967 and the other in 2002, **Gibraltarians overwhelmingly voted to remain a British territory**.
- Currently, the territory is self-governing in all aspects, except for defence and foreign policy, which are managed by London, and Gibraltarians have British citizenship.

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### [Vietnam Imports Rice from India for the first time](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations; GS-III - Trade  
**In news**

- Vietnam has started buying rice from India for the first time in decades after its local prices jumped to their highest in nine years amid limited domestic supplies.



#### Key takeaways

- The purchases underscore tightening supplies in Asia, which could lift rice prices in 2021.
- It could even force traditional buyers of rice from Thailand and Vietnam to switch to India which is the world's biggest exporter of the Rice.
- Dwindling supplies and continued Philippine buying have lifted Vietnamese rice export prices to a fresh nine-year high.
- The reducing supplies will increase concerns about food insecurity with sub-Saharan Africa among the areas where import demand has been increasing partly due to population growth.
- global pandemic has also prompted Vietnam and other countries to stockpile rice

#### Do you know?

- In 2020 India exported a record 14 million tonnes of rice.
- In December, the world's biggest rice importer China started buying Indian rice for the first time in at least three decades due to tightening supplies from Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam and an offer of sharply discounted prices.
- Vietnam is the world's third biggest exporter of rice.

[Cabinet approves signing of Memorandum of Cooperation between India and Japan on Partnership in "Specified Skilled Worker"](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

**In news**

- Cabinet recently approved signing of Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between India and Japan on Partnership in "Specified Skilled Worker".

**Key takeaways**

- The present MoC would set an institutional mechanism for partnership and cooperation between India and Japan on sending and accepting skilled Indian workers, who have qualified the required skill and Japanese language test, to work in fourteen specified sectors in Japan.
- These Indian workers would be granted a new status of residence of "Specified Skilled Worker" by the Government of Japan.
- Under this MOC, a Joint Working Group will be set up to follow up its implementation.
- MOC would enhance people-to-people contacts, foster mobility of workers and skilled professionals from India to Japan.
- **Some of these 14 sectors are:** Nursing care; Building cleaning; Material Processing industry; Industrial machinery manufacturing industry; Shipbuilding and ship-related industry; Automobile maintenance; Aviation; Agriculture; Fisheries; Food and beverages manufacturing industry and Food service industry

**US Capitol Violence**

**Context:** A ceremonial session of Congress to formally declare President-elect Joe Biden's victory devolved in an instant into a scene of violence and mayhem in the Capitol on Wednesday when a pro-Trump mob stormed the building, halting the counting of electoral votes.

### What were the protesters targeting?

- **Allegation of Fraud in Election:** Mr Trump has refused to concede the 3 November election, repeatedly alleging fraud without providing any evidence.
- **Opposition to results by Republicans:** A joint session of Congress was being held to certify Mr Biden's election victory on 3 November. The proceedings are usually brief and ceremonial but Republican lawmakers have been objecting to some results.
- **Pressure from Trump:** For days Mr Trump, who has lost the election, had also been putting pressure on Mr Pence (acting Vice-President), who is presiding over the session, to block certification of the result
- **Mobilisation of Trump Supporters:** The protesters arrived at the Capitol from a "Save America Rally", where Mr Trump had urged them to support those legislators opposing Mr Biden's confirmation.
- **Obstructing Certification Process:** The protestor's attack on the capitol forced lawmakers to flee the US Capitol and resulted in the death of one woman, disrupted the process of certification of Biden as the winner.
- **Demands of Protestors to restore Trump:** The conviction of protestors is that the election was stolen from President Trump, and the lawmakers inside the building should do their duty and somehow award the election to him.
- **Incitement by Trump:** Even though Mr Trump recorded a video message on Twitter calling on supporters to leave the Capitol, but he continued to make unsubstantiated claims that Democrats had stolen the election. There are also reports of protests at state legislatures around the country

### How is the situation now?

- **Election result is secured:** As lawmakers and staff rushed out, aides grabbed hold of the boxes containing the Electoral College certificates, making sure that the vandals could not literally steal the results of the election.
- **Curfew by Mayor:** Troops and police were mobilised in neighbouring states, and the FBI was deployed to help Capitol police. Mayor of the city announced curfew to help bring the situation under control.
- **Action by Social Media Platforms:** Trump's Twitter and Facebook account was locked for 12 hours after he pushed baseless claims about the election, and the social media platform warned him of permanent ban if he didn't remove his rule-breaking tweets
- **Judiciary's Actions:** Multiple state and federal courts, including the US Supreme Court, have already dismissed or ruled against Trump and his allies in the Republican Party in lawsuits seeking to change the election results.

### Critical Analysis of episode:

- **International Reaction:** Several world leader including UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed their shock over the incident.
- **Shows Unpredictable Behaviour of Mr Trump:** His use of tariffs as a political weapon against trade partners like Europe and China, his divisive rhetoric since long before his election in 2016, and his refusal to accept electoral loss in 2020, are continuation of his unpredictable behaviour. The violence is unlikely to be the last such challenge by Trump to established US System.
- **Sets Dangerous Precedent:** Pro-Trump supporters efforts to overturn a U.S. election would send its democracy into a death spiral.

- **Investor Sentiment tested:** America is a safe haven for financial investors around the world. The violence puts the United States and its sanctuary status to a serious test
- **Faith in US Institutions put to test:** If Washington gets back to work quickly, faith in U.S. institutions may be strengthened, else the credibility of US system, which is torchbearer of Democracy in the world, will be hampered.
- **Fault lines in Society:** Biden has called for peace and unity, but fractures in U.S. society remain. Pro-Trump supporters are not in mood to accept the defeat of Mr. Trump (that is partly aided by Trump's unfounded allegations & rumours). This has further widened the faultlines in US Society.

#### Conclusion

- Institutional integrity, a robust system of checks and balances, mostly means that people do their jobs. For the most part, it doesn't require heroism or bravery.

#### Connecting the dots

- Violence US Capitol has seen over the years: Click [here](#)

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#### [Place in news: Thousand Islands](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

#### In news

- On 9 January 2021, a Boeing 737-500 (PK-CLC) operating Sriwijaya Air Flight 182 went missing after taking off from Jakarta Soekarno–Hatta Airport on route to Pontianak Supadio Airport.
- The aircraft crashed near the Thousand Islands.

# Indonesia missing plane



## Important value additions

- The Thousand Islands (officially Kepulauan Seribu) are a chain of islands to the north of Jakarta's coast.
- It forms the only regency of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.
- It consists of a string of 342 islands stretching 45 km (28 mi) north into the Java Sea at West Jakarta Bay and in fact north of Banten Province.

## Bridging the Gulf: On Gulf reconciliation summit

**Context:** The Gulf reconciliation summit, in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom and its allies decided to end their blockade of Qatar, has brought to an end, for now, their long feud.

### What was the feud between Qatar and Saudi allies?

- **Accusation of Qatar funding Terrorism:** In 2017, Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed the blockade and severed diplomatic ties, accusing the tiny Gulf country of supporting terrorism.
- **List of Demands for Normalisation:** They also issued 13 demands for it to be lifted, which included shutting down the Qatar-funded TV network, Al Jazeera, closing a Turkish military base and reducing diplomatic relations with Iran.

### Did Qatar submit to the coercive tactics of Saudi Arabia & its allies?

- Qatar did not budge despite the heavy economic cost.
- When the Saudi and Emirati airspaces were closed, **Iran offered Qatar global connectivity.**
- Al Jazeera is still live.
- Qatar has invited **more Turkish troops**, bolstering its ties with Ankara, which is eager to play a bigger role in West Asia.
- Moreover, it played an **important role in the [U.S.-Taliban deal](#)** and continued to host talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government.
- If the original Saudi plan was to isolate Qatar and make it kneel, it **has backfired.**
- And in the last weeks of the Trump administration, MBS and his allies seem to have realised their strategic folly.

### What steps were announced by both sides in reconciliation summit to end the feud?

- Qatar has made few concessions to reach the reconciliation.
- **The 13 specific demands were replaced** by a broad agreement on non-intervention in other countries' internal affairs and cooperating to ensure regional stability and security, which can be **open to different interpretations for different sides.**
- After the summit, Qatar's Foreign Ministry has said that the country had no intention of altering ties with Iran and Turkey.
- In practice, the **Saudi side stepped down from its demands** and made amends with an unshaken Qatar.

### What are the reasons for Saudi Arabia stepping down from its demands?

The Saudi U-turn could be the result of a genuine tactical rethink.

- The rift in the Gulf helped Iran and Turkey, Riyadh's main rivals, while it failed to scuttle Qatar's standing. Iran, reeling under U.S. sanctions, also got some financial relief from Qatari payouts for using its airspace.
- By lifting the air and sea blockades, the Saudis and the Emiratis could deny Iran of those funds and also try to **put economic pressure on Iran.**
- Saudi Arabia also tries to up a **united Arab regional front** as Joe Biden is preparing to renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal.
- The Saudis may also be hoping that bridging the Gulf between two American allies (Saudi Arabia & Qatar) would help them warm up to the Biden administration.

### Conclusion

- While ending the feud is welcome, it cannot be overlooked that this unnecessary crisis was born out of an ill-thought-out Saudi-Emirati strategy of coercion. It reflects poorly on them.
- Saudi & its allies should learn from the mistakes and build ties based on mutual interests and cooperation, not on threats and coercion.

### [Parler suspended by Apple, Amazon and Google](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations & GS-III – Technology

**In news**

- Apple, Amazon and Google have suspended the social network called Parler as the platform has not taken enough measures to make sure that content inciting violence remains in check.

### Key takeaways

- Parler is an American alt-tech microblogging and social networking service.
- It markets itself as a free speech and unbiased alternative to mainstream social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.
- Parler also has a significant user base of Donald Trump supporters, conservatives, conspiracy theorists, and right-wing extremists.
- The suspension came following the events of January 6 when an armed mob of Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill and clashed with the police as Congress convened to validate Joe Biden's presidential win.
- The platform is favoured by right-leaning users and as per media reports was actively used by supporters of US President Donald Trump, including several of those who participated in the Capitol Hill siege.

### [Place in news: India expresses serious concern over the security situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad region](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

#### In news

- India has expressed serious concern over the security situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad region in West Africa.
- India also condemned terrorist attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria and Lake Chad region and by Islamic State in West Africa.

#### Important value additions

- Lake Chad is a historically large, shallow, endorheic lake in central Africa, which has varied in size over the centuries.
- An endorheic basin is a drainage basin that normally retains water and allows no outflow to other external bodies of water.
- The freshwater lake is located in the Sahelian zone of West-central Africa.
- Lake Chad is mainly in the far west of Chad, bordering on northeastern Nigeria.
- It is the largest lake in the Chad Basin.
- The Chari River, fed by its tributary the Logone, provides over 90% of the lake's water, with a small amount coming from the Yobe River in Nigeria/Niger.
- Despite high levels of evaporation, the lake is fresh water.

## Section 230 Of The US' Communications Decency Act

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations & GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- Soon after a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol last week, his social media accounts were suspended by Big Tech companies like Twitter and Facebook for his alleged role in inciting violence and spreading misinformation.

**Key takeaways**

- The incident spurred a renewed debate about Section 230 of the US' Communications Decency Act.
- The Act is a controversial piece of internet legislation.
- It permits these tech companies to use their powers and ban the president in the first place.
- The Act was passed in 1996.
- It provides legal immunity to internet companies for content that is shared on their websites.
- The act was first introduced to regulate pornography online.
- Section 230 is an amendment to the act, which holds users responsible for their comments and posts online.
- Also, according to the Act, online companies, including social media platforms, are not liable for the content shared on their website by its users.
- So if a user posts something illegal on the website, the company is protected from lawsuits.

**Do you know?**

**Why Section 230 is widely criticised?**

- It was passed before social media existed in its present form.
- Political leaders and internet activists have long called for the law to be updated.

**Related articles:**

- US Capitol Violence: [Click here](#)
- 

## 5th India – Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

**In news**

- The 5th Defence Ministers' Dialogue (DMD) between India and Singapore was successfully held recently through a video conference.



### Key takeaways

- At this 5th DMD, both Ministers witnessed the signing of the Implementing Agreement on Submarine Rescue Support and Cooperation between the two Navies.
- The Ministers further welcomed the implementing agreement on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) cooperation in August 2020 for the two Armed Forces to have closer operational collaboration in response to disasters.
- Recently, the Indian Navy and Singapore Navy successfully conducted the 27th edition of Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) and also participated in the second edition of the Singapore-India-Thailand Maritime Exercise (SITMEX); both held in November 2020.
- Indian Defence Minister reaffirmed ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture and pledged India's support to all endeavours of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus.
- The cyber agencies of both armed forces have also stepped up engagements.

### Tech Giants vs Regulators

**Context:** Parliament in Australia is debating legislation that would require Google and Facebook to enter into payment negotiations with **media companies** for using their content, with an arbiter mandated to adjudicate in the event an agreement cannot be reached.

#### Response from Tech giants

- **Counter arguments:** Facebook & Google argued that the media industry was already benefiting from traffic routed to them by the digital platforms, and that the proposed rules would expose them to “unmanageable levels of financial and operational risk”.
- **Threats of withdrawal:** Google threatened to remove its search engine from Australia. Facebook said it could block Australian users from posting or sharing news links if the proposed norms on royalty payments were put into operation.

#### What is the Core Issue in Australia?

- **Importance of news for Tech Giants:** While links to news may not be direct advertising money-spinners for Facebook or Google, both see the presence of news as an important aspect of audience engagement with their products.
- **Payment of royalties not an issue for Tech Giants:** While both companies are prepared to give some money to news publishers, they want to make deals on their own terms.
- **Control over payout process:** The fight in Australia is evidently centred on how much control these companies would be able to retain on their payout process — operational aspects such as

deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithms.

- **Balance of Bargaining Power:** But Google and Facebook are two of the largest and most profitable companies in history – and each holds far more bargaining power than any news publisher. The news media bargaining code sets out to undo this imbalance.
- **Commercial Agreement preferred:** The media bargaining code being introduced is far too systematic for them to want to accept it. They would rather pick and choose commercial agreements with “genuine commercial consideration”, and not be bound by a one-size-fits-all set of arbitration rules.
- **Difference with EU regulation:** European authorities have specifically linked payments to copyright, without putting a forcing device into the agreements. Australia’s code, on the other hand, is almost entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets vis-a-vis the tech majors, and has some coercive features as well.
- **Issue of Power Equations:** It is more of a competition issue in Australia, of power equations between traditional news outlets and tech platforms, with the question of abuse of dominance by the latter hanging in the balance

#### Case Study: South Korea

- **Naver Online Platform:** Nearly four years previously, Naver, South Korea’s most popular news site and biggest search engine (like Google), had thrashed out an unusual model for working with Korean news publisher.
- **New Business model to deal with News Media:** Naver started designating some 125 outlets as “Naver News in-link partners”, and paying them for published stories on Naver. Another 500 odd news outlets are unpaid “search partners”. The total payout was over \$40 million in 2017.
- **Criticism of model:** While this may not be the perfect model — news outlets have generally been unsatisfied with their share; and there are allegations that Naver manipulated the ranking of articles critical of South Korea’s top football association on the latter’s request — the template remains operational in a nation where nearly 85% of the population accesses news online.

#### What has been the Firms’ response elsewhere?

- Facebook plans to launch its **news tab feature** (available in the US since 2019) in the UK, with likely tie-ups with The Guardian, The Economist, and The Independent.
- Google is rolling out its **news offering platform**, Google News Showcase which features story panels that allow participating publishers to package the stories that appear within Google’s news products. It has on board more than 450 publications across a dozen countries,
- Google had announced in December 2020 that it would “soon start offering people access to paywalled content in partnership with select news publishers”. It had said it would pay participating partners to provide limited access to paywalled content for News Showcase users.
- Both the platforms of Facebook and Google aim to formalise payment pacts with news outlets
- However, Google’s first response to France adopting the EU copyright rules was **to stop displaying news snippets** – until the French competition regulator stepped in, in October last year.
- Google also **stopped its Google News service in Spain**, which made payments to publishers mandatory.

#### Do You Know?

- In India, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% year-on-year to Rs 27,900 crore, according to EY estimates, and are expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.
- Globally, Facebook and Google together command 61% of the market share in digital ad spends, according to Edelweiss Research; Google leads with 37%.

### The debate in India

- **Big Market:** According to a FICCI-EY report on India's media and entertainment sector for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country — making up approximately 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019. With 282 million unique visitors, India is the second largest online news consuming nation after China
- **Dominance of Intermediaries:** Policymakers in India have so far focused on the dominance of intermediaries such as Google and Facebook, which are positioned in a way that service providers cannot reach customers except through these platforms.
- **Lacks adequate discussion:** A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to commence in any meaningful way here.
- **Struggling Startups:** Other major news aggregators in India are Dailyhunt and InShorts. According to a January 2020 report by Harvard University's Nieman Lab, publishers were initially paid between Rs 5-6 lakh monthly for content hosted on Dailyhunt — but they started going off the platform after terms were changed.
- **Implication of Australia Events:** The tussles in Australia and elsewhere could have broader implications for the regulation of the digital economy in India in the longer term.

### Conclusion

Google and Facebook have locked horns with Australian govt over laws that propose to make them pay news organisations for using their content. The outcome of the fight will have implications for India as well.

### Connecting the dots

- Dominance of Big Tech: Click [here](#)
- Google Search Monopoly: Click [here](#)

## [USA restores relations with Palestine](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

### In news

- U.S. President's administration announced it was restoring relations with the Palestinians and renewing aid to Palestinian refugees.

### Key takeaways

- It is a reversal of the Donald Trump administration's cutoff and a key element of its new support for a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict agreed to by Israelis and Palestinians.
- Palestine is recognized officially as the State of Palestine by the United Nations and other entities.
- It is a de jure sovereign state in Western Asia claiming the West Bank (bordering Israel and Jordan) and Gaza Strip (bordering Israel and Egypt) with Jerusalem as the designated capital, although its administrative center is currently located in Ramallah.

- The entirety of territory claimed by the State of Palestine has been occupied since 1948, first by Egypt and Jordan and then by Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967.



## Intergovernmental Negotiations Framework (IGN)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

**In news**

- India's Permanent Representative to the UN said that It has been nearly 13 years since the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) started.
- The UN Security Council is finding itself unable to act effectively to address issues of international peace and security as it lacked inclusivity.

### **Important value additions**

- The Intergovernmental Negotiations framework (IGN) is a group of nation-states working within the United Nations to further reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 15-member top organ of the world body.
- **Composition:** The IGN is composed of several different international organizations, namely: (1) The African Union; (2) The G4 nations (India, Brazil, Japan and Germany); (3) The Uniting for Consensus Group (UfC); (4) The L.69 Group of Developing Countries; (5) The Arab League; (6) The Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
- Each group represents a different set of positions vis-a-vis reforming the United Nations Security Council.
- In 2016, an "oral decision" was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly which approved of a declaration known as the "elements of convergence" which outlined the status of the consensus reached by the members of the IGN at that time.

## Future Investment Initiative Forum

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; GS-III - Economy

### **In news**

- Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare addressed the 4th edition of the Future Investment Initiative Forum.

### **Important value additions**

- The Future Investment Initiative (FII) is an annual investment forum held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to discuss trends in the world economy and investment environment.
- It is hosted by the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia (PIF).
- The first event was in October 2017.
- The purpose of this year's forum was to find solutions on how business and government can expand access to healthcare, train healthcare workers, remove regulatory barriers and encourage investment in advanced health technologies



Image source: [Click here](#)

## Restoring Cross Border Mobility by WEF's Common Trust Network

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – International Relations

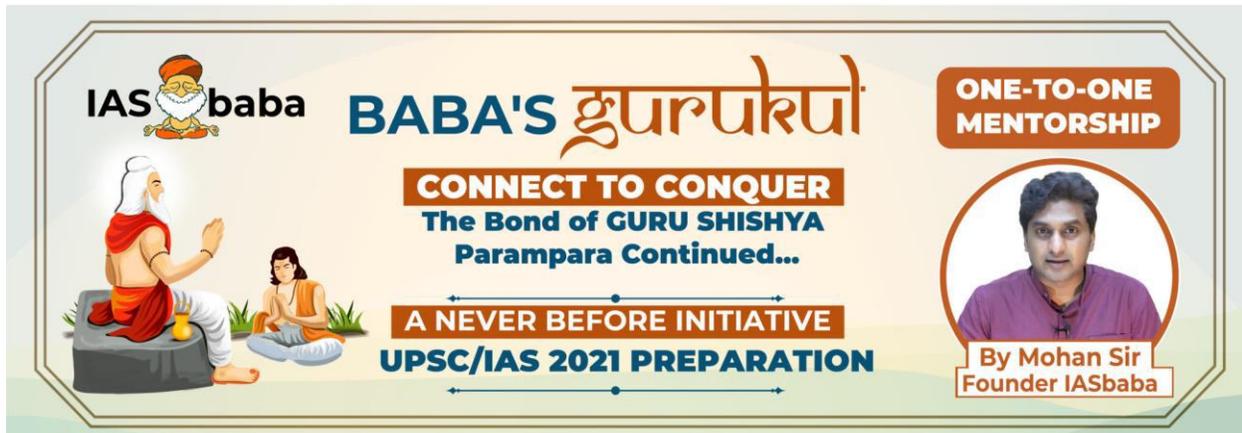
### **In news**

- Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare addressed the event on Restoring Cross Border Mobility by World Economic Forum's Common Trust Network through Video Conference.

### **Key takeaways**

- **Background:** As countries around the world work to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and restart their economies, they all face the challenge of how to reopen their borders and allow travel and commerce to resume while protecting their populations' health.
- To address this challenge, The Commons Project Foundation and the World Economic Forum have launched the Common Trust Network in collaboration with a broad voluntary network of public and private stakeholders.

- The Common Trust Network is designed to:
  1. empower individuals with digital access to their health information,
  2. make it easier for individuals to understand and comply with each destination's requirements,
  3. ensure that only verifiable lab results and vaccination records from trusted sources are presented for cross-border travel and commerce.
- The Network is enabled by a global registry of trusted laboratory and vaccination data sources, standard formats for lab results and vaccination records, and standard tools to make those results and records digitally accessible.



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## INDIA AND THE WORLD

### [ADB, India sign \\$10 million loan to support horticulture in Himachal Pradesh](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations & GS-III – Agriculture

**In news**

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Indian Government signed a \$10 million project readiness financing (PRF).
- **Objective:** To help finance piloting activities, and design and capacity building for an ensuing project that aims to expand horticulture production and farm household income in Himachal Pradesh.

**Key takeaways**

- PRF project will support advance actions to achieve high level of project readiness through detailed design activities, capacity building of state level agencies, and creating an enabling environment for subtropical horticulture development in the state.
- It aims to ensure implementation readiness with prior testing of new production technologies and marketing systems so that the project is cost-effective and gets completed in a timely manner.
- The project will support development of subtropical horticulture, including cultivation of fruits and vegetables, in the state's southern region which is currently lagging due to limited access to perennial water sources, crops losses due to wild animal encroachment and limited access to high value markets.
- The PRF also supports establishment of water user association (WUAs) on completed irrigation schemes and enhancing women's participation.

**Important value additions**

**Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

- It is a regional development bank.
- **Established on:** 19 December 1966,
- **Headquarter:** Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines.
- The bank promotes social and economic development in Asia.
- It is modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
- As of 31 December 2018, Japan and the United States each holds the largest proportion of shares at 15.571%.
- China holds 6.429%, India holds 6.317%, and Australia holds 5.773%.

### [India to chair three-key subsidiary bodies of the UNSC](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations

**In news**

- India will be chairing three-key subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).



#### Key takeaways

- The panels are: Counter-Terrorism Committee, Taliban Sanctions Committee, and Libya Sanctions committee.
- Chairing of Counter-Terrorism committee has a special resonance for India which has not only been at the forefront of fighting terrorism especially cross border terrorism but has also been one of its biggest victims.
- Taliban Sanctions Committee has always been a high priority for India keeping in mind its strong interest and commitment to peace, security, development, and progress of Afghanistan.
- India will be assuming the chair of the Libya Sanctions Committee at a critical juncture when there is an international focus on Libya and on the peace process.

#### Political Crisis in Nepal

**Context:** Nepal has drifted into a political crisis following its Prime Minister (PM) KP Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament, a move promptly approved by President Bidhya Devi Bhandari.

Oli also announced general elections would be held in April and May 2021, more than a year ahead of schedule

#### **A brief background of Nepal's Political Parties**

- Three major parties dominate Nepal's politics: Nepali Congress Party; Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist led by Oli, and Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) led by Prachanda
- Prachanda led the Maoist insurgency for a decade (1996-2006) before joining mainstream politics. Oli was a fierce critic of the politics of violence that caused more than 17,000 deaths.

- But Oli approached the Maoists in 2017 for a merger between their parties, pre-empting the possibility of an alliance between the Maoists and the Nepali Congress that may have come in the way of Oli's prime ministerial ambitions.
- Following the merger, the two leaders agreed that they would lead the government by turn, a promise that Oli did not honour at the end of his two-and-a-half years, thus sowing the seeds of separation.
- Now, as a split appears inevitable, Oli is hoping to continue in power with those following him.

#### Critical Analysis of the Dissolution of Parliament

- **Reasons for Oli's decision:** Oli took the step when he realised that a factional feud within the party had reached the point of no return and he faced possible expulsion both as party chief and as Prime Minister
- **End of Coalition:** Dissolution of Parliament effectively ended the unity forced among the left forces that had led to the creation of the single, grand Nepal Communist Party three years ago
- **Uncertainty over Nepal's new Constitution:** Dissolution of the House is not new in Nepal, but this is the first such instance after the new Constitution of 2015 that places safeguards against dissolution. The new constitution does not envisage such a step without exploring formation of an alternative government
- **Accountability of caretaker government:** The dissolution came hours before a Standing Committee meeting that was expected to order a probe into corruption charges levelled against him by party co-chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda. With Parliament dissolved and with a President seen as favourable to him, Oli will have the power to rule without being accountable to none.
- **The Army:** The Nepal Army has made it clear that it will remain neutral in the ongoing political developments. This implies that if Oli tries to rule with the help of security forces to maintain law and order and contain protests, it is uncertain how far the Army will play along.
- **The China Factor:** China has been a big factor in Nepal's internal politics since 2006. It is seen as having lobbied, visible or secret, to prevent the split. China has also invested in crucial sectors like trade and Investment, energy, tourism and post-earthquake reconstruction, and is Nepal's biggest FDI contributor
- **Judiciary's decision awaited:** Since dissolution, a dozen petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the dissolution with two years left of the present House's tenure. The constitutional validity of Oli's move has been questioned, and is awaiting decision by the Supreme Court.

#### How India handled this Political Crisis?

- **Ire not directed at India:** Unlike on previous occasions, Oli has refrained from blaming India for destabilising his regime. The PM's ire has been directed at his senior party colleagues for not allowing him to govern smoothly.
- **India's subtle support to Oli:** Anti-Oli forces were quietly cheered to dump him, but when they failed, India subtly extended a helping hand to a desperate Oli struggling for survival. PM Modi positively responded to Oli's telephonic greetings on India's Independence Day. A series of important visits from India followed.
- **Continuing bilateral relationship:** Energy and trade officials from the two countries have met each other, border talks are on board, and Nepal's foreign minister is visiting India for the joint commission

- **India has achieved its tactical goals:** Through these moves, India has achieved its immediate tactical goals. Oli has been emboldened to stick to power even by breaking the party. In the process, the shallowness of Oli's opportunistic and politically driven anti-Indian nationalism has been exposed.
- **Embarrassment to China:** India has played its cards cautiously and craftily. With an assiduously cultivated façade of non-interference, it let China smear itself into the mud of micromanaging the ruling party's internal conflicts. The unity and dominance of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has been shattered, and China, as its patron, has been embarrassed.
- **Support for elections:** On the sidelines of these developments, India has also fuelled and fed Hindutva forces under the leadership of a discarded monarchy, possibly as a ploy in the unfolding realignment of political forces in Nepal. Towards that end, India has now come out openly in favour of fresh elections.

#### Critical Analysis of India's moves in Nepal Political Crisis

- All this puts India on the side of undemocratic, unconstitutional and **opportunistic** players in Nepal, which South Block strategists think is a small price to be paid for the significant gains otherwise made.
- Seeking a friendly regime in the neighbourhood is a recognised norm in the **realist world of international relations**. India is no exception. It has often invested heavily in Nepal to have a friendly, even a pliant, regime.
- But in the long-term, this approach has largely **resulted in the erosion**, rather than consolidation, of India's vital security and economic interests.
- With **China deeply pitched in the regime change business in Nepal**, prospects of this approach in coming years seem expensive and uncertain.

#### Way Ahead for India

- **Let Nepal deal with its internal mess:** Irrespective of whether Nepal has elections or witnesses the restoration of Parliament, a prudent course for India would be to let Nepal cope with its internal political mess.
- **Improve its own popular profile:** As no major development in bilateral relations appears likely during the prevailing uncertainty, India must encourage consolidation of a people-driven polity, and improve its own popular profile.
- **Resolve Controversial Issues:** India can pick up pending controversial issues such as the 1950 treaty, the Kalapani border dispute, and trade and investment matters, and categorical state its position, drawing red lines that Nepal should not cross.
- **New Indo-Nepal Treaty:** Nepal has asked for a revision of the 1950 treaty, and this has been accepted by India. But the issue remains stuck because Nepal does not clarify how to strike a proper balance between India's security concerns and Nepal's developmental aspirations. Without this balance, no new treaty is possible, and Nepal, seemingly, is not prepared to abrogate the old treaty.
- **India's Stand should be made clear:** India's policy towards immediate neighbours has never been driven by territorial nationalism. This has been evident in the case of Sri Lanka (Katchatheevu), Bangladesh (territorial waters), and even Pakistan and China.
- **Bridge trade imbalance:** On trade and investment issues, India needs to be more accommodative. Nepal sells less than \$1billion worth of products to India while importing nearly \$8 billion of them. This is unsustainable, despite the fact that trade deficits are governed by the

nature of economies. India can and must move to remove structural and procedural impediments to the entry of genuine Nepali goods into Indian markets

- **China Factor:** In redefining India's approach to Nepal, India also needs to shed a great deal of its Sinophobia. China is no doubt politically assertive and financially spread out in Nepal, but most of its promises, such as transit through Chinese ports and railroad connections, are politically driven.

#### Connecting the dots

- India- Nepal Border dispute at Kalapani and Lipulekh: Click [here](#)

### Reclaiming SAARC from the ashes of 2020

**Context:** Thirty-six years after it first began, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), appears to be all but dead in the water.

- **Suspended in action:** The year 2020 marked the sixth year since the leaders of the eight nations that make up SAARC were able to meet.
- **Impact of weakening SAARC:** India-Pakistan issues have impacted other meetings of SAARC as well, making it easier for member countries, as well as international agencies to deal with South Asia as a fragmented group rather than a collective
- **India's Stand on not attending SAARC:** PM Modi on the SAARC charter day on December 8, made it clear that India's position on cross-border terrorism from Pakistan that led India to refuse to attend the SAARC summit in 2016 in Islamabad, is still in place.

### India – UAE MoU For Scientific And Technical Cooperation

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

#### In news

- The Union Cabinet has approved the MoU on Scientific and Technical Cooperation between National Centre of Meteorology (NCM), UAE and Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), India.

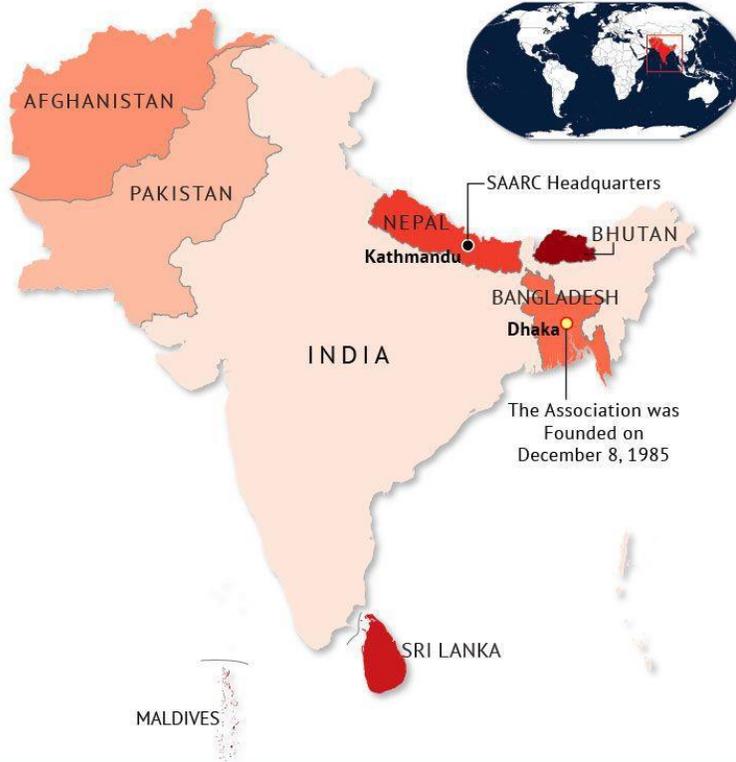
#### The MoU provides for:

- Exchange of experience/visits in term of scientists, research scholars and specialists, etc. for the purpose of tropical cyclones forecasting.
- Cooperation to support the Tsunami Early Warning Centre (TEWC)
- Cooperate at the field of Seismology which includes the study of Seismic activities having the potential to generate Tsunami waves in Arabian Sea and Oman Sea.
- Cooperation in Early warnings of Sand and Dust storms through the exchange of knowledge.





## SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)



Together the SAARC countries form



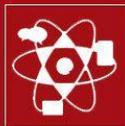
5 broad spheres which SAARC countries agreed to cooperate on:



Development of human resources



Transport



Meteorology, science, technology, & telecommunications



Rural and agricultural development



Population and health-related activities



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### Why India needs to rethink its position on SAARC?

- **Pakistan's undue influence:** India's problems with Pakistan on terrorism, territorial claims and on its role in blocking SAARC initiatives on connectivity and trade are well known. Even so, India's refusal to allow Pakistan to host the SAARC summit because of those problems is akin to giving Pakistan a 'veto' over the entire SAARC process.
- **Contradictory actions by India:** PM Modi and cabinet ministers continued to attend [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) meetings along with their Pakistani counterparts, including the SCO Heads of Government meeting in November where New Delhi even invited Pakistan PM Imran Khan (he deputed another official).
- **India's dealing with other neighbours:** While China's incursions in Ladakh and the Galwan killings constituted the larger concern in the year, India did not decline to attend meetings with the Chinese leadership at the SCO, RIC trilateral, the G-20 and others. No concerns over territorial claims stopped the Indian government from engaging with Nepal either, despite Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli's [decision to change Nepal's map](#) and Constitution to include Indian territories.
- **Pandemic induced challenges:** Reviving SAARC is crucial to countering the common challenges brought about by the pandemic. South Asia's unique experience with Pandemic, Vaccine distribution challenges, economic recovery especially tourism sector revival are some challenges that can be dealt effectively by close coordination by member countries
- **Suitable time for regional approach:** While it will be impossible for countries to cut themselves off from the global market entirely, regional initiatives will become the "Goldilocks option" (not too hot and not too cold), or the happy medium between globalisation and hyper-nationalism.
- **Countermeasure to China:** In dealing with the challenge from China too, both at India's borders and in its neighbourhood, a unified South Asian platform remains India's most potent countermeasure. Experts suggest that it is only a matter of time before Beijing holds a meeting of all SAARC countries (minus India and Bhutan), for they are all part of the BRI, and even that they will be invited to [join RCEP, which India declined](#).
- **Original logic of SAARC still holds true:** Despite the despondency, the rationale for SAARC existence remains intact: while history and political grievances may be perceived differently, geography is reality.

### Conclusion

New Delhi must find its own prism with which to view its South Asian neighbourhood as it should be: a unit that has a common future, and as a force-multiplier for India's ambitions on the global stage.

### [India-Japan MoU in ICT](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS -II – International Relations

#### In news

- India and Japan signed MoU to enhance cooperation in the field of Information and Communications Technologies.
- The Department of Telecom and Japan's Ministry of Communications will enhance mutual cooperation in the field of 5G technologies, telecom security, submarine optical fiber cable system to islands of India, spectrum management, smart cities, high altitude platform for broadband in unconnected areas, disaster management and public safety etc.

## India-Nepal Developments

### Relations

- Close cooperation between the two sides in combating the COVID-19 pandemic
- Early provision of vaccines to Nepal.
- Expansion of the Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum products pipeline to Chitwan
- Establishment of a new pipeline on the eastern side connecting Siliguri to Jhapa in Nepal
- Upgraded first passenger railway line between India and Nepal from Jaynagar to Kurtha via Janakpur
- Cross-border rail connectivity projects, including a possible Raxaul-Kathmandu broad gauge railway line
- Joint hydropower projects, including the proposed Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project
- Nepal expressed support for India's permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council (UNSC) to reflect the changed balance of power.

### Way Ahead

- Need for facilitating cross-border movement of people and goods
- Recently inaugurated Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at Birgunj and Biratnagar have helped in the seamless movement of people and trade between the two countries.
- Nepal relies on India's seaports in a big way for trading, and goods are transported by road, the integrated check posts are expected to ease trade and transit.
- India's support to two more cultural heritage projects in Nepal, namely, the Pashupatinath Riverfront Development and the Bhandarkhal Garden Restoration in Patan Durbar.
- India's Nepal policy is heading very clearly towards deeper engagement with all sections.

## Fishermen issue between India and Sri Lanka

**Context:** The recovery of bodies washed ashore in Sri Lanka has triggered protests in Tamil Nadu as they are believed to be of the four fishermen reported missing from the state.

Demanding to hand over bodies back to India, they **allege that the Sri Lankan Navy had beaten them to death**. They also demand jobs for family members of the dead, Rs 15 lakh compensation and murder charges against the Sri Lankan navy.

The latest incident has once again brought to fore the long-standing conflict between Indian fishermen and the Sri Lankan navy

### **What is the conflict between Lankan navy and Indian fishermen?**

#### **1. Conflict of Katchatheevu island:**

- Tamil fishermen had traditional fishing rights of uninhabited Katchatheevu island for centuries.
- However, in 1974, the island was ceded to Sri Lanka after an agreement was signed by Indira Gandhi between the two countries without consulting the Tamil Nadu government.
- The agreement allows Indian fishermen "access to Katchatheevu for rest, for drying of nests and for the annual St Anthony's festival" but it did not ensure the traditional fishing rights.
- The agreement forced Indian fishermen to restrict themselves to a meagre area in their fishing forays.

## 2. Depleting Resources in Indian region:

- As in the past, fishermen from Rameswaram and nearby coasts continue to sail towards Talaimannar and Katchatheevu coasts (now a part of Sri Lanka), a region famous for rich maritime resources in Sri Lanka.
- Indian fishermen continued to enter Lankan waters because of depletion of marine resources on the Indian side.

## 3. Proliferation of trawlers in Indian coast

- Plenty of catch in this oceanic region had triggered a proliferation of fishing trawlers in Tamil Nadu coast in the past three decades.
- Trawlers are mechanised boats with highly exploitative fishing nets unlike most of the poor fishermen in Sri Lankan coast who use traditional fishing methods.
- At times fishermen have employed bottom trawling that is banned in Sri Lanka.
- Bottom trawling, an ecologically destructive practice, involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea-floor, causing great depletion of aquatic resources.

## 4. Threats to Livelihoods

- Hoping for a better profit, too many people started buying trawlers in Rameswaram and nearby Tamil Nadu coasts.
- Smaller coastal stretches like Rameswaram, Mandapam, Pamban areas alone have about 2,500 trawlers; which means at least two dozen families depending on each trawler through various means such as about six people who work on board, fish, prawn, dry fish merchants, supporting staff for loading etc.
- But the post war scenario in the Indian ocean derailed businesses and livelihoods in Tamil Nadu coast.
- The Sri Lankan Navy arrested over 450 Indian fishermen in 2017 and 156 in 2018 on charges of poaching. A total of 210 arrests were made in 2019. This has impacted the livelihoods of considerable sections of fishermen population living along Rameswaram coast.

## 5. Enhanced monitoring of maritime border by Sri Lankan Navy:

- Access to Sri Lankan waters by Indian fishermen was easier at the time of Sri Lankan civil war where it was preoccupied with its war against the LTTE.
- As a result, its northern province and maritime boundaries nearby were never tightly guarded.
- But that changed in 2009 with the end of civil war. There is now enhanced monitoring of maritime border by Sri Lankan Navy leading to increased number of arrests of Indian fishermen crossing international maritime borders.

## 5. Politicization of Issue

- It has been often a sensitive political issue in Tamil Nadu in the past one decade. Tamil regional parties had been often fighting with the Union governments for their indifference to the issue.
- This has prevented the issue to linger upon thus derailing the consensus based long lasting solution to the issue.

## Way Forward

- Mutual recognition of each other's concerns and interests can improve the relationship between both countries.
- India needs to focus more on its traditional and cultural ties to improve relations with Sri Lanka.

- Starting ferry services between India and Sri Lanka can improve people to people linkages.

## 2021: Year Of Indo-French Alliance Towards A Greener Planet

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – International Relations

**In news**

- Union Minister for Environment and French Minister for Ecological Transition launched the Indo-French Year of the Environment recently.



### **Key takeaways**

- **Objective:** To strengthen Indo-French cooperation in sustainable development, increase the effectiveness of actions in favour of global environment protection and give them greater visibility.
- The Indo-French Year of the Environment over the period 2021-2022 would be based on **five main themes:** (1) Environmental protection; (2) Climate change; (3) Biodiversity conservation; (4) Sustainable urban development; (5) Development of renewable energies and energy efficiency.
- It is also a platform for engaging in discussions on critical areas of collaboration relating to the environment and allied areas.
- From the Indian side, it will be coordinated by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) along with the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and other concerned Ministries/Departments/Organisations.
- A joint screening committee will also be set up to finalize the calendar of the events for the Indo-French Year of the Environment.

**Do you know?**

- India-France alliance is the main pillar of the International Solar Alliance launched by Inidan PM.

## Framework for Strategic Partnership signed between the International Energy Agency and India

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – International Relations

**In news**

- The Framework for Strategic Partnership between the International Energy Agency (IEA) members and the Government of India was signed.

**Key takeaways**

- **Aim:** To strengthen mutual trust and cooperation & enhance global energy security, stability, and sustainability.
- This partnership will lead to an extensive exchange of knowledge and would be a stepping stone towards India becoming a full member of the IEA.

**Important value additions**

- The International Energy Agency (IEA) is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organisation.
- It was established in the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- The IEA is made up of 30 member countries.
- Also, the IEA family includes eight association countries which include Brazil, China, and India.
- Three countries are seeking accession to full membership, Chile, Israel, and Lithuania.

## MoU signed between India Textiles Ministry and Nissenken Quality Evaluation Centre Japan

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – International Relations; GS-III - Economy

**In news**

- A formal MoU signing ceremony was held between Textiles Committee, Ministry of Textiles, India, and M/s. Nissenken Quality Evaluation Centre Japan.

**Key takeaways**

- **Objective:** To provide the required support to the textile trade and industry for ensuring quality as per the requirement of Japanese buyers through Testing, Inspection & Conformity Assessment.
- It is expected that the MoU will strengthen the bilateral trade by enhancing India's export of Textile and Apparels (T&A) to Japan, which is the third-largest export destination of the world.

**Do you know?**

- The Textiles Committee was established in the year 1963 by an Act of Parliament.
- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Textiles to ensure the quality of all textiles and textile products for domestic and export markets.
- The Textiles Committee is the only body providing for all the quality-related needs of the entire Textiles Value Chain (TVC) in an integrated format on a pan-India basis.

## India-GCC Relations

**Context:** The pandemic has brought to fore new possibilities for cooperation between India and the GCC countries more specifically in Health and Education Sector.

### Gulf Cooperation Council

- It is political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries—**Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.**
- The GCC was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 1981.
- The purpose of the GCC is to achieve unity among its members based on their common objectives and their similar political and cultural identities, which are rooted in Arab and Islamic cultures.



Areas where India and GCC can cooperate for better future are:

<b>Healthcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is immense scope for investments in the healthcare and the pharmaceutical industries.</li> <li>• <b>Attracting investments from GCC countries</b> fits well into Government of India's initiative to develop the industrial and manufacturing base in India under the Atmanirbhar Bharat program</li> <li>• India is already a popular regional destination for <b>medical tourism.</b></li> <li>• <b>Digital healthcare services</b> are an area that are likely to witness</li> </ul>
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	<p>immense growth in the near future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The demand for hygiene and personal protective equipment (<b>PPE products</b>) has already skyrocketed. India has emerged as a major manufacturing hub for these products, apart from its strengths as a pharmaceutical manufacturing hub.</li> <li>• There are also possibilities to attract investments in the <b>Ayurveda healthcare</b> ventures which has a growing market in the Gulf region.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher education is an area that remains under-exploited, despite the potential for enhanced cooperation.</li> <li>• The vast network of professional colleges and universities in India can be an attractive destination for GCC students.</li> <li>• Given that the Indian 'Institutions of Eminence' have now been given the green signal to set up branches outside India, <b>IITs and IIMs should look for possibilities for opening branches in the GCC countries</b> which will attract both the local and expatriate population.</li> <li>• The field of digital education services can also be an area to attract GCC investments and strengthen bilateral cooperation</li> </ul>
<b>Defence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India and the GCC countries have witnessed an extraordinary growth in <b>bilateral defense relations</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Liberal FDI Policies</b> can be a major area to attract investments, especially as the GCC countries are among the world's top defense importers.</li> <li>• There is also a possibility of a <b>multilateral cooperation</b> among India, the UAE and Israel, given that India already has strong bilateral cooperation with both these countries in the defense and security fields.</li> </ul>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Niche areas such as space exploration, artificial intelligence, cyber security, bioinformatics, renewable energy etc. can be the new areas for cooperation between India and GCC countries.</li> <li>• The <a href="#">UAE is fast emerging</a> as a space exploration leader in the Arab world.</li> <li>• The GCC countries, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have in recent years invested significantly in <b>the renewable energy sector</b>.</li> <li>• India, being an energy-deficient country with a walloping hunger for energy, should explore possibilities for enhancing cooperation in renewable energy sector.</li> </ul>

#### Connecting the dots

- On Gulf reconciliation summit: Click [here](#)

[Agreement for the financial support to STARS Project signed between India and World Bank](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- II – Education; International relations  
**In news**

- Agreement for the financial support of the implementation of Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS) project was signed between Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) and World Bank along with Ministry of Education.

#### Important value additions

- The proposal of STARS project was approved in October 2020.
- The Program envisions improving the overall monitoring and measurement activities in the Indian school education system through interventions in 6 States viz. Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha.
- STARS project would be implemented as a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- **Implementing Ministry/agency:** Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education
- At the State level, the project will be implemented through the integrated State Implementation Society (SIS) for Samagra Shiksha.

#### Do you know?

- The total project cost of STARS project is Rs 5718 crore with the financial support of World Bank amounting to US \$ 500 million.
- The proposed World Bank support under STARS is primarily in the form of a results-based financing instrument called Program for Results (PforR).
- A State Incentive Grant (SIG) will be used to encourage States to meet desired project outcomes.

**IAS baba**

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## ECONOMY

### India commences exports of Moringa powder

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Trade

**In news**

- India commences exports of Moringa powder, keeping in mind the rising global demand, because of its nutritional properties.

**Key takeaways**

- In a bid to promote Moringa (botanical name Moringa oleifera) products exports from India, APEDA has been supporting private entities in creating necessary infrastructure.
- With more Moringa processing units being created through support of APEDA, the exports would be increasing in the next few years which would bring benefits to the farmers.

### **Important value additions**

**Moringa**

- Moringa has been used for centuries due to its medicinal properties and health benefits in various forms.
- Globally, the demand for Moringa products, such as Moringa Leaf Powder and Moringa Oil, has been witnessing healthy growth.
- Moreover, international organizations and institutions are exploring the best ways on how to use Moringa as a nutritional supplement and in food fortification.
- There are several species of Moringa across the world.
- Its usage has been well received among the global consumers for its nutritional, medicinal, culinary uses.

**Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority**

- It is an apex body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, responsible for the export promotion of agricultural products.
- APEDA was established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act passed by the Parliament in December, 1985.

**Some of the functions of APEDA are as following:**

- Promotion of exports of agricultural and processed food products. Promotion of export oriented production and development of the Scheduled products.
- To make Improvement in numerous areas such as packaging, marketing for the Scheduled products outside India.
- Setting standards and specifications for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports.
- Financial assistance, reliefs and subsidy to the relating industries.
- To provide training in the related areas

### UK to abolish the ‘tampon tax’

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I- Society; GS-III- Economy

**In news**

- The UK began 2021 by abolishing a 5 per cent Value Added Tax (VAT) on women's sanitary products, often referred to as the "tampon tax" and which many activists had described as sexist.
- It now joins the list of countries which have already eliminated this tax, which includes India, Australia and Canada.

**Key Highlights**

- Until December 31, the UK was a part of the EU, where period products such as sanitary napkins and tampons are classified as non-essential, and member states are required to levy a 5 per cent tax on them.
- Now that the UK is out of the 27-member bloc, it is not bound by its directives, under which sanitary products had been subjected to five different VAT rates since 1973– with the lowest 5 per cent slab being applicable since 2001.
- The removal of the tax has thus been praised by women's right activists and Brexit proponents at the same time.
- EU itself has been in the process of removing the tax on period products. In 2018, the bloc published proposals to change the tax rules, but these are yet to be accepted by all members
- The British government has estimated that the move to abolish the tampon tax would save the average woman about 40 pounds during her lifetime – as a pack of 20 pounds will be cheaper by around 7 pence and 12 sanitary pads by 5 pence.

**[Digital Payments Index \(DPI\) by RBI](#)**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- The RBI has constructed a composite Digital Payments Index (DPI) to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country.

**Key takeaways**

- The RBI-DPI has been constructed with March 2018 as the base period.
- The DPI for March 2019 and March 2020 work out to 153.47 and 207.84 respectively, indicating appreciable growth.
- The RBI-DPI comprises five broad parameters: Payment Enablers, Payment Infrastructure – Demand-side factors and Supply-side factors, Payment Performance and Consumer Centricity
- RBI-DPI shall be published on RBI's website on a semi-annual basis from March 2021 onwards with a lag of 4 months.

**Do you know?**

- The digital payments ecosystem is currently dominated by large technology players including Paytm, PhonePe, Google Pay, and recently launched WhatsApp Payments.
- India's UPI payments had shot up 82% in the current fiscal year's Q2 along with a 99% jump in value from the year-ago period, according to the Worldline India Digital Payments report.

## Banking Health: NPAs and COVID-19

**Context:** The data on gross non-performing assets (GNPA) has fallen from 11.5% in March 2018 to 7.5% of outstanding loans by September 2020.

### What Is a Non-Performing Asset (NPA)?

- A nonperforming asset (NPA) refers to a classification for loans or advances that are in default or in arrears.
- A loan is in arrears when principal or interest payments are late or missed.
- A loan is in default when the lender considers the loan agreement to be broken and the debtor is unable to meet his obligations.
- In India, a non performing asset (**NPA**) is defined as a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of 90 days

### Why NPA resolution is crucial for the economy?

Simply put, banks' ability to lend is critical for businesses and the economy to grow. A deluge of bad loans (i.e. NPAs) impairs banks' ability and willingness to lend that furthers impairs the growth prospects of economy.

### Improvement of Banking Health in recent quarters

- **Private Sector Profitable:** After losses in two consecutive years, India's scheduled commercial banks turned profitable in 2019-20.
- **PSB losses reduced:** However, State-run banks continued to bleed for the fifth year in a row, but their losses were much more stifled.
- **Impact of Policies:** The RBI attributed this to the resolution of a few large accounts through the introduction of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016, and fresh slippages in loan accounts dipping to just 0.74%.

### Genesis of the NPA Problem

- **Boom years of late 2000s:** A large part of the problem started in the latter half of 2010s, as assumptions of persistently high economic growth made several large corporates overzealous in their investment ambitions, thus over-leveraging themselves in the process.
- **Role of Easy Credit by Banks:** On the prospects of high economic growth financial sector, led by public sector banks, fuelled these expansion plans through easy money on credit.
- **2008 Financial Crisis:** Growth (and demand) fizzled out following the global financial crisis of 2008. Despite the fire-fighting measures taken by government, the impact of the global crisis was felt in coming years. The crisis got further precipitated by Policy Paralysis of UPA-2 government (Corruption Scandals, Coalition Politics, standstill bureaucracy)
- **Vicious cycle:** The stress from stretched corporate balance sheets (revenue impacted due to slowdown) infected banks' own books and underwhelmed banks own capacity for fresh lending. Former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian had called it India's 'twin balance sheet problem' in the Economic Survey for 2016-17.
- **Peak reached in 2018:** Over the course of 2014-19, India's banks were put on high alert by RBI for tighter recognition norms for bad loans. As a result, in March 2018, when bad loans on their books peaked to over ₹10 lakh crore — around 11.5% of all loans.
- **Policy Measures to stem the problem:** The vicious cycle of twin balance sheet problem was interrupted to an extent by the IBC, which, along with tighter recognition norms for bad loans, helped correct the course over time.

**COVID-19 should have further worsened NPA problem right?**

The reason bad loans and insolvency proceedings have not surged as multiple businesses went kaput, taking millions of employees with outstanding retail loans down with them, is because of steps taken by government

- **Regulatory forbearance steps taken by authorities:** Interest rates were cut after the onset of the pandemic, a moratorium was offered on loan instalments due from borrowers, and liquidity was infused into the system to keep the wheels of the economy moving without a further shock
- **Suspension of IBC:** At the same time, the invocation of the IBC was suspended for loans that went into default on or after March 25, when the lockdown began. While this suspension has now been stretched till March 31, 2021, a loan restructuring window for borrowers was closed in December 2020.
- **Support to Stressed Sectors:** Government under its Atmanirbhar package provided credit flows to some productive and COVID-19-stressed sectors (ex: [Production Linked Incentive Scheme](#))

#### **A decline in bad loans is good news. But is it the real picture?**

- **Economic Slowdown before Pandemic:** The problem is that the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown upended businesses and revenue models across industries, just as it did in the rest of the world. But unlike most of its peers, India's economy had been declining sharply even before the emergence of the virus.
- **Inadequate Support:** Despite all this, life support in the form of adequate credit flows to some productive and COVID-19-stressed sectors has been deficient, the central bank has said.
- **True Picture will emerge when support measures are rolled back:** RBI believes that a real picture of the state of borrowers' accounts (and consequently, the banking system in general, and the economy at large), will emerge once the policy support measures are rolled back. Had the central bank's normal loan classification norms been followed instead of the COVID-19 relief measures, bad loans would have been higher, the RBI has argued
- **Housing Finance Sector may drive NPAs in Future:** RBI has also warned about large-scale loan defaults looming over housing finance companies, which have been hit by delays in completion of housing projects, cost overruns due to reverse migration of labourers, and delayed investments by buyers in the affordable housing sector as incomes shrank and jobs were lost.

#### **What measures has RBI recommended to deal with future challenges?**

To make the banking sector healthy in the face of large-scale delinquencies and balance-sheet stress that the ravages of the pandemic leave behind, it is critical to

- Rewind various relaxations in a timely manner",
- Rein in loan impairment
- Ensure adequate capital infusion into banks
- Experts say more taxpayer money may be needed to shore up public sector banks.

#### **Conclusion**

- For now, as the central bank has said, the restoration of the health of banking and non-banking financial sectors depends on the revival of the real economy and how quickly the animal spirits of entrepreneurship return.
- The Union Budget for 2021-22, which is now just four weeks away, would be critical for banks on two fronts – in what it does to revive demand and investments, and how much money it can promise to set aside for recapitalising public sector banks in the coming year.

**Think!**

- Atmanirbhar Package
- N.K.Singh Panel on FRBM Act

## [New Industrial Development Scheme For Jammu & Kashmir \(J&K IDS, 2021\) approved](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions & GS-III - Industries

**In news**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a scheme for the Industrial Development of Jammu & Kashmir.
- The scheme is approved with a total outlay of Rs. 28,400 crore upto the year 2037.

**Key takeaways**

- It is a Central Sector Scheme for the development of Industries in the UT of J & K.
- **Objective:** To generate employment which directly leads to the socio economic development of the area.

**The following incentives would be available under the scheme:**

- Capital Investment Incentive at the rate of 30% in Zone A and 50% in Zone B on investment made in Plant & Machinery (in manufacturing) or construction of building and other durable physical assets(in service sector) is available.
- **Capital Interest subvention:** At the annual rate of 6% for maximum 7 years on loan amount up to Rs. 500 crore for investment in plant and machinery (in manufacturing) or construction of building and all other durable physical assets (in service sector).
- **GST Linked Incentive:** 300% of the eligible value of actual investment made in plant and machinery (in manufacturing) or construction in building and all other durable physical assets (in service sector) for 10 years. The amount of incentive in a financial year will not exceed one-tenth of the total eligible amount of incentive.
- **Working Capital Interest Incentive:** All existing units at the annual rate of 5% for maximum 5 years. Maximum limit of incentive is Rs 1 crore.

**Key Features of the Scheme:**

- Scheme is made attractive for both smaller and larger units.
- Smaller units with an investment in plant & machinery upto Rs. 50 crore will get a capital incentive upto Rs. 7.5 crore and get capital interest subvention at the rate of 6% for maximum 7 years.
- The scheme aims to take industrial development to the block level in UT of J&K, which is the first time in any Industrial Incentive Scheme of the Government of India.

**Related articles:**

- Forest Rights Act in J&K: [Click here](#)
- PM-JAY SEHAT for J&K: [Click here](#)

## Seven key takeaways from the latest GDP data

**Context:** After Second Quarter results of FY21 where India [experienced the first technical recession](#), government has released the First Advance Estimates (FAE) for the current financial year.

### **What are the First Advance Estimates of GDP? What is their significance?**

- For any financial year, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) provides regular estimates of GDP.
- The first such instance is through the FAE. The FAE for any particular financial year is typically presented on January 7th.
- Their significance lies in the fact that they are the **GDP estimates that the Union Finance Ministry uses** to decide the next financial year's Budget allocations.
- The FAE will be quickly updated as more information becomes available.
- On February 26th, MoSPI will come out with the **Second Advance Estimates** of GDP for the current year.

### **How are the FAE arrived at before the end of the concerned financial year?**

The FAE are derived by **extrapolating the available data**. The sector-wise estimates are obtained by extrapolating indicators such as

- Index of Industrial Production (IIP) of first 7 months of the financial year
- Financial performance of listed companies in the private corporate sector available up to quarter ending September, 2020
- The 1st Advance Estimates of crop production,
- The accounts of central & state governments,
- Information on indicators like deposits & credits, passenger and freight earnings of Railways, passengers and cargo handled by civil aviation, cargo handled at major sea ports, sales of commercial vehicles, etc., available for first 8 months of the financial year.

### **How is the data extrapolated?**

- In the past, extrapolation for indicators such as the IIP was done by dividing the cumulative value for the first 7 months of the current financial year by average of the ratio of the cumulative value of the first 7 months to the annual value of past years.
- So if the annual value of a variable was twice that of the value in the first 7 months in the previous years then for the current year as well the annual value is assumed to be double that of the first 7 months.
- However, this year, **because of the pandemic there were wide fluctuations** in the monthly data. Moreover, there was a significant drop, especially in the first quarter, on many counts. That is why the usual projection techniques would not have yielded robust results.
- As such, MoSPI has **tweaked the ratios for most variables**.

Table 1: India has been losing the GDP growth momentum

Year	GDP Growth Rate (in %)
2015-16	8
2016-17	8.3
2017-18	7
2018-19	6.1
2019-20	4.2
2020-21	-7.7

Source: MoSPI

**What are the key takeaways from the First Advance Estimates for 2020-21?****1. GDP Growth Rate**

- India has been losing GDP growth momentum (see above Table 1)
- **Unprecedented Contraction:** According to FAE, India's GDP will contract by 7.7 per cent in 2020-21. This is a sharp one considering that India has registered an average annual GDP growth rate of 6.8 per cent since the start of economic liberalisation in 1992-93.
- **Pandemic Factor in First Half of Year:** But, a big reason for the contraction this year has been the disruption caused by Covid-induced lockdowns which saw the economy contract by almost 24% in the first quarter (April, May and June) and by 15.7% during the first half (H1) of the year
- **Expectation of Recovery in Second Half of Year:** However, in the second half of the current financial year — that is, October to March — the government expects the economy will produce almost exactly the same amount of goods and services that it produced in the second half of the last financial year (2019-20).

Table 2: Real GDP in 2020-21 will be lower than the 2018-19 level

Year	GDP in Rs Lakh Crore (constant prices)
2015-16	114
2016-17	123
2017-18	132
2018-19	139
2019-20	143
2020-21	134

Source: MoSPI

**2. Absolute levels of Real GDP (see above Table 2)**

- **In the H1 of 2020-21,** India produced goods and services worth Rs 60 lakh crore — much lower than the Rs 71 lakh crore worth of goods produced in H1 of 2019-20.
- **In H2 of 2020-21,** MoSPI expects GDP to be worth Rs 74.4 lakh crore, which is roughly the same as the GDP in H2 of 2019-20 — about Rs 74.7 lakh crore
- **Lower than 2018-19 level:** At Rs 134.4 lakh crore, India's real GDP — that is, GDP without the influence of inflation — in 2020-21 will be lower than the 2018-19 level. In other words, from

the start of the next financial year, India would first have to raise its GDP back to the level it was at in 2019-20 (Rs 143.7 lakh crore).

Table 3: This year India's per capita GDP will fall to levels last seen in 2016-17

Year	Per Capita GDP in Rs (constant prices)
2015-16	88616
2016-17	94751
2017-18	100268
2018-19	105361
2019-20	108620
2020-21	99155

Source: MoSPI

### 3. Per Capita GDP (see above Table 3)

- **Significance of Per Capita GDP:** While the GDP provides an all-India aggregate, per capita GDP is a better variable if one wants to understand how an average India has been impacted.
- **Erosion of three years of Progress:** India's per capita GDP will fall to Rs 99, 155 in 2020-21 — last seen four years ago during 2016-17. In fact, while the overall real GDP will fall by 7.7 per cent, per capita real GDP will fall by 8.7 per cent.

Table 4: India's real GVA level will fall below the 2018-19 level

Year	GVA in Rs Lakh Crore (constant prices)
2015-16	105
2016-17	113
2017-18	121
2018-19	128
2019-20	133
2020-21	123

Source: MoSPI

### 4. Absolute level of real Gross Value Added (or GVA) (see above Table 4)

- **Significance of GVA:** The Gross Value Added provides a picture of the economy from the supply side. It maps the value-added by different sectors of the economy such as agriculture, industry and services. In other words, GVA provides a proxy for the income earned by people involved in the various sectors.
- **Fall in GVA below 2018-19 level:** At Rs 123.4 lakh crore, India's real GVA level, too, will fall below the 2018-19 level.

Table 5: Aggregate private consumption levels of Indians will be almost what it was in 2017-18

Year	PFCE in Rs Lakh Crore (constant prices)
2015-16	63.8
2016-17	69
2017-18	73.8
2018-19	79
2019-20	83.3
2020-21	75.4

Source: MoSPI

**5. Absolute level of Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)** (see above Table 5):

- **Significance of PFCE:** The biggest demand for goods and services comes from private individuals trying to satisfy their consumption needs. Typically this would include all the things — be it a toothpaste or a car — that people buy in their private individual capacity. This demand is called PFCE and it constitutes over 56% of the total GDP.
- **9.5% decline from 2019-20 levels:** PFCE levels of 2020-21 will be 75.4 lakh crores which is nearly 9.5% fall from 2019-20 level (83.3 lakh crores). This will be almost what they were in 2017-18.

Table 6: But per capita private consumption level will fall below the 2017-18 level

Year	Per Capita PFCE in Rs (constant prices)
2015-16	49738
2016-17	55120
2017-18	56163
2018-19	59594
2019-20	62087
2020-21	55609

Source: MoSPI

**6. Per capita PFCE** (see above Table 6)

- **Significance:** Just like per capita GDP, the per capita PFCE is also a relevant metric as it shows how much does an average Indian spend in his/her private capacity. Typically, with rising incomes standards, such consumption levels also rise
- **10.4% decline from 2019-20 levels:** It is estimated that per capita PFCE of 2020-21 will be at Rs 55,609 (at 2019-20 it was Rs 62,807). The estimation for this financial year is far below even the 2017-18 level (56,163 Rs).

Table 7: The investment demand in the economy will fall even below the 2016-17 level

Year	GFCF in Rs Lakh Crore (constant prices)
2015-16	34.9
2016-17	37.9
2017-18	40.6
2018-19	44.6
2019-20	43.3
2020-21	37.1

Source: MoSPI

### 7. Absolute level of Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) (see above Table 7):

- **Second biggest component of GDP is called GFCF** and it measures all the expenditures on goods and services that businesses and firms make as they invest in their productive capacity. So if a firm buys computers and software to increase the overall productivity then it will be counted under GFCF.
- This type of demand accounts for close to 28 per cent of India's GDP. Taken together, private demand and business demand account for almost 85 per cent of all GDP.
- **Fallen to five year low:** at Rs 37 lakh crore, GFCF (or the investment demand in the economy) has fallen even below 2016-17 level.

## Spectrum Auctions

**Context:** The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) said on Wednesday (January 6) that auctions for 4G spectrum in the 700, 800, 900, 1,800, 2,100, 2,300, and 2,500 MHz bands will begin from March 1.

### What are spectrum auctions?

- **Role in Communications:** Devices such as cellphones and wireline telephones require signals to connect from one end to another. These signals are carried on airwaves, which must be sent at designated frequencies to avoid any kind of interference.
- **Ownership of Spectrum:** The Union government owns all the publicly available assets within the geographical boundaries of the country, which also include airwaves.
- **Need for Auction:** With the expansion in the number of cellphone, wireline telephone and internet users, the need to provide more space for the signals arises from time to time. To sell these assets to companies willing to set up the required infrastructure to transport these waves from one end to another, the central government through the DoT auctions these airwaves from time to time.
- **Validity of Spectrum:** These airwaves are called spectrum, which is subdivided into bands which have varying frequencies. All these airwaves are sold for a certain period of time, after which their validity lapses, which is generally set at 20 years.

### Why is spectrum being auctioned now?

- **Previous Auction:** The last spectrum auctions were held in 2016, when the government offered 2,354.55 MHz at a reserve price of Rs 5.60 lakh crore. Although the government managed to sell only 965 MHz – or about 40 % of the spectrum that was put up for sale – and the total value of bids received was just Rs 65,789 crore.

- **Licences expire in 2021:** The need for a new spectrum auction has arisen because the validity of the airwaves bought by companies is set to expire in 2021. In the spectrum auctions scheduled to begin on March 1, the government plans to sell spectrum for 4G in the 700, 800, 900, 1,800, 2,100, 2,300, and 2,500 MHz frequency bands.
- **Importance of Reserve Price:** The reserve price of all these bands together has been fixed at Rs 3.92 lakh crore. Depending on the demand from various companies, the price of the airwaves may go higher, but cannot go below the reserve price.

#### Who are likely to bid for the spectrum?

- **Existing Players:** All three private telecom players, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Bharti Airtel, and Vi are eligible contenders to buy additional spectrum to support the number of users on their network.
- **Foreign Players:** Apart from these three, new companies, including foreign companies, are also eligible to bid for the airwaves. Foreign companies, however, will have to either set up a branch in India and register as an Indian company, or tie up with an Indian company to be able to retain the airwaves after winning them.

#### What will the bidding cost the three existing companies?

- Both Bharti Airtel and Vi have repeatedly expressed their inability to shell out a lot of money – either to buy new spectrum or to renew the old spectrum licences that they already hold.
- Most analysts expect Bharti Airtel to renew some of its old spectrum, but to not bid for new spectrum at all.
- On Vi, all analysts expect that the company may not participate at all in this auction, given the cash flow constraints it is facing.
- Reliance Jio is likely to not only renew the 44 MHz spectrum that it had bought from Reliance Communication, but to also bid for additional spectrum in the 55 MHz band owned by the latter in the upcoming auctions.
- To this end, Reliance Jio will incur a total capital expenditure of Rs 240 billion at reserve prices, and would require to make an upfront payment of nearly Rs 60 billion, if it were to opt for the long term deferred payment plan.

#### What is the Impact of lukewarm response by existing private players?

- **Below par revenue collection:** Government may not be able to get the expected revenue from its spectrum auction, like it happened in 2016.
- **Impacts Budget Estimation:** Below par performance in auctions may impact the budget estimation which takes into account the revenues from this source.
- **Fiscal Situation of Telecoms:** The unenthusiastic participation by existing players also reflects the tight fiscal position of telecom companies which they are in, that may further **impact the roll out of 5G in India**

#### How will the deferred payment plan work?

- As part of the deferred payment plan, bidders for the sub-1 GHz bands of 700, 800 and 900 MHz can opt to **pay 25 per cent of the bid amount now, and the rest later.**
- In the above-1 GHz bands of 1,800, 2,100, 2,300, and 2,500 MHz frequency bands, bidders will have to pay 50 per cent upfront, and can then opt to pay the rest in equated annual instalments.
- The successful bidders will, however, have to pay 3 per cent of [Adjusted Gross Revenue \(AGR\)](#) as spectrum usage charges, excluding wireline services.

## Conclusion

Spectrum auction in India has turned into a buyer's market. There is expectation of minimal competition, with operators picking up spectrum that provides best value for money instead of focusing on renewing all their expiring spectrum

## 'Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav' drive

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III –Economy

### In news

- Under the ICAR's initiative 'Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav', Cleanliness drive was carried out recently in Ibrampur, Veling and Parra villages in Goa.

### Important value additions

- "Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav" was launched in 2015.
- It is the flagship programme of the Prime Minister of India.
- **Objective:** To provide farmers with required information, knowledge and advisories on regular basis by adopting villages.
- **Aim:** To promote the direct interface of scientists with the farmers to hasten the lab to land process.
- **Implemented by:** Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), an autonomous body responsible for coordinating agricultural education and research in India.
- It reports to the Department of Agricultural Research and Education, Ministry of Agriculture.

## Planning an exit out of the easy money regime

**Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) embarked on an extraordinary **expansionary policy** to manage the financial pressures unleashed by COVID-19, some of which are:

- It slashed policy interest rates aggressively
- Flooded the market with an unprecedented amount of liquidity
- Instituted a slew of measures for targeted assistance to especially distressed sectors.

As we sight [springshoots in the economy](#), the RBI must be planning for a non-disruptive exit out of the easy money regime.

### **What are the challenges that the RBI will confront on the way out?**

- **It should be deliberative process:** When the economy is in crisis, central banks go for expansionary policy often shedding their characteristic deliberation. In contrast, reversing a crisis-driven expansionary policy has to be a deliberative process, with the timing and sequencing carefully planned.
- **Learning from 2008 Financial Crisis:** Indeed, one of the big lessons of the global financial crisis is that any missteps on the exit path by way of commission, omission, or importantly communication, can be costly in macroeconomic terms. The lesson from the [taper tantrums](#) of US is that the RBI will have to manage its communication as carefully as it does the liquidity withdrawal.

- **Absorption capacity of system:** Banks are routinely depositing trillions of rupees with the RBI every day, evidencing that all the money that the central bank unleashed into the system is not doing much good anymore
- **Dangers of easy money to Financial Stability:** Mispricing of risk is the result when there is too much liquidity sloshing around the system for too long. It will drive investors into dodgy ventures and threaten financial stability.
- **Restrain the rupee from appreciating out of line with fundamentals:** Here, the RBI is confronted with a classic case of 'the impossible trinity' — of keeping doors open for capital flows while simultaneously maintaining a stable exchange rate and restraining inflation. Maintaining a policy balance across all three conflicting objectives can be tricky.
- **Policy dilemma for RBI:** The biggest challenge for RBI while planning an exit strategy will be to manage the tension between restraining inflation and supporting the recovery.
- **Plight of Savers:** Quite apart from the upside risks to inflation and downside risks to growth, the RBI should also be concerned about the plight of savers who are being shortchanged by low interest rates at a time of high inflation. All these concerns taken together make a complex cocktail of dilemmas for the RBI as it seeks to normalise the policy rates.

#### Dilemma for RBI between Inflation Vs Recovery

- **Inflation above Target Band:** Inflation remained above the [RBI's target band](#) for the past several months, and according to the RBI's own estimates, is expected to remain above the band for the next several months.
- **Recovery concern of RBI:** Despite inflation concerns, the Monetary Policy Committee of RBI decided against any rate action out of concerns for growth and financial stability.
- **RBI's expectation of Inflation Softening:** The MPC expects inflation to soften on its own in the weeks ahead as supply chains, disrupted by the lockdown, normalise, and the bumper winter crop comes into the market.
- **Concerns with RBI's expectation of Inflation Softening:** Excessive margins, among the factors cited by the MPC as one of the causes of high inflation, may not disappear if firms, regaining pricing power amid demand recovery, raise prices to mend their balance sheets.
- **Risk of Inflation Persisting:** There is the risk that persistent high inflation expectations would result in food inflation getting more generalised. Core inflation could firm up because of rising input prices.
- **Recovery Concerns:** Equally, there are concerns that the recovery, for all the positive signals, is still fragile. It has also been uneven and unequal, with large industries finding their foothold while small and medium enterprises and the entire informal sector continue to be in distress.

#### Conclusion

- It is better to be rough right, as Keynes said, than be precisely wrong. That should be the guiding principle for RBI as it navigates its way out of the crisis driven easy money policy.

#### Connecting the dots

- The problem with liquidity push: Click [here](#)

### [Risk Based Internal Audit \(RBIA\) Framework](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- RBI has issued Risk Based Internal Audit (RBIA) Framework for Strengthening Governance arrangements of banks.

### Key takeaways

**In order to bring uniformity in approach followed by the banks and to align the expectations on Internal Audit Function with the best practices, banks are advised as under:**

- **Authority, Stature and Independence:** The Head of Internal Audit (HIA) shall be a senior executive of the bank who shall have the ability to exercise independent judgement.
- **Tenor for appointment of HIA:** The HIA shall be appointed for a reasonably long period, preferably for a minimum of three years.
- **Reporting Line:** The HIA shall directly report to either the Audit Committee of the Board (ACB) / MD & CEO or Whole Time Director (WTD).
- **Staff Rotation:** Except for the entities where the internal audit function is a specialised function and managed by career internal auditors, the Board should prescribe a minimum period of service for staff in the Internal Audit function.
- The internal audit function shall not be outsourced.
- However, where required, experts, including former employees, could be hired on contractual basis subject to the ACB being assured that such expertise does not exist within the audit function of the bank.

## Payment Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) scheme

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

### In news

- The RBI recently announced the operationalisation of the payment infrastructure development fund (PIDF) scheme.

### Key takeaways

- **Objective:** To subsidise deployment of payment acceptance infrastructure in tier-3 to tier-6 cities, with a special focus on the north-eastern states of the country.
- An advisory council (AC) under the chairmanship of RBI deputy governor BP Kanungo has been constituted for managing the PIDF.
- The fund will be operational for three years effective from January 1, 2021 and may be extended for two more years.
- The implementation of targets shall be monitored by the RBI with assistance from card networks, the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and the Payments Council of India (PCI).

### Do you know?

- The PIDF presently has a corpus of Rs 345 crore, with Rs 250 crore contributed by the RBI and Rs 95 crore by the major authorised card networks in the country.
- The authorised card networks shall contribute in all Rs 100 crore.
- The card issuing banks shall also contribute to the corpus based on the card issuance volume.
- Besides, the PIDF shall also receive annual contributions from card networks and card issuing banks.

## Academic advisory council for College Of Supervisors (COS) set up

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- The RBI has set up an academic advisory council with former deputy governor N S Vishwanathan as the chairperson to advise the full-time director of the central bank's College of Supervisors (CoS).
- **Functions:** (1) Identify areas where skill building/up-skilling is required; (2) Plan and develop curricula of all programmes; (3) Benchmark the programmes with international standards/best practices; (4) Develop appropriate teaching methods, etc.

### **Important value additions**

#### **College of Supervisors (CoS)**

- **Set up by:** RBI
- It was set up as part of the measures to further strengthen Supervision over regulated entities.
- **Objective:** To augment and reinforce supervisory skills among its regulatory and supervisory staff both at entry level and on a continuous basis.
- While the CoS was functioning in a limited way in virtual mode since May 2020, it is now being fully operationalised.
- This will further contribute to effective oversight of the regulated entities by augmenting and ensuring a consistent quality of supervisory resources pool.
- The CoS will have a full-time Director supported by an Academic Advisory Council (AAC).
- Rabi Narayan Mishra, former Executive Director, RBI has been appointed as the Director of CoS.

## Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) Introduced

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- The RBI has introduced the Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) for Large Value Transactions in Centralised Payment Systems.

#### **Key takeaways**

- The LEI is a 20-digit number used to uniquely identify parties to financial transactions worldwide.
- **Objective:** To improve the quality and accuracy of financial data systems for better risk management post the Global Financial Crisis.
- The RBI has now decided to introduce the LEI system for all payment transactions of value Rs.50 crore and above undertaken by entities (non-individuals) using RBI-run Centralised Payment Systems viz. Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT).
- The LEI has been introduced by the RBI in a phased manner for participants in the over the counter (OTC) derivative and non-derivative markets as also for large corporate borrowers.
- In India, LEI can be obtained from Legal Entity Identifier India Ltd. (LEIL), which is also recognised as an issuer of LEI by the Reserve Bank under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

## K-shaped economic recovery

**Context:** Economists states the prospects of a K-shaped recovery from COVID are increasing both in India and across the world.

India's economic recovery is being characterised by three distinct forces that need to be disentangled

### 1. Controlling COVID-19 has led to better recovery

- **Successful Controlling of Virus Spread:** India has broken the link between virus proliferation and mobility earlier and more successfully than many countries. Rising mobility and normalising economic activity, rather than sparking another wave of infections, have coincided with COVID cases falling by 80 per cent since September.
- **Recovery much sooner than expected:** Consequently, the progressive return towards pre-COVID activity levels has occurred much sooner than expected. Activity jumped back up to 95 per cent of pre-COVID levels by October, and has been inching up since
- **Supportive actions by Government:** Sooner than expected recovery is being complemented by the much-awaited pick-up in central government spending, which surged in November and is expected to remain strong for the rest of the year

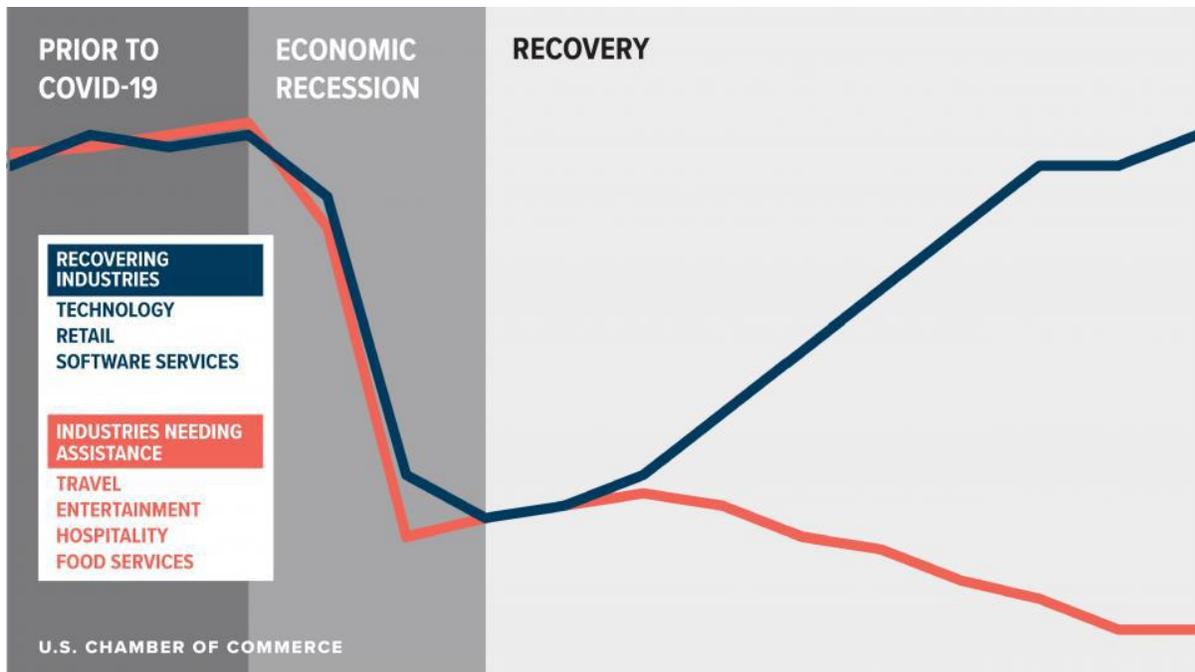
### 2. Recovery not led by labour and wages

- **Lingering Unemployment Problem:** CMIE's labour market survey still reveals 18 million fewer employed (about 5% of the total employed) compared to pre-pandemic levels. The employment rate gradually improved till September but has weakened since then, even as the economy has progressively opened up.
- This also shows up in the PMI surveys where employment is lagging activity, and in demand for MGNREGA jobs which are still 50 per cent higher than the previous year
- **Impacts recovery prospects:** These labour market pressures increase risks of medium-term economic scarring, and are not incompatible with a sharper near-term rebound because the recovery appears to be led by capital and profits, not labour and wages.
- **Differential Impact on Labourers:** Even within labour, blue-collar workers are likely to have been disproportionately impacted vis-à-vis their white-collar counterparts.

### 3. Greater Scale and Formalisation

- **Weak Resilience of Smaller Firms:** A third phenomenon is large firms have endured the crisis better and are gaining market share at the expense of smaller firms. It's, therefore, important to interpret the data carefully because some variables will reflect this substitution effect as much as the pace of the recovery.
- **Benefits of having larger firms:** To the extent there is a migration of activity from the informal/SME firms to larger firms, tax collections and Sensex/Nifty earnings should get a boost, even holding the economic pie constant.
- **Associated Risks:** Greater scale and formalisation undoubtedly augur well for medium-term productivity but could increase near-term labour market frictions and boost pricing power.

All this, therefore, increases prospects of a K-shaped recovery from COVID, a phenomenon playing out globally.



### What is a K-shaped recovery?

- A K-shaped recovery happens when different sections of an economy recover at starkly different rates.
- Households at the top of the pyramid are likely to have seen their incomes largely protected, and savings rates forced up during the lockdown, increasing “fuel in the tank” to drive future consumption.
- Meanwhile, households at the bottom are likely to have witnessed permanent hits to jobs and incomes.
- Example: Passenger vehicle registrations (proxying upper-end consumption) have grown about 4 per cent since October while two-wheelers have contracted 15 per cent.

### What are the macro implications of a K-shaped recovery?

#### 1. Recurring drag on the demand if labour market doesn't heal faster

- With the top 10% of India's households responsible for 25-30% of total consumption, one could argue consumption would get a boost as this pent-up demand expresses itself.
- But it's important not to conflate stocks with flows, and levels with changes. Upper-income households have benefitted from higher savings for two quarters. What we are currently witnessing is a sugar rush from those savings being spent. This is, however, **a one-time effect**.
- To the extent that households at the bottom have experienced a permanent loss of income in the forms of jobs and wage cuts, this will be a recurring drag on demand, if the labour market does not heal faster.

#### 2. Marginal Propensity to consume if high at bottom

- To the extent that COVID has triggered an effective income transfer from the poor to the rich, this will be demand-impeding because the poor have a higher marginal propensity to consume i.e. they tend to spend (instead of saving) a much higher proportion of their income.

#### 3. Inequality and impact on productivity

- Third, if COVID-19 reduces competition or increases the inequality of incomes and opportunities, it could impinge on trend growth in developing economies by hurting productivity and tightening political economy constraints.

### Way Ahead

- **Plan ahead by incentivising Private Investment:** Policy will, therefore, need to look beyond the next few quarters and anticipate the state of the macro economy post the sugar rush. The key, of course, is to incentivize the private sector to start re-investing and re-hiring, thereby setting the economy onto a more virtuous path.
- **Manufacturing can benefit from export led growth:** With manufacturing utilisation rates below 70 per cent pre-COVID, an investment revival, in turn, will depend crucially on the demand dynamics. Exports should benefit from strengthening global growth as the world gets progressively vaccinated
- **Seize the Opportunity:** It's against this backdrop that the upcoming budget presents India with its New Deal moment. An unprecedented infrastructure push under the New Deal in 1935 created millions of jobs and regenerated regional economic development in the US. India must seek inspiration from this.

### Conclusion

India's faster-than-expected rebound is very encouraging. But given labour market pressures and prospects of a K-shaped recovery around the world, the economy will need to be carefully nurtured and stoked.

### [Khadi Prakritik Paint launched](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

#### In news

- Union Minister for MSME launched an innovative new paint developed by Khadi and Village Industries Commission recently.

#### Key takeaways

- The eco-friendly, non-toxic paint is called Khadi Prakritik Paint.
- It is a first-of-its-kind product, with anti-fungal, anti-bacterial properties.
- The paint has been certified by Bureau of Indian Standards.
- Khadi Prakritik Paint is available in two forms – distemper paint and plastic emulsion paint.
- Based on cow dung as its main ingredient, the paint is cost-effective and odorless.
- The paint is free from heavy metals like lead, mercury, chromium, arsenic, cadmium and others.

#### Do you know?

- It will be a boost to local manufacturing and will create sustainable local employment through technology transfer.
- This technology will increase consumption of cow dung as a raw material for eco-friendly products and will generate additional revenue to farmers and gaushalas.

- This is estimated to generate additional income of Rs 30,000 (approx.) per annum per animal to farmers/ gaushalas.
- Utilization of cow dung will also clean the environment and prevent clogging of drains.

### Important value additions

#### The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- It is a statutory body formed in April 1957 (as per an RTI) by the Government of India, under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.
- It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- **Vision** – To plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- In April 1957, it took over the work of former All India Khadi and Village Industries Board.
- **Head office:** Mumbai
- **Six zonal offices:** Delhi, Bhopal, Bangalore, Kolkata, Mumbai and Guwahati.

#### Related articles:

- 1000-yrs Old Monpa Handmade Paper Industry brought alive in AP: [Click here](#)
- Migrant workers engaged in Honey Mission: [Click here](#)

### [North East Venture Fund \(NEVF\) gains popularity](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

#### In news

- The North East Venture Fund (NEVF) is gaining popularity among Start-Ups and young entrepreneurs.

### Important value additions

- The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) had joined with North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) to set up the North East Venture Fund.
- It the first and the only Venture Fund for Northeast with an initial corpus of Rs. 100 crores.
- The fund targets to invest in Start-Ups and unique business opportunities to provide resources for new entrepreneurships.
- The main focus of NEVF is for mostly the enterprises involved in Food Processing, Healthcare, Tourism, segregation of services, IT, etc.
- The investment size with the Venture Fund Scheme ranges between Rs.25 lakhs and Rs. 10 crores with a long term horizon of five to ten years.

### [BSNL and MTNL turn EBITDA positive](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure; Economy

**In news**

- The State-owned undertakings Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) have turned EBITDA positive in first 6 months of this financial year.

**Key takeaways**

- EBITDA stands for Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization.
- EBITDA is a measure of profits.
- It is a metric used to evaluate a company's overall financial performance.
- EBITDA is now commonly used to compare the financial health of companies and to evaluate firms with different tax rates and depreciation policies.
- However, EBITDA is not a substitute for analysing a company's cash flow and can make a company look like it has more money to make interest payments than it really does.
- It also ignores the quality of a company's earnings and can make it look cheaper than it really is.

### [Single Window Clearance Portal launched for coal mining](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Energy resources; Economy

**In news**

- Ministry of Coal launched Single Window Clearance Portal.
- It is a unified platform that facilitates grant of clearances and approvals required for starting a coal mine in India.

**Key takeaways**

- Single Window Clearance Portal is in the spirit of Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.
- It would be a milestone for Ease of Doing Business in the Indian Coal Sector.
- Presently, about 19 major approval or clearances are required to be obtained before starting a coal mine in the country.
- The Portal will map only the relevant application formats and also process flow for grant of approval or clearances.

**Do you know?**

- The portal was launched in an event organized in New Delhi to execute agreements with successful bidders of India's first ever commercial coal mine auctions.
- Recently, 19 successful bidders were allotted mines under the country's first commercial coal mining auction.
- This will give the states estimated revenue of about Rs 6,500 crore per year and will also create more than 70,000 jobs.

### [RBI Working Group constituted on digital Lending](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- The RBI has constituted a working group on digital lending — including online platforms and mobile apps — to study all aspects of digital lending activities in the regulated financial sector and by unregulated players.

**Key takeaways**

- The working group consists of both internal and external members and is chaired by Jayant Kumar Dash, Executive Director, RBI.
- **Functions of the working group will:** (1) Evaluate digital lending activities and assess the penetration and standards of outsourced digital lending activities in RBI regulated entities; (2) Identify the risks posed by unregulated digital lending to financial stability, regulated entities and consumers; (3) Suggest regulatory changes to promote orderly growth of digital lending; (4) Measures for expansion of specific regulatory or statutory perimeter and suggest the role of various regulatory and government agencies; (5) Recommend a robust fair practices code for digital lending players.
- The group will submit its report within three months.

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## [Startup India Seed Fund announced](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; innovation

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister announced launching of Startup India seed fund with 1,000 crore rupees so that there is no shortage of seed money for startups.
- This was announced during the 'Prarambh: Startup India International Summit'.
- This will help in starting and growing new startups.
- Fund of funds scheme is already helping startups raising equity capital.
- The Government will also help the startups in raising capital through guarantees.

**Related articles:**

- Prarambh: Startup India International Summit': [Click here](#)

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## [Iron-Ore Policy 2021](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure; Economy

**In news**

- The Ministry of Railways has approved a new iron-ore policy governing the allocation of rakes and transportation of iron-ore.

**Key takeaways**

- This new policy has been named as Iron-ore Policy 2021 and shall come into effect from February 10, 2021.
- The provisions of the new policy will be updated in the rake allotment system module by the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS).
- Scrutiny of documentation by Railways has been removed.
- Executive Director Rake Movement of Railway Board (EDRM) office, Kolkata which has been sanctioning programmes for movement of iron-ore traffic will have no regulatory role in the new policy.
- Customers now desirous of moving their traffic under any priority will have to give (an) undertaking that they have procured, transported and utilized materials as per rules and regulations of Central and State Governments.
- Higher priority will be given to the movement of iron-ore traffic for domestic manufacturing activity.
- Old and new plants will be treated similarly as far as allotment and loading of rakes is concerned.

#### Do you know?

- Iron ore is the second most important stream of traffic of Railways and along with steel accounts for nearly 17% of total 1210 million tonne freight loading of Indian Railways in 2019-2020.

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### Financial Stability Report: RBI's Warning

**Context:** Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the 22nd issue of its biannual Financial Stability Report outlining the risks to financial stability as well as the resilience of the financial system in the contemporary context.

Key takeaways from the latest GDP estimates released: Click [Here](#)

#### **Significance of Financial Stability report**

- The FSR is a hugely useful publication as it receives contributions from all the financial sector regulators in the country.
- As such, it provides a rather comprehensive picture of the so-called **macro-financial risks** facing the economy.
- The FSR released by the RBI is the biannual alert of such risks in the Indian economy.

#### **An Example of Macro-Economic Risk – High NPAs**

- If lots of banks in an economy find that the loans they extended to different businesses are unlikely to be repaid, it is a macro-financial risk.
- Because if banks do not get their money back, they won't be able to fund the next set of investments. Lack of access to credit thus impairs the economic growth as expansion of firms is curtailed.
- Even if the government decides to use the taxpayer's money to bail banks out, it will have to curtail some other expenditure — perhaps on education or healthcare or infrastructure, thus impacting the welfare of citizens

- So, one thing can lead to another and the economic growth of a country can take a massive hit just because too many banks had too many non-performing assets (NPAs or bad loans) all at the same time.

### What are the major concerns highlighted by FSR Report of RBI?

#### 1. High Bank NPAs

- According to the RBI's analysis, the level of Gross NPA ratio in India's banking system **could almost double** between [September 2020 \(7.5% of all loans extended\)](#) and September 2021 (13.5% to 14.8% depending on economic deterioration)
- To see these percentages in perspective, one must note that when the economy was growing fast — before the 2008 financial crisis — NPAs hovered around the 2.5% level.
- The banking system is the financier of the whole economy. If its wheels get jammed or malfunction, it can **derail the fledgling economic recovery**.

#### 2. Disconnect between certain segments of financial markets and the real economy

- The RBI noted that measures taken to support the economy and safeguard the financial system during the COVID-19 pandemic “may **have unintended consequences** as reflected, for instance, in the soaring equity valuations disconnected from economic performance”.
- While the country's experienced [historic recession](#) (economic output shrank by 7.5% in Q2 and 23.9% in Q1 of FY21) the stock markets have been seemingly disconnected and soaring to record highs. As of the close of trading on January 11 (the day the RBI released its report), the benchmark S&P **BSE Sensex had appreciated almost 90% from its closing level on March 23, 2020**.
- It is a fact that stock market indices, both in India and elsewhere, have surged even when the real economy — that is the number of cars/TVs/ACs/ phones/ houses/ travel trips etc. — has struggled in contrast.
- RBI warned, “Stretched valuations of financial assets pose risks to financial stability,” adding, “banks and financial intermediaries need to be cognisant of these risks and spillovers in an interconnected financial system.”

### How did the above situation arise (stock market rise while economy shrank)?

- **Stimulus Packages across world:** The onset of the pandemic saw monetary and fiscal authorities worldwide, including in India, introducing a slew of support measures to ensure that the restrictions imposed on economic activity did not completely devastate national economies and household incomes.
- **Easy money in Financial System:** The stimulus measures, which included interest rate cuts and infusion of liquidity, have driven a substantial surge in funds in the financial system, including in India's case from overseas investors. Availability of lower-cost borrowings also spur people to borrow money to invest in stocks.
- **Resurgence of Foreign Portfolio Investment(FPI) to India:** Latest data from the NSDL show that net FPI into equities in the current fiscal year had surged more than 38-fold to ₹2,36,781 crore (as on January 16), from the meagre ₹6,153-crore inflow in the preceding year.
- **Lack of alternatives for higher returns:** Worldwide, easy money conditions have in the past invariably spurred stock market rallies as investors seek higher returns at a time when interest rates on fixed income assets such as deposits and bonds decline.

### Why is the RBI worried?

- **Creation of Asset bubble:** Easy money often creates asset bubbles. An asset bubble is when assets such as housing, stocks, or gold dramatically rise in price over a short period that is not supported by the value of the product. The hallmark of a bubble is irrational exuberance—a phenomenon when everyone is buying up a particular asset.
- **Possibility of Economic Crisis caused by bursting of such bubble:** RBI is wary of the risk that a sudden sharp reversal in the trend (of easy money flowing into stock markets) could cause the asset bubble to pop, triggering wider contagion effects.
- **Example:** Imagine a man investing his savings in a travel company because the stock is rising fast in the hope that with a vaccine being available, travel business will take off. But if there is a second, more infectious strain of the virus and the travel company goes bust, its share price will plummet and the pain will be shared with all the shareholders
- **Spill over effect:** What makes these asset bubble burst worse is the level of interconnectedness it has among financial institutions. A sell-offs can potentially transmit asset market shocks across the financial system (ex Mutual Funds, Asset Management Companies, Banks and NBFCs, HFCs, NABARD, EXIM, NHB, SIDBI etc)
- **Worldwide Experience:** The 2001 recession in the U.S., for instance, was sparked by the bursting of the dotcom bubble (overvaluation of Tech companies), which, coupled with the September 11 terrorist attacks and a series of accounting scandals at major companies.

### Conclusion

Active intervention by central banks and fiscal authorities has to be taken to be able to ward off any risks to macro-financial stability of the system.

### Russia's exit from the Open Skies Treaty

**Context:** Russia has announced that it was leaving the Open Skies Treaty (OST). In November 2020, USA left the OST after accusing Russia of violating the pact—allegations that Russia denied. Moscow has now blamed Washington for its own decision of leaving the treaty.

#### What is the Open Skies Treaty?

- It is an accord that allows participants **to fly unarmed reconnaissance flights** over any part of their fellow member states
- First proposed in 1955 by former US President Dwight Eisenhower as a means to deescalate tensions during the Cold War. Claiming the initiative would be used for extensive spying, Moscow rejected Eisenhower's proposal.
- However, the landmark treaty was eventually **signed in 1992** between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of USSR.
- It **went into effect in 2002** and had 35 signatories, including key players US and Russia, along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).
- The OST aims at **building confidence among members** through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war.
- Under the treaty, a member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation, with the latter’s consent. A country can undertake **aerial imaging over the host state** after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.
- The information gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to **be shared with all member states**.
- **Only approved imaging equipment** is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can also stay on board throughout the planned journey.

### Signatories

**35 states** - Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

### Significance of the Open Skies Treaty

- **Importance for Intelligence Gathering:** The OST was signed in 1992, much before the advent of advanced satellite imaging technology which is currently the preferred mode for intelligence gathering. Yet, surveillance aircraft provide key information that still cannot be gathered by satellite sensors, such as thermal imaging data.
- **Helps Smaller Countries party to Treaty:** Though satellites can provide the same, and even more detailed, information, not all of the treaty states-parties have such capabilities.
- **Confidence Building Tool:** The treaty is also aimed at building confidence and familiarity among states-parties through their participation in the overflights.
- **USA has utilized the treaty more than Russia:** Between 2002 and 2016, the U.S. flew 196 flights over Russia compared to the 71 flights flown by Russia. A former Trump official had also hailed OST data gathered during the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict.

### So, why did the US leave the Open Skies Treaty?

- While it was envisaged as a key arms control agreement, many in US had for over a decade **accused Russia of non-compliance** with OST protocols, blaming Moscow of obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
- US President Donald Trump was also unhappy that a Russian reconnaissance flew over his golf course in New Jersey state in 2017.
- In May 2020, the Trump administration announced its intention of withdrawing from the OST, accusing Russia of “flagrantly and continuously violating the Treaty in various ways for years”, and left it in November 2020.



### Why did Russia leave after the US?

- A contentious issue regarding Russia's compliance with the OST was its alleged **reluctance to allow flights over Kaliningrad**, its exclave in Eastern Europe that sits between NATO allies Lithuania and Poland.
- Russia defended its position by saying that the restrictions were permissible under treaty rules, and gave the example of the **US imposing similar limits on flights over Alaska**.
- After the US left the OST, Russia **sought assurances from NATO allies** who continued to remain on the treaty that they would not transfer data collected by their flights over Russia to Washington. In its statement, Russia said that these **requests were not backed** by the NATO members, prompting it to leave the treaty.

### Critical Analysis of the recent development (Russia's withdrawal from OST)

- **Growing mistrust between global powers:** The failure of the Open Skies Treaty follows the demise of another significant arms control accord, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, after both the US and Russia left it in 2019.
- **Weakens EU' capabilities to track Russia:** Russia's departure could adversely impact Washington's European allies, which rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region
- **Larger Nuclear Arms Control Treaty in Jeopardy:** Experts are now contemplating the fate of the much larger US-Russia 'New START' nuclear arms control agreement, which is slated to expire in February 2021. Trump has already said that his administration would not renew the treaty unless China joins. Despite new President Elect Joe Biden's willingness to renegotiate, there are apprehensions that it would not be completed before Feb deadline.

### [Follow-On Public Offers](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- SEBI recently relaxed the framework for follow-on public offers (FPOs).
- The move will help promoters of companies to raise funds more easily through this route.

**Key takeaways**

- The applicability of minimum promoters' contribution norm and the subsequent lock-in requirements for the issuers making the FPO have been removed.
- Earlier, promoters were mandated to contribute 20% towards a FPO.
- Besides, in case of any issue of capital to the public, the minimum promoters' contribution was required to be locked-in for three years.
- Relaxation would be available for those companies which are frequently traded on a stock exchange for at least three years.
- Also, such firms should have redressed 95% of investor complaints.

**Important value additions****The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**

- It is the regulator of the securities and commodity market in India owned by the Government of India.
- It was established in 1988 and given statutory status through the SEBI Act, 1992.
- SEBI is responsible to the needs of three groups:
  - Issuers of securities
  - Investors
  - Market intermediaries
- Functions:
  - Quasi-legislative – drafts regulations
  - Quasi-judicial – passes rulings and orders
  - Quasi-executive – conducts investigation and enforcement action
- Powers:
  - To approve by-laws of Securities exchanges.
  - To require the Securities exchange to amend their by-laws.
  - Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognised Securities exchanges.
  - Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
  - Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more Securities exchanges.
  - Registration of Brokers and sub-brokers

**Related articles:**

- Mutual Funds (MF) Risk-o-meter becomes effective: [Click here](#)
- SEBI eases Fund-raising norms for firms: [Click here](#)

[FAO Food Price Index](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO), World food prices rose for a seventh consecutive month in December, with all the major categories, barring sugar, posting gains last month.

**Key takeaways**

- The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) food price index is a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities.
- It consists of the average of five commodity group price indices [cereal, vegetable, dairy, meat and sugar], weighted with the average export shares.
- It averaged 107.5 points in December versus 105.2 in November.
- For the whole of 2020, the benchmark index averaged 97.9 points, a three-year high and a 3.1% increase from 2019.

**Important value additions**

**FAO**

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.
- Its Latin motto, fiat panis, translates to "let there be bread".
- **Headquarters:** Rome, Italy
- **Founded:** 16 October 1945, Quebec City, Canada
- **Parent organization:** United Nations Economic and Social Council

**Bad Bank**

**Context:** With commercial banks set to witness [a spike in NPAs, or bad loans](#), in the wake of the contraction in the economy as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das recently agreed to look at the proposal for the creation of a bad bank.

**What's a bad bank and how does it work?**

- **Idea of Bad Bank:** Technically, a bad bank is an asset reconstruction company (ARC) or an asset management company that takes over the bad loans of commercial banks, manages them and finally recovers the money over a period of time.
- **Utility of Bad Bank:** The bad bank is not involved in lending and taking deposits, but helps commercial banks clean up their balance sheets and resolve bad loans in
- **Working of Bad Bank:** The takeover of bad loans is normally below the book value of the loan (provides certain margin to ARC). The bad bank subsequently tries to recover as much as possible using its expertise in stressed asset resolution.
- **Support of Government:** The bad bank concept is in some ways similar to an ARC but is funded by the government initially, with banks and other investors co-investing in due course. The presence of the government is seen as a means to speed up the clean-up process.
- US-based Mellon Bank created the first bad bank in 1988.

**Merits of Having Bad Bank-**

1. **Banks' Burden is Reduced:** The burden of recovering those loans is reduced for other banks.
2. **Specialisation leads to faster recovery:** Speed of recovery will be better as Bad Bank's main work is recovery and they are specialised in that.
3. **Positive Impact on Financial Sector:** Bad Bank will help improve the banking sector's health and fasten the recovery aspects of ailing by putting back frozen assets back into economic circulation.
4. **Increased Profitability of Banks:** Bad Bank increases profitability of other banks as they can focus more on lending, acquiring more customers and upgrading technology without spending too much time on recovery or resolution of bad loans
5. **Feasibility:** Bad banks can make profits as they usually keep high margin before acquiring the bad loans. The concept of Bad Bank has been implemented in other countries including Sweden, Finland, France and Germany.

#### Demerits of Bad Bank-

1. **Shifting of Problem:** Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan had opposed the idea of setting up a bad bank in which banks hold a majority stake. He was of the opinion that bad bank idea as merely shifting loans from one government pocket (the public sector banks) to another (the bad bank).
2. **Reckless Lending:** Other banks may not concentrate on the quality of loans as they always an option of shifting bad loans to ARC/ Bad Bank. This leads to doling out loans without proper diligence leading to reckless lending
3. **Efficacy Debate:** Bad banks may not acquire critical loans which are difficult to recover and only concentrate on easily recoverable loans. As a result, troubled Commercial banks continue to face the issue of bad loans. There is also the fear that it end up as another case of throwing good money after bad.
4. **Profitability of Banks:** High margin of Bad banks may curtail the profits of other banks which can in turn impact their lending capabilities.
5. **Moral Issues:** Due to pressure bad banks may employ some unethical ways to recover loans. Another issue is that other banks may not show the actual position of loan accounts by doing window dressing.

#### What has been the stand of the RBI with regard to resolving stressed loans?

- Viral Acharya, when he was the RBI Deputy Governor, had said it would be better to limit the objective of these asset management companies to the orderly resolution of stressed assets, followed by a graceful exit.
- Acharya suggested **two models to solve the problem of stressed assets**.
  - The first is a private asset management company (PAMC), which is said to be suitable for stressed sectors where the assets are likely to have an economic value in the short run, with moderate levels of debt forgiveness.
  - The second model is the National Asset Management Company (NAMC), which would be necessary for sectors where the problem is not just one of excess capacity but possibly also of economically unviable assets in the short to medium terms.
- While the RBI did not show much enthusiasm about a bad bank all these years, there are signs that it can look at the idea now. Recently, Governor Das indicated that the RBI can consider the idea of a bad bank.

#### Do we need a Bad Bank now?

- The idea gained currency during Raghuram Rajan's tenure as RBI Governor.

- The RBI had then initiated an **asset quality review (AQR)** of banks and found that several banks had suppressed or hidden bad loans to show a healthy balance sheet.
- However, the idea remained on paper amid **lack of consensus on the efficacy** of such an institution.
- Now, with the **pandemic hitting the banking sector**, the RBI fears a spike in bad loans in the wake of a six-month moratorium it has announced to tackle the economic slowdown.

#### How serious is the NPA issue in the wake of the pandemic?

- The RBI noted in its [recent Financial Stability Report](#) that the gross NPAs of the banking sector are expected to shoot up to 14.8% of advances by September 2021, from 7.5% in September 2020
- Among bank groups, the NPA ratio of PSU banks, which was 9.7% in September 2020, may increase to 16.2% by September 2021 under the baseline scenario.
- The **K V Kamath Committee**, which helped the RBI with designing a one-time restructuring scheme, also noted that corporate sector debt worth Rs 15.52 lakh crore has come under stress after Covid-19 hit India, while another Rs 22.20 lakh crore was already under stress before the pandemic.
- This effectively means Rs 37.72 crore (72% of the banking sector debt to industry) remains under stress. This is almost 37% of the total non-food bank credit.
- The panel led by Kamath, a veteran banker, has said companies in sectors such as retail trade, wholesale trade, roads and textiles are facing stress. Sectors that have been under stress pre-Covid include NBFCs, power, steel, real estate and construction. Setting up a bad bank is seen as crucial against this backdrop

#### Why is it crucial to tackle toxic loans?

- Banks and other financial institutions are the key drivers of economic growth, as they are the formal channels of credit.
- As things stand, lenders, particularly the state-owned ones, are saddled with massive bad loans.
- Growing NPAs has made Banks risk-averse and eroded their capacity to lend to help spur economic recovery from the shock of the covid-19 pandemic that has roiled the world.
- Banks will find it tough and exorbitantly expensive to raise capital from the market if the asset-quality trajectory remains uncertain, delaying and even jeopardizing, economic growth.

#### Has the banking system made any proposal with regard to Bad Bank?

- The banking sector, led by the **Indian Banks' Association**, had submitted a proposal in May 2020 for setting up a bad bank to resolve the NPA problem, proposing equity contribution from the government and banks.
- The proposal was also discussed at the **Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)** meeting, but it did not find favour with the government which preferred a market-led resolution process.
- The banking industry's proposal was based on an idea proposed by a panel on faster resolution of stressed assets in public sector banks headed by former Punjab National Bank Chairman Sunil Mehta.
- **Sunil Mehta panel** had proposed a company, Sashakt India Asset Management, for resolving large bad loans two years ago.
- The idea of a bad bank was discussed in 2018 too, but it never took shape.

- During the pandemic, banks and India Inc were also pitching for one-time restructuring of loans and NPA reclassification norms from 90 days to 180 days as relief measures to tackle the impact of the lockdown and the slowdown in the economy.
- Currently, loans in which the borrower fails to pay principal and/or interest charges within 90 days are classified as NPAs and provisioning is made accordingly.

#### Will a bad bank solve the problem of NPAs?

- **Complements Previous Measures:** Despite a series of measures by the RBI for better recognition and provisioning against NPAs, as well as massive doses of capitalisation of public sector banks by the government, the problem of NPAs continues in the banking sector, especially among the weaker banks. Having a Bad Bank will complement other measures taken by RBI & government to clean up banking sector.
- **Helps solve economic aftershocks of Pandemic:** As the Covid-related stress pans out in the coming months, proponents of the concept feel that a professionally-run bad bank, funded by the private lenders and supported the government, can be an effective mechanism to deal with NPAs.
- **Experience from Other Countries:** Many other countries had set up institutional mechanisms such as the Troubled Asset Relief Programme (TARP) in the US to deal with a problem of stress in the financial system in the wake of 2008 financial crisis.

#### Conclusion

Banks and other financial institutions are the key drivers of economic growth. However, many borrowers may find it difficult to service their loans, requiring lenders to set aside capital to cover those losses. A bad bank can free them up to start lending. However, adequate measures need to be put in place so as to overcome the pitfalls of bad bank

### Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

#### In news

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has floated a discussion paper on review of ownership and governance norms to facilitate new entrants to set up stock exchanges and depositories, otherwise called as market infrastructure institutions (MIIs).

#### Key takeaways

- As per the key proposals, a resident promoter setting up an MII may hold up to 100% shareholding, which will be brought down to not more than either 51% or 26% in 10 years.
- A foreign promoter from Financial Action Task Force (FATF) member jurisdictions setting up an MII may hold up to 49% shareholding, which shall be brought down to not more than either 26% or 15% in 10 years.
- Foreign individuals or entities from other than FATF member jurisdictions may acquire or hold up to 10% in an MII.
- Any person other than the promoter may acquire or hold less than 25% shareholding.

- At least 50% of ownership of the MII may be represented by individuals or entities with experience of five years or more in the areas of capital markets or technology related to financial services.

### Important value additions

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- It was established in 1988 and given statutory status through the SEBI Act, 1992.
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- Mutual Funds (MF) Risk-o-meter becomes effective: [Click here](#)
- SEBI eases Fund-raising norms for firms: [Click here](#)

### 1st National Conference Of States On Logistics

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

#### In news

- Union Minister of Commerce & Industry recently addressed the 1st National Conference of States on Logistics.

#### Key takeaways

- National Logistics Policy, which is under consultation, along with the National Logistics Council and State Logistics Coordination Committee, will work as a template for better coordination and integrated development for logistics centre.

- Logistics consists of 5R's: Getting the Right product - In the Right condition - At the Right place - At the Right time - To the Right customer.

**Do you know?**

- India has a \$200 billion logistics ecosystem.
  - A good part of it is supported by the Indian Railways.
  - About 13-14% cost of a product is logistics, and Ministry shall work towards bringing it down to about 8%.
- 

## [SBI raises \\$600 million of 'Regulation S' bonds](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Banking; Economy

**In news**

- State Bank of India (SBI) recently raised \$600 million of 'Regulation S' bonds — via its London branch — at a coupon rate of 1.8%.

**Key takeaways**

- The bond is priced at a spread of 140 basis points over the 5-year U.S. Treasury rate and will be listed on Singapore Exchange Securities Trading Limited (SGX-ST) and India International Exchange Limited (India INX).
  - The issuance represented SBI's return to the international public bond markets after a gap of close to two years.
  - Regulation S offerings are typically referred to as "Offshore Offering" because they mainly have to either do with a foreign company creating an offering, or an US company that is offerings its debt or equity overseas, i.e. outside the United States.
  - A Regulation S offering is typical of many European offerings and the larger clearing firms in Europe, often grant access to their systems via a Regulation S offering.
- 

## [28 non-official members nominated to the National Startup Advisory Council](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Entrepreneurship; Innovation

**In news**

- The Government of India nominated 28 non-official members on the National Startup Advisory Council, including Byju's CEO Byju Raveendran, Ola Cabs co-founder Bhavish Aggarwal, Kalaari Capital Managing Director Vani Kola and SoftBank India country head Manoj Kohli.

**Key takeaways**

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) had constituted the council on January 21, 2020, to advise the government on measures required to build a "strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country.
- The term of the non-official members of this council shall be for two years or until further orders, whichever is earlier.

## Important value additions

### Composition of the Council

- **Chairman:** Minister for Commerce & Industry.
- **Convener of the Council:** Joint Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- **Ex-officio Members:** Nominees of the concerned Ministries/Departments/Organisations not below the rank of Joint Secretary.
- Non-official members, to be nominated by the Central Government.
- These members shall be nominated from various categories like founders of successful startups, veterans who have grown and scaled companies in India, persons capable of representing the interests of investors into startups, etc.
- The term of the non-official members will be for a period of two years.

### Functions

- The Council will suggest measures to foster a culture of innovation amongst citizens and students, in particular, promote innovation in all sectors of the economy across the country.
- It will also suggest measures to facilitate public organisations to assimilate innovation with a view to improving public service delivery, promote creation, protection and commercialization of intellectual property rights.
- Further, it will suggest measures to make it easier to start, operate, grow and exit businesses by reducing regulatory compliances and costs, promote ease of access to capital for startups.

## Second Edition of India Innovation Index

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Entrepreneurship; Innovation

### In news

- NITI Aayog, along with the Institute for Competitiveness released the second edition of the India Innovation Index.
- The first edition of the index was launched in October 2019.

### Key takeaways

- The India Innovation Index 2020 examines the innovation capabilities and performance of the states and union territories.
- **Toppers in 'Major States' category:** (1) Karnataka; (2) Maharashtra; (3) Tamil Nadu
- Four southern states—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Kerala—occupied the top five spots under the 'Major States' category this year.
- Overall, Delhi retained its first rank, while Chandigarh landed in the second place this year.
- **Under the 'North-Eastern/Hill States' category:** Himachal Pradesh moved up from the second position to emerge as the top ranker this year.

### Parameters:

- The innovation inputs were measured through five enabler parameters, and the output through two performance parameters.
- **Enabler parameters:** 'Human Capital', 'Investment', 'Knowledge Workers', 'Business Environment', 'Safety and Legal Environment'
- **Performance parameters:** 'Knowledge Output' and 'Knowledge Diffusion'

**Do you know?****Reason for Karnataka's rank:**

- Karnataka's rank is attributable to its substantive number of venture capital deals, registered geographical indicators and information and communications technology exports.
- Karnataka's high FDI inflow has also enhanced the innovation capabilities of the state.

**Related article:**

- National Innovation Portal (NIP) launched: [Click here](#)

**Power Subsidies**

**Context:** India spends about Rs 2.89 lakh crore (~\$39.5 billion) annually to subsidise energy production and consumption, according to a recent CEEW and IISD study. This covers electricity, gas, LPG, kerosene and fertiliser.

Subsidies are needed either to promote goods and services that have greater social/environmental welfare or to underwrite access to basic levels of consumption for those who cannot afford them.

**Issues**

- **Improper Targeting of subsidies:** If the target beneficiaries are not assessed properly, subsidies end up being wasted, thereby distorting the very social welfare they were meant to fix.
- **Continuation of High tariffs:** Poorly targeted electricity subsidies (at Rs 63,778 crore) constituted more than a fifth of all energy subsidies. Yet, India has one of the highest electricity tariffs on a purchasing power parity basis.
- **Subsidy structure not aligned with India's Policies:** Government's programmes indicate that India is, rightly, going through two energy transitions: one towards universal energy access and another a shift toward cleaner energy. But its subsidy structures militate against both objectives, perpetuating distorted prices for dirty fuels and limiting the resources available to target the households needing support.

**Way Ahead**

- **Data based subsidy structure:** Improved subsidy distribution data would help identify the groups that benefit, and create the political space to revise electricity tariffs upwards for richer consumers. The Give-It-Up campaign for LPG subsidies followed this principle.
- **Use Census for Proper Targeting:** The population needs to be better categorised based on wealth/income so as to better target power subsidies. Census can provide necessary data for such purposes. In order to overcome the limitations of self-reporting of incomes, wealth and social indicators would also be needed to categorise households properly.
- **DBT alternative to Subsidies:** A well-targeted direct income transfer could cover all or a portion of nominal electricity consumption. Such an electricity access safety net, during stressed economic conditions, would cost Rs 3,000 crore for three months, less than 5% of annual power subsidies across all states.

- **Proportionate agri-power subsidies:** Subsidies for agricultural use of electricity and fertiliser should be linked to farm size. Also, natural farming could save subsidies on fertiliser, and instead cover the costs (within a decade) of shifting farmers to more sustainable farming practices.
- **Inter-departmental Collaboration:** A targeted direct benefit transfer scheme for power could be designed in collaboration with departments responsible for providing non-energy social welfare schemes as well.
- **Subsidies for infrastructure creation:** Subsidies for renewables are needed to invest in grid balancing and energy storage so that the wider electrification of many other sectors (transport, cooking, small industries) becomes feasible.
- **Piped Natural Gas in Urban areas:** It is estimated that rapid rollout of piped natural gas in urban areas by 2025 could result in LPG subsidy savings of over Rs 1 lakh crore.
- **Restructuring Subsidy structure:** Substituting subsidy reforms (such as a direct benefit transfer to poor consumers) for poorly designed cross-subsidies could not only reduce money spent on subsidies but will substantially improve industrial competitiveness.
- **Holistic approach:** Adopt principles consistent with social justice, environmental sustainability and new economic opportunity.

### Conclusion

- The difference between good and bad subsidies lies in the balance between social welfare and political patronage.
- The pandemic-induced economic crisis gives one more chance to fix the distortions, increase energy security nets for those who need them, free up resources to invest in clean infrastructure, create more jobs and attract billions more in new investment.

## [RBI retains SBI, ICICI and HDFC Banks as 'TOO BIG TO FAIL' banks](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Banking

### In news

- The RBI has retained State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank as domestic systemically important banks (D-SIBs) or banks that are considered as “too big to fail”.

### Key takeaways

- The RBI had issued the framework for dealing with domestic systemically important banks on July 22, 2014.
- The D-SIB framework requires the RBI to disclose the names of banks designated as D-SIBs starting from 2015 and place these banks in appropriate buckets depending upon their systemic importance scores (SISs).
- According to analysts, too big to fail is a phrase used to describe a bank or company that's so entwined in the economy that its failure would be catastrophic.
- In case a foreign bank having branch presence in India is a global systemically important bank (G-SIB), it has to maintain additional capital surcharge in India as applicable to it as a G-SIB, proportionate to its risk weighted assets (RWAs) in India.

## [RBI suggests a tougher regulatory framework for NBFCs](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Banking; Economy  
**In news**

- The RBI has suggested a tougher regulatory framework for the non-banking finance companies' (NBFC) sector to prevent recurrence of any systemic risk to the country's financial system.

#### Key takeaways

- RBI released a discussion paper on the revised regulatory framework which is formulated on a scale-based approach, and sought comments within a month.
- The regulatory and supervisory framework of NBFCs will be based on a four-layered structure — the base layer (NBFC-BL), middle layer (NBFC-ML), upper layer (NBFC-UL) and the top layer.
- If the framework is visualised as a pyramid, the bottom of the pyramid, where least regulatory intervention is warranted, can consist of NBFCs currently classified as non-systemically important NBFCs (NBFC-ND), NBFCP2P lending platforms, NBFCAA, NOFHC and Type I NBFCs.
- The next layer may comprise NBFCs currently classified as systemically important NBFCs (NBFC-ND-SI), deposit-taking NBFCs (NBFC-D), HFCs, IFCs, IDFs, SPDs and CICs.
- The extant regulatory framework for NBFC-NDs will now be applicable to base layer NBFCs.
- The extant regulatory framework applicable for NBFC-NDSI will be applicable to middle layer NBFCs.
- NBFCs residing in the upper layer will constitute a new category.
- The current threshold for systemic importance, which is ₹500 crore now, is proposed to be revised to ₹1,000 crore.
- As per the proposals, the extant NPA classification norm of 180 days will be reduced to 90 days.

#### Important value additions

##### Non-Banking Financial Company

- It is a financial institution that does not have a full banking license or is not supervised by a national or international banking regulatory agency.
- The most important difference between non-banking financial companies and banks is that NBFCs don't take demand deposits.

##### Related articles:

- RBI introduces risk-based internal audit norms for NBFCs, UCBs: [Click here](#)
- Structured Finance and Partial Guarantee Programme to NBFC-MFIs launched: [Click here](#)
- Special liquidity scheme for NBFCs/HFCs approved: [Click here](#)

#### [Cost of issuing green bonds remains higher than other bonds](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy  
**In news**

- A study by RBI noted that the cost of issuing green bonds has generally remained higher than other bonds in India, largely due to asymmetric information.

### Key takeaways

- The average coupon rate for green bonds issued since 2015 with maturities between 5 to 10 years have generally remained higher than the corporate and government bonds with similar tenure.
- For the US dollar-denominated green bonds with tenure of more than or equal to 10 years, the coupon rate was lower than the corporate bonds.
- Most of the green bonds in India are issued by the public sector units or corporates with better financial health.
- Green bonds constituted only 0.7% of all the bonds issued in India since 2018,
- Developing a better information management system in India may help in reducing maturity mismatches, borrowing costs and lead to efficient resource allocation in this segment.

### Important value additions

- A green bond is a fixed-income instrument designed specifically to support specific climate-related or environmental projects.
- Green bonds typically come with tax incentives to enhance their attractiveness to investors.
- The World Bank issued the first official green bond in 2009.
- Around \$157 billion worth of green bonds were issued in 2019.

### Budgeting in a time of crisis

**Context:** World over economies are facing crisis in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic that disrupted the normal functioning of life.

#### **How US is trying to deal with economic crisis?**

Today the U.S. is facing its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Like Roosevelt, President Joe Biden is launching the American Rescue Plan to revive the economy.

His \$1.9 trillion plan proposes

- \$1,400 per-person payments
- Increased unemployment benefits
- Assistance to local governments
- Support for accelerated vaccine rollout
- Investments to get children back in school
- Minimum wage of \$15 an hour.

#### **What are Paul Krugman principles to deal with economic crisis?**

- Noble Laureate Paul Krugman has offered advice against too much of caution in dealing with the economic mess. He has laid down the rules for budget-making.
- **Enhanced Government Spending:** The first rule is to not doubt the power of the government to help. Government spending can be hugely beneficial. The Affordable Care Act, for instance, led to a decline in the number of Americans without health insurance, and gave people a sense of security.
- **Relaxation of Deficits:** The second is to not be obsessed with debt. Economists agree that debt is far less a problem than conventional wisdom asserts. Interest rates are low by historical standards. The burden of servicing debt is low.

- **Inflation Concerns are overstated:** The third rule is to not worry about inflation. Countries can run a 'hot economy' with low unemployment and large budget deficits, without runaway inflation.
- **Consensus on is difficult:** The fourth is to not count on bipartisan support. There will be certain opposition with respect to government economy revival plans that can be for narrow purposes. Nevertheless, government should go ahead with providing stimulus to the economy.

#### The Indian context – What measures can be adopted in upcoming Budget?

- **Challenges w.r.t Fiscal Deficit:** India's GDP is estimated at ₹200 lakh crore. The government was quick to announce a package of ₹20 lakh crore. Fiscal deficit could overshoot the target set by the FRBM Act. Spending more is going to be difficult.
- **Prioritising Health Spending:** India has only five beds for 10,000 Indians and ranks 155th on bed availability in the Human Development Report of 2020. Experts opine that the government should increase healthcare spending from 1.5% of the GDP to 2.5%.
- **Increase Spending on Infrastructure as it has multiplier effects:** The [National Infrastructure Pipeline](#) aims to invest ₹111 lakh crore by 2025 in over 6,800 projects. The proposal to set up a Development Finance Institution is still on the anvil. The Chinese government has entered into building social housing projects.
- **Urban employment guarantee scheme** on lines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This will be far better than direct cash transfers. [ Proposal for DUET: Click [here](#) ]
- **Changes in Taxation:** Despite historic lows in fuel prices, the government chose to increase fuel prices to record levels. GST has been a big source of revenue. There is a strong case for reducing GST tariff. Cess or surcharge can be levied on the super-rich. The average tariff must come down to 10% from its current level of 14% by 2024, as suggested by Professor Arvind Panagariya.
- **Trade Liberalisation and Privatisation:** With several key reforms – [new labour codes](#), [new farm laws](#), single [nationwide GST](#), [Insolvency Code](#), low Corporate Profit Tax – addition of privatisation and trade liberalisation would nearly guarantee a double digit growth.

#### Conclusion

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, unemployment, both rural and urban, is surging, and health and infrastructure budgets are getting stretched. Hence government has to come up with Budget which provides stimulus to the economy.

## AGRICULTURE

### Cabinet approves modified scheme to enhance ethanol distillation capacity

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure; Environment; Agriculture

#### In news

#### Background

- There has been surplus production of sugar in the country since sugar season 2010-11.
- Sugar production is likely to remain surplus in India in coming years due to introduction of improved varieties of sugarcane.
- To deal with surplus stocks of sugar, sugar mills have been exporting sugar, for which Government has been extending financial assistance.
- India being a developing country can export sugar by extending financial assistance only up to year 2023 as per WTO arrangements.
- So, diversion of excess sugarcane & sugar to ethanol is a correct way forward to deal with surplus stocks.

#### Key takeaways

- Thus, recently Cabinet has approved modified scheme to enhance ethanol distillation capacity.
- Diversion of excess sugar would help in stabilizing the domestic ex-mill sugar prices.
- It will also help sugar mills to get relieved from storage problems.
- It will improve their cash flows and facilitate them in clearance of cane price dues of farmers.
- Government has fixed target of 10% blending of fuel grade ethanol with petrol by 2022, 15% blending by 2026 & 20% blending by 2030.
- With a view to support sugar sector and in the interest of sugarcane farmers, the Government has also allowed production of ethanol from B-Heavy Molasses, sugarcane juice, sugar syrup and sugar.
- To increase production of fuel grade ethanol, Govt. is also encouraging distilleries to produce ethanol from maize; & rice available with FCI.
- Government has fixed remunerative price of ethanol from maize & rice.
- Government is also planning to prepone achievement of 20% blending target by year 2025 and onwards.
- With increase in blending levels, dependence on imported fossil fuel will decrease and will also reduce the air pollution.

#### Also, the Government has taken following decisions:

- To bring a modified scheme for extending interest subvention to augment ethanol production capacity.
- Government would bear interest subvention for five years including one year moratorium against the loan availed by project proponents from banks at 6% per annum or 50% of the rate of interest charged by banks whichever is lower.
- Interest subvention would be available to only those distilleries which will supply at least 75% of ethanol produced to Operations Management & Control System (OMCs) for blending with petrol.

**Do you know?**

- Proposed intervention would enhance production of 1G ethanol from various feed stocks thereby, facilitate in achieving blending targets of ethanol with petrol.
- It would promote ethanol as a fuel which is indigenous, non-polluting and virtually inexhaustible.
- It would improve the environment and the ecosystem and result in savings on Oil Import Bill.
- It will also ensure timely payment of dues to farmers.

## [North East's first-ever specialized "Ginger" Processing Plant in Meghalaya being revived](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II –Policies and Interventions

**In news**

- North East's first-ever specialised "Ginger" Processing Plant at district Ri-Bhoui in Meghalaya is being revived and is likely to become functional in the beginning of 2021.

**Key takeaways**

- The Plant is located at the Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP), Raja Bhagan, Byrnihat Hatt.
- It will process ginger and help in preparing products like waxed ginger, ginger paste, ginger powder, ginger flakes, ginger oil etc.
- Significantly ginger has attained a place of prominence in recent months because of its reported properties as an immunity booster against COVID-19 Virus.
- The ginger products being prepared from this Plant will be available for domestic consumption and will be able to meet the Global demand as well.
- This will also be in keeping with Prime Minister Modi's calls for "Vocal for Local".
- For the PPP mode, an Operation and Maintenance Operator was selected through the tendering process and the work on setting up and reviving the Plant is under progress.

**Do you know?**

- North Eastern Region of India produces about 450,000 Metric Ton of high-quality ginger every year but most of it is sold at a lower price due to lack of processing and cold storage facilities.
- The Plant at Meghalaya will give the much-needed facility to the ginger growers.
- They will be able to use their capacities and at the same time optimally utilize the natural resources.
- There is also a plan to set up 100 new fresh retail points in Northeast and Fruit Kiosks at Guwahati and other major towns of the North Eastern Region.
- Most of these will be in the PPP mode.

## [To help farmers, right approach is through FPOs, not APMC mandis](#)

**Context:** Protest by farmers against [newly enacted farm bills](#) and their adamant demand of the repeal of these laws. However, government is trying its best to negotiate with agitating farmers and reach an amicable solution

Basic facts about Indian agriculture, which may help negotiators on both sides, with a common objective of benefitting the larger interest of the farming community.

1. **Implicit Taxation:** As per research by ICRIER, Indian agriculture was implicitly taxed to the tune of almost 14% of its value. This was primarily due to restrictive trade and marketing policies, ranging from export controls and stocking limits to the restrictive mandi system.
2. **Misplaced Fears:** The way to improve farmers' price realisation, therefore, was to liberate agriculture from these various controls. But somehow, a fear has been created that these farm laws will rob farmers of APMC markets, MSP, and they may even lose their lands to big corporate houses through contract farming.

#### **But won't the APMC face competition from Private Players?**

- There is no doubt that APMC markets and MSP will face competition from private markets and out-of-APMC mandi transactions.
- But agricultural experts like Ashok Gulati believe the competition will help the farmers at large, especially small and marginal ones. The creation of an additional 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and the promised Agri-infrastructure Fund of Rs one lakh crore will aid this process.
- But many among the agitating farmers fear losing the MSP for wheat and paddy that they get in Punjab-Haryana.
- However, in all these years since the MSP was given birth to in 1965 only 6 per cent of farmers and broadly, 6 per cent of the value of agri-produce has benefitted from this system
- The MSP and APMC system primarily helps those who have large surpluses, mainly the large farmers.
- So, if one really wants to help the small and marginal farmers, the right approach is through FPOs at the village level and not in APMC mandis. About 86 per cent of Indian farmers are small and marginal (less than 2 ha), operating roughly 47 per cent of the total operated area in the country.

#### **What about farmers demand of making MSP Statutory right & repealing of laws?**

- Asking for making MSP a statutory binding even on the private sector will turn out to be anti-farmer as much of the private trade will shun such a system, leading to chaos. It will be worse than repealing these laws.
- Repealing these farm laws would be like robbing more than 90 per cent of farmers — who never gained from the MSP system and who are largely small and marginal — of their rights

#### **Given these basic facts, how do we dispel the fears of agitating farmers?**

- First, the government should be ready to **give in writing** that the existing system of APMC markets and MSP will continue and be strengthened.
- Second, the government can also give in writing that the **contract will be for the produce**, not the land.
- Third, farmers can take **disputes to district courts**, if they like.
- Fourth, to add to these written assurances, the government can also commit to creating a fund of **Rs 25,000 crores under the Price Stabilisation Scheme**, which can be used to support market prices of specified commodities that take a dip of more than 10 per cent below MSP.
- This is akin to NAFED's operations to support market prices of pulses and oilseeds, or the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) for cotton prices, and can be extended to maize, sorghum, pearl millet, etc.
- Fifth, if stocks keep piling up, as is the case with wheat and rice today, to correct imbalance in demand and supply, government should either limit the size of procurement or go for **price**

**deficiency payments.** A further positive step will be to announce a diversification package for the Punjab-Haryana belt.

### Conclusion

One must remember that farmers always want a higher price for their produce, but higher food prices can also bring pains to poor consumers. The art of policymaking is to balance the interest of producers and consumers within reasonable financial resources.

### Comparison of Govt's Support for Agriculture

**Context:** Ongoing farmer protests while the government argues that the three farm laws are a logical extension of market reforms into India's agriculture sector.

**What are the arguments of farmers against newly enacted farm bills?**

- **Fear of losing Social Safety Net:** For the protesting farmers — primarily belonging to Punjab and Haryana — there is a fear that new farm laws and allegations of dilution of MSP system will rob farmers of their traditional social safety net.
- **Farming is viewed as fall back option:** Farmers do not view farming merely as a “job” as many of us who are part of the modern economy often do. For them, farming is also the fall-back option when other ventures fail.
- **Farming as only livelihood Option:** For farmers, cultivation is not just about productivity metrics; it is also about an option for them to eke out a living, however meagre, when they find themselves unable to participate in the other sectors of the economy — industries and services sectors.
- This perhaps explains why two-thirds of the world's second-most populous country lives in rural areas. Or why agriculture employs almost half of India (44%) despite contributing less than 15% to India's GDP.

### India

Indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	1986 - 2019
Total Support Estimate, % of GDP	1.10	0.11	0.66	0.15	0.39	
Producer Support Estimate, % of GFR	-3.6	-7.0	-3.3	-6.7	-5.0	
Nominal Protection Coefficient, Ratio	0.91	0.88	0.90	0.87	0.87	
Agriculture in GDP, %	16.2	16.2	15.6	14.6	—	
Agricultural employment, %	45.56	45.12	44.52	43.86	—	

### Does the Indian government support its farmers as much as some of the other comparable countries?

According to the data provided by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (or OECD), the Indian farmers seem to have a genuine grouse.

Across countries, the OECD provides five sets of data on the issue of agriculture support and India trails on most counts.

### 1. Producer Support Estimates or PSEs

- These are transfers to agricultural producers and are measured at the farm gate level.
- They comprise market price support, budgetary payments and the cost of revenue foregone.
- Support to producers in India is composed of budgetary spending corresponding to 7.8% of gross farm receipts, positive market price support (MPS) of +2.0% of gross farm receipts among those commodities which are supported, and negative market price support of -14.8% among those which are implicitly taxed.
- Overall, this leads to negative net support of -5.0% of gross farm receipts (%PSE or producer support estimate) in 2019
- PSEs for USA was approx. +10% and EU was +20% .

### 2. Consumer Support Estimates or CSE

- These refer to transfers from consumers of agricultural commodities.
- They are measured at the farm gate level. "If negative, the CSE measures the burden (implicit tax) on consumers through market price support (higher prices), that more than offsets consumer subsidies that lower prices to consumers,
- India's CSE as a percentage of agricultural consumption, 2019 is at around 24%, while that of US, EU is at around +10% and -3% respectively.

### 3. General services support (or GSSE)

- GSSE transfers are linked to measures creating enabling conditions for the primary agricultural sector through development of private or public services, institutions and infrastructure.
- GSSE includes policies where primary agriculture is the main beneficiary, but does not include any payments to individual producers. GSSE transfers do not directly alter producer receipts or costs or consumption expenditure
- India's GSSE, in Million US Dollars 2019, was at around 17k, while that of USA, EU and China was at around 10K, 12K and 35K respectively.

### 4. Total Support Estimate (or TSE)

- The TSE transfers represent the total support granted to the agricultural sector, and consists of producer support (PSE), consumer support (CSE) and general services support (GSSE).
- India's TSE, measured as a percentage of GDP, in 2019 was nearly at 0.4%, while that of EU, China and Indonesia was at nearly 0.6%, 1.5% and 3% respectively.

### 5. Producer protection

- The PP is the ratio between the average price received by producers (measured at the farm gate), including net payments per unit of current output, and the border price (measured at the farm gate).
- For instance, a coefficient of 1.10, which China has, suggests that farmers, overall, received prices that were 10% above international market levels.

### Conclusion

- The negative value of the PSE reflects that domestic producers, overall, continue to be implicitly taxed, as budgetary payments to farmers do not offset the price-depressing effect of complex domestic regulations and trade policy measures.
- Mirroring the farm price-depressing effect on producers, the policies provide implicit support to consumers.

- In other words, contrary to the perception among many, the government has preferred the welfare of Indian consumers over the Indian farmers.

## 'Accelerating Quality Production, Post-Harvesting, Value Addition & Export of Coriander from India': World of Coriander webinar

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Agriculture

**In news**

- Recently, the World of Coriander webinar 'Accelerating Quality Production, Post-Harvesting, Value Addition & Export of Coriander from India' was organized.
- **Organized by:** The Spices Board of India and DBT-SABC Biotech Kisan Hub in collaboration with ICAR-NRCSS, RSAMB and Kota Agriculture University

**Key takeaways**

- The Hadoti region of South-East Rajasthan and Guna district of Madhya Pradesh are known for coriander (*Coriandrum sativum* L.) production and contributes major share in coriander export from the country.
- Ramganj APMC Mandi located at Kota district is the largest coriander mandi in Asia, and thus Ramganj is also known as the 'Coriander city'.
- Recently, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MOFPI) has assigned 'Coriander' to the district of Kota in the list of One District One Product (ODOP).

**Do you know?**

- Coriander is a spice produced from the round, tan-colored seeds of the coriander plant (*Coriandrum sativum*).
- All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and the dried seeds (as a spice) are the parts most traditionally used in cooking.
- It is also known as Chinese parsley, dhania or cilantro.

## Small farmers need second source of income

**Issues**

- **Majority of Farmers are marginal:** 70% of India's farmers have small and marginal land holdings, operating below one hectare.
- **Unrewarding livelihood:** On an average, smaller holdings lose money as their household costs are higher than their earnings. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the average income of farmers owning up to two hectares is Rs 5,240 a month
- **Subsistence Farming:** The smallest farms are afloat since they don't pay for labour, relying entirely on the family, and they consume much of what is produced.
- **Irregular Income:** Farming is a seasonal affair, not a full-time job

**Farm to factory is the need of the hour**

- **Encouraging Industrial Investment:** Industrial investment should be encouraged in rural and backward areas by offering special incentives. This can ensure an additional income to minimise the dependency on the sole agriculture-based income.
- **Untapped Potential:** Apart from part-time seasonal farming, a small farmer and a farm labourer have sufficient time to work and can earn Rs 12,000-Rs 15,000 a month easily after eight hours of labour in a nearby factory.

### Case Study

- Of the 8,000 workers at the Sonalika plant in Hoshiarpur, 90% are marginal farmers and farm labourers of nearby villages.
- This model of linking industry with employment for marginal farmers and farm labourers can be amplified pan-India, particularly in the backward areas.

### Way Ahead

- .
- **Promoting Exports:** To increase export from these areas, 50% relaxation in railway freight as freight subsidy can be provided from dry ports.
- **Cluster Approach:** Special incentives are being offered to develop industrial corridors and clusters but this model should be replicated in the rural and backward areas to provide job opportunities to nearby small and marginal farmers and farm labourers.
- **Decentralised Microenterprise Ecosystem:** A distributed, micro-level factory that can produce solopreneurs and micro-enterprises has to be created and supported in the rural areas. For instance, processing and packaging of vegetables for sale in urban malls can be one such micro-enterprise that is labour intensive.
- **Investment in Rural areas:** Promotion of new industrial investment with a special incentive in backward areas to provide new jobs to rural India. Providing jobs to small, marginal farmers and farm labourers in nearby areas will minimise the rural-to-urban migration

### Conclusion

- On ground reforms in the agriculture sector through central amended laws will take more time but it is time for a policy and framework to promote industrial investment in rural and backward areas as a job engine for small, marginal farmers and farm labourers.
- It would be the real execution of sab ka saath, sab ka vikas (progress for all), covering more than 60% of the population of the country residing in rural and backward areas.

### Connecting the dots

- New Farms Laws and Opposition to it: Click [Here](#)

[Eri Silk to be provided to Grade IV employees in Assam](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography & GS-III – Agriculture

**In news**

- The Assam government will provide khadi shirts, eri shawl and eri stole to Grade IV employees in a phased manner, in a move to pay tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and his movement for Khadi.

**Important value additions**

- Eri silk comes from the caterpillar of *Samia ricini*.
- It is found in northeast India and some parts of China, Japan.
- The name "eri" is derived from the Assamese word "era", which means "castor", as the silkworm feeds on castor plants.
- Eri silk is also known as endi or errandi in India.
- The woolly white silk is often referred to as the fabric of peace when it is processed without killing the silkworm.
- This process results in a silk called Ahimsa silk.
- Moths leave the cocoon and then the cocoons are harvested to be spun.
- The eri silkworm is the only completely domesticated silkworm other than *Bombyx mori*.

**Do you know?**

- India has the distinction of being the only country in the world producing all Five major types of silk broadly divided into two categories:
- **Mulberry silk:** Mainly in Karnataka
- **Non-mulberry Silk: Temperate tussar silk** in Maharashtra, WB, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh; **Tropical tussar silk** in sub-himalayan belt ( Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, etc); **Muga Silk** in Assam and **Eri silk** in Assam, Odisha, Bihar

**Related articles:**

- Types of silk and challenges of India's silk industry: [Click here](#)

**[Farm laws, their constitutional validity, and hope](#)**

**Context:** The Supreme Court of India staying the [operation of new farm laws](#) and setting up a committee of experts to negotiate with the government and the farmers.

Why farmers are protesting against farm laws: Click [here](#) and [here](#)

Why earlier government negotiations have failed: Click [here](#)

What is the long term solution advocated by experts: Click [here](#)

**What has been the reaction by farmers to SC decision to set up committee?**

- The farmers' unions **have not reacted favourably** to the formation of the experts' committee.
- They allege that the committee **does not comprise entirely impartial experts**. Most of them are well known and strong defenders of the farm laws, and are critical of the agitation.
- Thus, the agitation being carried on by the farmers is **entering a new phase**.

**Critical Analysis of SC's decision**

- **Challenge for the Committee to gain confidence of parties:** For conducting negotiations with both the government and the farmers, the members of the committee ought to and should be

known to have an open mind on the core issues, which alone will create a necessary confidence in the parties concerned.

- **Maximalist Position by farmers:** The farmers have made it clear that they will not agree to anything less than the repeal of these laws. This would mean that the present agitation is likely to continue indefinitely.
- **SC's decision Lacks Clarity:** It is not yet clear what impact the report of this committee will have on the final decision of the Supreme Court on the question of the constitutional validity of the farm laws. So whatever the experts' committee recommends, the question of the constitutional validity of the farm laws can be decided only after a proper hearing of the matter before the Court.
- **Political Investment by ruling party:** While the repeal of a law is a simple legislative act, having to repeal a law in which the government has invested a lot of its prestige is not so easy.

### On what basis can farm laws be further challenged in Supreme Court?

#### 1. Violation of Federalism

- The constitutional validity of the farm laws has been challenged in the Supreme Court mainly on the ground that Parliament has no legislative competence to enact these laws, the subject matter of which is essentially in the State list.

#### 2. Violation of rules of the House

- It is a universally acknowledged fact that the voting on the Farm Bills in the Rajya Sabha was not done in accordance with the rules of the House.
- These rules require the Chair to order the recording of votes (division) by members even when one member demands it.
- The Deputy Chairman of the House, who was conducting the proceedings at that time, **did not order division** although a few members openly and loudly demanded it.
- Thus, there was a violation of the rules of the House in passing the Bills by voice vote when there was a demand for division.

#### 3. Violation of Constitution with regard to procedures adopted for passage of bills

- Article 100 says that all questions at any sitting of either House shall be determined by a majority of votes of the members present and voting.
- Majority can be determined only in terms of number, and therefore what this Article requires is that all questions in the House should be determined by recording the votes of the members present and voting.
- Majority cannot be determined through voice vote. In fact, the **Constitution does not recognise voice vote** to determine majority in a legislature.
- However, deciding a question by **voice vote is a practice prevailing in all legislatures**. This was devised for the sake of convenience and there is always an assumption that since the government of the day has a majority, any proposal before the House has the support of the majority.
- But that assumption goes when a member demands voting in the House and the Chair has, then, no option but to order the actual voting. Since this was not done and the Bills were all passed by voice vote, there is a violation of the rules as well as the Constitution (Article 100)

**What are the options before the Supreme Court if and when above challenges are made?**

### 1. Strike down laws on violation of Article 100 & 107

- The Court can strike down the whole laws as the requirement of Article 107 has not been fulfilled. This Article says that a Bill shall not be deemed to have been passed unless it has been agreed to by both Houses.
- As has been explained above, the Bills have not in fact been passed by the Rajya Sabha because the majority had not been determined in accordance with Article 100.

### 2. Invalidate the proceedings of Rajya Sabha

- The Court may also invalidate the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and send the three 'Acts' back to that House for further proceedings in accordance with the constitutional provisions.
- If this happens, it may provide a good opportunity to the government to revisit these laws.
- These can then be referred to a Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha which can invite the farmers and all other stakeholders and finally produce better Bills.

### Conclusion

The issue that needs to be settled by the top court is the constitutional validity of the laws and adherence to the Procedures established by law & Constitution.

## [Virtual Buyer Seller Meet with Millet Exporters organized by APEDA](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture

### In news

- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in association with Andhra Pradesh Drought Mitigation Project (APDMP), an externally aided project funded by IFAD, organized a Virtual Buyer Seller Meet with Millet Exporters.
- Considering the potential of increasing exports of Millets and Millet products and the focus given by Government for development of Millet sector of Nutri Cereals, APEDA is closely interacting with Indian Institute of Millet Research (IIMR) and other stakeholders.

### Important value additions

- Millet is a common term to categorize small-seeded grasses that are often termed nutri-cereals.
- It includes Sorghum, Pearl Millet, Ragi, Small Millet, Foxtail Millet, Proso Millet, Barnyard Millet, Kodo Millet and other millets.
- These are known for high nutritive value.

### Indian Institute of Millets Research (ICAR-IIMR)

- It is an agricultural research institute engaged in basic and strategic research on sorghum and other millets.
- It is located at Rajendranagar (Hyderabad, Telangana).
- IIMR operates under the aegis of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- It was founded in 1958 under the Project on Intensified Research on Cotton, Oilseeds and Millets (PIRCOM).

### Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority

- It is an apex body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, responsible for the export promotion of agricultural products.
- APEDA was established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act passed by the Parliament in December, 1985.

#### Some of the functions of APEDA are as following:

- Promotion of exports of agricultural and processed food products. Promotion of export oriented production and development of the Scheduled products.
- To make Improvement in numerous areas such as packaging, marketing for the Scheduled products outside India.
- Setting standards and specifications for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports.
- Financial assistance, reliefs and subsidy to the relating industries.
- To provide training in the related areas

#### Related articles:

- Export of Moringa powder: [Click here](#)
- Kiwis of Ziro Valley: [Click here](#)

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### [Lessons from Kenya's agri experiment](#)

**Context:** In the debate on [new farm laws](#), emotions are running high with concerns that small farmers are being pitted against large agri-businesses.

Why farmers are protesting against farm laws: Click [here](#) and [here](#)

Why earlier government negotiations have failed: Click [here](#)

What is the long term solution advocated by experts: Click [here](#)

#### Shortcomings in the debates

- **Predictability Factor:** The new laws contain mostly untried policies and it is difficult to gauge what might happen when they are implemented
- **International Models:** Surprisingly, little of the discussion has drawn on lessons learned from countries that have implemented large-scale policies to encourage agri-businesses.
- **Lack of data:** Since the advent of market-oriented policies in the 1980s and 1990s, many governments in developing economies moved away from controlling agricultural markets to encouraging participation by private-sector firms. Evaluation of those policies have been difficult because of a lack of data on farmer-buyer relationships and the complexity of quantifying the many clauses that go into farm policies.

Recent research at the London School of Economics (LSE) overcomes these hurdles by examining a decade of high-quality farmer-buyer data from Kenya during a period when it introduced radical farm laws to encourage agri-businesses.

#### Kenya's agri-Experiment

- **Much in the same way as India is doing now**, the Kenyan government introduced new laws with the expectation that the rise of such businesses would transform smallholder agriculture for the better.

- **Over 20 pieces of legislation were repealed** to encourage agri-business participation in crop markets that made up over 70% of small farm incomes.
- **It had its expected impact** on the rise of agri-businesses. Their (Private players) overall market share as buyers of farm produce almost doubled, reaching 38% by 2010.

#### Was Kenya's experiment without any flaws?

Within the crops that were "liberalised", the story was not as straightforward.

- **Long run experience was bitter:** Soon after the policy was implemented, small farmers became more likely to sell these crops to agri-businesses, especially in areas that were more reliant on these crops due to agro-ecological conditions. But, five years on, many had stopped selling to these businesses.
- **Farm incomes from these crops had fallen.** Farmers who were reliant on agri-businesses saw their incomes fall by an average 6%. They sold household assets to maintain their day-to-day consumption

#### Why agri-businesses in Kenya didn't yield expected results in long run?

- **Initial Gain of market share at expense of others:** Kenyan farmers expected to see productivity gains from selling to agri-businesses, which initially gained market share at the expense of other buyers. The ease of doing business increased in buying and marketing. However, in the long run, the productivity didn't see much increase and consequently farmers' incomes also fell.
- **Agri-businesses needed more Profits:** As agri-businesses moved into these new activities, greater investment outlays and hence greater profitability was needed to finance them. This impacted the payments made to small farmers and thus their incomes.
- **Fewer Buyers over time:** Farmers began facing bigger agri-businesses which, on average, saw their profit margins rise by 5%. While some farmers were able to leave their agri-business relationships, many were facing bigger and fewer buyers in crop markets.
- **Key lesson learnt by Kenyan government:** In its revised agricultural strategy in 2010, Kenyan policymakers reflected on how small farmers can suffer when ease of doing business is prioritised in markets where there is "no critical mass and enough capacity for the private sector to grow".

#### Conclusion

- The Kenyan experience illustrates what can go wrong with large-scale untried policies and what provisions need to be in place to avoid hardship.
- Of course, this is not to say India will have the same experience. India is certainly in a better economic position in terms of per capita income, about a third higher than Kenya.
- But there are many common problems in smallholder agriculture, such as low productivity, investments and market access, which keep farm incomes low across India.

### [Feasibility studies of Solution Mining of Potash to be taken up in Rajasthan](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Sci & tech; Agriculture

#### In news

- A tripartite agreement was signed between Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited (MECL), Rajasthan State Mines & Minerals Limited (RSMML) and the Department of Mines & Geology

(DMG), Govt. of Rajasthan for taking up feasibility studies of Solution Mining of Potash in the state of Rajasthan.



#### Key takeaways

- Rajasthan has huge Potash and Halite resources spread across 50,000 sq. kms in the Nagaur – Ganganagar basin in the northwest.
- Bedded Salt formations are strategically useful for underground oil storage, repositories for hydrogen, ammonia and helium gas, storage of compressor gas and nuclear waste.
- Potash & Sodium Chloride from the Bedded Salt are extensively used in the Fertiliser Industry and the Chemical Industry respectively.
- Paving the way for the 1st Solution Mining project in the country, this project will generate employment.

#### Important value additions

- Potash includes various mined and manufactured salts that contain potassium in water-soluble form.
- The name derives from pot ash, which refers to plant ashes or wood ash soaked in water in a pot, which was the primary means of manufacturing the product before the Industrial Era.
- Potash is produced worldwide mostly for use in fertilizer.

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### [CCEA gives its approval for MSP of copra for year 2021](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture

#### In news

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of copra for 2021.

#### Key takeaways

- Copra is the dried meat or kernel of the coconut, which is the fruit of the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*).
- Coconut oil is extracted from copra, making it an important agricultural commodity for many coconut-producing countries.
- The MSP for Fair Average Quality (FAQ) of milling copra has been increased, by Rs.375/-, to Rs. 10335/- per quintal for 2021 season from Rs. 9960/- per quintal in 2020.
- The approval is based on recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- The increase in MSP for copra for 2021 season is in line with the principle of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times the all India weighted average cost of production which was announced by the Government in the Budget 2018-19.

### Do you know?

- [The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited \(NAFED\)](#) and National Cooperative Consumer Federation of India Limited (NCCF) will continue to act as Central Nodal Agencies to undertake price support operations at the MSP in the coconut growing States.

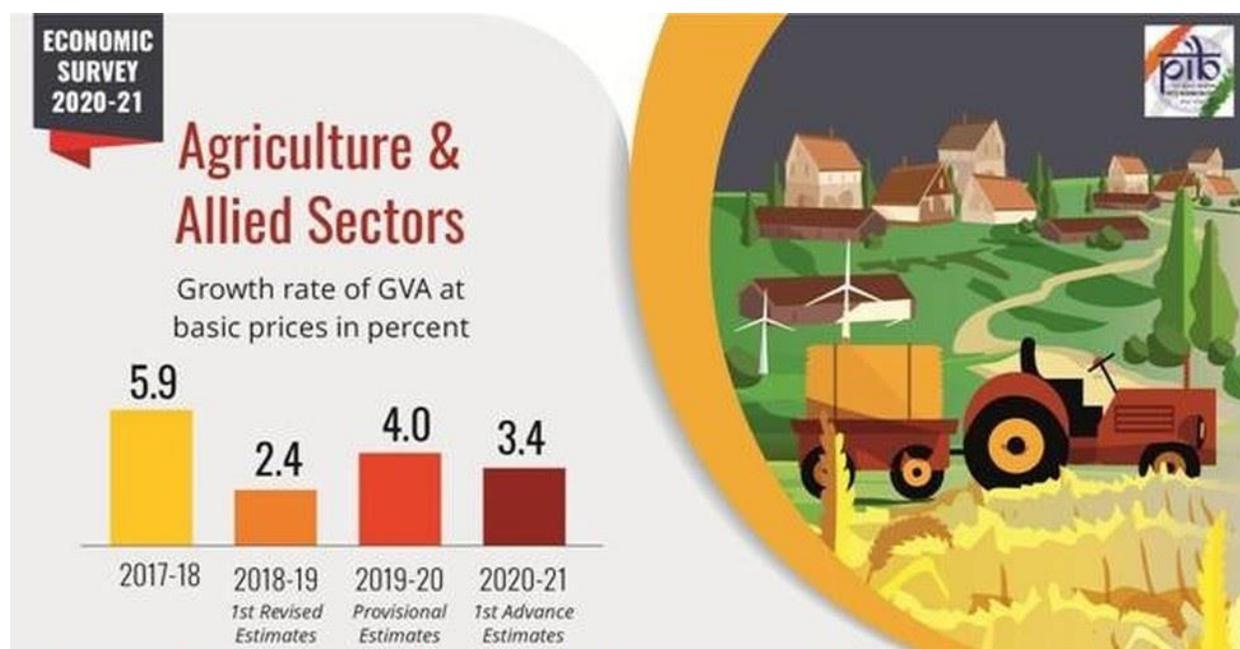
### Important value addition

#### National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED)

- It is an apex organization of marketing cooperatives for agricultural produce in India.
- It was founded on 2nd October 1958.
- It is registered under the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002.
- NAFED is now one of the largest procurement as well as marketing agencies for agricultural products in India.
- **Objectives:** (1) To organize, promote and develop marketing, processing and storage of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce; (2) To distribute agricultural machinery, implements and other inputs; (3) To act and assist for technical advice in agricultural production

#### [Economic Survey 2020-21: Agriculture](#)

- According to the Economic Survey, 2020-21 The Agriculture and Allied activities clocked a growth of 3.4% at constant prices during 2020-21 (first advance estimate).



### Key takeaways

- As per the Provisional Estimates of National Income released by CSO on 29th May, 2020, the share of Agriculture and Allied Sectors in Gross Value Added (GVA) of the country at current prices is 17.8% for the year 2019-20.
- In the Agriculture year 2019-20 (as per Fourth Advance Estimates), total food grain production in the country is estimated at record 296.65 million tonnes which is higher by 11.44 million tonnes than the production of food grain of 285.21 million tonnes achieved during 2018-19.
- In 2019-20, the major agricultural and allied export destinations were USA, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- The top agriculture and related products exported from India were marine products, basmati rice, buffalo meat, spices, non-basmati rice, cotton raw, oil meals, sugar, castor oil and tea.
- Livestock sector contributed 4.19% of total GVA in 2018-19.
- During the last 5 years ending 2018-19, Food Processing Industries (FPI) sector has been growing at an Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR) of around 9.99% as compared to around 3.12% in Agriculture and 8.25% in Manufacturing at 2011-12 prices.

## ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

### Rethinking waste management: Improving governance in India's North East

**Context:** North East India is the land of rising sun and has an abundance of fresh water sources. But that may not remain so in the coming days.

#### Issues of Waste Management in North East India

- **Lack of Waste Management system in ecological sensitive areas:** The world's largest, fully habituated river island Majuli is situated in the middle of Brahmaputra, with the Kaziranga National Park touching Jorhat and Nagaon. Yet, none of these places have any waste management system or a waste water treatment plant
- **River Pollution:** At least 85 per cent of the waste in the North East is unceremoniously dumped, without processing and treatment in the Ganga, Yamuna and Brahmaputra. Several dumpsites in India's north-eastern states are located at wetlands or river banks.
- **Untapped Employment Generation Potential:** If the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 are implemented in letter and spirit, more than 12,000 jobs can be created in these towns. If extended to all villages, nearly 40,000 jobs related to door-to-door collection, composting and recycling value chain can be created.
- **Inadequate Capabilities:** Municipalities in the North East lack the technical know-how. There is also a lack of political commitment from the local elected representatives. Some staff members lack adequate training and exposure. Most trainings are organised for commissioners and engineers but seldom for collection staff or sanitary supervisors.

#### Way Ahead

- **Strong Commitment:** If we look at the top five cleanest cities of India, did they do it not because they received money but because there was strong commitment by people & authorities concerned.
- **Involving Community rather than spending big of technology:** The solution for India lies in strengthening the existing system and integrating the informal sector in collection and recycling. The informal sector can remove more than 60 per cent of inorganic waste from dumpsites with little investment and save more energy through recycling.
- **Encouraging Small Companies:** None of the cities that figured in the cleanest city of the country employed large companies for waste management. Rather, they relied on good local players, including self-help groups for women, waste picker cooperatives or even local non-profits and small contractor.
- **Enforcement of Waste Segregation Laws:** A lack of municipal by-laws or enforcement of penalties regarding littering and non-segregation are the two worst forms of waste governance deficits. If authorities do not enforce it, cities cannot be kept clean for long time.
- **Collecting fees for Services rendered:** It is important that people must learn to pay for services. The provision for payment for waste services are there in the laws but are not enforced because of objections by politicians. Surveys suggest that people will pay segregate their waste if there are systems in place
- **Reducing Corruption in administration:** There is a direct link between cleaner cities and corruption-free cities. For Ex: Top 10 cleanest cities of the world: Calgary, Honolulu, Helsinki, Kobe, Oslo, Adelaide, Brisbane, Wellington etc. have very low corruption index.

## Conclusion

- North East India needs to reform its municipal governance along with building capacity of the lower staff of the municipal systems. The Swachh Bharat Mission will not succeed as long as we do not see commitment from the administration.

## Climate Change and India in 2021

### Issues

- **High Vulnerability to Climate risks:** 75% of districts in India, home to over half the population, were vulnerable to extreme climate risks. Drought-affected districts have increased by yearly average of 13 times over the last two decades. The frequency of cyclones has also doubled.
- **Increased Frequency of extreme Climate events:** While India witnessed 250 extreme climate events between 1970 and 2005, the country recorded 310 extreme climate events after 2005 alone.
- **Financial Losses:** Between 1990 and 2019, India incurred losses exceeding \$100 billion.
- **Enhanced Intensity of Extreme Climate events:** The intensity of floods increased eightfold and that of associated events such as landslides and heavy rainfall increased by over 20 times since 1970.
- **Swapping Trend:** Over 40% of Indian districts now show a swapping trend: flood-prone areas are becoming drought-prone, and vice-versa.

### Steps India should take in 2021 to enhance its resilience and adaptive capacity against extreme climate events

- **Focused Mission:** India should create an Environment and Health De-risking Mission to increase emergency preparedness, secure critical resources and build resilient infrastructure and governance systems to counter the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climate events.
- **Decentralization:** Focus on democratising local climate-related and weather-related data along with integrating risk projections in national, sub-national and district disaster and climate plans.
- **Focus on Indigenous Communities:** Restoration, revival, and recreation of traditional climate-resilient practices, with a special focus on indigenous communities, often on the front lines of ecosystem conservation.
- **Creation of Comprehensive Climate Risk Atlas:** This Atlas should identify, assess and project chronic and acute risks at a granular level to better prepare against extreme climate events. The Atlas would also help in assessing the resilience and adaptation capabilities of communities & business and act as risk-informed decision-making toolkit for policymakers. It would help in climate-proofing critical infrastructure.
- **Financing Tools:** To finance climate action at scale, risk financing instruments and risk retention and identification tools should be supplemented by contingency and adaptation funds such as the Green Climate Fund. This will enhance the public finance pool and gear up efficient allocation across sectors at risk by mobilising investments on critical infrastructures and resilient community actions.
- **International Collaboration:** As the permanent chair of the recently formed Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, India should play a pivotal role in attracting private investments into climate-proofing of infrastructure. It should also promote adaptation-based infrastructure investment decision making in these countries.

### Connecting the dots

- Paris Climate Deal
  - Do you think COVID-19 has enhanced environmental consciousness of the world?
- 

## Community fishing prohibited in Deepor Beel

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity  
**In news**

- The Kamrup (Metropolitan) district administration has prohibited community fishing in Deepor Beel.
- It is a wetland on the south-western edge of Guwahati.
- It is Assam's only Ramsar site.

### **Key takeaways**

- The order was necessary to prevent fishing, excavation and construction in and around the wetland that has been shrinking over the years.
- Deepor Beel was designated a Ramsar site in 2002 for sustaining a range of aquatic life forms besides 219 species of birds.

### **Important value additions**

#### **The Ramsar Convention**

- It was signed on 2nd February, 1971.
- It is one of the oldest inter-governmental accords signed by member countries.
- **Objective:** To preserve the ecological character of their wetlands of international importance.
- It is named after Ramsar, the Iranian city where the treaty was signed.
- Places chosen for conservation under it are given the tag 'Ramsar site'.
- **The aim of the Ramsar list:** To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits.

#### **Related articles:**

- Other recently added Ramsar sites: [Click here](#)
- 

## 2020 Was 8th Warmest Year Since 1901

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Climate  
**In news**

- A statement on Climate of India during 2020 was recently released by India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- According to it, the year 2020 was the eighth warmest since 1901 but it was substantially lower than the highest warming observed in 2016.

### **Key takeaways**

- The past two decades - 2001-2010 and 2011-2020 - were also the warmest decades on record with anomalies of 0.23 degree Celsius and 0.34 degree Celsius respectively, indicating the overall rising temperature.
- 12 out of the 15 warmest years since 1901 were during the past 15 years itself - between 2006 and 2020.
- India's average annual mean temperature during 1901-2020 showed an increasing trend of 0.62 degree Celsius per 100 years.
- It also showed significant increasing trend in maximum temperature (0.99 degree C/100 years) and relatively lower increasing trend (0.24 degree C/100 years) in minimum temperature.
- During 2020, annual mean land surface air temperature averaged was 0.29 degree Celsius above normal (based on the data of 1981-2010).
- The five warmest years on record in order were: 2016, 2009, 2017, 2010, and 2015.
- The 2020 Northeast monsoon season (October-December) rainfall over the country as a whole was normal (101% of LPA).

### [Joint study group and surveillance squad constituted to check Ammoniacal Nitrogen in River Yamuna](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Pollution

**In news**

- Recently, a meeting was convened between the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the officials of Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Irrigation & Water Resources Department, Haryana and Irrigation and Flood Control Department, Delhi.
- **Objective:** To discuss the recurring issue of increase in Ammoniacal Nitrogen in River Yamuna and short and long term remedial actions required.

**Key takeaways**

- The long deliberations on the issue identified and agreed that possible reasons could be: (1) Discharge of untreated sewage from upstream towns in Haryana; (2) Discharge from industrial units, Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) and Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs); (3) Illegal discharge of sewage from unsewered colonies in outer Delhi through tankers; (4) Lean flow in the River Yamuna and anaerobic decomposition of accumulated sludge on river bed.
- A study group comprising Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Haryana State Pollution Control Board, Delhi Pollution Control Committee, Irrigation and Water Resources Department, Haryana, Irrigation and Flood Control Department, Delhi has been constituted.
- The group will review: (1) Uniform monitoring protocol and requirement of strengthening monitoring mechanism; (2) Analyse past data and carry out field survey to identify critical hotspots as well as period of high ammonia levels.
- It has also been asked to suggest short and long term measures for sustained solutions, and submit its report within a month.

**Important value additions**

Ammoniacal nitrogen (NH<sub>3</sub>-N) is a measure for the amount of ammonia, a toxic pollutant often found in landfill leachate and in waste products, such as sewage, liquid manure and other liquid organic waste products.

## Government approves advisory for management of Human-Wildlife Conflict across the country

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

**In news**

- The Standing Committee of National Board of Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has approved the advisory for management of Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) in the country.
- The advisory makes important prescriptions for the States/ Union Territories for dealing with Human-Wildlife conflict situations and seeks expedited inter-departmental coordinated and effective actions.

### **Key measures approved**

- Empowering gram panchayats in dealing with the problematic wild animals as per the section 11 (1) (b) of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Utilising add-on coverage under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna for crop compensation against crop damage due to HWC.
- Augmenting fodder and water sources within the forest areas.
- Payment of a portion of ex-gratia as interim relief within 24 hours of the incident to the victim/family.
- Prescribing inter-departmental committees at local/state level.
- Adoption of early warning systems
- Creation of barriers
- Dedicated circle wise Control Rooms with toll free hotline numbers which could be operated on 24X7 basis.
- Identification of hotspots and formulation and implementation of special plans for improved stall-fed farm animals etc.
- Inclusion of Caracal, a medium size wild cat found in some parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, into the list of critically endangered species

### **Do you know?**

- The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is constituted by the Central Government under Section 5 A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA).
- The Standing Committee of NBWL considers proposals after a series of levels of scrutiny and have recommendations of the State Chief Wildlife Warden, State Government and the State Board for Wildlife.
- During the meetings of SC-NBWL, the views of the expert members are taken into consideration before arriving at decisions.

### **Important value additions**

#### **The caracal**

- It is a medium-sized wild cat native to Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and India.
- It is Typically nocturnal.

- The caracal is highly secretive and difficult to observe.
- It is territorial.
- It lives mainly alone or in pairs.
- The caracal is a carnivore
- Caracals were tamed and used for hunting in ancient Egypt.
- In India, the caracal occurs in Sariska Tiger Reserve and Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve.
- **IUCN Red List:** Least Concern since 2002
- **Threats:** Habitat loss due to agricultural expansion, the building of roads and settlements
- **CITES status:** (1) African caracal populations - Appendix II; (2) Asian populations - Appendix I.



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### [NCAVES India Forum 2021 organised](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Ecology; Economy

**In news**

- Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) India Forum-2021 is being organised.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).



### Key takeaways

- The NCAVES Project is funded by the EU.
- **Jointly implemented by:** United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).
- **In India, it is being implemented by:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).
- India is one of the five countries taking part in this project.
- The other countries being Brazil, China, South Africa and Mexico.
- The participation in the project has helped MoSPI commence the compilation of the Environment Accounts as per the UN-SEEA framework and release environmental accounts in its publication “EnviStats India” on an annual basis since 2018.
- Under the NCAVES Project, the India-EVL Tool has been developed.
- This is a look-up tool giving a snapshot of the values of various ecosystem services in the different States of the country, based on about 80 studies conducted across the country.

### Electric vehicles: A Case Study of Norway

**Context:** In 2020, Norway further cemented its position as a world leader in renewable technologies, as battery electric vehicles (BEVs) made up more than half of all vehicles sold in the country during the year

#### Statistics of auto market in Norway

- In 2020, the market share of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) rose to 54%, up from 42% in 2019.
- Only a decade ago, BEVs made up just 1 per cent of the overall market.
- If hybrid vehicles are included, the share of electric vehicles sold in 2020 is 83 per cent.
- Petrol and diesel cars sold, which commanded a 71 per cent market share in 2015, are now at 17 per cent.
- There are 2.8m vehicles on Norway’s roads and more than 260,000 are fully electric, nearly 9% of the total car stock.

#### How Norway became an electric vehicles pioneer?

- **Contradiction:** Norway, which is the biggest producer of crude oil in Western Europe, has in the recent past made a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy.
- **Early Start in 1990s itself:** A country roughly the size of Maharashtra in terms of area, it began the electric push in the 1990s in an effort to cut pollution, congestion, and noise in urban centres.
- **Ambitious Target:** In 2017, Norway's parliament set a non-binding goal to ensure that all cars sold should be zero emissions by 2025. The UK and Germany plan to do this by 2030, and France by 2040. In India, the government has set a target of 30 per cent vehicles becoming EV by 2030
- **Reduced taxes:** Norway has some of the highest taxes in the world on what it regards as luxury goods, which includes cars. So reduced taxes on electric vehicles, with numerous incentives, is bound to entice car buyers.
- **Incentives:** The government lets electric cars run on bus lanes, while toll roads are free for them. Also, Parking lots offer a free charge for electric vehicles.
- **Charging Infrastructure:** New charging stations are continuously being built on the nation's highways — a mix of regular charging stations and fast-chargers. At the moment, Norway has 10,000 publicly available charging points.
- **Policy Tweaks:** The country's policies have also encouraged carmakers to use Norway as a testing ground. As per the *CNN* report, Volkswagen's luxury brand Audi was the market leader in 2020, selling 9,227 units of its e-tron model, followed by Tesla's Model 3, which sold 7,770 units.
- **Blessed with Natural resource:** While Norway is still one of the world's big oil producers, it gets more than 90% of its power from hydroelectric sources. This goes some way to explain why the introduction of electric vehicles has been such a winner: as long as the rivers and waterfalls don't run dry, this is an infinite source of power that can also be applied to vehicles.

### Challenges Ahead

- **Dependence on Imports:** The country does not manufacture cars (with the exception of a Norwegian city electric car called Buddy produced by a homegrown firm Buddy Electric) and pretty much all of its vehicle fleet is imported.
- **Climate Footprint:** Although BEVs are environmentally friendly in a local context, globally they still leave big climate footprint. The manufacture of BEV batteries requires expensive and rare metals, while the secure disposal of used and broken batteries is a problem.
- **Burden on Developing Countries:** Concerns of disposal of used & broken batteries are conveniently palmed off on poor, vulnerable countries – such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, which produces 60% of the world's Cobalt – that lack the legislation to deal with them.
- **Difficult to Replicate:** Norway's policies are difficult to replicate in other parts of the world, mainly because the country can offer generous subsidies thanks to its revenues from oil and gas production. Thanks to its hydrocarbon wealth, Norway has been able to build the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, currently valued at \$1.3 trillion.

### [30th National Energy Conservation Awards \(NECA\) function organised](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Energy Resources; Conservation

#### In news

- Ministry of Power, in association with Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), organised the 30th National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA) function.

### Key takeaways

- During the event, the Standards and Labelling Programme for Air Compressors and Ultra High Definition (UHD) TV was launched on a voluntary basis.
- The energy consumption standards will be effective from 01st January 2021.
- This initiative is expected to save around 8.41 Billion Units of electricity for Air Compressors and 9.75 Billion Units for UHD TV till 2030.
- SAATHEE (State-wise Actions on Annual Targets and Headways on Energy Efficiency) – A portal for State Designated Agency for state level activities was also launched.
- BEE has developed this portal.
- It will facilitate real-time monitoring of the progress of implementation of various Energy Conservation endeavours at State level.

### Important value additions

#### Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Power, Government of India.
- It assists in developing policies and strategies.
- Objective: Reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.

#### Related articles:

- (DISCOMs) to be covered under the Energy Conservation (EC) Act, 2001: [Click here](#)

### [Management Effectiveness Evaluation Of Indian Zoos \(MEE-ZOO\) Framework launched](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

#### In news

- The Union Environment Minister launched the Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Indian Zoos (MEE-ZOO) framework.

### Key takeaways

- The framework proposes guidelines, criteria and indicators for evaluation of zoos of India in a manner which is discrete, holistic and independent.
- The assessment criteria and indicators look beyond the traditional concepts and include issues of animal welfare, husbandry and sustainability of resources and finance.
- The MEE-ZOO exercise is moving towards developing highest standards in Zoos across India.

- It will help in adhering to core values of accountability, transparency, innovation, use of technology, collaboration and integrity to achieve the mandate of conservation of endangered species.

## Mealworms the first insect to be approved in Europe as a human food

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Ecology; Biodiversity

**In news**

- Mealworm has become the first insect to be approved in Europe as a human food.

**Key takeaways**

- The decision by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) paves the way for mealworms to be used whole and dried in curries and other recipes and as a flour to make biscuits, pasta and bread.
- Rich in protein, fat and fibre, they are likely to be the first of many insects to feature on European's plates in the coming years.

**Important value additions**

- Mealworms are the larval form of the mealworm beetle, *Tenebrio molitor*, a species of darkling beetle.
- Despite their name, mealworms are beetle larvae rather than worms.
- They also go through four life stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult like all holometabolic insects.



## Mutual Funds (MF) Risk-o-meter becomes effective

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Ecology; Biodiversity

**In news**

- Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI's) decision on the "risk-o-meter" came into effect on January 1.

**Key takeaways**

- SEBI has made it mandatory for mutual fund houses to characterise the risk level of their schemes on a six-stage scale from "Low" to "Very High".
- All mutual funds shall, beginning January 1, assign a risk level to their schemes at the time of launch, based on the scheme's characteristics.

- The risk-o-meter must be evaluated on a monthly basis.
- Fund houses are required to disclose the risk-o-meter risk level along with the portfolio disclosure for all their schemes on their own websites as well as the website of the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) within 10 days of the close of each month.
- Any change in the risk-o-meter reading with regard to a scheme shall be communicated to the unit-holders of that scheme.
- The move will help investors to make a more informed investment decision.

### Important value additions

#### The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)

- It is the regulator of the securities and commodity market in India owned by the Government of India.
- It was established in 1988 and given statutory status through the SEBI Act, 1992.
- SEBI is responsible to the needs of three groups:
  - Issuers of securities
  - Investors
  - Market intermediaries
- Functions:
  - Quasi-legislative – drafts regulations
  - Quasi-judicial – passes rulings and orders
  - Quasi-executive – conducts investigation and enforcement action
- Powers:
  - To approve by-laws of Securities exchanges.
  - To require the Securities exchange to amend their by-laws.
  - Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognised Securities exchanges.
  - Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
  - Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more Securities exchanges.
  - Registration of Brokers and sub-brokers

#### Related articles:

- SEBI eases Fund-raising norms for firms: [Click here](#)
- Participatory notes: [Click here](#)

### [Saksham: a month long campaign for consumers of fossil fuels launched](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

#### In news

- With a view to create awareness among the consumers of fossil fuels, 'SAKSHAM', a month long campaign, was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas

#### Key takeaways

- The campaign shall highlight the adverse health and environmental impacts of increasing carbon footprints.
- 'SAKSHAM's idea is to convince consumers to switch to cleaner fuels and bring in behavioural change to use fossil fuel intelligently.
- The campaign will also spread awareness about 7 key drivers that Prime Minister recently mentioned, that would help India move towards cleaner energy.
- The key drivers include: (1) Moving towards a gas-based economy; (2) Cleaner use of fossil fuels; (3) Greater reliance on domestic sources to drive bio-fuels; (4) Achieving renewable targets with the set deadlines; (5) Increased use of electric vehicles to decarbonize mobility; (6) Increased use of cleaner fuels like Hydrogen; (7) Digital innovation across all energy systems.

### Model Tender for public procurement drafted by the Finance Ministry

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

**In news**

- The Finance Ministry (Expenditure Department) has drafted a model tender document for public procurement by all central government departments, in order to standardise the language and clauses included, and avoid contractual disputes.

**Key takeaways**

- Public procurement refers to the purchase of goods and services by the public sector or the government, accounting for an average 15% of GDP globally.
- In India, government procurement is estimated to constitute about 30% of GDP with the central government accounting for a major chunk.
- There is no standardised nomenclature in public procurement in India and a mix of American, European and Indian nomenclature has become common. E.g. participants in the Tender are called tenderers and bidders.
- The standard bidding document developed now, seeks to ease out this duality by mooted that the 'Tender' should refer to the tender document and process, while the term 'Bid' shall refer to the bidders' pitches;
- 'Bidder' is to be used instead of 'Tenderer' to refer to potential suppliers and the usage 'Bid document' be done away with, as per the proposed model.

### Unchecked flow of untreated industrial effluent increases pollution in Gujarat rivers

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Pollution

**In news**

- The unchecked flow of untreated industrial effluent into rivers in Gujarat has led to increasing pollution in the Sabarmati, Mahisagar, Narmada, Vishwamitri and Bhadar.

**Key takeaways**

- According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), the Sabarmati is among the most polluted rivers in the country.

- Gujarat ranks fourth among the top five States with highly polluted rivers, with as many as 20 rivers in the critically polluted category.
- As per the official parameters, if the chemical oxygen demand (COD), which indicates organic pollutant load, is higher than 250 mg per litre, then it should not be released into the rivers.
- Most of the Gujarat rivers where the effluents are dumped into, the COD level is in the range of 700 to 1000 mg per litre.
- While Dissolved Oxygen (DO) level (indicating the health of a river) in perennial rivers like Mahisgar should be in the range of 6 to 8 mg per litre, it is actually below 2.9 mg per litre.

## Dragon Fruit

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Ecology; Biodiversity

**In news**

- Dragon fruit was recently in news because the Gujarat government has decided to rename it as 'kamalam'.



### Important value additions

- Dragon fruit is the fruit of a species of wild cactus indigenous to South and Central America, where it is called pitaya or pitahaya.
- The fruit's flesh is usually white or red — although there is a less common yellow pitaya too — and is studded with tiny seeds rather like the kiwifruit.
- Largest Dragon fruit producer and exporter: **Vietnam**
- The Vietnamese call it thanh long, which translates to “dragon's eyes”, believed to be the origin of its common English name.
- Dragon fruit is also cultivated in Thailand, Taiwan, China, Australia, Israel, and Sri Lanka.
- It was brought to India in the 1990s, and is grown in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

- It grows in all kinds of soil, and does not require much water.

## CSIR-CMERI unveils India's First-ever Aqua Rejuvenation Plant

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure; Environment

**In news**

- CSIR-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute, Durgapur (West Bengal) unveiled the first-ever Waste Water Treatment Technology Model which purifies Waste Water for Irrigation/Farming purposes.
- It facilitates an Organic Farming Model through treated Waste Water.



**Key takeaways**

- Aqua Rejuvenation Plant (ARP) is an Integrated Waste Water Rejuvenation Model which has Six-Stage purification profile for comprehensive treatment of Waste Water, based upon diverse purification parameters.
- The approx. 24,000 litres of Water that can be rejuvenated using ARP will be sufficient for almost 4 acres of Agricultural Land (barring seasonal variations in water requirements).
- The used filtration media have been specially developed to handle Indian Sewage Water Parameters and based upon Geographical Variations they may be modified.
- The system has dual benefit. While the treated water is being used for irrigation purpose, the filtered sludge generated is also utilized as manure / fertilizer.
- The bio char prepared from dry leaves falling in autumn season is also used for mixing in soil as it reduces the water requirement for irrigation thus saving precious water.

## Two new species of a rare ant genus discovered in India

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Biodiversity; Environment

**In news**

- Two new species of a rare ant genus have been discovered in India.
- The species of the ant genus *Ooceraea* found in Kerala, and Tamil Nadu add to the diversity of this rare genus.

**Key takeaways**

- One of them found in the Periyar Tiger Reserve of Kerala, has been named *Ooceraea joshii*, in honour of Prof. Amitabh Joshi, a distinguished evolutionary biologist.
- The newly discovered ant species with ten segmented antennae, establish an old world lineage that contains a species emerging as the only model organism among the ant subfamily.

**[Draft 'Arctic' Policy](#)**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Environment

**In news**

- India has unveiled a new draft 'Arctic' policy that, among other things, commits to expanding scientific research, sustainable tourism and mineral oil and gas exploration in the Arctic region.



#### Key takeaways

- India expects the Goa-based National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research to lead scientific research and act as a nodal body to coordinate activities under it.
- **Aim:** (1) To put in place Arctic related programmes for mineral/oil and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes; (2) To encourage tourism and hospitality sectors in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises.
- Arctic research will help India's scientific community to study melting rates of the third pole — the Himalayan glaciers, which are endowed with the largest freshwater reserves in the world outside the geographic poles.

#### Do you know?

- India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic in 2007.
- Himadri is India's first permanent Arctic research station located at Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- It was set up during India's second Arctic expedition in 2008.

### [USA's new President restores America's participation in Paris Climate Agreement](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Environment

#### In news

- Joe Biden assumed office as President of the USA recently.
- Among the first orders he signed was one to restore America's participation in the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change.

**Key takeaways**

- America's return will take effect on February 19.
- USA has promised enforcement mechanism to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050, including a target no later than the end of his term in 2025, aided by a planned federal investment that will total \$1.7 trillion over ten years, besides private investments.
- The plan revolves around 10 million well-paying clean energy jobs with a focus on solar and wind power.
- This year's UN climate conference in Glasgow will see the new administration engaging UNFCCC member-nations to raise global ambition.

**Do you know?**

- The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement meant that the U.S. was no longer bound by its national pledge made under the pact: to achieve an economy-wide reduction of its GHG emissions by 26%-28% below the 2005 level in 2025.
- America also stopped its contribution to the UN's Green Climate Fund, to which it had pledged \$3 billion, after transferring an estimated \$1 billion.
- In the past, the U.S., under George W. Bush, had pulled out of the previous pact, the Kyoto Protocol, in 2001.

**Important value additions****What is the Paris Agreement?**

- In December 2015, 195 countries signed an agreement (came into force on Nov 2016) within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), dealing with greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance
- Objective: To slow the process of global warming by limiting a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Another crucial point in this agreement was attaining "net zero emissions" between 2050 and 2100. Nations have pledged "to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century".
- Developed countries were also told to provide financial resources to help developing countries in dealing with climate change and for adaptation measures.
- As part of a review mechanism, developed countries were also asked to communicate every two years the "indicative" amount of money they would be able to raise over the next two years, and information on how much of it would come from public financial sources.
- In contrast, developing countries have only been "encouraged" to provide such information every two years on a voluntary basis.
- The agreement also includes a mechanism to address financial losses faced by less developed nations due to climate change impacts like droughts, floods etc. However, developed nations won't face financial claims since it "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation".

**Related articles:**

- US and Paris Agreement: [Click here](#)
- Paris Climate Deal: India's Progress, Pandemic and Challenges: [Click here](#)

## In agri-credit, small farmers are still outside the fence

**Context:** Farmers on the warpath would mean that agriculture reforms have again occupied centrestage not just in the minds of the politicians but also policymaker.

Why farmers are protesting against farm laws: Click [here](#) and [here](#)

Why earlier government negotiations have failed: Click [here](#)

What is the long term solution advocated by experts: Click [here](#)

### Do You Know?

- As in the Agriculture Census, 2015-16, the total number of small and marginal farmers' households in the country stood at 12.56 crore. These small and marginal holdings make up 86.1% of the total holdings.
- RBI has set a cap that out of a bank's overall adjusted net bank credit, 18% must go to the agriculture sector, and within this, 8% must go to small and marginal farmers and 4.5% for indirect loans

### Farm Credit and Small Farmers

- **Institutional Credit avoids Debt Trap:** To enable small farmers to diversify their crops or improve their income they must have access to credit at reasonable rates of interest. This prevents them from going to private moneylender who charge exorbitant rate of interest leading to debt trap
- **Subsidised Agri-credit Increasing every year:** The central government announces an increase in the target of subsidised agriculture credit limit every year and banks surpass the target. In 2011-12, the target was ₹4.75-lakh crore; now, agri-credit has reached the target of ₹15-lakh crore in 2020-21 with an allocated subsidy of ₹21,175 crore.
- **Agri-credit has become less efficient in delivering agricultural growth:** Unfortunately, while the volume of credit has improved over the decades, its quality and impact on agriculture has only deteriorated. Over 85% of farmers' income remain stagnant over the years.
- **Agri-Credit not reaching Small Farmers:** In the last 10 years, agriculture credit increased by 500% but has not reached even 20% of the 12.56 crore small and marginal farmers. Households with the lowest land holding (up to two hectares) getting only about 15% of the subsidised outstanding loan from institutional sources (bank, co-operative society). The share is 79% for households having land more than two hectares.
- **Agri Machinery still financed by non-subsidised loans:** Despite an increase in agri-credit, even today, 95% of tractors and other agri-implements sold in the country are being financed by NBFCs, at 18% rate of interest or by Banks at 11%.
- **Bulk of subsidised agri-credit is grabbed by big farmers and agri-business companies:** A loose definition of agri-credit has led to the leakage of loans at subsidised rates to large companies in agri-business. In 2017, 53% of the agriculture credit that NABARD provided to Maharashtra was allocated to Mumbai city and suburbs, where there are no agriculturists, only agri-business.
- **Institutional Credit is Unevenly Distributed:** RBI's internal working group in 2019 found that in some States, credit disbursement to the farm sector was higher than their agriculture GDP and the ratio of crop loans disbursed to input requirement was very unevenly distributed. Examples are in Kerala (326%), Andhra Pradesh (254%), Tamil Nadu (245%), Punjab (231%) and Telangana (210%).
- **Diversion of credit for non-agriculture purposes:** The subsidised credit disbursed at a 4%-7% rate of interest is being disbursed to other purposes due to corruption and loopholes in the

system. At times these loans are refinanced to small farmers in the open market at a rate of interest of up to 36%.

- **Ignored by new farm laws:** Even [new farm laws](#) have not addressed the reform in the agriculture credit system

### Way Forward

- **Direct Income Support:** One way to empower small and marginal farmers is by giving them direct income support on a per hectare basis rather than hugely subsidising credit.
- **Promoting Farmer Producer Organisations(FPO):** Streamlining the agri-credit system to facilitate higher crop loans to farmer producer organisations, or the FPOs of small farmers against commodity stocks can be a win-win model to spur agriculture growth
- **Leveraging Technology:** With mobile phone penetration among agricultural households in India being as high as 89.1%, the prospects of aggressive effort to improve institutional credit delivery through technology-driven solutions can reduce the extent of the financial exclusion of agricultural households.
- **Promoting New Age Agri-Entrepreneurs:** There are reports that farmers have been able to avail themselves of loans through mobile phone apps. These apps use satellite imagery reports which capture the extent of land owned by farmers in States where land records are digitised and they grow the crop to extend the Kisan Credit Card loans digitally
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Other steps needed are reforming the land leasing framework and creating a national-level agency to build consensus among States and the Centre concerning agriculture credit reforms to fill the gap and reach out to the most number of small and marginal farmers.

### [USA re-joining Paris Accord](#)

**Context:** Joe Biden assumed office as President of the United States on January 20, 2021, and among the first orders he signed was one to restore America's participation in the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change, that premised on voluntary targets for national emissions cuts

His decision on America's return will take effect on February 19, which would be 107 days after its [withdrawal under the Donald Trump administration became formal on November 4, 2020](#).

### US and Pollution

- **Share in Global GHG Emission:** The U.S. accounts for 15% of global GHG emissions, but it is the biggest legacy contributor of atmosphere-warming gases.
- **Sectoral Contribution to GHG Emission:** Transport (28%) and power (27%) are the two biggest national sectors contributing to GHG emissions, followed by industry (22%), agriculture (10%) and Commercial and residential emissions together make up only 13%
- **Major Contributor of Methane Pollution:** Significantly, 10% of U.S. emissions are methane, which has a greater warming effect than CO<sub>2</sub>, and 81% is carbon dioxide. The rest is made up of nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases.

### Do You Know?

- On the long road to Paris, the U.S., under George W. Bush, had pulled out of the previous pact, the Kyoto Protocol, in 2001.
- Since Trump Presidency (2016 onwards), US has
  - Quit the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. cultural agency UNESCO
  - Pulled out of Iran nuclear deal

- Cut funding for the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and U.N. agency that helps Palestinian refugees (UNRWA)
- Opposed a U.N. migration pact
- [Withdrew U.S. from the World Health](#) Organization (WHO)

#### What changes did the Trump administration make on climate?

- **No more bound by pledges:** The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement meant that the U.S. was no longer bound by its national pledge made under the pact -to achieve an economy-wide reduction of its GHG emissions by 26%-28% below the 2005 level in 2025 and to make best efforts to reduce emissions.
- **Global Funding Stopped:** America also stopped its contribution to the UN's Green Climate Fund, to which it had pledged \$3 billion, after transferring an estimated \$1 billion.
- **Supported Fossil fuel based industries:** On the contrary, the Trump regime focused on relaxing controls on emissions from fossil fuel-based industries, diluting standards on air quality and vehicular emissions, hydrofluorocarbon leaking and venting from air-conditioning system.
- **Revoked Protection to Natural Habitats:** Trump administration loosened the way the government calculated the social cost of carbon, restraining individual States such as California from setting higher standards, revoking protection for natural habitats, including the Arctic sought by the oil and gas industry, and for individual wildlife species
- **Tweaked Environmental legislations:** In all, more than 100 environmental rules were tinkered with by the administration, with some rule reversals remaining in process when the presidential election took place, and others taken to court.
- **Nullified Clean Power Plan:** It was a major provision from the Obama-era to cut power sector emissions by 32% over 2005 levels by 2030. This was initially replaced with the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule, with a reduction effect of only 0.7%. (However, the ACE rule was struck down by a court, giving Mr. Biden the freedom to reformulate a strong rule)

#### What areas will Mr. Biden focus on to cut emissions?

- **Dedicated Team:** Mr. Biden, who has formed a high-powered team including special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry, to lead clean development, has placed climate change front and centre among his priorities.
- **Carbon Neutrality:** New President Biden has promised an “enforcement mechanism to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050”, including a target no later than the end of his term in 2025
- **Enhanced Financing:** The plan to achieve carbon neutrality is being aided by a planned federal investment that will total \$1.7 trillion over ten years, besides private investments.
- **Comprehensive Plan for Climate Action:** The plan revolves around 10 million well-paying clean energy jobs with a focus on solar and wind power, close linkages between university research and the private sector, active support for carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and a renaissance in green transport.
- **Multilateralism and Accountability:** In his Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice released before the election, Mr. Biden says America will strongly support multilateralism again, but also call for accountability from other countries, including the top emitter, China, on GHG emissions

#### What does Mr. Biden's policy mean for other countries?

- Increased participation from US in international forums and seeking accountability from others means that nations that default could face carbon adjustment fees or quotas.

- This year's UN climate conference in Glasgow will see the new administration engaging UNFCCC member-nations to raise global ambition.
- It also means that there are hopes for developing countries like India who can get aid through Green Climate Fund that will help access cleaner expensive technologies from developed nations.

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## Climate Adaptation Summit 2021

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations & GS- III – Climate change

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister addressed the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021 recently.
- **Hosted by:** Netherlands

**Key takeaways**

- The summit will have a significant focus on securing new investments to ensure that millions of smallholder farmers can adapt to the stresses of climate on food production.
- During the summit, it was said that India is targeting 450 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity by 2030.
- It is also promoting LED lights and saving 38 million tons of carbon-di-oxide emissions annually.
- India is going to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
- Clean cooking fuel is being provided to 80 million rural households.
- 64 million households are being connected to piped water supply.

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## Place in news: Sigur Plateau

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

**In News**

- The Supreme Court appointed conservationist Nandita Hazarika as Member of a Technical Committee constituted by it on October 14, 2020 to hear complaints by land owners against the action taken by the Nilgris Collector, which included “arbitrary variance in acreage of the elephant corridor.”

**Key takeaways**

- On October 14, SC upheld the Tamil Nadu government's authority to notify an 'elephant corridor' and protect the migratory path of the animals through the Nilgiri biosphere Reserve.
- The corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau.

**Do you know?**

- Sigur Plateau is a plateau in the north and east of Nilgiri District in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu.

- It connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats and sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity.
- It has the Nilgiri Hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar River Valley on its north-eastern side.
- The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water.

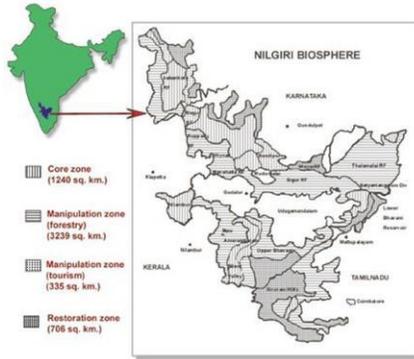


Image source: [Click here](#)

## [National Marine Turtle Action Plan](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Environment; Biodiversity  
**In news**

- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has released ‘Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Guidelines’ and ‘National Marine Turtle Action Plan’.

### Key takeaways

- The documents contain ways and means to guide improved coordination amongst the government, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders on the response to cases of stranding, entanglement, injury or mortality of marine mammals, and also conservation of marine turtles.
- These two documents highlight:
  1. actions to be taken for handling stranded animals on the shore, stranded or entangled animals in the sea or on a boat,
  2. management actions for improved coordination,
  3. reducing threats to marine species and their habitats,
  4. rehabilitation of degraded habitats,
  5. enhancing people’s participation,
  6. advance scientific research and exchange of information on marine mammals and marine turtles and their habitats.

### Important value additions

#### Status of turtles in India

- Five species of Indian turtles along with their IUCN status are as follows:

1. Olive Ridley – Vulnerable
  2. Green turtle – Endangered
  3. Loggerhead – Vulnerable
  4. Hawksbill – Critically Endangered
  5. Leather back – Vulnerable
- They are protected in Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, under Schedule I.
  - They are also protected under the Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation programme.

**Related articles:**

- World Turtle Day 2020: [Click here](#)

## ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

### [Species in news: Kolar Leaf-Nosed Bat](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

**In news**

- The Karnataka Forest Department, along with the Bat Conservation India Trust (BCIT), is on a war footing to save the Kolar Leaf-Nosed Bat from extinction.



**Important value additions**

- **Common Name:** Kolar leaf-nosed bat or leafletted leaf-nosed bat.
- **Scientific Name:** Hipposideros hypophyllus.
- It is a species of bat in the family Hipposideridae.
- **Habitat:** Its natural habitats are subtropical or tropical dry forests and caves.
- It is endemic to India.
- It is found only in one cave in Hanumanahalli village in the Kolar district of Karnataka.
- Its population is less than 200 individuals.
- **IUCN Red List:** critically endangered

**Gangetic River Dolphin**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions

**In news**

- A video of a group of men and boys in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh district beating to death a Gangetic river dolphin surfaced on social media recently.
- An endangered species, the Gangetic River Dolphin is recognised as the National Aquatic Animal of India.

**Important value additions****Gangetic Dolphin**

- **Scientific Name:** Platanista gangetica
- These are generally blind.
- They catch their prey by emitting an ultrasonic sound which reaches the prey.
- These are also called Susu.
- It is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems and in the Ganga's tributaries.
- **Threats:** Construction of dams, Pollution, excessive silting and sand mining.
- It has been recognized by the Indian Government as its National Aquatic Animal
- It is the official animal of the Guwahati, Assam.
- **IUCN Status:** Endangered

**Do you know?**

- They are included in Appendix I (most endangered) of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES).
- They are also included in Appendix II of the [Convention on Migratory Species](#) (CMS).
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga celebrates 5th October as National Ganga River Dolphin Day.

**Related articles:**

- Project Dolphin announced: [Click here](#)
- Project Lion and Project Dolphin: [Click here](#)

**[India home to both species of red panda: ZSI](#)**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Ecology and Biodiversity

**In news**

- Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India have concluded that India is home to both the (sub) species — Himalayan red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) and the Chinese red panda (*Ailurus styani*).

**Key takeaways**

- The Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh splits the red panda into these two phylogenetic species.
- The red panda was considered a monotypic species till 2020 until the scientists studied its genetic make-up with respect to the geographical distribution and described the occurrence of the two species.
- The reason for the reduction in the population size of the Himalayan red panda is due to the geological and climatic oscillations as the landscape was exposed to heavier topographic and geological changes through repeated cycles of the wet and dry periods during the last glacial maxima and Pleistocene Era.
- It is considered an indicator species for ecological change, the red panda is shy, solitary and arboreal animal. It primarily feeds on bamboo and avoids human presence.
- Director of the ZSI, said the overall conservation of this ecologically sensitive species required an effort from both the national and international stakeholders and adequate awareness among the local communities.

**Important value additions**

- The **red panda** (*Ailurus fulgens*) is a mammal species native to the eastern Himalayas and southwestern China.
- It is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List
- **Threats:** Habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching, and inbreeding depression.
- Despite its name, it is not closely related to the giant panda

**Related articles:**

- Zoological Survey of India lists 62 species of Skinks: [Click here](#)
- Malayan Giant Squirrel could decline by 90% in India by 2050: Zoological Survey of India (ZSI): [Click here](#)
- Red Panda: [Click here](#)

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**[The Indian Sunderbans home to 428 species of birds: ZSI](#)**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Biodiversity; Environment

**In news**

- A recent publication of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) states that the Indian Sunderbans, which is part of the largest mangrove forest in the world, is home to 428 species of birds.
- Of the 428 birds listed, some, like the masked finfoot and the Buffy fish owl, are recorded only from the Sunderbans.
- The area is home to nine out of 12 species of kingfishers found in the country and rare species such as the Goliath heron and the spoon-billed sandpiper.

**Important value additions**

- The Indian Sunderbans also includes the Sunderban Tiger Reserve.
- It is home to about 96 royal Bengal tigers as per the last census in 2020.
- It is a world heritage site and a Ramsar site.

**The masked finfoot**

- The masked finfoot or Asian finfoot is an aquatic bird from the fresh and brackish wetlands of the eastern Indian subcontinent, Indochina, Malaysia and Indonesia.



### The buffy fish owl

- The buffy fish owl, also known as the Malay fish owl, is a fish owl in the family Strigidae.
- It is native to Southeast Asia and lives foremost in tropical forests and wetlands.
- Due to its wide distribution and assumed stable population, it is listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List since 2004



## INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

### [Cabinet approves Deepening and Optimization of Inner Harbour Facilities at Paradip Port](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- Cabinet approved recently Deepening and Optimization of Inner Harbour Facilities.
- Development of Western Dock on Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) basis under PPP mode was also approved to handle cape size vessels at Paradip Port.
- Approved by: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister

**Key takeaways**

- On commissioning of the project, it shall cater to the requirement of coal & limestone imports besides export of granulated slag & finished steel products.
- The project shall also facilitate (i) de-congestion of the Port, (ii) reduce Sea freight making coal imports cheaper, and (iii) boost the industrial economy in the hinterland of the port leading to creation of job opportunities.

**Important value additions**

**Paradip port**

- Paradip Port Trust (PPT), a Major Port under Government of India and administered under the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963, was commissioned in 1966 as a mono commodity port for export of iron ore.
- Location: Odisha

**Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Contract**

- A build-operate-transfer (BOT) contract is a model used to finance large projects, typically infrastructure projects developed through public-private partnerships.
- The BOT scheme refers to the initial concession by a public entity such as a local government to a private firm to both build and operate the project in question.
- After a set time frame, typically two or three decades, control over the project is returned to the public entity.

### [Indian Railway completes successful speed trials of the new design Vistadome Tourist Coaches](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- In order to provide world class modern travelling experience for the passengers, Indian Railways successfully completed the speed trials of the newly designed Vistadome tourist coach manufactured by Integral Coach Factory.

**Key takeaways**

- The coach has successfully completed 180 KMPH oscillation trial.
- The Vistadome tourist coach is provided with larger viewing area including roof top glasses with 44 seats for passengers with rotation up to 180 degree to face the direction of train movement.
- The coach is also having Wi-Fi based Passenger information system.
- Integral Coach Factory (ICF) is a manufacturer of rail coaches located in Perambur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.



Elegant Interior of the Vistadome Coach by ICF

## [Progress of Work on Railways National Project in Jammu and Kashmir reviewed](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

### **In news**

- Progress of Work on Railways National Project in Jammu and Kashmir was recently reviewed.
- Work on the Remaining Portion of the Udampur Srinagar Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) Project to be completed in Mission Mode.
- Focus on Providing All-Weather Connectivity to Kashmir Region from rest of the Country.

### **Important value additions**

- The USBRL is a National project undertaken by the Indian Railways for construction of broad-gauge railway line through the Himalayas.
- **Aim:** Connecting the Kashmir region with rest of the country.
- The all-weather, comfortable, convenient and cost effective mass transportation system will be the catalyst for the overall development of the region.
- Currently, the line is in operational use for running trains between Baramulla-Banihal in Kashmir valley and Jammu-Udhampur-Katra.

## [ADB, India sign \\$231 million loan to enhance power generation capacity in Assam](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations & GS-III – Infrastructure; Energy

### In news

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India signed a \$231 million loan to augment electricity generation capacity in Assam through construction of a 120 megawatts (MW) hydroelectric power plant.

### Key takeaways

- This is the third tranche loan for the ongoing Assam Power Sector Investment Programme that was approved by the ADB Board in July 2014.
- The programme, including its two previous tranches, focuses on enhancing capacity and efficiency of the energy generation and distribution systems in Assam to improve electricity service to end users.
- Increased supply of affordable and clean electricity facilitated through the project will help improve living conditions, promote business expansion, and increase employment opportunities in the state beside reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- The project is run-of-the-river project over Kopili river which will help increase electricity supplied from clean energy by 469 gigawatthour (GWh) by 2025 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 360,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually.
- A \$2 million grant from Japan fund for poverty reduction (JFPR) is also associated with the project to finance equipment and consulting services.

### Related articles:

- ADB signs \$500 million loan for Delhi-Meerut RRTS Corridor: [Click here](#)
- ADB and India sign \$177 million loan for Maharashtra roads: [Click here](#)
- 15-billion ADB loan to India to fund COVID-19 emergency: [Click here](#)

## [Kochi-Mangaluru natural gas pipeline](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

### In news

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate the Kochi-Mangaluru Natural Gas Pipeline to the nation on January 5 at 11 am via video conferencing.

### Key Highlights

- The 450-km pipeline has been built by GAIL (India) Ltd
- It has transportation capacity of 12 million standard cubic metres per day
- It will carry natural gas from the liquefied natural gas (LNG) regassification terminal at Kochi to Mangaluru
- Laying of the pipeline was an engineering challenge as the route of the pipeline necessitated it to cross water bodies at more than 100 locations. This was done through a special technique called horizontal directional drilling method.
- The pipeline will supply environment friendly and affordable fuel to households, transportation sector and to commercial and industrial units across the districts along the pipeline.

## Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions & GS-III – Infrastructure

### In news

- Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is initiating the ambitious Project of Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS) with potential airline operators.



### Key takeaways

- Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is initiating the process of commencing operations of the Seaplane services, on the select routes, under a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) framework through prospective airline operators.
- The project execution and implementation would be through Sagarmala Development Company Ltd (SDCL), which is under the administrative control of the Ministry.
- Several destinations are envisaged for seaplane operations.
- The proposed Origin-Destination pairs under Hub and Spoke model include various islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep, Guwahati Riverfront & Umranso Reservoir in Assam, Yamuna Riverfront / Delhi (as Hub) to Ayodhya etc.
- [One such Seaplane Service is already in operation between Kevadia and Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister on 31st October 2020.](#)
- To run more such services in the coastal areas or proximity to water bodies, SDCL is keen to associate with the interested scheduled / non-scheduled airline operators.

### [Double Stack Long Haul Container Train Operation to be flagged off](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- On 7th January 2021, Indian Prime Minister will flag off the world's first Double Stack Long Haul 1.5 Km long Container Train pulled by electric traction from New Ateli -New Kishangarh.

**Key takeaways**

- Double Stack Long Haul Container Train Operation will have an enhanced axle load of 25 tons.
- The design will maximize capacity utilization and uniform distributed and point loading.
- These wagons can carry four times in terms of container units compared to the current traffic on Indian Railways.

### [New Rewari - New Madar Section Of WDFC to be flagged off](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister will dedicate to the nation the 306 Km New Rewari - New Madar Section of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) on 7th January 2021.

**Key takeaways**

- The New Rewari - New Madar section of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor is situated in Haryana and Rajasthan.
- The opening of this stretch will benefit various industries of Rajasthan & Haryana.
- It will also enable better usage of the container depot of CONCOR at Kathuwas.
- This section will also ensure seamless connectivity with the western ports of Kandla, Pipavav, Mundhra, and Dahej situated in Gujarat.
- With the inauguration of this section, seamless connectivity between the WDFC and EDFC will be achieved.
- Earlier the 351-km New Bhaupur- New Khurja section of the EDFC was dedicated to the nation by the Prime Minister on 29th December 2020.

### [World Bank Signs \\$105 Million Project to Improve Waterways in West Bengal](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations & GS-III - Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Government of India, the Government of West Bengal and the World Bank signed a \$105 million project to improve the inland water transport infrastructure in Kolkata, West Bengal.

**Key takeaways**

- The West Bengal Inland Water Transport, Logistics and Spatial Development Project will facilitate: (1) Passenger and freight movement across the Hooghly river; (2) Undertake spatial planning to improve accessibility in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area; (3) Enhance the quality of life of its residents; (4) Contribute to the growth of the state's logistics sector.

- The Inland waterways are now emerging as a cost effective and an environment friendly option for passenger and freight movement.
- This Project will help improve the river transport infrastructure in West Bengal and help in the economic development of the state by connecting the hinterland with markets and job centers in Kolkata's Metropolitan Area.
- The project will cover the five most populous districts of southern West Bengal, including its urban agglomeration -- the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) where around 30 million people or one-third of West Bengal's population live.

### Do you know?

- **In the first phase:** The project will enhance the capacity and improve the safety of the Inland Water Transport system including rehabilitating existing jetties, buying new ferries with enhanced design and installing electric gates in 40 locations.
- **In the second phase:** It will support - (1) Long-term investments for passenger movements, including in terminals and jetties; (2) Improve the design of the inland water transport vessels; (3) Ensure night navigation on the most hazardous and trafficked routes and crossing points; (4) Encourage the private sector to invest in Ro-Ro vessels that will allow easier movement of trucks across the Hooghly river.
- To better cope with increased precipitation and flooding, climate-smart engineering solutions will be applied.
- The project will facilitate disable-friendly amenities, ensure women's safety and encourage women's employment.
- The \$105 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a maturity of 17 years, including a grace period of 7 years.

### Important value additions

- The Hooghly River is a distributary of the river Ganga in Kolkata.
- It separates the Kolkata port from its large consumption centres, which are, its wholesale market and its vast hinterland comprising among others the entire North Eastern India and two landlocked neighbouring countries namely, Nepal and Bhutan.
- More than 80% of freight and passenger traffic currently cross the river via Kolkata's three bridges.
- To curtail congestion, the city has restricted the movement of trucks to the port to certain bridges and only during limited hours, reducing access to the port and increasing the cost of logistics.

### [Freight Business Development Portal](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

#### In news

- Freight Business Development Portal was recently launched as one stop solution for all the needs of freight customers.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Railways

**Railways Launches Freight Business Development Portal**

**One-Stop Cargo Solution for Seamless Goods Transportation**

**Distinguishing Features of Portal**

- Easy to Register
- Professional Support
- Advanced Services for Customers
- Convenient Tools & Services
- Commodity Information Pages
- Welcoming Logistics Partners

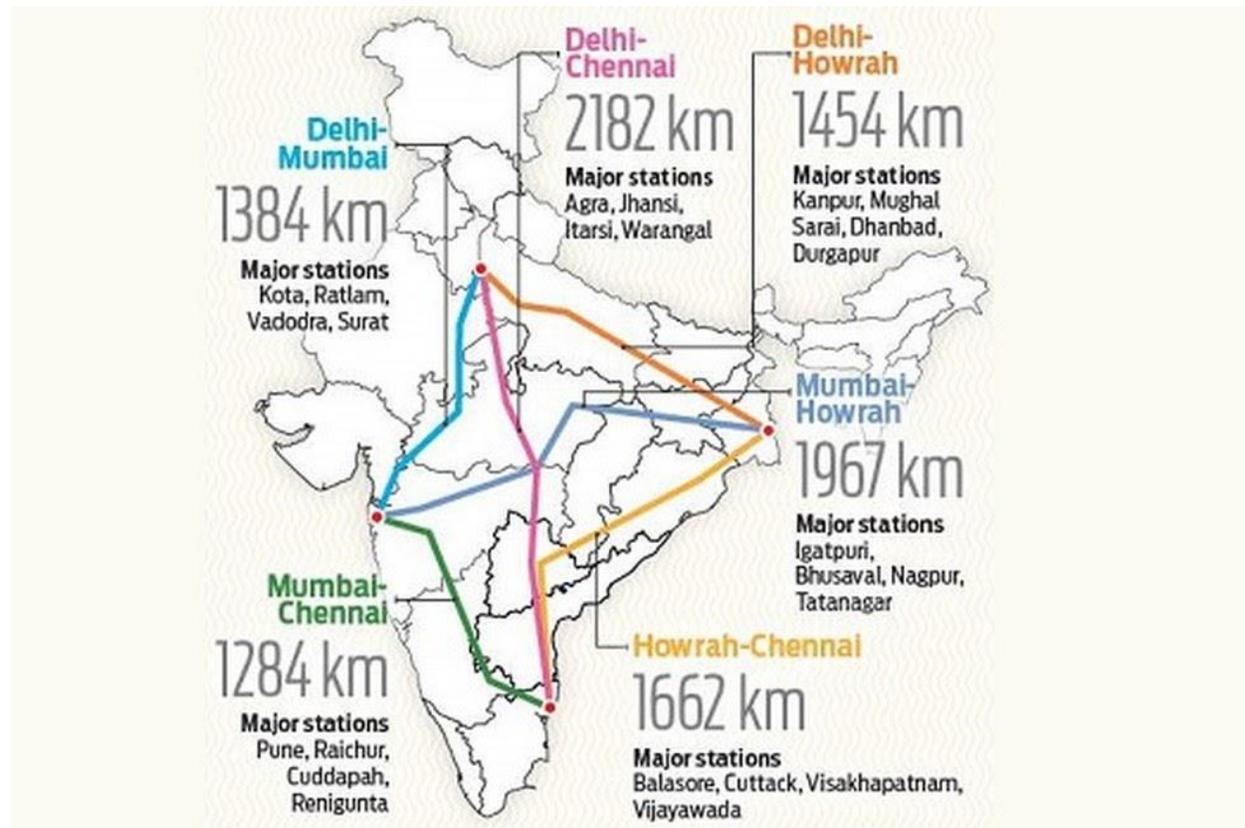
#### Key takeaways

- The portal is designed to replace physical processes with online ones to minimise the need of human-to-human interaction.
- it will help them use rail mode seamlessly.
- The personalised dashboard of freight business portal provides customers a view with their business in railways, outstanding indents, on-run consignments, status of various interactions and facility to apply for various services and raising concerns.
- Customers also get to know about discount schemes, diversion, rebooking, demurrage and wharfage waivers, stacking permissions.

#### [Maximum speed of Golden Quadrilateral - Golden Diagonal \(GQ-GD\) route enhanced](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure  
**In news**

- Indian Railway has started the New Year by achieving a landmark achievement by drastically enhancing the maximum speed to 130 kmph for 1,280 km length out of 1,612 Km in Golden Quadrilateral - Golden Diagonal (GQ-GD) route.



#### Key takeaways

- This covers the entire GQ-GD route over South Central Railway, except Vijayawada - Duvvada section, where signalling up-gradation work is in progress.
- The enhanced speed limits could be achieved due to the systematic and planned strengthening of track & its infrastructure by removing bottlenecks in these sections on a fast pace.
- This included heavier rails, laying of 260 meters Long welded rail panels, improvement of curves and gradients among others.
- Already, the maximum speed limits in the High-Density Network (HDN) between Secunderabad – Kazipet (132 Kms distance) had been enhanced to 130 kmph.

#### Important value additions

- The Golden Quadrilateral (GQ) is a national highway network connecting most of the major industrial, agricultural and cultural centres of India.
- It forms a quadrilateral connecting the four major metro cities of India, viz., Delhi (north), Kolkata (east), Mumbai (west) and Chennai (south).
- It is the largest highway project in India and the fifth longest in the world.
- It is the first phase of the National Highways Development Project (NHDP), and consists of four- and six-lane express highways, built at a cost of ₹600 billion.

- **Planned in:** 1999; **Launched in:** 2001; **Completed in:** 2012
- The Golden Quadrilateral project is managed by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) under the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways.

### Miscellaneous

#### Cherry Blossom Mao Festival

- In Manipur, the Cherry Blossom Mao Festival was held at Senapati district marking the beginning of pink season in the district.
- The Mao area of Senapati district in Manipur is known for Cherry Blossom, a plant which is popularly known as Sakura in Japan.
- The festival features the picturesque landscape of Mao town adorned with beautiful Cherry Blossom flowers.
- A cherry blossom is a flower of many trees of genus Prunus.
- Prunus cerasoides, called wild Himalayan cherry, Indian wild cherry, and sour cherry, is known in Hindi as padam, pajja, or padmakashtha.

#### First direct flight between Kalaburagi to Tirupati flagged off under UDAN

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions & GS-III – Infrastructure

#### **In news**

- Star Air has commenced the direct daily flight operations from Kalaburagi, Karnataka to Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh under the RCS-UDAN (Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik).

### Important value additions

#### **Tirupati city**

- It is also called as the ‘Spiritual Capital of Andhra Pradesh’.
- It is home to the most famous Sri Venkateshwara Swamy Temple popularly called ‘Tirupati Balaji Temple’ which has its name in the most-visited shrine across the globe.
- Apart from the Tirupati Balaji temple, the place is also famous for other historical temples, Sri Venkateshwara National Park, Deer Park, Tirupati, & Talakona Waterfalls.
- The Tirumala Hills in Tirupati is the second oldest rock mountain hills in the world.
- Tirupati Laddu received Geographical indication tag which entitles that only Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams can make and sell it.

#### **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik)**

- It is a regional airport development and "Regional Connectivity Scheme" (RCS) of Government of India
- **Objective:** Letting the common citizen of the country fly
- **Aim:** (1) Making air travel affordable and widespread; (2) To boost inclusive national economic development, job growth and air transport infrastructure development of all regions and states of India.

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Civil Aviation

#### Do you know?

- Inaugurated under the UDAN scheme, Kalaburagi airport recently completed a successful 1 year of service.
  - The airport has become the fastest growing airport in the country.
- 

### [Hisar Airport inaugurated under RCS-UDAN](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

#### In news

- Hisar Airport was inaugurated under RCS-UDAN recently.

#### Key takeaways

- First flight to the newly constructed Hisar airport in Haryana from Chandigarh was also flagged off under the Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (RCS-UDAN) of the Government of India.
- Hisar airport is a public licensed airport that is suitable for 18 seat type aircraft.
- The airline Aviation Connectivity & Infrastructure Developers Pvt. Ltd (Air Taxi) was awarded the Hisar – Chandigarh – Hisar route under the UDAN 4 bidding process.
- The airline has become the first start-up airline of the country to assist the nation with Air Taxi services.
- Thus, the Inauguration Marks Commencement of India's First Air Taxi Services from Chandigarh to Hisar.

#### Related articles:

- First direct flight between Kalaburagi to Tirupati flagged off under UDAN: [Click here](#)
  - Objective assessment & transparency of UDAN scheme: [Click here](#)
  - UDAN Mindmap: [Click here](#)
- 

### [8 trains connecting different regions of the country to Kevadiya railway Station to be flagged off](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Infrastructure

#### In news

- Prime Minister will flag off eight trains connecting different regions of the country to Kevadiya, Gujarat, on 17th January, 2021.

#### Key takeaways

- These trains will facilitate seamless connectivity to the Statue of Unity, located on the Narmada River in the Kevadiya, Gujarat.

- Prime Minister will inaugurate the Dabhoi – Chandod Gauge converted Broad Gauge railway line, Chandod – Kevadiya new Broad Gauge railway line, newly electrified Pratapnagar – Kevadiya section and the new station buildings of Dabhoi, Chandod and Kevadiya.
  - Kevadiya station is India's first railway station with a Green Building Certification.
- 

## India's First Indigenously Designed & Developed Driverless Metro Car

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- Defence Minister unveiled India's First Indigenously Designed & Developed Driverless Metro Car recently.

**Key takeaways**

- State-of-the-art 'Driverless Metro Car' for Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) was unveiled at a function held at BEML's Bangalore Complex.
- MMRDA project has 63% indigenous content which will enhance to 75% in next two to three years.
- The Aerospace Assembly Hangar and first indigenously manufactured Tatra Cabin by BEML were also unveiled.
- Indigenously designed & developed state-of-the-art Driverless Metro trains are being manufactured at BEML Bangalore Complex.

**Related articles:**

- India's First Driverless Metro To Be Inaugurated: [Click here](#)
- 

## Department of Telecommunications (DoT) seeks inputs from telcos on use of radio frequency spectrum

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has sought inputs from telcos and other industry experts on the sale and use of radio frequency spectrum over the next 10 years, including the 5G bands.

**Important value additions**

- 5G or fifth generation is the latest upgrade in the long-term evolution (LTE) mobile broadband networks.
- 5G mainly works in 3 bands, namely low, mid and high frequency spectrum — all of which have their own uses as well as limitations.
- While the low band spectrum has shown great promise in terms of coverage and speed of internet and data exchange, the maximum speed is limited to 100 Mbps (Megabits per second).

- The mid-band spectrum offers higher speeds compared to the low band, but has limitations in terms of coverage area and penetration of signals.
- The high-band spectrum offers the highest speed of all the three bands, but has extremely limited coverage and signal penetration strength.
- Internet speeds in the high-band spectrum of 5G has been tested to be as high as 20 Gbps (giga bits per second), while, in most cases, the maximum internet data speed in 4G has been recorded at 1 Gbps.

**Related articles:**

- Spectrum Auctions: [Click here](#)
- BRICS 5G Innovation Base: [Click here](#)

### [Janshatabdi Express from Ahmedabad-Kevadia to have a Vistadome coach](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister recently flagged off eight trains from different parts of the country to Kevadia in Narmada district, Gujarat.
- Out of these eight trains, the Janshatabdi Express from Ahmedabad-Kevadia has a Vistadome coach.

**Key takeaways**

- The Vistadome coach is a state-of-the-art coach made by Indian Railways, designed to provide passengers with travel comfort as well as an enhanced viewing experience of their surroundings.

- The Vistadome coach in the Janshatabdi Express has been manufactured at the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- It is for the first time that the Vistadome coach has been made on the Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) platform, made for passenger coaches for trains in India.
- Some of the features of the Vistadome coach are an observation lounge with a large window for passengers to experience the scenic route to Kevadia.
- The 44 recliner-180 degree rotatable seats ensure people can enjoy the view from both windows to their right and left, there are automatic sliding doors at both gates of the coach, glass rooftops offer a panoramic view, while there are five large windows on each side.

**Related articles:**

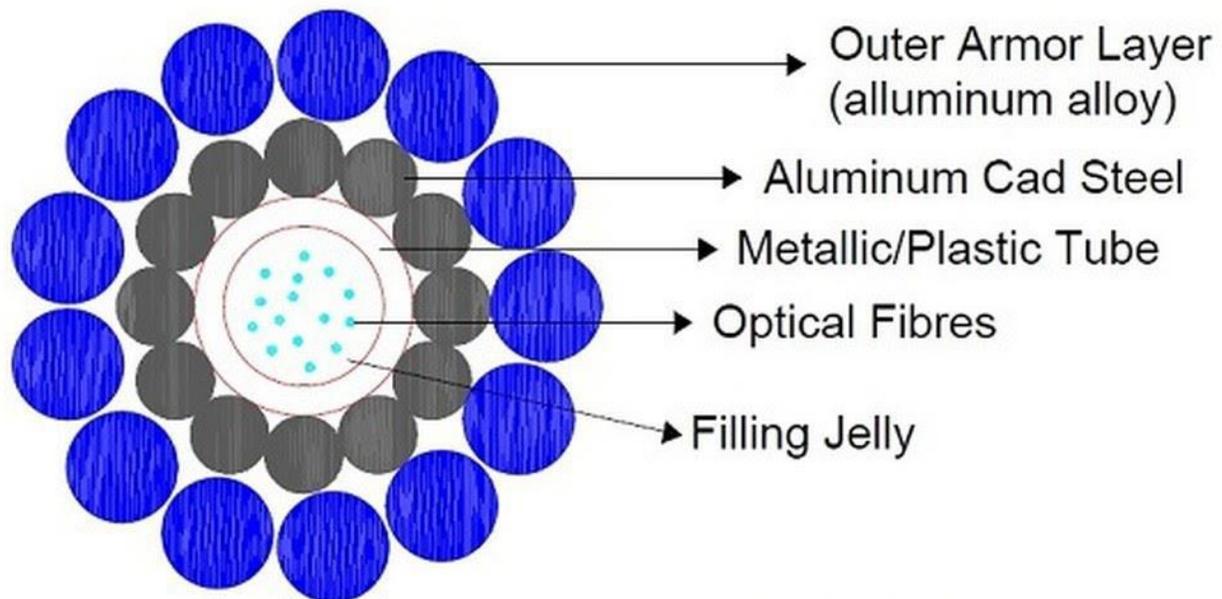
- Indian Railway completes successful speed trials of the new design Vistadome Tourist Coaches: [Click here](#)

[POWERGRID signs agreement with HPSEBL for Optical Ground Wire \(OPGW\) Telecom network](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- To improve telecom connectivity in hilly areas, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), has recently signed an agreement with Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd. (HPSEBL) in Shimla (H.P.) for utilization of 500 Kms of OPGW Telecom network.



## Schematic diagram of OPGW

### Key takeaways

- Through this OPGW Network, Telecom Service providers will be able to provide uninterrupted mobile/Internet services to the people of the state.
- An optical ground wire is also known as an OPGW or, in the IEEE standard, an optical fiber composite overhead ground wire.
- It is a type of cable that is used in overhead power lines.
- Such cable combines the functions of grounding and communications.

### Construction of OPGW:

- OPGW is optical fiber composite ground wire.
- This cable contains a tubular structure having one or more optical fiber and surrounded by layers of aluminium and steel wires.
- This layer of aluminium and steel wires serves to connect the tower to the ground.
- The optical fiber within the cable is used for the high speed data telemetry between the utilities or sold to some third parties for high speed fiber interconnection between the cities.

### Do you know?

- POWERGRID, a 'Maharatna' CPSE under Ministry of Power, Government of India and Central Transmission Utility (CTU) of India, is India's principal power transmission company and also one of the largest power transmission utilities in the world.
- It is a public limited company.
- It started its commercial operation in the year 1992-93.

### Related articles:

- Monetisation of assets of POWERGRID: [Click here](#)

## Ratle Hydro Power Project

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the investment of Rs.5281.94 crore for 850 MW Ratle Hydro Electric (HE) Project.

**Key takeaways**

- It will be located on river Chenab, in Kishtwar district of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- It will be implemented by a new Joint Venture Company (JVC) to be incorporated between National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) and Jammu & Kashmir State Power Development Corporation Ltd (JKSPDC) with equity contribution of 51% and 49% respectively.
- The Ratle Hydro Electric Project shall be commissioned within a span of 60 months.
- The Power generated from the Project will help in providing balancing of Grid and will improve the power supply position.
- Further, Union Territory of J&K will be benefitted by getting free power worth Rs. 5289 crore and through levy of Water Usage Charges worth Rs.9581 crore from Ratle Hydro Electric Project, during project life cycle of 40 years.

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## Construction of village in Arunachal Pradesh by China

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography; GS-II – International Relations

**In news**

- Recently, China has said that its construction of a village across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh was “beyond reproach” because it had “never recognised” Arunachal.
- India’s Ministry of External Affairs has also said that it was aware of the construction.



### Key takeaways

- The village was built between November 2019 and November 2020.
- It is located a couple of kilometres across the LAC, beyond what India sees as the border separating Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet, on the banks of the Tsari Chu river in Upper Subansiri district in Arunachal.
- The site of the village is close to where China had attacked an Assam Rifles post in 1959, in what is known as the Longju incident.
- It is at least 2 km south of the McMahon Line, which is not recognised by China.
- After the 1962 war, India stopped patrolling the area.
- Another village built last year, called Pangda, was built 2-3 km inside what Bhutan sees as its territory, in another disputed area.

### Do you know?

- The Subansiri River is a trans-Himalayan river and a tributary of the Brahmaputra River that flows through Tibet's Shannan Prefecture and the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- It is formed by joining three streams Lokong Chu, Chayal Chu and Tsari Chu.

### [Place in news: Namrup](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Energy Resources; Infrastructure

### In news

- Union Minister for Chemicals & Fertilizers recently chaired a meeting on upcoming 12.7 lakh MMTPA capacity urea plant at Namrup.
- The Namrup-IV unit is important for ensuring local development and creating job opportunities.

**Important value additions**

- Namrup is a small town situated close to the foothills of the great Patkai Mountain Range (Purvanchal Range connecting to Myanmar) in the extreme south-eastern part of Assam.
- The river Dihing or Disang flows through it.
- Namrup today is an important industrial town of Assam.
- Namrup is the first place in India where a natural gas based fertilizer factory was established - It made use of natural gas, water (in the form of steam) and Nitrogen (from air) to produce urea.

**Patkai Mountain Range**

- The Pat-kai or Patkai Bum are the hills on India's north-eastern border with Burma or Myanmar.
- They were created by the same tectonic processes that created the Himalayas in the Mesozoic.
- The Patkai hill range are not as rugged as the Himalayas and the peaks are much lower.
- Features of the range include conical peaks, steep slopes and deep valleys.
- Three mountain ranges come under the Patkai.
- The Patkai-Bum, the Garo-Khasi-Jaintia, and the Lushai Hills - highest point Phawngpui Tlang, also known as 'Blue Mountain'.

**Fleet of electric buses flagged-off in Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure; Environment

**In news**

- The Lieutenant Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, flagged-off fleet of electric buses.

**Key takeaways**

- The introduction of electric buses will help cut down tail pipe emissions as well as provide comfortable public transport.
- The project for 40 electric buses is being executed by NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited (NVVN Limited), a 100% subsidiary of NTPC Limited, a PSU under Ministry of Power, Government of India.
- In addition to the above project, NVVN has emerged as successful bidder for providing turnkey solution for 90 electric buses in Bengaluru under the Smart City project.
- These buses will provide last mile connectivity to NAMMA Metro network.
- NVVN is developing and providing complete range of zero emission mobility solutions for various vehicle segments.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY****Cabinet approves Industrial Corridor nodes at Krishnapatnam and Tumakuru under CBIC**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

**In news**

- Cabinet has approved Industrial Corridor nodes at Krishnapatnam and Tumakuru under Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC).
- Multi Modal Logistics Hub & Multi Modal Transport Hub (MMTH) at Greater Noida was also approved.
- The approved proposals have a total estimated cost of Rs. 7,725 crore and an estimated employment generation of more than 2.8 lakh persons.
- These will facilitate manufacturing investments into the country by providing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to industries
- These will also position India as a strong player in Global Value Chains with developed land parcels in cities for immediate allotment for attracting investments
- Approved proposals shall provide an impetus to “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” & “Make in India”.

### **Key takeaways**

#### **Multi Modal Logistics Hub**

- Logistics Hub project will be developed as a world-class facility that will provide efficient storage of goods to/from the Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC).
- It will offer a one-stop destination to freight companies and customers.
- The facility will provide standard container handling activities.
- It will also provide various value-added services to reduce logistics cost with improved efficiency of operations.

#### **Multi Modal Transport Hub (MMTH) project**

- It will be located near the already existing Indian Railways station of Boraki.
- It will act as a transport hub with provisioning of Rail, Road and MRTS accessibility for the passengers in a seamless manner.
- MMTH will have space for Inter State Bus Terminal (ISBT), Local Bus Terminal (LBT), Metro, commercial, retail & hotel space and green open spaces.
- The project will provide world-class passenger movement facilities for the growing population of the catchment zone catering to upcoming developments in U.P. sub-region of the NCR and thus, decongest Delhi.
- It will increase employment opportunities as well.

#### **Industrial Corridor nodes at Krishnapatnam and Tumakuru under CBIC**

- It is envisioned on the backbone of major transportation corridors like Eastern & Western Dedicated Freight Corridors, Expressways and National Highways, proximity to ports, airports, etc.,
- Objective: Creation of greenfield industrial cities with sustainable, ‘plug n play’, ICT enabled utilities to facilitate the manufacturing investments by providing quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to industries.
- The developed land parcels in these cities will be ready for immediate allotment for attracting investments.
- It strives to attain the objective of creation of an “Aatmanirbhar Bharat”

- These greenfield industrial cities will be self-sustained with world-class infrastructure, road and rail connectivity for freight movement to and from ports and logistic hubs along with reliable power and quality social Infrastructure.

## [US drugmaker Moderna applies for Emergency Use Authorisation \(EUA\)](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- US drugmaker Moderna said it was applying for emergency use authorisation for its Covid-19 vaccine.
- In India, Serum Institute of India, which is trialling a version of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, has said it expects to seek emergency use authorisation within the next two weeks.

**Key takeaways**

- Vaccines, medicines, diagnostic tests and medical devices, require the approval of a regulatory authority before they can be administered.
- In India, the regulatory authority is the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).
- For vaccines and medicines, approval is granted after an assessment of their safety and effectiveness, based on data from trials.
- This is a long process, designed to ensure that a medicine or vaccine is absolutely safe and effective.
- In emergency situations, like COVID-19, regulatory authorities around the world have developed mechanisms to grant interim approvals if there is sufficient evidence to suggest a medical product is safe and effective.
- Final approval is granted only after completion of the trials and analysis of full data; until then, emergency use authorisation (EUA) allows the medicine or the vaccine to be used on the public.

## [Foundation stone of TiHAN-IIT Hyderabad laid](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Innovation; Sci & Tech

**In news**

- Union Minister of Education laid foundation stone of 'TiHAN-IIT Hyderabad'.
- It is India's first Test bed for Autonomous Navigation Systems (Terrestrial and Aerial).

## WILL HELP REPLICATE REAL-LIFE SCENARIOS

- The new hub has been established in two acres of land within the campus and the facilities are planned in phases

- It will facilitate research grounds to investigate the functioning of unmanned and connected vehicles in a controlled environment



- It will help replicate different scenarios, ranging from frequently occurring to extreme cases that may ensue in real-life traffic operations

- All smart poles within the institute are enabled with communication providing technology with some poles designed with sprinklers to simulate rain scenario

### Key takeaways

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, has sanctioned Rs. 135 crores to IIT Hyderabad under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS) to set up a Technology Innovation Hub on Autonomous Navigation and Data Acquisition Systems (UAVs, RoVs, etc.).
- The Technology Innovation Hub on Autonomous Navigation Systems for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Remotely Operated Vehicles at IIT Hyderabad, known as 'TiHAN Foundation' has been incorporated as a Section-8 company by the institute in June 2020.
- TiHAN Foundation is a multi-departmental initiative, including researchers from Electrical, Computer Science, Mechanical and Aerospace, Civil, Mathematics, and Design at IIT Hyderabad with collaboration and support from reputed institutions and industry.
- Special Features of this Facility include Test Tracks, Emulation of Real-World Scenarios, State of the Art Simulation Technologies, Road Infrastructure, V2X Communication, Drone Runways and many more.

### [Meteorological \(Met\) Centre at Leh \(Ladakh\) inaugurated](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech

#### In news

- The Union Minister of Earth Sciences inaugurated Meteorological (Met) Centre at Leh (Ladakh).

**Key takeaways**

- Located at a height of 3500 m, Meteorological Centre Leh will be the highest meteorological centre in India.
- The Centre will be a world class facility for high altitude meteorology.
- It will cater to the various kinds of weather and climate needs of the people and the administration of Ladakh.
- It will provide forecast for important tourist places like Nubra, Changthang, Pangong Lake, Zaskar, among others.

**Need for a Met Centre at Leh**

- The Ladakh region has lofty mountains with high slopes and no vegetation and lots of loose soil and debris making the region vulnerable to various kinds of natural hazards like Cloud burst (of 2010), Flash Floods, Avalanches and Glacial Lake Outbursts, etc.
- To avert losses due to such weather events in future, the Government felt the need to establish a State of the Art Meteorological (Met) Centre at Leh to strengthen weather related Early Warning System in Ladakh.

**National Metrology Conclave**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech; Environment

**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister recently inaugurated the National Metrology Conclave on January 4, 2021 through video conferencing.

**Key takeaways**

- **Organised by:** Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi
- **Theme:** Metrology for the Inclusive Growth of the Nation.
- National Atomic Timescale and Bhartiya Nirdeshak Dravya was launched.
- Foundation stone of the National Environmental Standards Laboratory was also laid.

**Do you know?**

- The National Atomic Timescale generates Indian Standard Time with an accuracy of 2.8 nanosecond.
- Bhartiya Nirdeshak Dravya is supporting testing and calibration of laboratories for quality assurance, at par with international standards.
- The National Environmental Standards Laboratory will aid self-reliance in the certification of ambient air and industrial emission monitoring equipment.

**40th Indian Scientific Expedition To Antarctica**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech; Achievements of Indians

**In news**

- India launched the 40th scientific expedition to Antarctica.

**Key takeaways**

- This Indian expedition marks four decades of India's scientific endeavour to the Antarctica.
- The 40th expedition journey will be flagged off from Goa on January 5, 2021, with 43 members onboard.
- The chartered ice-class vessel MV Vasiliy Golovnin will make this journey and will reach Antarctica in 30 days.
- After leaving behind a team of 40 members, it would return to India in April 2021.
- On return, it will also bring back the winter team of the preceding trip.

**Do you know?**

- The Indian Antarctic expeditions began in 1981.
- The Indian Antarctic programme has now been credited to have built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri, and Bharati.
- As of today, India has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri and Bharati.
- The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.

**Tide–Rainfall Flood Quotient: A new measurement devised**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography & GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- To understand if a coastal city is more prone to floods caused by tidal events or extreme rainfall, a team from the IIT Bombay devised a new measure called the Tide–Rainfall Flood Quotient.

**Key takeaways**

- Using the past rainfall data, tidal data, and topography of the region this framework can be applied to pinpoint the major factor at play.
- The team selected three geographically diverse flood-prone coastal regions – Mithi Catchment in Mumbai, Jagatsinghpur District in Odisha, and Greater Chennai Corporation in Tamil Nadu to test their new metric.
- The new method helped classify these regions into ‘storm-tide dominated’ or ‘pluvial (rainfall) dominated’ regions.
- The metric can help disaster management experts in framing better flood risk management systems directed towards long term planning.

**Do you know?**

- The C40 Cities report of 2018 notes that by 2050, over 570 low-lying coastal cities will face projected sea level rise by at least 0.5 meters, putting over 800 million people at risk from the impacts of rising seas and storm surges.
- While the inland areas can be flooded due to the heavy rainfall, the coasts are threatened by the impact of tidal surges.

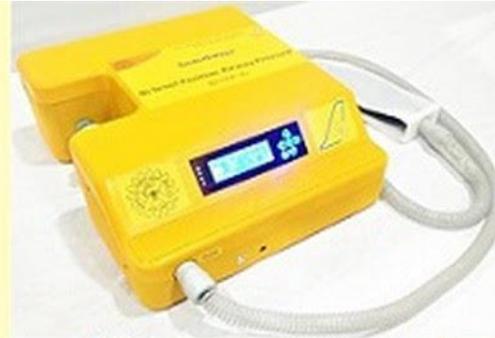
**Swasth Vayu may be used on Covid-19 patients**

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- The expert committee constituted by Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, has concluded that SwasthVayu may be used on Covid-19 patients who require oxygen supplementation up to 35%.

**CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), Bengaluru develop BiPAP Non Invasive Ventilator “SwasthVayu” in 36 Days for COVID -19**



#### Key takeaways

- Indigenously designed and developed by: Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) - National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL)
- **Objective:** To address the shortages of ventilators in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic
- It is the non-invasive bi-level positive airway pressure ventilator.
- It is a microcontroller based precise closed-loop adaptive control system with a built-in biocompatible “3D printed manifold and coupler” with HEPA filter (Highly Efficient Particulate Air Filter).
- It has features like CPAP, Bi-Timed, Spontaneous / AUTO modes with provision to connect Oxygen concentrator or Enrichment unit externally.
- CSIR-NAL has commercialized this technology with six private companies.

#### [CEPI centralized network lab at DBT-THSTI Faridabad inaugurated](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Innovation; Sci & tech  
**In news**

- One of the seven labs of the world called as the centralized network lab of Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) established was recently established at Translational Health Science & Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Science & Technology

#### Key takeaways

- The CEPI centralized laboratory at DBT-THSTI Faridabad is first of its kind in India and one of the seven in the world.
- THSTI is the only laboratory of such kind in India and is also accredited by National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL).
- CEPI is an innovative partnership between public, private, philanthropic, and civil organizations, launched at Davos in 2017, to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics.
- The Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology is implementing the Ind-CEPI mission titled 'India Centric Epidemic Preparedness through Rapid Vaccine Development: Supporting Indian Vaccine Development Aligned with the Global Initiative of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)'.
- **Aim:** (1) To strengthen the development of vaccines for the diseases of epidemic potential in India; (2) Build coordinated preparedness in the Indian public health system and vaccine industry to address existing and emergent infectious threats in India.

### [CEPI centralized network lab at DBT-THSTI Faridabad inaugurated](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – Health & GS-III – Innovation; Sci & tech

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### [DRDO Signs MOU with MAHA-METRO for implementation of Advanced Biodigester](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech, Environment

#### In news

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Maharashtra Metro Rail Corporation (MAHA –METRO), a joint venture company of the GoI and Government of Maharashtra, are working together to conserve water and protect the environment by installing DRDO's eco-friendly biodigester units in its facilities.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was inked recently between MAHA-METRO and DRDO.

**Key takeaways**

- Through MoU, DRDO will render technical support for the implementation of its advanced biodigester Mk-II technology for the treatment of human waste in the metro rail network.
- DRDO's biodigester is an indigenous, green and cost-effective technology,
- A customized version of this MK-II Biodigester, suitable for treating human waste generated from houseboats in Dal Lake was also successfully demonstrated by the DRDO to J&K Administration.

**Important value additions**

- A biodigester system utilizes organic waste, particularly animal and human excreta, to produce fertilizer and biogas.
- It consists of an airtight, high-density polyethylene container within which excreta diluted in water flow continuously and are fermented by microorganisms present in the waste.
- The fermentation process is anaerobic, i.e., it takes place without oxygen.
- The bacteria responsible for decomposition are methanogenic (i.e., they produce methane known as biogas).
- The processed manure is an organic, pathogen-free fertilizer that is rich in nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.
- The products are primarily for self-consumption on farms.

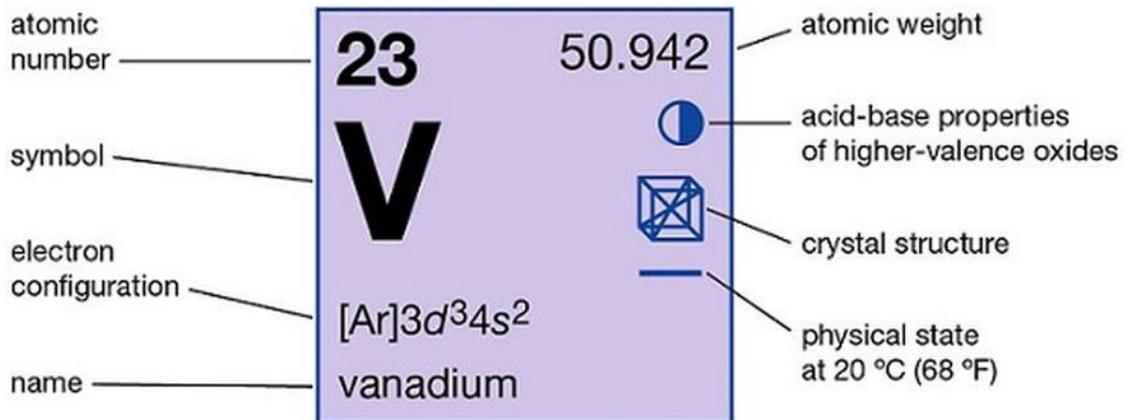
### [Arunachal Pradesh likely to become India's prime producer of Vanadium](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy; Sci & Tech

**In news**

- Arunachal Pradesh is likely to become India's prime producer of vanadium.

## Vanadium



 Transition metals	 Solid
 Body-centred cubic	 Equal relative strength

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### Key takeaways

- The largest deposits of vanadium in the world are in China, followed by Russia and South Africa.
- China, which produces 57% of the world's vanadium, consumed 44% of the metal in 2017.
- India is a significant consumer of vanadium, but is not a primary producer of the strategic metal.
- According to data provided by the GSI, India consumed 4% of about 84,000 tonnes of vanadium produced across the globe in 2017.
- The Geological Survey of India (GSI) found promising concentrations of vanadium in the palaeoproterozoic carbonaceous phyllite rocks in the Depo and Tamang areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh.
- This was the first report of a primary deposit of vanadium in India, with an average grade of 0.76% V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> [vanadium pentoxide].
- Vanadium mineralisation in Arunachal Pradesh is geologically similar to the "stone coal" vanadium deposits of China hosted in carbonaceous shale.
- This high vanadium content is associated with graphite, with a fixed carbon content of up to 16%.

### Important value additions

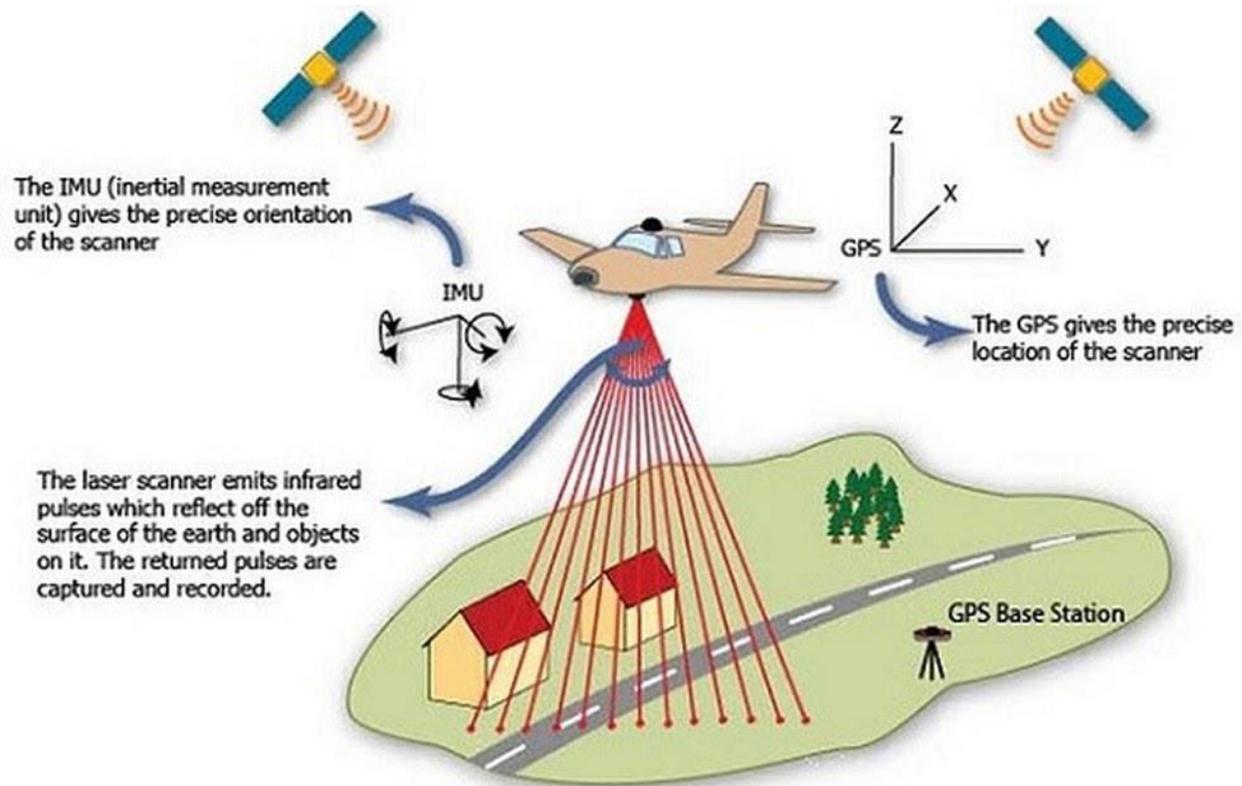
- Vanadium is a chemical element with the symbol V and atomic number 23. It is a hard, silvery-grey, malleable transition metal.
- The elemental metal is rarely found in nature. It is recovered as a by-product from the slag collected from the processing of vanadiferous magnetite ores (iron ore).
- Vanadium is a high-value metal used in strengthening steel and titanium.

## High Speed Rail work gathers momentum for Delhi - Varanasi High Speed Rail Corridor with the start of LiDAR (Aerial Ground) Survey

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy; Sci & Tech

### **In news**

- With the start of LiDAR (Aerial Ground) Survey, High Speed Rail work gathered momentum for Delhi - Varanasi High Speed Rail Corridor.



### **Key takeaways**

- The LiDAR survey for Delhi-Varanasi High Speed Rail Corridor started from Greater NOIDA where a Helicopter fitted with state of art Aerial LiDAR and Imagery sensors took the first flight and captured the data related to ground survey.
- National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited is adopting Light Detection and Ranging Survey (LiDAR) technology which provides all the ground details and data in 3-4 months wherein this process normally takes 10-12 months.
- The ground survey is a crucial activity for any linear infrastructure project as the survey provides accurate details of areas around the alignment.

### **Important value additions**

#### **LiDAR**

- Lidar, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth.

- These light pulses—combined with other data recorded by the airborne system— generate precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.
- A LiDAR instrument principally consists of a laser, a scanner, and a specialized GPS receiver.
- This technology is mostly used for ground-based surveys.
- LiDAR was first used on a spacecraft during the Apollo 15 mission in 1971, when astronauts mapped the surface of the moon.
- Apart from aerial surveys, the LiDAR sensor is the most important component in self-driving cars. The LiDAR sensor provides continuous 360 degrees of visibility and accurate depth information.

#### Do you know?

- Airplanes and helicopters are the most commonly used platforms for acquiring the data.
- It can be used to examine both natural and manmade environments with accuracy, precision, and flexibility.
- Two types of LiDAR are:
  - Topographic typically uses a near-infrared laser to map the land
  - Bathymetric uses water-penetrating green light to measure seafloor and riverbed elevations.

#### Related articles:

- About LiDAR: [Click here](#)
- Prehistoric settlements discovered through Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data: [Click here](#)

### [Supermassive Black Hole seems to go missing](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III –Sci & Tech

#### In news

- A supermassive black hole, which is estimated to weigh up to 100 billion times the mass of the Sun, is seemingly missing which has left astronomers perplexed.

#### Key takeaways

- Scientists have been looking for the black hole using NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory and Hubble Space Telescope.
- However, so far, they have found no evidence of its existence.
- The black hole is supposed to be located in Abell 2261, an enormous galaxy cluster that is about 2.7 billion light-years away from the Earth.
- At 2.7 billion light-years away, the Abell galaxy is at an overwhelmingly large distance away from us.

#### Do you know?

- Every large galaxy in the universe has a supermassive black hole at its centre, whose mass is millions or billions of times that of the Sun.

- The black hole at the centre of our galaxy– the Milky Way– is called Sagittarius A\*, and is 26,000 light-years away from Earth.

### National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)

**Context:** In a difficult year, government has managed to complete an expert-driven, bottom-up, evidence-based and inclusive draft of the fifth National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)

**Need of National Policy:** STIP 2020 is the collective aspiration to ensure that we get the benefits of our national investments in science and technology. It is a comprehensive policy framework that guides & promotes investment in Science & Technology.

The Science, Technology and Innovation Policy will be guided by the following broad vision;

1. **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** To achieve technological self-reliance and position India among the top three scientific superpowers in the decade to come.
2. **Human Capital:** To attract, nurture, strengthen and retain critical human capital through a 'people centric' science, technology and innovation (STI) ecosystem.
3. **Investment:** To double the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) researchers, Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) and private sector contribution to the GERD every 5 years.
4. **Globally Competitive:** To build individual and institutional excellence in STI with the aspiration to achieve the highest level of global recognitions and awards in the coming decade.

**Key features of draft STIP are:**

#### 1. Objective:

- STIP 2020 by way of its decentralized, bottom-up, and inclusive design process aims to re-strategize priorities, sectoral focus, and methods of research and technology development for larger socio-economic welfare.

#### 2. STI Observatory and Centralised Database

- STIP will lead to the establishment of a National STI Observatory that will act as a central repository for all kinds of data related to and generated from the STI ecosystem.
- It will encompass an open centralised database platform for all financial schemes, programmes, grants and incentives existing in the ecosystem.
- The Observatory will be centrally coordinated and organized in distributed, networked and interoperable manner among relevant stakeholders.

#### 3. Open Science Framework

- A future-looking, all-encompassing Open Science Framework will be built to provide access to scientific data, information, knowledge, and resources to everyone in the country and all who are engaging with the Indian STI ecosystem on an equal partnership basis.
- All data used in and generated from publicly-funded research will be available to everyone under FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) terms.
- A **dedicated portal** to provide access to the outputs of such publicly-funded research will be created through Indian Science and Technology Archive of Research (INDSTA).

#### 4. STU Education to be made more inclusive

- **Online learning platforms** will be developed using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to address the issue of accessibility and to promote research and innovation at all levels.
- **Teaching-learning centres (TLCs)** will be established to upskill faculty members which in turn will improve the quality of education.
- Engaged Universities will be created to promote **interdisciplinary research** to address community needs.
- Higher Education Research Centres (HERC) and Collaborative Research Centres (CRC) will be established to provide **research inputs to policymakers** and bring together stakeholders.

#### 5. Increasing Investments

- With an aim to expand the financial landscape of the STI ecosystem, each department/ ministry in the central, the state and the local governments, PSUs, private sector companies and startups will **set up an STI unit** with a minimum earmarked budget to pursue STI activities.
- Each State **will earmark a percentage of the state allocation** for STI-related activities under a separate budget head.
- STI investments will be increased through **boosting fiscal incentives**, enhancing support to industry, especially Medium Small Micro Enterprises (MSMEs), for pursuing research through innovation support schemes and other relevant means on a need basis.
- To ensure systematic governance of the expanded STI financing landscape, **an STI Development Bank** will be set up to facilitate a corpus fund for investing in direct long term investments in select strategic areas

#### 6. Translational Research and Promotion of Innovation

- The policy aims to create a fit for purpose, accountable research ecosystem promoting translational as well as foundational research in India in alignment with global standards.
- An institutional architecture to integrate **Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS)** and grassroots innovation into the overall education, research and innovation system will be established.
- Grassroots innovators will also be supported for registration, claiming the Intellectual Property Right (IPR), filing of patent, or any type of legal claim with the help of Higher Education Institute (HEIs).

#### 7. Technology self-reliance and indigenization

- A two-way approach of indigenous development of technology as well as technology indigenization will be adopted and focused upon in alignment with national priorities, like sustainability and social benefit, and resources
- A Technology Support Framework will be created to facilitate this development. A Strategic Technology Board (STB) will be constituted to act as a link connecting different strategic departments.

#### 8. Inclusivity an integral part of STIP

- An India-centric Equity & Inclusion (E&I) charter will be developed for tackling all forms of discrimination, exclusions and inequalities in STI leading to the development of an institutional mechanism.

- An inclusive culture will be facilitated through equal opportunity for women along with candidates from rural- remote areas, marginalised communities, LGBTQ+ Communities and differently-abled individuals including Divyangjans.

### 9. International Engagement

- Engagement with the Diaspora will be intensified through attracting the best talent back home through fellowships, internships schemes and research opportunities expanded and widely promoted across different ministries.
- Appropriate facilitating channels will be created for remote contribution as well.
- An engagement portal exclusively for the Indian scientific diaspora will be created. 'S&T for Diplomacy' will be complemented with Diplomacy for S&T'.

### 10. STI Policy Institute

- To serve all the aspects of STI **policy governance** and to provide the knowledge support to institutionalised governance mechanisms , a STI Policy Institute will be established to build and maintain a robust interoperable STI metadata architecture.
- It will conduct and promote nationally and internationally relevant STI policy research and strengthen the science advice mechanism at national, sub-national and international levels.
- It will develop long term capacity building programs for STI policy through training and fellowships.
- An implementation strategy and roadmap will be devised for STI policy and programs along with continuous monitoring and timely evaluation mechanisms.

## [PM to interact with Startups and address 'Prarambh: Startup India International Summit'](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Innovation; Sci & Tech  
**In news**

- Indian Prime Minister will interact with startups and address 'Prarambh: Startup India International Summit' on 16th January 2021

### Key takeaways

- **Organized by:** Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- The two-day Summit is being organised as a follow up of the announcement made by the Prime Minister at the fourth BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu in August 2018 wherein India committed to host the BIMSTEC Startup Conclave.
- The Summit marks the 5th anniversary of the Startup India initiative, launched by the Prime Minister on 16 January, 2016.
- Over 25 countries and more than 200 global speakers shall participate.
- The Summit will be the largest startup confluence organised in India since the launch of the Startup India initiative.
- **Focus:** Enhancing multilateral cooperation and engagement with countries from around the globe to collectively develop and strengthen the startup ecosystems.

## [National Innovation Portal \(NIP\) launched](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Innovation; Sci & Tech

### **In news**

- National innovation portal was recently launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Science & Technology
- **Developed by:** National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India

### **Key takeaways**

- The National Innovation Portal (NIP) is currently home to about 1.15 lakh innovations scouted from common people of the country, covering Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary and Human Health.
- The innovations cover Energy, mechanical, automobile, electrical, electronics, household, chemical, civil, textiles, etc.
- Innovation Portal is a step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat and an excellent resource for students, entrepreneurs, MSME's, Technology Business Incubators (TBI's) and common people engaged in a variety of occupations.

### **Do you know?**

- National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India is an autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.

### **Related articles:**

- Calibrated Economic Package (Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0) – Part 1: [Click here](#)
- Calibrated Economic Package (Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0) – Part 2: [Click here](#)
- Aatmanirbhar Bharat & Small Entrepreneurs: [Click here](#)

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## [Mukundpura CM2](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech

### **In news**

- A new study by Geological Survey of India, Kolkata has shed light on the mineralogy of the meteorite which fell in 2017 in Mukundpura village near Jaipur.

### **Key takeaways**

- The meteorite named Mukundpura CM2 was classified to be a carbonaceous chondrite.
- The composition of carbonaceous chondrites is also similar to the Sun.
- This is a type of stony meteorite, considered the most primitive meteorite and a remnant of the first solid bodies to accumulate in the solar system.
- Meteorites are broadly classified into three groups – stony (silicate-rich), iron (Fe–Ni alloy), and stony-iron (mixed silicate–iron alloy).

- Chondrites are silicate-droplet-bearing meteorites, and this Mukundpura chondrite is the fifth carbonaceous meteorite known to fall in India.
- The results of the Mukundpura CM2 study are relevant to the surface composition of near-Earth asteroids Ryugu and Bennu.



## [Mass digital migration of users to messaging platform Signal](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Sci & Tech

### **In news**

- Facebook-owned WhatsApp recently updated its privacy policy which led to a mass digital migration of users from the messaging platform to its rivals such as Signal app.

### **Important value additions**

- Signal is a cross-platform centralized encrypted messaging service developed by the Signal Technology Foundation and Signal Messenger LLC.
- The non-profit Signal Foundation was launched in 2018 with initial funding of \$50 million from Brian Acton.
- It uses the Internet to send one-to-one and group messages, which can include files, voice notes, images and videos.
- It can also be used to make one-to-one and group voice and video calls.
- Signal uses standard cellular telephone numbers as identifiers and secures all communications to other Signal users with end-to-end encryption.

### **Recent Development:**

- On 7 January 2021, Signal saw a surge in new user registrations due to a WhatsApp privacy policy change and a Signal endorsement by Elon Musk and Edward Snowden via Twitter.
- Between 12 and 14 January 2021, the number of Signal installations listed on Google Play increased from over 10 million to over 50 million.

## [Technology and Conservation: Elephants counted from Space](#)

**Context:** Scientists are using very high-resolution **satellite imagery to count and detect wildlife species**, including African elephants.

A team of researchers from the University of Oxford Wildlife Conservation Research Unit and Machine Learning Research Group detected elephants in South Africa from **space using Artificial Intelligence** with an accuracy that they have compared to human detection capabilities.

#### So, how did scientists track the elephants?

- **Earlier Methodology relied on manned aircrafts:** Before researchers developed the new technique, one of the most common survey methods to keep a check on elephant populations in savannah environments involved aerial counts undertaken from manned aircraft.
- **Limitations of earlier method:** However, this method does not deliver accurate results since observers on aircraft are prone to get exhausted, are sometimes hindered by poor visibility and may even succumb to bias. Further, aerial surveys are costly and logistically challenging.
- **Satellites Imagery Utilized:** To test the new method, researchers chose the Addo Elephant National Park in South Africa, which has a high concentration of elephants. Researchers used the highest resolution satellite imagery currently available, called Worldview3.
- **Leveraging Artificial Intelligence Technology:** At first, the satellite images appear to be of grey blobs in a forest of green splotches - but, on closer inspection, those blobs are revealed as elephants wandering through the trees. And all the laborious elephant counting is done via machine learning - a computer algorithm trained to identify elephants in a variety of backdrops.

#### Significance of using Satellite & AI Technology in counting Elephants

- **Accurate Count improves Conservation:** In order to conserve the species, it is important for scientists to track elephant populations. This is because inaccurate counts can lead to misallocation of conservation resources, which are already limited and have resulted in misunderstanding population trends.
- **Helps arrest Declining Population:** The population of African elephants has plummeted over the last century due to poaching, retaliatory killing from crop-raiding and habitat fragmentation. The scientists say better counting & monitoring could be used in anti-poaching work.
- **Useful in International borders:** This approach of using satellites and AI could vastly improve the monitoring of threatened elephant populations in habitats that span international borders, where it can be difficult to obtain permission for aircraft surveys.
- **Cost effective:** Scientists used satellite imagery that required no ground presence to monitor the elephants. The breakthrough could allow up to 5,000 sq km of elephant habitat to be surveyed on a single cloud-free day.
- **Suited in Pandemic Situation:** Also since these images are captured from space, there is no need for anyone on the ground, which is particularly helpful during these times of coronavirus

#### Did You Know?

- But, this is not the first study of its kind to initiate tracking of elephants using satellites. In 2002, Smithsonian scientists started using geographic information systems (GIS) technology to understand how they could conserve Asian elephants.
- At the time, scientists launched the first satellite-tracking project on Asian elephants in Myanmar.

## Absence of Digital Regulator

**Context:** India today has over 500 million active internet users, who consume the highest volume of data in the world (average of 25GB per month) and pay the lowest rates in the world (average price of \$0.30 per GB vs \$8 in the US).

From a **tele-density of 2% in 1995 to 12% in 2005 to over 90% in 2020**, things have come a long way. This massive rise in the use of the mobile internet helped lay the foundation for many businesses, besides delivering governance efficiently.

India urgently needs an evolved regulatory framework which empowers the consumer to utilise this digital transformation without being vulnerable to data security threats.

### **What issues arise in the absence of regulator?**

- **Data Sovereignty:** India's consumer internet is dominated by American Big Tech. Absence of regulator is therefore an associated issue of Sovereignty.
- **Implications on Freedoms:** Presence and absence of regulator has implications for freedom of expression because its content rules and broader policy determinations will determine our online public squares.
- **Continuation of offences:** Repeated offences on data breaches and sharing of data between platforms have been ignored — in the absence of a regulator.
- **Complexity of Regulation:** India has conventionally resorted to broad trade and market restrictions — such as blocking — rather than nuanced regulation of the digital space.
- **Regulation can be misconstrued as de-globalisation:** In a digitally integrated world, globalisation of ideas and information has helped economies find novel ways to power growth and inclusion. Denying digital access to certain services be it through app bans or internet shutdowns, is an act of digital de-globalisation.
- **Existing regulations misused:** Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, which gives the government the provision to block public access to specific webpages, websites and mobile applications, has been used extensively, and often without accountability. In 2020 alone, India lost \$2.8 billion due to internet shutdowns.
- **Proper Governance framework will act as propeller of growth:** A strong and consistent governance framework together with a digitally empowered Indian consumer will be a great step in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- **Proportionate Governance required:** Supreme Court, in 2019, acknowledged that internet access is integral to the right to freedom of speech and expression. Any restriction on internet access must pass the test of proportionality, and suggested the evolution of a rules-based mechanism to govern the internet

### **Way Ahead**

- As the government evolves its policies to empower a digital India, a comprehensive national security law needs to be brought in, which thrives on compliance rather than bans as a regulation mechanism.
  - One way to empower consumers is by creating mechanisms to ensure inter-operability, by making it easier to switch services from one platform to another.
- 

## Quantum Computing Applications Lab to be established

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in India will establish a Quantum Computing Applications Lab in India, in collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS).
- **Objective:** To accelerate quantum computing-led research and development and enable new scientific discoveries.

**Key takeaways**

- The Lab will provide quantum computing as a service to government ministries and departments, researchers, scientists, academia, and developers, to enable advances in areas such as manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, and aerospace engineering.
- AWS will provide hosting with technical and programmatic support for the Lab.
- The lab is World's first quantum computing applications lab on AWS to support a national government's mission to drive innovation.

**Do you know?**

- Amazon Web Services (AWS) is a subsidiary of Amazon providing on-demand cloud computing platforms and APIs to individuals, companies, and governments, on a metered pay-as-you-go basis.
- 

## Transfats and FSSAI

**Context:** In, 2020, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) reduced the permissible limit of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022, against the earlier cap of 5%.

**About new regulation**

- The decision was effected by an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.
- The new rules apply to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other cooking media like vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.
- In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) had called for a global elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023.

**Different types of fats/ fatty acids**

- All natural fats and oils are a combination of
  - Monounsaturated fatty acids
  - Polyunsaturated fatty acids
  - Saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids.

- Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated fats are 'healthy' fats as apart from being a major source of energy, they help absorb some vitamins and minerals and build cell membranes and the sheaths surrounding nerves. These fats are free-flowing.

#### About Transfats and their harmful nature

- There are two broad types of trans fats found in foods: naturally-occurring and artificial trans fats.
- **Artificial trans fats**, which are considered harmful, are created in an industrial process that **adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils** to make them more solid, **increase their shelf life**, and for use as an adulterant as they are cheap.
- They are present in baked and fried foods as well as adulterated ghee, which becomes solid at room temperature.
- Saturated fats or Trans fats are considered harmful as they clog arteries and result in hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular issues.
- The WHO estimates that over 5 lakh people with cardiovascular issues die globally every year due to the consumption of industrially produced TFAs. As per FSSAI, about 77,000 deaths take place annually in India due to TFAs.

#### How did India and other nations start acting on it?

- In 2018, the **WHO called for elimination** of industrially produced TFAs by 2023, and brought out a step-by-step guide called 'REPLACE' to help countries frame policies.
- This prompted accelerated action by member states and other stakeholders.
- However, threats posed by non-communicable diseases started gaining attention much earlier in the 1980s, following which **Denmark became the first country to ban TFAs in 2003**. In the next five years, Chile and Switzerland banned TFAs too.
- During the same period, several U.S. States, such as New York, implemented local bans.
- In its report in 2020, the WHO said that 58 countries had introduced laws that will protect 3.2 billion people from TFAs by the end of 2021.
- But more than 100 countries still needed to take action. Last year, 11 of the 15 countries that account for two-thirds of deaths linked to trans fats still needed to act. These were Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea.
- In India, action against trans fats coincided with the setting up of the FSSAI. Though it came into existence in 2006, civil society organisations say that its functioning picked up by 2011-12.
- It was in 2011 that it imposed a cap of 10% on trans fats in oils and fats in India, which was further revised to 5% in 2015.
- Civil society organisations in India are pushing for a cap of 3% for 2021 and 2% for 2022 to be imposed not just on trans fats in oils and fats, but in "all" foods.

#### About FSSAI

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is an autonomous statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSS Act).
- The Act aims to establish a single reference point for all matters relating to food safety and standards, by moving from multi-level, multi-departmental control to a single line of command.
- FSSAI works under the overall guidance of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- The FSSAI comprises of a Chairperson and twenty two members out of which one – third are to be women.
- The Chairperson of FSSAI is appointed by the Central Government.

- The Food Authority is assisted by Scientific Committees and Panels in setting standards and the Central Advisory Committee in coordinating with enforcement agencies.
- The **primary responsibility for enforcement is largely with the State Food Safety Commissioners.**

#### Landmark cases with FSSAI:

- Nestle India Limited Maggi Case: The maggi noodles were reported with excess lead unfit for human consumption and FSSAI prescribed for ban.
- Cadbury India: It was reported that worms was found in Cadbury's Dairy Milk. The FSSAI declared packaging was not proper or airtight and made it mandatory to change the packaging.

#### Challenges and Shortcomings of FSSAI

- **Large Exemption:** The “petty manufacturers, retailers and hawkers” are exempted from FSSAI ambit. These segments greatly contributes to unorganised food sector and due to its low prices, most of the population prefer food consumption from these segments.
- **Inadequate infrastructure:** Many states don't have sufficient food testing laboratories. There are only 87 National Accreditation Board for testing and calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited Labs, where as there are more than 1500 private labs in India.
- **Shortage of Human Resources:** Shortage of qualified manpower and functional food testing equipment in state food laboratories and referral laboratories resulted in deficient testing of food samples. Also, there is an acute shortage of licensing and enforcement officers in the states which severely affected food safety measures.
- **Improper functioning:** The body has been only prescriptive in nature and failed to ensure safety, quality and hygiene in food industry. Also, there are no standard practices for food inspection, the process being mostly discretionary. Moreover, the list of FSSAI regulated items is not regularly reviewed.
- **Bureaucratic Hindrances:** FSSAI is highly underfunded to monitor the widening ambit of food laws. Cumbersome and lengthy approval procedures have delayed the pre-launch approvals for products from the FSSAI for over a year. Differences of opinion between the food regulator and the food processing ministry also handicap the FSSAI functioning.
- **Federal Issues:** Regulations are made by FSSAI in accordance with international norms & trends, but the challenge lies in implementation which is a State subject.
- **Instances of Irregularities:** The CAG has found that "licenses were issued on the basis of incomplete documents in more than 50 per cent of cases, checked in Audit".

#### Conclusion

The FSSAI will need to pursue local governments to improve surveillance, inspection of food premises, sampling of food products, regular training of officers, upgradation of food labs, etc.,

### [World Economic Forum's Davos Dialogue](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; GS-III - Economy

#### In news

- Indian Prime Minister will address the World Economic Forum's Davos Dialogue on 28th January, 2021 via video conferencing.

### Important value additions

- The Davos Dialogues agenda marks the launch of the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Great Reset Initiative in the post COVID world.
- WEF is based in Cologny-Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is an NGO, founded in 1971.
- The WEF hosts an annual meeting at the end of January in Davos, a mountain resort in Graubünden, in the eastern Alps region of Switzerland.



Image source: [Click here](#)

### Emphasising self-reliance in science

**Context:** India's Department of Science and Technology recently released a draft of the fifth Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP). The public is expected to provide feedback on this document before it gets finalised

For details on the Policy: Click [here](#)

#### **Criticism of the Policy:**

##### **1. Generalised in Nature:**

- The problem with the document is that it is rambling and full of jargon and clichés, making the task of separating the grain from the chaff a major exercise in itself.

##### **2. Doesn't provide progress of previous goals:**

- The report states that the private sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D should be doubled every five years.
- The 2013 policy had similar aims. The 2020 draft policy fails to discuss what we have achieved on these fronts since then.

##### **3. Blame on Private Sector:**

- R&D investment in science continue to hover between 0.5% and 0.6% of the GDP, whereas the goal is to achieve 2% of GDP.
- The 2020 draft policy blames this on "inadequate private sector investment".
- It looks as if the government is trying to shift the responsibility of financing R&D to different agencies such as the States, private enterprises, and foreign multinational companies.

##### **4. Post-Pandemic Situation:**

- It is doubtful if the various funding models that are presented in the draft report are workable or practical, especially during a pandemic.

- The policymakers who drafted this report should have gone back to the self-financing revenue model proposed in the Dehradun Declaration for the CSIR labs back in 2015 and critically evaluated its success rate

#### **5. Basic Research should be government driven:**

- Common sense informs us that the private sector cannot be expected to pay for basic research.
- This is because the return on investment in basic research takes too long from a private sector perspective.
- Only the government can have long-term interest to support such research.
- Participation of the private sector in basic science has not happened even in the U.S.

#### **6. Inadequate funding for Basic Sciences R&D:**

- The fact is that basic science research in India is suffering from the lack of adequate funding despite grand proclamations.
- Even elite institutes like the Indian Institutes of Technology are finding it difficult to run their laboratories on a day-to-day basis because of paucity of funds.

#### **7. Contradictory STI Governance:**

- The draft policy visualises a decentralized institutional mechanism balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches, focusing on administrative and financial management, research governance, data and regulatory frameworks and system interconnectedness, for a robust STI Governance.
- However, several new authorities, observatories and centres have been proposed, which may end up feeding up the already fattened bureaucracy in science administration.

#### **8. Issue of Inclusivity and proportionate representation:**

- As a part of inculcating an inclusive culture in academia, the document promises to tackle discriminations “based on gender, caste, religion, geography, language, disability and other exclusions and inequalities”.
- It also mentions more representation of women and the LGBTQ community, but is silent on how we are to achieve it.

#### **9. Scientific temperament:**

- The draft reiterates the constitutional obligation to “develop a scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.”
- But it is silent on how this can be achieved when pseudoscience is deliberately propagated by certain sections who feel protected by ruling dispensation.

#### **Conclusion**

- The ruling dispensation has a moral obligation to facilitate an environment that encourages a mindset that constantly challenges conventional wisdom as well as open-minded inquiry among the students. Only a dissenting mind can think out of the box.
- With the advent of new disruptive technologies, global competitiveness will be increasingly determined by the quality of science and technology, which in turn will depend on raising the standard of Indian research/education centres and on the volume of R&D spending. India has no time to waste.

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

### Forest fires in Himachal Pradesh

**Context:** Himachal Pradesh frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions. In the month of Jan 2021, a forest fire which started near Kullu raged for several days before being brought under control. Forest fires were also reported in Shimla and other parts of the state.

#### **What is the forest cover of Himachal Pradesh?**

- **Legal Classification:** Although two-thirds of the total geographical area of Himachal Pradesh is legally classified as forest area.
- **Effective Forest Cover:** Much of the declared forest area is permanently under snow, glaciers, cold desert or alpine meadows and is above the tree line. This leaves an effective forest cover of around 28% of the total area which amounts to 15,434 square kilometres, as per the Forest Survey of India.
- **Common Trees:** Chir Pine, Deodar, Oak, Kail, Fir and Spruce are some of the common trees found here.

#### **Forest Fires in Himachal Pradesh a recurrent phenomenon**

Except for periods of precipitation in monsoon and winter, the forests remain vulnerable to wildfires. Forest fires are a recurrent annual phenomenon in the state, and most commonly occur in Chir Pine forests.

- **In the summer season,** forest fires occur frequently in the low and middle hills of the state, where forests of Chir Pine are common.
- **The dry summer season** from March to June coincides with the shedding of highly-combustible needles by Chir Pine trees. Once the fallen dry needles catch fire, it can spread quickly over the entire forest due to the action of the wind.
- However, due to their thick bark, the Chir Pine trees are themselves relatively unharmed by these fires, and can spring back to life during the monsoon season.
- **During the post-monsoon season** and in winters, forest fires are also reported in higher areas, including parts of Shimla, Kullu, Chamba, Kangra and Mandi districts, where they usually occur in grasslands.

#### **What causes the fire?**

- **Natural causes** such as lightning or rubbing of dry bamboos with each other can sometimes result in fires
- **Human Factors:** When the grass is dry, even a small spark, such as someone dropping a burning matchstick, torchwood or a bidi/cigarette, can cause a massive fire. A spark can also be produced when dry pine needles or leaves fall on an electric pole.
- **Forest Activities:** People who frequently pass through a forest to gather minor produce, take their animals for grazing or for other purposes may set up a temporary hearth to cook food or warm themselves. If they leave behind a smouldering fire, it can develop into a forest fire.
- **Agricultural Practices:** Also, when people burn their fields to clear them of stubble, dry grass or undergrowth, the fire sometimes spreads to the adjoining forest.

#### **What are the fuels of such massive fires?**

- **The dry leaf litter** on the forest ground acts as a ready fuel. Fallen tree leaves, dry grass, weeds, low brushwood, deadwood on the forest floor, logs and stumps etc form the surface fuels.

- Below the loose litter, **decaying materials such as humus**, wood, shrubs, roots, much and peat can also support the combustion.
- Above the surface level, **dry standing trees**, mosses, lichens, dry epiphytic or parasitic plants, and fallen branches trapped in the understory can spread the fire to the upper foliage and the tree crowns.

#### What damages do the forest fires cause?

- **Impacts regenerative capacity of forests:** Forest fires can cause a lot of damage to the regeneration in the forests and their productivity. Moisture-loving trees such as Oaks and Deodars may give way to other species and exotic weeds.
- **Impact on Water system:** Forests help maintain aquifers and continuous flow of streams and springs, and provide firewood, fodder and non-timber produce to the local communities – all these capacities may get adversely affected in case of a fire.
- **Impact on Soil Productivity:** Forest fires may destroy organic matter in the soil and expose the top layer to erosion thus negatively impacting soil fertility & productivity.
- **Impact on animal and human lives:** Forest fires may also impact the wildlife by burning eggs, killing young animals and driving the adult animals away from their safe haven. Sometimes, a forest fire may get out of control and extend to human settlements, thus posing danger to human life and property.
- **Economic Losses:** From 2016-17 to 2019-20, the annual loss to the Himachal Pradesh state due to forest fires has ranged from Rs 1.7 crore to Rs 3.5 crore. Around 1,200 to 2,500 forest fires were reported each year during this period affecting thousands of hectares.

#### Are the recent forest fires unusual?

- Forest fires are common every time a dry spell hits the state.
- Himachal witnessed **unusually dry weather conditions last year (2020)** from August to November, resulting in drought-like conditions.
- That period also saw a large number of forest fires – at least 500 fires were recorded from August till early November.
- Currently in the second week of Jan 2021, the weather has been dry resulting in some fires.

#### What is done to prevent and control forest fires?

- **Getting rid of forest fire fuels:** Clearing camping sites of dried biomass. Early burning of dry litter on the forest floor
- **Changing Composition of Forest:** Growing strips of fire-hardy plant species within the forest
- **Defensive Mechanism:** Creating fire lines in the forests (fire lines are strips in the forest kept clear of vegetation to prevent the fire from spreading).
- **Better Predictions:** Forecasting fire-prone days using meteorological data will help control forest fires at early stages
- **Dedicated Force:** Once a fire starts, early detection and quick action by fire-fighting squads is crucial. For such activities, the state forest department has a fire protection and fire control unit.
- **Regulation of Forest activities:** In 1999, the state government notified forest fire rules which restrict or regulate certain activities in and around forest areas such as lighting a fire, burning agricultural stubble or undergrowth (ghasnis) and stacking inflammable forest produce such as dried leaves and firewood.

#### Connecting the dots

- Australian Wildfires: Click [Here](#)

## [DRDO signs MoU with MoRTH on Geo-Hazard Management](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Disaster Management

**In news**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has entered into a framework MoU with the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) to strengthen collaboration on sustainable Geo-Hazard management.

**Key takeaways**

- DRDO's Defence Geo-Informatics Research Establishment (DGRE) is working for the development of critical technologies for enhancing combat effectiveness in various kinds of terrains and avalanches.
- It has been agreed that the expertise of DGRE will be utilized in providing sustainable mitigation measures to damages caused by landslides, avalanche and other natural factors on various National Highways in the Country.
- MoRTH is responsible for development & maintenance of National Highways across the country.

## DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

## [Maiden Flight Trial of SAHAYAK-NG, Air Droppable Container](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence & Security

**In news**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) along with Indian Navy conducted the successful maiden test trial of 'SAHAYAK-NG' off the coast of Goa.
- It is India's first indigenously designed and developed Air Dropped Container from IL 38SD aircraft (Indian Navy)

**Key takeaways**

- The trial was conducted by Indian Navy to enhance its operational logistics capabilities and provide critical engineering stores to ships which are deployed more than 2000 km from the coast.
- It reduces the requirement of ships to come close to the coast to collect spares and stores.
- SAHAYAK-NG is an advanced version of SAHAYAK Mk I.
- The newly developed GPS aided air dropped container is having the capability to carry a payload that weighs upto 50 kg and can be dropped from heavy aircraft.

## [Induction of Indigenous Bridging System into the Indian Army](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence & Security

**In news**

- In close coordination with the private industry and DRDO, the Indian Army has inducted three sets of 10-metre short span bridges.

**Key takeaways**

- The equipment will meet the important requirement of providing mobility to own forces by speedy bridging of gaps during operations.
- This accomplishment is a step towards weaning away our armed forces from foreign manufactured equipment because the Bridge is indigenously designed, developed and delivered.
- All stakeholders have put in concerted efforts to overcome challenges and realise the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government, which aims to ensure self reliance and self sufficiency in meeting the defence needs of the Indian Army.



### [MoD signs contract with BEL to supply indigenously developed 10 Lynx U2 Fire Control systems for Indian Navy](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

**In news**

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for procurement of 10 Lynx U2 Fire Control systems for frontline warships of Indian Navy.

- **Designed and developed by:** BEL

#### Key takeaways

- The Lynx system would further the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' vision.
- The LYNX U2 GFCS is a Naval Gun Fire Control System designed to acquire, track and engage targets amidst sea clutter.
- It is capable of accurately tracking air/surface targets, generating required target data for predicting weapon aiming points and engaging target.
- The target engagement is carried out with the medium/short range gun mounts like Russian AK176, A190 and AK630 and the SRGM available onboard ships.
- The system will be installed on the NOPV, Talwar and Teg class of ships.
- The system includes the Tracking Radar, Servo and Weapon Control Modules.
- The indigenous system will ensure maximum up-time of the system and guarantees excellent Product support throughout its life time.

### [BEL signs contract with Indian Navy for Initial supply of indigenously developed Laser Dazzlers](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

#### In news

- Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has signed a contract with Indian Navy for initial supply of 20 Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation Dazzlers (Laser Dazzlers).
- **Developed by:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

#### Key takeaways

- The Laser Dazzler is used as a non-lethal method for warning and stopping suspicious vehicles/boats/aircrafts/UAVs/pirates etc. from approaching secured areas during both day and night.
- It is capable of dazzle and thereby suppress the person's/optical sensor's action with disability glare in case of non-compliance to orders.
- It disorient/ confuse/blind a person temporarily.
- It also dazzles and distract aircraft/UAVs.
- It is a portable, shoulder operated and ruggedized for military use in adverse environmental conditions.
- This unique product is indigenously designed and developed for the first time for the Armed Forces.

### [MARCOS being deployed in the Eastern Ladakh](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence & Security

#### In news

- MARCOS are being deployed in the Eastern Ladakh alongside the Indian Army against the Chinese military.

- They are present in the vicinity of the Pangong Tso lake where they will soon be conducting missions using boats.

### Important value addition

- The Marine Commandos are abbreviated as MARCOS and officially called the Marine Commando Force (MCF).
- It is the special forces unit of the Indian Navy that is responsible for conducting special operations.
- MARCOS was founded in February 1987.
- MARCOS are capable of operating in all types of environments; at sea, in air and on land.
- The force has gradually acquired experience and an international reputation for professionalism.
- The MARCOS regularly undertake specialised maritime operations in Jammu and Kashmir through the Jhelum River and Wular Lake.

### Ministry of Defence (MoD) seeks to exempt armed forces personnel from the ambit of decriminalization of adultery

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

#### In news

- The Supreme Court recently admitted a petition filed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- MoD has sought to exempt armed forces personnel from the ambit of a Constitution Bench judgment of 2018 that decriminalised adultery.

#### Key takeaways

- A three-judge Bench led by Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman said the plea had to be considered by a Constitution Bench because the original verdict, striking down Section 497 (adultery) of the IPC, was pronounced by a five-judge Bench in September 2018.
- The court referred the case to the Chief Justice to pass appropriate orders to form a five-judge Bench to clarify the impact of the 2018 judgment on the armed forces.

#### Reason given by the government for seeking exemption:

- There will always be a concern in the minds of the Army personnel who are operating far away from their families under challenging conditions about the family indulging in untoward activity.
- Personnel of the Army, Navy and the Air Force were a “distinct class”.
- They were governed by special legislation, the Army Act, the Navy Act and the Air Force Act.
- Adultery amounted to an unbecoming conduct and a violation of discipline under the three Acts.
- The three laws were protected by Article 33 of the Constitution, which allowed the government to modify the fundamental rights of the armed forces personnel.

## Procurement of LCA Tejas approved

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

**In news**

- The Union Cabinet has approved procurement of 73 LCA Tejas Mk-1A fighter aircrafts and 10 LCA Tejas Mk-1 Trainer aircrafts.

**Key takeaways**

- Light Combat Aircraft Mk-1A variant is an indigenously designed, developed and manufactured state-of-the-art modern 4+ generation fighter aircraft.
- This aircraft is equipped with critical operational capabilities of Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) Radar, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) Missile, Electronic Warfare (EW) Suite and Air to Air Refuelling (AAR) would be a potent platform to meet the operational requirements of Indian Air Force, IAF.
- It is the first “Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)” category procurement of combat aircrafts with an indigenous content of 50% which will progressively reach 60% by the end of the programme.
- The Cabinet has also approved infrastructure development by IAF under the project to enable them handle servicing at their base depot so that the turnaround time would get reduced for mission critical systems and would lead to increased availability of aircraft.

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## India’s First Indigenously Developed 9mm Machine Pistol

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech

**In news**

- India’s first indigenous 9mm Machine Pistol has been jointly developed by DRDO and Indian Army.

**Key takeaways**

- The Machine Pistol fires the in-service 9mm ammunition and sports an upper receiver made from aircraft grade Aluminium and lower receiver from carbon fibre.
- 3D Printing process has been used in designing and prototyping of various parts including trigger components made by metal 3D printing.
- The weapon has huge potential in Armed forces.
- The weapon is named “Asmi” meaning “Pride”, “Self-Respect” & “Hard Work”.
- This small step will pave way for self reliance and it is expected that the Services and Paramilitary Forces (PMFs) will induct this expeditiously.



### [Indian Army signs \\$20-million contract with ideaForge](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence and Security

**In news**

- The Indian Army has signed a \$20-million contract with ideaForge to procure undisclosed quantities of a high-altitude variant of SWITCH UAV.
- ideaForge is a player in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology.

#### **Important value additions**

- SWITCH UAV is an indigenous system built to cater to the most demanding surveillance operations of the Indian forces.
- This fixed-wing vertical take-off and landing UAV can be deployed at high altitudes and under harsh environments for day and night surveillance.

### [DRDO hands over Motor Bike Ambulance 'Rakshita' to CRPF](#)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence & Security & Sci & Tech

**In news**

- DRDO hands over Motor Bike Ambulance 'Rakshita' to CRPF.

#### **Key takeaways**

- Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Delhi based DRDO laboratory, handed over Rakshita to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).
- It is a bike-based casualty transport emergency vehicle.
- Rakshita is fitted with a customized reclining Casualty Evacuation Seat (CES), which can be fitted in and taken out as per requirement.
- The bike ambulance will help in overcoming the problems faced by Indian security forces and emergency healthcare providers.
- It will provide life-saving aid for evacuation of injured patients from low intensity conflict areas.
- This bike ambulance is useful not only for the paramilitary and military forces but has potential civil applications too.



## Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW)

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Defence & History

**In news**

- DRDO successfully conducted captive and release trial of indigenously developed Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) from Hawk-I of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) off the Odisha coast.



### **Key takeaways**

- The smart weapon was successfully test fired from Indian Hawk-Mk132 of HAL.
- This was the 9th successful mission of SAAW conducted by DRDO till now.
- **Indigenously designed and developed by:** DRDO
- This is 125 Kg class smart weapon, capable of engaging ground enemy airfield assets such as radars, bunkers, taxi tracks, and runways etc. up to a range of 100 kms.
- The high precision guided bomb is light weight as compared to weapon system of the same class.

## Integrated Weapons System Design Centre

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS- III – Defence & Security

**In news**

- Indian Vice President recently inaugurated the Integrated Weapons System Design Centre at DRDO's Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile complex in Hyderabad.

**Key takeaways**

- The Integrated Weapon System Design facility is said to enhance the capability in design and development of command & control systems for surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems and ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems.
- Centre will give a thrust to the overall system design and evaluation methodology for state-of-the-art missile systems and will help in improving the performance of missiles.
- The Vice President inaugurated a new missile technology exposition and seminar hall on the campus.
- The exposition will display missile technologies and weapon systems and the centre will be the backbone for outreach activities.

## Data Privacy can take the form of non-price competition: CCI

**Part of:** GS Prelims and GS-III – Cyber Security

**In news**

- A study by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has said that the Data privacy can take the form of non-price competition and abuse of dominance can lower privacy protection,

**Key takeaways**

- CCI noted that an aspect of data in the context of competition in digital communications market is the conflict between allowing access and protecting consumer privacy.
- Abuse of dominance can take the form of lowering the privacy protection and therefore fall within the ambit of antitrust as low privacy standard implies lack of consumer welfare.
- The study also made observations about other non-price factors such as quality of service (QoS), data speeds and bundled offerings, which are likely to be the new drivers of competitive rivalry between service providers in telecom sector in addition to just price.

## **Important value additions**

**Competition Commission of India (CCI)**

- It is a statutory body of the Government of India.
- It is responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India.
- It prevents activities that have an appreciable adverse effect on competition in India.

- It was established on 14 October 2003 and became fully functional in May 2009.
  - CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
  - It is the duty of the Commission to:
    - eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition,
    - promote and sustain competition,
    - protect the interests of consumers,
    - ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
-

## MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Banana Grit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientists have come up with a new product, banana grit or granules, developed from raw Nendran bananas.</li> <li>• Billed as an ideal ingredient for a healthy diet, banana grit can be used for making a wide range of dishes.</li> <li>• The product resembles to 'rava' and broken wheat.</li> <li>• The concept was introduced to utilise the presence of resistant starch in bananas, which is reported to improve gut health.</li> </ul>
2. Nendran Banana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changalikodan Nendran Banana or famously known as Changalikodan is a banana variety originated and cultivated in Chengazhikodu village of Thrissur District in Kerala.</li> <li>• Changalikodan, now are cultivated on the banks of the Bharathapuzha river.</li> <li>• Changalikodan got Geographical indication registration from the Geographical Indications Registry, Chennai.</li> </ul>
3. Pong Dam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearly 1,400 migratory birds were found dead recently due to an unexplained cause in the Pong Dam area of Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh. The local authorities have suspended all tourism activities in the reservoir precincts</li> <li>• The Pong Dam, also known as the Beas Dam, is an earth-fill embankment dam on the Beas River in the state of Himachal Pradesh.</li> </ul>
4. Sabari River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a unique initiative, Migrant fisher-folk families have built temporary houses on the sands of Sabari river along the tri-State border of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh in East Godavari Agency.</li> <li>• Sabari River is one of the main tributaries of Godavari.</li> <li>• It originates from the western slopes of Eastern Ghats in Odisha from Sinkaram hill ranges.</li> <li>• It forms common boundary between Chhattisgarh and Odisha states and later enters into Andhra Pradesh to merge with River Godavari.</li> <li>• It is also known as Kolab river in Odisha.</li> <li>• Upper Kolab project, located in Odisha across the Sabari is a major dam project supplying water for irrigation and Hydro power generation.</li> </ul>
5. Sileru River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sileru River (known as Machkund in its upper reaches) is the major tributary of Sabari.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It joins Sabari river at tri-junction boundary point of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.</li> <li>• Sileru river has huge potential of hydro electricity generation.</li> </ul>
6. Chattergala Tunnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed Chattergala tunnel in Jammu &amp; Kashmir will connect district Kathua with district Doda enroute the new Highway via Basohli-Bani through Chattergalla to touch Bhaderwah and Doda.</li> <li>• This is going to be a historic landmark project providing all-weather alternate road connectivity between the two distant regions and reducing the travel time from Doda to Lakhanpur on the Punjab border to just around four hours.</li> <li>• It is going to be a 6.8 Km long tunnel.</li> <li>• The tunnel is likely to take about 4 years for completion after the execution work starts and its construction cost is around Rs. 3,000 crore.</li> </ul>
7. World Hindi Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Hindi Day was recently observed on 10th January.</li> <li>• The day is commemorated every year with the objective to promote use of Hindi language abroad.</li> <li>• On this day in 2006, the First World Hindi Conference was held in Nagpur.</li> <li>• Since then, every year 10th January is being observed as the World Hindi Day.</li> </ul>
8. Eluru illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 550 people in Eluru town of Andhra Pradesh's West Godavari district have been suffering from convulsions, seizures, dizziness and nausea.</li> <li>• The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has found traces of lead and nickel in blood samples of some victims.</li> <li>• The primary suspicion is on water contamination by heavy metals.</li> <li>• Scientists suspect that pesticide or insecticide has seeped into drinking water sources.</li> <li>• Eluru receives water through canals from both Godavari and Krishna rivers.</li> <li>• The canals pass through agricultural fields where runoff laced with pesticides mixes with water in the canals.</li> <li>• Many aspects of the mystery illness have baffled scientists.</li> <li>• People who only use packaged drinking water have also fallen sick.</li> </ul>
9. Sea Vigil 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The second edition of the biennial pan-India coastal defence exercise 'Sea Vigil-21' will be conducted on 12-13 January 2021.</li> <li>• The exercise will be undertaken along the entire 7516 km coastline</li> </ul>

	<p>and Exclusive Economic Zone of India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will involve all the 13 coastal States and Union Territories along with other maritime stakeholders, including the fishing and coastal communities.</li> <li>• The exercise is being coordinated by the Indian Navy.</li> <li>• The exercise is a build up towards the major Theatre level exercise TROPEX [Theatre-level Readiness Operational Exercise] which Indian Navy conducts every two years.</li> <li>• SEA VIGIL and TROPEX together will cover the entire spectrum of maritime security challenges, including transition from peace to conflict.</li> </ul>
10. Khelo India Zaskar Winter Sport & Youth festival 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zaskar Winter Sports &amp; Youth Festival 2021 is being organized from 18th to 30th January 2021 by the Dept. of Sports &amp; Youth Services under the Khelo India banner in collaboration with the Ladakh Tourism Department.</li> <li>• Zaskar, Zahar (locally) or Zangskar is also known as Janskar or Jangskar.</li> <li>• The Zaskar Range is a mountain range in the union territory of Ladakh that separates Zaskar from Ladakh.</li> <li>• Geologically, the Zaskar Range is part of the Tethys Himalaya, an approximately 100-km-wide synclinorium (synclinal form that includes a series of smaller folds) formed by strongly folded and weakly metamorphosed sedimentary series.</li> <li>• The average height of the Zaskar Range is about 6,000 m.</li> <li>• Its eastern part is known as Rupshu.</li> </ul>
11. First ever ice climbing festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Leh, the first ever Ice climbing festival was celebrated in Nubra valley.</li> <li>• Nubra is a subdivision and a tehsil in the union territory of Ladakh.</li> <li>• Its inhabited areas form a tri-armed valley cut by the Nubra and Shyok rivers.</li> <li>• The Shyok River meets the Nubra River (or Siachan River) to form a large valley that separates the Ladakh and Karakoram Ranges.</li> <li>• The Shyok river is a tributary of the Indus river.</li> </ul>
12. Shijiazhuang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shijiazhuang has become China's new hotspot of Coronavirus surge.</li> <li>• It is the capital and largest city of North China's Hebei Province.</li> <li>• It is situated east of the Taihang Mountains.</li> <li>• The city stands at the edge of the North China Plain, which rises to the Taihang Mountains to the west of the city, and lies south of the Hutuo</li> </ul>

	River.
13. Kayakalp awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public and Private Health Facilities were felicitated with Kayakalp award for high standards of Sanitation and Hygiene.</li> <li>The government had launched a National Initiative 'Kayakalp' on 15th May 2015 to ensure hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness in Public Health Facilities in India</li> </ul>
14. CollabCAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Informatics Centre (NIC), MeitY along with Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Ministry of Education is jointly launching CollabCAD Software.</li> <li>CollabCAD software will be used for Practical assignments as part of the subject curriculum for making different types of 3D designs and 2D Drawings.</li> <li>Students from around 140 plus schools across the country and the schools in the Middle East (affiliated with CBSE, New Delhi) will have access to this software which can be used for practical projects and understanding concepts of Engineering Graphics.</li> </ul>
15. Dzukou Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The wildfire at Dzukou Valley has been doused after it raged for two weeks.</li> <li>The Dzüko Valley is located at the borders of the states of Nagaland and Manipur.</li> <li>The valley is famous for its wide range of flowers in every season but the most famous one is the Dzüko Lily and it is found only in this valley.</li> </ul>
16. Dharashiv Caves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DharaShiv caves were in news recently when Maharashtra CM referred to Osmanabad as Dharashiv (named after 6th century caves).</li> <li>Osmanabad is named after the last ruler of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan, while Dharashiv is derived from the name for the sixth-century caves near the city.</li> <li>Dharashiv caves are the nexus of 7 caves in Balaghat mountains in Maharashtra.</li> <li>These have been declared as Protected area by Government of Maharashtra.</li> <li>They are believed to be built around 5th-7th century.</li> <li>There have been debates over caves whether they are Buddhist or Jain creations.</li> <li>It is believed that these caves were originally Buddhist, but later some caves were converted to Jain caves.</li> </ul>

17. Sulawesi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Indonesia, heavy rain is hampering the search operation for survivors following a powerful earthquake on Sulawesi island.</li> <li>• Sulawesi is an island in Indonesia.</li> <li>• It is situated east of Borneo, west of the Maluku Islands, and south of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.</li> <li>• The Strait of Makassar runs along the western side of the island and separates the island from Borneo.</li> <li>• Within Indonesia, it is smaller than Sumatra and larger than Java Island.</li> <li>• Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" where tectonic plates collide, and the country has a history of devastating earthquakes and tsunamis.</li> </ul>
18. Harike Wetland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winter migratory water birds using the central Asian flyway have started making a beeline to Punjab's Harike wetland, offering a delight for bird lovers.</li> <li>• Harike Wetland is the largest wetland in northern India in the border of Tarn Taran Sahib district and Ferozepur district of Punjab.</li> <li>• The wetland and the Harike lake were formed by constructing the headworks across the Sutlej river in 1953.</li> <li>• It has been designated as one of the Ramasar sites in India.</li> </ul>
19. Furfura Pilgrimage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Furfura pilgrimage site was in news owing to it becoming the epicentre of Muslim politics in West Bengal.</li> <li>• Furfura Sharif (also known as Furfura, Phurphura, Furfura Darbar Sharif) is a village in Hooghly District, West Bengal.</li> <li>• It is a holy place for Bengali Muslims.</li> <li>• According to locals, this is the second most prominent mazar in the country after Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan.</li> </ul>
20. Exercise Desert Knight-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indian Air Force and French Air and Space Force will conduct a bilateral Air exercise, Ex Desert Knight-21 at Air Force Station Jodhpur from 20 to 24 Jan 2021.</li> <li>• The exercise is unique as it includes fielding of Rafale aircraft by both sides.</li> </ul>
21. Exercise Kavach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large scale Joint Military exercise 'Exercise Kavach' involving assets of Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and Indian Coast Guard is being conducted in the coming week under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC).</li> <li>• The exercise involves synergised application of maritime surveillance assets, coordinated air and maritime strikes, air defence, submarine</li> </ul>

	<p>and landing operations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concurrently Joint Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) exercise involving various technical, electronic and human intelligence from three services will be conducted.</li> <li>• The tri-services exercise aims to fine tune joint war-fighting capabilities and SOPs towards enhancing operational synergy.</li> <li>• The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) is the only Joint Forces Command of the country.</li> </ul>
22. Leang Tedongnge Cave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Archaeologists have discovered the world's oldest known cave art — a life-sized picture of a wild pig that was painted at least 45,500 years ago in Indonesia.</li> <li>• The Sulawesi warty pig painting was found in the limestone cave of Leang Tedongnge.</li> <li>• The warty pig depicted in the painting is endemic to this Indonesian island.</li> <li>• The cave is in a valley that is enclosed by steep limestone cliffs, and is only accessible by a narrow cave passage in the dry season.</li> <li>• The isolated Bugis community living in this hidden valley claim it had never before been visited by Westerners.</li> <li>• The previously oldest dated rock art 'scene' at least 43,900 years old, was a depiction of hybrid human-animal beings hunting Sulawesi warty pigs and dwarf bovinds.</li> </ul>
23. Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recognize and honour the invaluable contribution and selfless service rendered by individuals and organizations in India in the field of Disaster Management, Government of India has instituted an annual award known as Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar.</li> <li>• For the year 2021, (i) Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (in the institutional category) and (ii) Dr. Rajendra Kumar Bhandari (in the Individual category) have been selected for the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar for their excellent work in Disaster Management.</li> <li>• The award is announced every year on 23rd January, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.</li> <li>• The award carries a cash prize of Rs. 51 lakh and a certificate in case of an institution and Rs. 5 lakh and a certificate in case of an individual</li> </ul>
24. Bhawana Kanth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flight lieutenant Bhawana Kanth is set to become the first woman fighter pilot to take part in the Republic Day parade.</li> <li>• She will be a part of the Indian Air Force's (IAF's) tableau that will</li> </ul>

	<p>showcase mock-ups of the light combat aircraft, light combat helicopter and the Sukhoi-30 fighter plane.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She is currently posted at an airbase in Rajasthan where she flies the MiG-21 Bison fighter plane.</li> <li>• Kanth is also one of the first women fighter pilots in the IAF.</li> </ul>
25. Padma Awards 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This year the President has approved conferment of 119 Padma Awards.</li> <li>• Important ones are listed below.</li> </ul>
26. Padma Vibhushan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second-highest civilian award of the Republic of India, after the Bharat Ratna</li> <li>• Shinzo Abe (Japan) - Public Affairs</li> <li>• S P Balasubramaniam (Posthumous) - Art</li> <li>• Belle Monappa Hegde - Medicine</li> <li>• Maulana Wahiduddin Khan - Others: Spiritualism</li> </ul>
27. Padma Bhushan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third-highest civilian award in the Republic of India, preceded by the Bharat Ratna and the Padma Vibhushan and followed by the Padma Shri</li> <li>• Krishnan Nair Shantakumari Chithra - Art</li> <li>• Tarun Gogoi (Posthumous) - Public Affairs</li> <li>• Chandrashekhar Kambara - Literature and Education</li> <li>• Sumitra Mahajan - Public Affairs</li> <li>• Kalbe Sadiq (Posthumous) - Others: Spiritualism</li> </ul>
28. MARUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai re-dedicated its artefacts of Rail Locomotives that have been restored during the lockdown period, for the visitors.</li> <li>• India's own first indigenously designed and developed fighter aircraft Marut will now be available for public viewing.</li> </ul>
29. manoeuvres at sea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ex KAVACH for defence of Andaman &amp; Nicobar Islands formed a part of AMPHEX – 21.</li> <li>• A joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance exercise under the aegis of HQ Integrated Defence Staff was also run concurrently to achieve Maritime Domain Awareness by employment of a multitude of sensors.</li> </ul>
30. AMPHEX – 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large-scale tri-service joint amphibious exercise AMPHEX – 21 was conducted in Andaman &amp; Nicobar group of islands from 21 – 25 Jan 2021.</li> <li>• The exercise involved participation of Naval ships, amphibious troops</li> </ul>

of the Army and different types of aircraft from the Air force.

- Aim: Validating India's capabilities to safeguard the territorial integrity of its island territories.
- It also sought to enhance operational synergy and joint warfighting capabilities amongst the three Services.
- The exercise involved multi-faceted maritime operations by synergised employment of amphibious assault ships, surveillance platforms, execution of maritime air strikes and complex.



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## (TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

### Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Paradip Port is located in which state?

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Odisha
- c) Kerala
- d) Rajasthan

Q.2 consider the following statements regarding Build - Operate - Transfer contract:

1. It is one of the models of public private partnership.
2. Initially the projects are built and operated by a public entity and later on it is transferred to the private entity after typically two or three decades.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.3 Consider the following statements regarding SAHAYAK – NG:

1. It is India's first indigenously designed and developed Air Droppable Container.
2. It has the capacity to carry the payload that weighs up 200 kg .
3. It can be dropped only from a light aircraft.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3
- d) 2 and 3 only

Q.4 Which of the following regarding ethanol is incorrect?

- a) Ethanol as a fuel is non polluting.
- b) Ethanol blending can decrease the dependence on fossil fuels.

c) Ethanol can be used as an alternative fuel to reduce air pollution.

d) Government has fixed target of 20% blending of fuel grade ethanol with petrol by 2022.

Q.5 Kala Azar is endemic in which of the following states of India?

1. Bihar
2. Jharkhand
3. Chhattisgarh
4. Odisha
5. West Bengal

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 4 and 5 only
- c) 2, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1,2 and 5 only

Q.6 Consider the following statements regarding Kala Azar:

1. It is caused by infection with leishmania fungus.
2. Visceral leishmaniasis is spread by sandfly bites.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.7 Horticulture farming consists of which of the following?

- a) Fruits
- b) Vegetables
- c) Nuts
- d) All of the above

Q.8 Asian Development Bank is headquartered at which of the following?

- a) China
- b) India
- c) Malaysia

d) Philippines

Q.9 Consider the following statements regarding Assam Power Sector Investment Programme that was approved by the ADB Board in July 2014:

1. The project is run-of-the-river project over Brahmaputra River.
2. It will help increase electricity supplied from clean energy by 469 gigawatthour (GWh) by 2030.
3. A \$2 million grant from Japan fund for poverty reduction (JFPR) is also associated with the project.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.10 Pong Dam is located in which state?

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Odisha
- c) Kerala
- d) Himachal Pradesh

Q.11 consider the following statements regarding Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

1. It was an agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—plus Germany) together with the European Union.
2. Under JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.12 Consider the following statements regarding Gibraltar:

1. Gibraltar is a small portion of land on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula.
2. There is a sovereignty dispute regarding Gibraltar between Spain and France

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.13 Consider the following statements regarding National Biopharma Mission (NBM):

1. It is implemented by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).
2. It is 50% co-funded by AIDB.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.14 Which of the following is/are India's operational research stations in Antarctica?

- a) Dakshin Gangotri
- b) Maitri
- c) Bharati.
- d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.15 Consider the following statements regarding Kolar leaf-nosed bat:

1. It is found only in one cave of Andhra Pradesh.
2. It is listed as critically endangered in IUCN Red List.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.16 Which of the following is not the Ramsar Site of Northeast India?

- Loktak Lake
- Rudrasagar Lake
- Deepor Beel
- Kabartal Wetland

Q.17 Consider the following statements regarding Avian Influenza:

- It is caused by Avian influenza Type A viruses.
- AI viruses can be transmitted to humans via the consumption of contaminated poultry products.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.18 Which among the following region is called as rust belt of Japan?

- Shikoku
- Honsh
- Kyushu
- Chubu

Q.19 Hirakud Dam, the longest earthen dam in the world, is located at which of the following?

- Puri
- Sambalpur
- Kangra
- Nagpur

Q.20 Recently, a statement on Climate of India during 2020 was recently released by India Meteorological Department (IMD). Consider the following statements regarding the same:

- The 2020 Northeast monsoon season rainfall over India as a whole was less than normal.
- 2020 was the warmest year since 1901.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.21 Chattergala Tunnel will be constructed at which of the following?

- Jammu and Kashmir
- Goa
- Sikkim
- Assam

Q.22 Which of the following is the only riverine major port of India?

- Mumbai
- Kandla
- Mangalore
- Kolkata

Q.23 World Bank is headquartered at which of the following?

- Washington
- Paris
- Switzerland
- Netherlands

Q.24 Which of the following statement regarding a biodigester is incorrect?

- A biodigester system utilizes organic waste, particularly animal and human excreta, to produce fertilizer and biogas.
- It consists of an airtight polyethylene container within which excreta diluted in water flow continuously.
- The fermentation process is aerobic.
- The bacteria responsible for decomposition are methanogenic.

Q.25 Consider the following statements regarding Caracal:

- IUCN Red List status is Least Concern
- National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has decided to include of Caracal into the list of critically endangered species.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.26 Where is Sariska Tiger Reserve located?

- a) Madhya Pradesh
- b) Uttar Pradesh
- c) Sikkim
- d) Rajasthan

Q.27 Consider the following statements regarding Coriander:

1. Ministry of Commerce has assigned 'Coriander' to the district of Kota in the list of One District One Product
2. Only Guna district of Madhya Pradesh contributes major share in coriander export from the country.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.28 Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) India Forum-2021 is being organised by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.29 Which of the following Countries are part of Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES)?

1. Brazil
2. China
3. South Africa
4. India
5. Pakistan
6. USA

Select the correct code:

- a) 1,2 and 3 only
- b) 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- c) 2, 4 and 6 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

Q.30 Which of the following sea borders Libya in the north?

- a) Mediterranean Sea
- b) Black sea
- c) Aral sea
- d) Caspian Sea

Q.31 Who can remove the Judge of the Supreme Court?

- a) Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- b) Only President
- c) Only Parliament
- d) Both Parliament and President

Q.32 Consider the following statements regarding Gangetic Dolphin:

1. It is the the National Aquatic Animal of India
2. Its IUCN Status is Critically Endangered.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.33) Consider the following statements regarding Vanadium:

1. The elemental metal is rarely found in nature.
2. The metal is used in strengthening steel and titanium.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.34 Which of the following state is likely to become India's prime producer of vanadium?

- a) Assam
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Gujarat
- d) Arunachal Pradesh

Q.35 Consider the following statements regarding

1. LiDAR is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges to the Earth.
2. It generates precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.36 Which of the following country is the only country in the world producing all Five major types of silk?

- a) India
- b) China
- c) Japan
- d) USA

Q.37 Which of the following is the second oldest rock mountain hills in the world?

- a) Tirumala Hills
- b) Anantagiri Hills
- c) Parvati Hill
- d) Susunia Hills

Q.38 Which of the following is responsible for UDAN scheme?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Ministry of Civil Aviation
- c) National Highway Authority of India
- d) Ministry of External Affairs

Q.39 College of Supervisors (CoS) has been set up with which of the following objective?

- a) Strengthening Supervision over regulated entities in the banking sector.
- b) Strengthening Supervision over Central universities.
- c) Strengthening Supervision over trading sector
- d) Strengthening Supervision over IAS and IFS officers.

Q.40 Consider the following statements regarding the Khadi and Village Industries Commission:

1. It is an autonomous body.
2. It functions under the ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41 Consider the following statements regarding North East Venture Fund:

1. It is the only venture fund of the northeast.
2. The initial Corpus is of Rs. 1000 crores.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42 Sea-vigil 2021 will be conducted between which of the following countries?

- a) India and Japan
- b) India and Russia
- c) India and Afghanistan
- d) None of the above

Q.43 Bureau of Energy Efficiency is a statutory body under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Power
- b) Ministry of Trade and Commerce
- c) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change
- d) Ministry of Finance

Q.44 Bihu is a harvest festival of which of the following state of India?

- a) Odisha
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Assam
- d) Punjab

Q.45 Lake Chad is a fresh water lake of which of the following region?

- a) West Africa

- b) North America
- c) Himalayan region
- d) South Africa

Q.46 consider the following statements regarding securities and exchange Board of India

1. It was given statutory status through the SEBI Act 1992.
2. It is responsible to the needs of investors only.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.47 Agricultural and processed food products export Development Authority come under which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of Agriculture
- b) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- c) Ministry of Food Processing Industries
- d) Ministry of Consumer Affairs

Q.48 which of the following country does not share its border with UAE?

- a) Iran
- b) Qatar
- c) Oman
- d) Iraq

Q.49 Which of the following is not a factor for strengthening of a tropical cyclone in the atmosphere?

- a) Warm sea surface temperatures
- b) Coriolis force so that low pressure can be developed
- c) High humidity in the lower to middle levels of the troposphere
- d) Lightning in the troposphere

Q.50 India's first air taxi services shall commence from which of the following?

- a) Chandigarh to Hisar
- b) Mumbai to Nagpur
- c) Delhi to Lucknow

- d) Shimla to Mussoorie

Q.51 National Innovation Portal has been developed by which of the following?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) CSIR
- c) National Innovation Foundation - India
- d) Ministry of Science and Technology

Q.52 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana comes under which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of Finance
- b) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- c) Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
- d) Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

Q.53 Dharashiv caves, recently seen in news, are located in which of the following state of India?

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Chhattisgarh

Q.54 Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple is located in:

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Telangana
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Karnataka

Q.55 Which of the following is IUCN's Status for Red Panda is:

- a) Endangered
- b) Critically endangered
- c) Vulnerable
- d) Least concern

Q.56 Mukundpura CM2 meteorite was found in which of the following city?

- a) Jaipur
- b) Nagpur
- c) Ranchi
- d) Raipur

Q.57 Which of the following is incorrect about Kalaripayattu?

- a) It originated in Kerala.
- b) It is one of the oldest forms of martial arts.
- c) Only men are allowed to practice the art.
- d) Practitioners possess intricate knowledge of healing techniques that incorporate the knowledge of Ayurveda and Yoga.

Q.58 Where is Harike Wetland situated?

- a) Himachal Pradesh
- b) Punjab
- c) Jammu & Kashmir
- d) Rajasthan

Q.59 Anubhava Mantapa is associated with which of the following philosopher of India?

- a) Bhartrhari
- b) Ghosha
- c) Yajnavalkya
- d) Basaveshwara

Q.60 Consider the following statements regarding Vistadome coaches:

1. These coaches shall have 360-degree rotatable seats.
2. It was recently installed in Janshatabdi Express from Ahmedabad-Kevadia.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.61 Mount Semeru was recently in news.

Where is it situated?

- a) Singapore
- b) Japan
- c) Vietnam
- d) Indonesia

Q.62 Which of the following is related with the Southern Oscillation?

- a) El Nino
- b) Jet Stream
- c) South-west monsoon
- d) Western Disturbance

Q.63 Exercise Desert Knight-21 is being held between which of the following countries?

- a) France and China
- b) India and France
- c) Russia and Pakistan
- d) USA and India

Q.64 Second edition of the India Innovation Index was launched by which of the following?

- a) Ministry of Science and Technology
- b) NITI Aayog
- c) Ministry of Commerce
- d) National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India

Q.65 Consider the following statements regarding Dragon fruit:

1. It is indigenous to Vietnam only.
2. It grows in all kinds of soil.
3. It requires lots of water.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 2 only

Q.66 Maritime Exercise SITMEX is held between which of the following countries?

- a) Singapore and Thailand
- b) Singapore, Thailand and India
- c) Singapore and India
- d) Thailand and India

Q.67 Which of the following is or are tributaries of Brahmaputra river?

1. Teesta
2. Lohit
3. Subansiri
4. Manas

Select the correct code

- a) 1 and 3 only

- b) 2 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.68 Which of the following mountain ranges come under the Pat Kai?

1. The Patkai Bum
2. The Garo-Khasi-Jaintia hills
3. Lushai Hills

Select the correct code

- a) 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.69 Which of the following is responsible for development and maintenance of national highways across the country?

- a) Ministry of Commerce and trade
- b) Border Roads Organisation
- c) Niti Aayog
- d) Ministry of Roads, Transport and Highways

Q.70 Exercise Kavach is a joint military exercise between which of the following?

- a) Indian and British army
- b) Indian Army and Indian Navy
- c) India and Chinese Air Force
- d) Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and Indian Coast Guard

Q.71 Risa is a customary handwoven cloth worn by women of which of the following state?

- a) Jharkhand
- b) Odisha
- c) Assam
- d) Tripura

Q.72 Vaikom Satyagraha was started against which of the following?

- a) Untouchability
- b) Sati
- c) Women's education
- d) Economic downfall of Indian artisans

Q.73 India's first Solution Mining project shall begin in which of the following state?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Gujarat
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Q.74 Where is Periyar Tiger Reserve situated?

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Karnataka
- d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.75 The first-ever Waste Water Treatment Technology Model which purifies Waste Water was recently unveiled for which of the following purpose?

- a) Farming
- b) Household purposes in rural areas
- c) Processing wood to make paper
- d) In producing steel for automobiles

Q.76 Which of the following is India's first permanent Arctic research station?

- a) Dakshin Gangotri
- b) Maitri
- c) Bharati
- d) Himadri

Q.77 Bodo tribe belongs to which of the following state of India?

- a) Assam
- b) Meghalaya
- c) Jharkhand
- d) Manipur

Q.78 Consider the following statements regarding green bond:

1. It typically come with tax incentives to enhance their attractiveness to investors.
2. The first official green bond was issues by United Nations Environment Programme in 2009.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.79 Consider the following pairs:

Sea	Bordering country
1. Adriatic Sea	Albania
2. Black Sea	Croatia
3. Caspian Sea	Kazakhstan
4. Mediterranean Sea	Morocco
5. Red Sea	Syria

Which of the pair given above are correctly matched?

- a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2 and 5 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q.80 Consider the following advantages of electric vehicles:

1. Reduced emissions
2. Lower long-term maintenance costs
3. Unlimited life expectancy of rechargeable batteries
4. Saves money

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 3 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 1 only

Q.81 Which of the following organisation is or are part of intergovernmental negotiations framework

1. Arab League
2. Caribbean community
3. uniting for consensus group

4. G4 Nations
5. Asian
6. BRICS

Select the correct code

- a) 1, 4, 5 and 6 only
- b) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 5 and 6 only
- d) 3, 5 and 6 only

Q.82 Dhannipur Mosque was in news recently. Where is it going to be constructed?

- a) Uttar Pradesh
- b) Assam
- c) Delhi
- d) Nagpur

Q.83 Consider the following statements regarding Competition Commission of India (CCI):

1. It is a statutory body of the Government of India.
2. Members are appointed by the Chief Justice of India.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.84 World Economic Forum is based in?

- a) Switzerland
- b) France
- c) Netherlands
- d) Austria

Q.85 Future Investment Initiative Forum is hosted by which of the following country?

- a) Israel
- b) USA
- c) Russia
- d) Saudi Arabia

Q.86 Which of the following Species of turtle is/are found in India?

1. Olive Ridley

2. Green turtle
3. Loggerhead
4. Hawksbill
5. Leather back

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q.87 Recently, Indo-French Year of the Environment was launched. Consider the themes covered under the same:

1. Environmental protection
2. Climate change
3. Biodiversity conservation
4. Sustainable rural development

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1 only

Q.88 Common Trust Network is recently launched by which of the following?

- a) World Economic Forum
- b) World Bank
- c) International Monetary Fund
- d) UNESCO

Q.89 International Energy Agency was established in the framework of which of the following?

- a) Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
- b) Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
- c) Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- d) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Q.90 Which of the following is not included in the Neglected tropical diseases?

- a) Dengue
- b) Rabies
- c) Blinding trachoma
- d) AIDS

Q.91 Which of the following is incorrect?

- a) PM eVIDYA is a comprehensive initiative to unify all efforts related to digital to enable multi-mode and equitable access to education for students and teachers.
- b) SWAYAM which is an indigenously developed MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course) platform.
- c) The MANODARPAN initiative provides psychological support to students.
- d) PRAGYATA guidelines were launched to ensure girls' safety in schools.

Q.92 Consider the following statements regarding Bare Necessities Index (BNI):

1. Access to drinking water to households in most of the States has improved in 2018 compared to 2012 in rural as well as urban areas.
2. There is improvement in micro environment for all States in 2018 except for Assam in rural and Odisha and Assam in urban areas as compared to 2012.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

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## 2021 JANUARY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1 B	24 C	47 B	70 D
2 A	25 C	48 D	71 D
3 A	26 D	49 D	72 A
4 D	27 D	50 A	73 A
5 D	28 A	51 C	74 A
6 B	29 D	52 D	75 A
7 D	30 A	53 A	76 D
8 D	31 D	54 D	77 A
9 A	32 A	55 A	78 A
10 D	33 C	56 A	79 B
11 C	34 D	57 C	80 B
12 A	35 C	58 B	81 B
13 A	36 A	59 D	82 A
14 D	37 A	60 B	83 A
15 B	38 B	61 D	84 A
16 D	39 A	62 A	85 D
17 A	40 B	63 B	86 D
18 A	41 A	64 B	87 A
19 B	42 D	65 D	88 A
20 D	43 A	66 B	89 D
21 A	44 C	67 D	90 D
22 D	45 A	68 D	91 D
23 A	46 A	69 D	92 C



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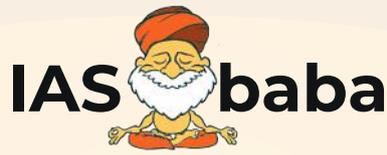
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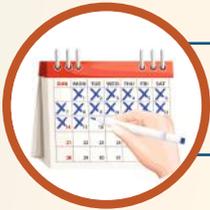
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