



MARCH 2021

**IASBABA'S
MONTHLY
MAGAZINE**

**LATERAL ENTRY AND BUREAUCRACY REFORMS
MARITIME INDIA SUMMIT 2021
BLOCKAGE OF SUEZ CANAL
PRADHAN MANTRI SWASTHYA SURAKSHA NIDHI
INDIA'S LIST OF WORLD HERITAGE SITE**

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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 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 **70th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **MARCH 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

Saras Aajeevika Mela

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture & GS - II – Self help groups; Policies and Interventions

In news

- Saras Aajeevika Mela 2021 was recently inaugurated at Noida Haat.
- **Ministry:** Minister of Rural development

Key takeaways

- **Objective:** To include more women in [Self Help Groups \(SHGs\)](#) which play a vital role in increasing family income and improving quality of life.
- More than 300 rural self-help groups and craftsman from 27 states are participating in the Mela.

Khujli Ghar: Nagaland's traditional form of punishment

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I- Culture/ Society

In news

- Some villages in [Nagaland](#) are trying to revive a traditional form of punishment to reduce crime.

Key takeaways

- Khujli ghar is a cramped, triangular cage made from the logs of Masang-fung.
- Masang-fung is a local tree that causes irritation.
- Social offenders of Naga customary laws dread this punishment due to humiliation within the community.
- Such itchy cages are referred to as khujli ghar in Nagamese — a pidgin lingua franca — but each Naga community has its own name.
- The Aos, one of the major tribes of Nagaland, call it Shi-ki (flesh-house).
- The cage is usually placed at a central spot in the village, usually in front of the morung (bachelor's dormitory) for the inmate to be in full public view.

Related articles:

- [Nagaland issue: Extremist group counters Governor](#)

Maa Bamleshwari Devi Temple under PRASHAD Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- Foundation Stone was laid down for “Development of Maa Bamleshwari Devi Temple, Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh” under [PRASHAD Scheme](#)
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Tourism.

Important value additions

‘National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive’ (PRASHAD)

- It is a Central Sector Scheme

- **Launched by:** Ministry of Tourism in 2014-15
- **Objective:** Integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations
- **Aim:** Infrastructure development such as entry points (Road, Rail and Water Transport), last mile connectivity, ATM/ Money exchange, area Lighting and illumination with renewable sources, first aid centers, etc
- Till now, 13 projects have been successfully completed under PRASHAD Scheme.

India's list of World Heritage Sites

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- Lok Sabha was informed about the Declaration of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Key takeaways

- At present, India has 38 World Heritage Properties.
- All the sites are conserved as per ASI's Conservation Policy.
- India has 42 sites listed under Tentative List which is a prerequisite condition for inscription as World Heritage Site.
- '[Dholavira: A Harappan City](#)' has been submitted for nomination of World Heritage Site in 2019-2020.
- Nomination dossiers of 'Santiniketan, India' and 'Sacred Ensemble of Hoysalas' have been submitted to UNESCO for the year 2021-22 cycle.
- Sites are selected on the basis of their potential for fulfilling criteria under Operational Guidelines and demonstration of Outstanding Universal Value.

Related articles:

- [Hampi World Heritage site](#)
- [Rakhigarhi](#)

Bamiyan Buddhas

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Culture

In news

- In March 2001, the Taliban began blowing up two monumental Buddha statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley.
- Now, 20 years later, on the anniversary of the annihilation, the Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called "A Night With Buddha".

Important value additions

Bamiyan Buddhas

- The Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
- They are said to date back to the 5th century AD.
- They were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.

- They were called by the locals Salsal and Shamama.
- Salsal means “light shines through the universe”; Shamama is “Queen Mother”.
- UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003
- Efforts have been made to restore and reconstruct the Buddhas in their niches with the pieces available.

Bamiyan

- It is situated in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan.
- The valley is set along the line of the Bamiyan River.
- It was once integral to the early days of the Silk Roads, providing passage for merchants, culture, religion and language.

Conservation works of Singorgarh Fort

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- Foundation stone for the conservation works of Singorgarh Fort was laid down in Madhya Pradesh by the President of India.
- He also inaugurated the newly carved [Jabalpur Circle](#) of [Archaeological Survey of India](#).

Important value additions

Singorgarh Fort

- **Location:** Madhya Pradesh.
- It is a hill-fort of Gondwana Kingdom
- Gond ruler Sangram shah conquered the Singorgarh fort from Chandel rulers in early 16th century.
- It is presently in a ruined condition.

Devara Kaadu of Coorg

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- [Sacred grove](#) or devara kaadu of Coorg, Karnataka, was in news recently.



Important value additions

- Devara Kaadu (Sacred Forest) is a small forest like grove marked as the adobe of the local deities.
- Coorg has many hundred such sacred groves scattered all over the region.
- Some of them are sprawling mini forests, while the rest are of smaller scales.
- The groves are left untouched due to their scared nature.
- Inside the Devara Kaadu there are shrines dedicated to various deities.

Jaapi, Xorai and Gamosa

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- Decorative jaapis (field hats), hand-woven gamosas and bell-metal xorais are making frequent appearances in Assam due to upcoming Assembly elections.



Important value additions

- **Jaapi:** It is a conical hat made of bamboo and covered with dried tokou (a palm tree found in rainforests of Upper Assam) leaves.
- Today, the bulk of Assam's jaapis are made by artisans based in a cluster of villages in Nalbari district.
- **Gamosa:** It has wide-ranging uses. It can be used at home as a towel (uka gamosa) or in public functions (phulam/floral gamosa) to felicitate dignitaries or celebrities.
- **Xorai:** It is made of bell-metal. It essentially is a tray with a stand at the bottom, with or without a cover. It can be found in every Assamese household.

MICE Roadshow - Meet in India'; Chhatrasal Convention Centre

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Culture

In news

- The 'Chhatrasal Convention Centre at Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh was recently inaugurated
- **Inaugurated by:** Ministry for Tourism and Culture and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh
- **Developed under:** Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism.

Key takeaways

- The Ministry of Tourism has framed 'Development of Iconic Tourist Destinations Scheme' a Central Sector Scheme for development of nineteen identified iconic destinations in the country following a holistic approach.
- They will also launch "MICE Roadshow – Meet in India" Brand and Roadmap for the Promotion of India as MICE Destination (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.

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POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Lateral Entry into bureaucracy

Context: UPSC has recently issued an advertisement seeking applications from individuals, who would make a “lateral entry” into the government secretariat.

Key features of Lateral Entry Advertisement

- **Vacancies:** Three posts of Joint Secretary and 27 of Director in central government
- **Time Period:** These jobs would be contracted for three to five years.
- **The basic qualification** for a Joint Secretary lateral entrant is 15 years of work experience, and for Directors it is 10 years of work experience.
- **Reservations:** These posts were “unreserved”, meaning there were no quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs.

What is ‘lateral entry’ into government?

- The term lateral entry relates to the appointment of specialists, mainly those from private sector, in government organisations.
- These ‘lateral entrants’ would be part of the central secretariat which in the normal course has only career bureaucrats from the All India Services/ Central Civil Services
- **Niti Aayog Recommendation:** NITI Aayog, in its three-year Action Agenda, and the Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance in its report submitted in February 2017, recommended the induction of personnel at middle and senior management levels in the central government.

What is the government’s reasoning for lateral entry?

- **Domain Expertise:** The government’s idea is to bring in domain expertise from the private sector to the Central administration which helps address the complexity of present day administration
- **Augments the availability of manpower:** The government also faces a shortage of IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officers working on deputation in the Centre, this option of lateral entrants will help address this problem.
- **To induct competitiveness:** Another objective of inducting specialists is to improve efficiency and create competition in governance delivery which is criticised for being status-quoist and conservative in its functioning.
- **Aligned with Liberalisation Policy:** After liberalisation in 1991, markets are playing critical role in administration. In such environment, regulatory capacity of govt. is critical which depends upon the up to date knowledge of administrators, which require fresh intake from private sector.
- **Participatory Governance:** In the present times governance is becoming more participatory and multi actor endeavour, thus lateral entry provides stakeholders such as the private sector and non-profits an opportunity to participate in governance process.

Has the government so far made any ‘lateral entry’ appointments?

- The new ad is for the second round of such recruitments. Earlier, the government had decided to appoint experts from outside the government to 10 positions of Joint Secretary in different Ministries/Departments and 40 positions at the level of Deputy Secretary/Director.

- The ad for the Joint Secretary-level appointments, issued in early 2018, attracted 6,077 applications; after a selection process by the UPSC, nine individuals were recommended for appointment in nine different Ministries/Departments in 2019.

Why is lateral entry sometimes criticised?

- **Lack of Reservation:** Groups representing SCs, STs and OBCs have protested the fact that there is no reservation in these appointments.
- **Issue of transparency:** The key to the success of lateral entry would lie in selecting the right people in a manner which is open and transparent. The selection process conducted by credible Constitutional body like UPSC partly address this problem.
- **Incoherence in Value System:** Private sector approach is profit oriented on the other hand motive of Government is public service. This is also a fundamental transition that a private sector person has to make while working in government.
- **Internal Resistance:** Lateral entry is faces resistance from serving Civil Servants who would have worked within the system for years and in line for occupying such top level posts. A lateral entry can thus be met with resistance from the existing bureaucrats
- **Conflict of interest:** The movement from private sector raises issues of potential conflict of interest. This issue requires stringent code of conduct for entrants from private sectors to ensure conflict of interest is not detrimental to public good.
- **Lack of specific criteria:** The criteria laid out in the advertisement were broad-based, and so failed to provide a narrow window to attract people of eminence or domain experts in the fields advertised for.
- **Lack of Institutionalised Process:** Lateral entry is being done on temporary and ad hoc basis. This cannot be a sustainable model of human resource management.

Conclusion

- An intensive training program for entrants from the private sector to civil services need to be formulated which help them understanding the complex nature of work in Government.
- There is also a need to institutionalize the process of induction of outside talent into the government.

Connecting the dots

- [Mission Karmayogi](#)

[Launch of Sugamya Bharat App](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Governance

In news

- Sugamya Bharat App was recently launched.
- **Ministry:** [Ministry for Social justice and Empowerment](#)

Key takeaways

- **Developed by:** Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- It is a Crowdsourcing Mobile Application.
- It is a means for sensitising and enhancing accessibility in the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign i.e. built environment, transportation sector and ICT ecosystem in India.
- The app provides for five main features, 4 of which are directly related to enhancing accessibility.
- The fifth is a special feature meant only for Divyangjan for COVID related issues.

Launch of Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Governance

In news

- Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship was Recently launched.
- **Launched by:** The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India under its “Waste to Wealth” Mission

Key takeaways

- **Aim:** To recognize students, community workers/self-help groups, and municipal/sanitary workers who are engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably.
- The Waste to Wealth Mission is one of the nine national missions of the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).
- The three categories of awards under the fellowships are as below:
- Category-A – Open to School students from 9th to 12th standards engaged in waste management community work
- Category-B – Open to College students (UG, PG, Research students) engaged in waste management community work
- Category-C – Open to Citizens working in the community and through SHGs, municipal or sanitary workers working beyond specifications of their job requirement
- Up to 500 fellows will be recognised under the fellowship.

“Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege” report

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Fundamental rights

In news

- “Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege” report was recently released.
- **Released by:** U.S. think tank, Freedom House
- It has classified India as ‘partly free’.

Key takeaways

- India's score was 67
- Last year, its score was 71/100 (free category)
- According to the report, the Indian government and its State-level allies continued to crack down on critics during the year.
- The report also highlighted that many outfits encouraged the scapegoating of Muslims, who were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- The U.S. dropped three points over one year, down to 83/100.
- China, classified as 'not free', dropped a point from last year going down to 9/100.

Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Governance

In news

- [Municipal Performance Index](#) (MPI) 2020 was announced recently.
- **Ministry:** [Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs](#)

Key takeaways

- **Million+ category:** Indore (1st) followed by Surat and Bhopal.
- **Less than Million:** New Delhi Municipal Council followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.
- The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities across five verticals.
- **The five verticals are:** Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance.

Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Governance

In news

- [Ease of Living Index \(EoLI\)](#) 2020 was recently released.
- **Ministry:** [Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs](#)

Key takeaways

- **Aim of EoLI:** To measure the well-being of Indian citizens in 111 cities, across the pillars of Quality of Life, Economic-ability, and Sustainability
- The EoLI 2020 has also added Citizen Perception Survey in the index, having a weightage of 30%.
- The rankings were announced for cities with a population of more than a million, and cities with less than a million people.
- **Top performer in the Million+ category:** Bengaluru
- **Top performer in Less than Million category:** Shimla

Police & Prison Reform

Context: Uttarakhand government recently issued a notification to post IPS officers as superintendents of prisons.

Analysis

- **Appointment of Police against Correctional Administration:** The decision to appoint police officers as heads of the prison department, a practice that goes against the philosophy of correctional administration, was started in the 1980s, on grounds of strengthening security and to control corruption.
- **Difference in Training:** Police personnel are recruited and trained to detect crime and maintain law and order, while prison officers are recruited and trained to reform and rehabilitate offenders.
- **Against Principle of Separation of powers:** Appointing police officers in prisons either as superintendents or as jailors amounts to a violation of the principle of separation of powers enshrined in our Constitution.
- **Purview of Judicial System:** The meaning of judicial custody is that the police investigation is over and the accused is now taken out of police custody and handed over to the prison custody under the supervision of the judiciary.
- **Systemic Pressure on Prison Officials:** Prison officers are a demotivated lot, often at the receiving end of a criminal justice system and the media, which is quick to highlight their misdemeanours and violations without going into the systemic reasons for the same.
- **Specialised Force recommended:** Various prison reform committee reports like the Justice Mulla Committee on Prison Reforms Report (1983) and the Justice Krishna Iyer Committee on Women Prisoners Report (1987) have advocated that prisons should be houses of reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners and their families, and have recommended the creation of a specialised All India Prison Service along the lines of the IPS or IAS

Way Ahead

- **Increased Investment:** We do not invest in the prison system in terms of resources and staff. In order to improve prison administration, increased investment has to go into infrastructure and training of prison officials
- **Involve Civil Society:** We need to appoint social workers and counsellors in sufficient numbers.
- **Training:** We need to conduct regular training in human rights and social reintegration for prison staff.
- **Filling up vacancies:** We need to fill vacancies, which are as high as 30 to 40 per cent as per the India Justice Report 2020.
- **Professional Rewards:** We need to create sufficient scope for upward mobility for prison officers, so that good work can be rewarded with promotions.

Connecting the dots

- [Police Reforms](#)

Uttarakhand ILP System

Context: The Uttarakhand government, in a recent meeting with Union Home Minister, had sought withdrawal of “inner-line permit” (ILP) system in Niti Valley of Chamoli district and Nelang Valley of Uttarkashi district of the State.

What is ILP System?

- Uttarakhand shares a 350-km border with China and a 275-km boundary with Nepal.
- The ILP system restricts movement in areas close to the border for everyone other than those with a **formal permission**.
- In Uttarakhand, tourists have to obtain ILP **for locations near China border**, at least in the three districts of Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh and Chamoli.
- ITBP allows a minimum possible number of tourists in these areas as there is a risk of getting trapped and going missing in **snowfalls** in that area

Reasons why Government and People are asking for removal of ILP system

- Relaxation on movement will **increase tourist activities in the area**. Presently, foreign tourists are prohibited in this area while domestic tourists are allowed entry with ILP. The maximum number of people allowed are 24 in a day and they cannot stay there at night.
- Removal of restriction also means increase in **overall economic activities** of the region.
- Villages will be rehabilitated so that locals could also act as 'eyes' and 'ears' at **border for surveillance**.
- It will also **stop outward migration**. This is because most of the border villages see outward migration owing to lack of livelihood opportunities

Connecting the dots

- [Uttarakhand Glacier Disaster](#)

SC's rule over State Election Commissioners

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Judiciary

In news

- The Supreme Court has held that independent persons and not bureaucrats should be appointed as State Election Commissioners.

Key takeaways

- Giving government employees the additional charge of State Election Commissioners is a "mockery of the Constitution".
- It directed that the States should appoint independent persons as Election Commissioners all across India.

Important value additions

Article 243K

- Article 243K deals with the Elections to the Panchayats.
- It states that The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission.
- It shall consist of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.

- The conditions of service and tenure of office of the State Election Commissioner shall be such as the Governor may by rule determine.
- The State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like ground as a Judge of a High Court.
- The conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

Centre versus State in Delhi

Context: The Centre has recently introduced the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 (GNCTD) in Lok Sabha, reviving the dispute on the distribution of powers between the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor (L-G).

Constitutional Framework of Delhi

- Delhi's current status as a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the 69th Amendment Act through which Articles 239AA and 239BB were introduced in the Constitution.
- The GNCTD Act was passed simultaneously to supplement the constitutional provisions relating to the Assembly and the Council of Ministers in the national capital.
- For all practical purposes, the GNCTD Act outlines the powers of the Assembly, the discretionary powers enjoyed by the L-G, and the duties of the Chief Minister with respect to the need to furnish information to the L-G.

What does the 2021 amendment Bill say?

- **In light of Supreme Court Judgement:** In the statement of objects and reasons section, the Centre claims that the amendment Bill seeks to give effect to the Supreme Court's interpretation and that it further defines the responsibilities of the elected government and the Lt Governor in line with the Constitutional scheme.
- **Clarification on the term Government:** The bill clarifies that the term "government" in any law made by the Legislative Assembly shall mean the L-G. This, essentially, gives effect to former L-G's assertion that "Government means the Lieutenant Governor of the NCT of Delhi appointed by the President under Article 239 and designated as such under Article 239 AA of the Constitution".
- **Prior Opinion of LG:** The Bill adds that the L-G's opinion shall be obtained before the government takes any executive action based on decisions taken by the Cabinet or any individual minister.

What did the Constitution Bench say?

- **Concurrence of LG:** In its 2018 verdict, the five-judge Bench had held that the L-G's concurrence is not required on issues **other than police, public order and land**.
- **Communication between CoM & LG:** SC also had added that decisions of the Council of Ministers will, however, have to be communicated to the L-G.
- **Upheld the spirit of Representative Governance:** SC stated that "It has to be clearly stated that requiring prior concurrence of the Lieutenant Governor would absolutely negate the ideals of representative governance and democracy conceived for the NCT of Delhi by Article 239AA of the Constitution". The L-G was bound by the aid and advice if the council of ministers, it had said.

- **Status of LG and Delhi:** The Court pointed out that “The status of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi is not that of a Governor of a State, rather he remains an Administrator, in a limited sense, working with the designation of Lieutenant Governor”. It had also pointed out that the elected government must keep in mind that Delhi is not a state.

Consequences of the SC Judgement

- The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, therefore, tilted the scales in favour of the elected government through its 2018 verdict.
- Encouraged by the Supreme Court verdict, the elected government had stopped sending files on executive matters to the L-G before the implementation of any decision.
- It has been keeping the L-G abreast of all administrative developments, but not necessarily before implementing or executing any decision.
- It is observed that it was because of the judgment that the elected government was able to clear policy decisions like giving free power to those using under 200 units, free bus riders for women and doorstep delivery of ration.

Does the L-G enjoy no discretionary power under the current arrangement?

- **Article 239AA(4):** The L-G does have the power to refer any matter, over which there is a disagreement with the elected government, to the President under Article 239AA(4).
- **2018 SC Verdict & Article 239AA(4):** The Delhi Law Secretary had in 2019 written in an internal memo that the elected government cannot use the Supreme Court verdict to keep the L-G in the dark about its decisions as that would prevent him from taking informed decisions on whether to invoke Article 239AA(4) or not.
- **SC on invoking 239AA(4):** But the SC had also categorically pointed out that the L-G “should not act in a mechanical manner without due application of mind so as to refer every decision of the Council of Ministers to the President”.

What will change if the amendments are cleared by Parliament?

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the Bill, which “seeks to drastically curtail powers of the elected government”, is “**against** the Supreme Court judgment”.
- The amendment, if cleared, will force the elected government to take the L-G’s advice before taking any action on any cabinet decision.
- The Bill seeks to add a provision in the original GNCTD Act, 1991, barring the Assembly or its committees from making rules to take up matters concerning day-to-day administration, or to conduct inquiries in relation to administrative decisions.
- By making it mandatory for the elected government to route all its files through the L-G, the amendments will essentially take away the **government’s autonomy** and the **dream for full statehood** for the state.

Connecting the dots

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

Electoral Financing

Context: The political system in India has traditionally been hostile to the idea of transparency in electoral financing.

What is [Electoral Bond](#) Scheme?

- An [electoral bond](#) is like a promissory note that can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India from select branches of State Bank of India.
- An individual or party will be allowed to purchase these bonds digitally or through cheque after disclosing their identity through know your customer (KYC) norms
- The citizen or corporate can then donate the same to any eligible political party of his/her choice.
- The bonds are similar to bank notes that are payable to the bearer on demand and are free of interest. It has to be redeemed by Political parties within 15 days only in their specified account.
- The electoral bonds were introduced with the Finance Bill (2017). On January 29, 2018 the NDA government notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018.

Issues with Electoral Bonds

- Electoral bonds allows donors to anonymously donate unlimited amounts of funds to political parties.
- The scheme allows parties to receive these bonds without the public, the Election Commission or even the Income Tax Department knowing the identity of the donors.
- It has legitimised opacity and opened the floodgates for anonymous donations to parties, dealing a severe blow to voters' right to know.
- People's ability to track donations by big businesses and expose quid pro quo has been undermined.
- They will have an adverse impact on transparency in political party financing and would make it impossible for the ECI to ascertain whether donations received were in compliance with the statutory framework governing political parties.
- Electoral bonds allow anonymous financing by foreign entities opening Indian elections to the influence of foreign interests.
- Electoral bonds are likely to abet money laundering since the amendments to the Companies Act in 2017 removed the cap of 7.5% on political contributions by a company as a percentage of its average net profits of the preceding three years.
- This allows for black money to be easily routed through shell companies to purchase electoral bonds, which was flagged by both ECI and RBI.
- As bonds are issued only through the State Bank of India, it would not be difficult for the party in power to access information about the identity of purchasers and details of bonds sold to them, and match those to deposits in political party accounts.

Way Ahead

- To ensure public trust in the electoral process, it is critical that the Supreme Court immediately adjudicates on the matter.
- If bonds are to be retained as an instrument for contributing to political parties, donations must be made transparent and parties should be obligated to file reports with the Election Commission and other oversight bodies disclosing the names of donors and amounts received.
- This information must also be placed in the public domain.
- These steps are necessary to safeguard democracy and ensure that elections do not become a mere formality.

Connecting the dots:

- Cash donations to Political Parties also capped at Rs 2000 through Finance Act of 2017. Why cash donations are still allowed?
- Do Political Parties come under the ambit of RTI?

Places of Worship Act

Context: Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to respond to a petition that challenges the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

What does the 1991 Act say?

- The law was enacted to **freeze the status of all places of worship** in the country as on August 15, 1947.
- The Act says that no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section. It contains a declaration that a place of worship shall continue to be as it was on August 15, 1947.
- Significantly, it **prohibits any legal proceedings** from being instituted regarding the character of a place of worship, and declares that all suits and appeals pending before any court or authority on the cut-off date regarding the conversion of the character of a place of worship shall abate.
- In other words, all pending cases will come to an end, and no further proceedings can be filed.
- However, any suit or proceedings relating to any conversion of status that happened after the cut-off date can continue
- **Penal Provision:** Anyone contravening the prohibition on converting the status of a place of worship is liable to be imprisoned for up to three years, and a fine. Those abetting or participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit this offence will also get the same punishment.

What are the exception under the act?

- An exception was made to keep the **Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute** out of its ambit as the structure was then the subject of litigation.
- The 1991 Act will not apply to **ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites** and remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- It will also not apply to any **suit that has been finally settled or disposed of**, any dispute that has been settled by the parties before the 1991 Act came into force, or to the conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence.

What are the grounds of challenge?

- **Constrains Judicial Remedy:** The act amounts to taking away the right of the people to seek justice through the courts and obtain a judicial remedy. The petitioner argues that the Act takes away the rights of communities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains to reclaim the sites of their places of worship through legal proceedings.
- **Contention on Cut-off date:** The petitioner also contends that the cut-off date of August 15, 1947, is arbitrary and irrational.
- **Issue of Exemption:** The petition contends that the legislation legalises the actions of invaders in the past who demolished places of worship. It wonders how the law could exempt the [birthplace of Ram](#), but not that of Krishna.

- **Restriction on Fundamental Right to Practise Religion:** The petition also said the law violates the right to practise and propagate religion, as well as the right to manage and administer places of worship.
- **Not in spirit of Secularism:** Further, petition has argued that that act goes against the principle of secularism and the state's duty to preserve and protect religious and cultural heritage.

What has the SC said on the status freeze?

- In its final verdict on the [Ayodhya dispute](#), the Supreme Court had observed that the Act "imposes a non-derogable obligation towards enforcing our commitment to secularism".
- The court went on to say: "Non-retrogression is a foundational feature of the fundamental constitutional principles, of which secularism is a core component."
- The court described the law as one that **preserved secularism** by not permitting the status of a place of worship to be altered after Independence.
- In words of caution against further attempts to change the character of a place of worship, the five-judge Bench said, "**Historical wrongs cannot be remedied by the people taking the law in their own hands.** In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs **shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future.**"

What are the implications of the case?

- **Contentious Places:** Some Hindu organisations have been laying claim to the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah in Mathura.
- **Controversy in Mathura:** Civil suits have been filed in a Mathura court seeking the shifting of the 17th-century mosque from the spot that some claim is the birthplace of Lord Krishna.
- **Dilution of 1991 law impacts outcome:** Any order that strikes down or dilutes the 1991 law on the status of places of worship is likely to influence the outcome of such proceedings.

Connecting the dots

- [Ram Temple History & Significance](#)

[No proposal to implement Panchayat system in Sixth Schedule areas of Assam](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Constitution

In news

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that "presently, there is no proposal to implement panchayat system in [Sixth Schedule](#) areas of Assam".

Important value additions

Sixth Schedule of the Constitution

- It protects tribal populations and provides autonomy to the communities through creation of autonomous development councils that can frame laws on land, public health, agriculture and others.
- Presently, 10 autonomous councils exist in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- **Specified tribal areas of Assam:** North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and the Bodoland Territorial Area
- **Specified tribal areas of Meghalaya:** Khasi Hills, Jaintiya Hills and Garo Hills
- Tribal Areas in Tripura

- **Specified tribal areas of Mizoram:** Chakma, Mara and Lai districts

Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019

- In January 2019, the Union Cabinet approved amendments to increase the financial and executive powers of the autonomous councils.
- The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019, was subsequently introduced in the Rajya Sabha in February 2019, that provides for elected village municipal councils.
- The Bill that is still active proposes that the State Election Commissions would hold elections to the autonomous councils, village and municipal councils.

Next CJI recommended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Judiciary

In news

- Present Chief Justice of India has recommended Justice N.V. Ramana, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, as the next CJI

A brief profile of Justice N.V. Ramana

Aug. 27, 1957: Born in an agricultural family in Ponnavaaram village in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh

Feb. 10, 1983: Enrolled as an advocate

June 27, 2000: Appointed permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court


March 10-May 20, 2013: Functioned as the Acting Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court

Sept. 2, 2013: Elevated as the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court

Feb. 17, 2014: Elevated as a judge of the Supreme Court

■ He has practised in the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, Central and Andhra Pradesh Administrative Tribunals and the Supreme Court in civil, criminal, constitutional, labour, service and election matters

■ Justice Ramana specialises in constitutional, criminal, service and inter-State river laws



Key takeaways

- Justice Ramana is now set to take over as the 48th CJI from April 24.
- He will be the CJI till August 26, 2022.

Important value additions

Appointment of CJI

- **Article 124:** Manner of appointing judges to the SC.
- But there is no specific provision in the Constitution for appointing the Chief Justice.
- CJI should be the senior most judge of the SC.
- Law Minister has to seek recommendation of the outgoing CJI for appointment of new CJI at an appropriate time.

- **Article 124(2):** Consultation with other Judges to be made In case of doubt about the fitness of the senior-most Judge to hold office of CJI.
- Law Minister then puts up recommendation to Prime Minister (PM) who will advise the President on appointment.
- Seniority at the apex court is determined not by age, but by the date a judge was appointed to the SC.
- If two judges are elevated to the Supreme Court on the same day, (1) the one who was sworn in first as a judge would trump another; (2) if both were sworn in as judges on the same day, the one with more years of high court service would 'win' in the seniority stakes; (3) an appointment from the bench would 'trump' in seniority an appointee from the bar.
- **Tenure:**
 1. Once appointed, the CJI remains in office until the age of 65 years.
 2. **Article 124(4):** A SC Judge including CJI can be moved only through a process of impeachment by Parliament.

Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021

Context: The Bihar legislature witnessed noisy disorder inside and outside the Assembly on March 23-24 as Opposition parties opposed the government's attempt to pass the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021.

Protesting Opposition lawmakers were forcibly ousted by marshals and additional police forces called in by the Speaker's office, with many injured in the scuffle that followed. However, the contentious Bill, was passed in both the Houses.

What is the new Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021?

- **Special Armed Force:** The contentious bill proposes to set up a special armed force to maintain public order and combat any threat to security or extremism. It apparently seeks to arm the Bihar Military Police, rename them, and empower it on the lines of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).
- **Power to arrest people on mere suspicion:** Section 7 of the Bill gives the force the power to arrest people on the basis of mere suspicion of disrupting state government functions, or attempting to conceal their presence with the aim to commit a crime or cognizable offence.
- **No requirement of warrant:** The forces wouldn't need a warrant from a magistrate to carry out an arrest or to search their premises, and the provisions to search under Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 will be applied.
- **Check on arrest power:** The only check in place for this is that it would allow any Special Armed Police Officer, not below the notified rank to carry out an arrest. The officer must take the suspect to a nearby police station to get a report lodged detailing the arrest.
- **Role of Courts & Government Sanction:** The Special Armed Forces personnel cannot be taken to court for any proceeding against them unless authorised by the government.

What is the Government Saying?

- The Bill says it will be for maintenance of **public order, combating extremism**, ensuring the better protection and security of specified establishments.

- The Bihar government cited that the Bihar Military Police, with its distinct organisational structure, has been handling industrial security, such as that in airports and Metros, and **needs a separate identity** as Special Armed Forces to fulfil the changing needs of the state's security.
- Chief Minister has stated that the specially trained force will **strengthen internal security**.

Why is the Opposition protesting?

- The Opposition has termed the Bill "**draconian and unconstitutional**" and an attempt by the government to enforce "**Police Raj**" in the State.
- The joint Opposition statement said the Bill will "effectively transform the police force into an armed militia to **throttle the voice of the people**, academics, activists, journalists, political opposition and those who would dare to speak the truth".
- There is also criticism of the bill on the grounds of **separation of power**. Section 15 of the Bill says even if a person is shot, the inquiry will be done not in the court or by the magistrate but by the police.
- Through this Act, it has been alleged by opponents that the BMP will function as National Investigating Agency (NIA).

Reforms in the bureaucracy

A look at Defence Bureaucracy reform - CDS

- Nearly 20 years after the recommendation of the Kargil Review Committee on higher defence management, Prime Minister announced the decision to create the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in 2019
- The decision was not so simple as many within the defence establishment were opposed to the idea of concentrating military decision-making in one person.
- General Bipin Rawat was appointed as the first CDS for three years on January 1, 2020 and was also made Secretary of the newly-created Department of Military Affairs (DMA)
- CDS was tasked with delivering on military reforms through transparent need-based hardware acquisition and creation of theatre commands for better synergy among the land, air and sea-based forces
- The idea was to cut through bureaucratic red-tape and speed up decision-making in the defence ministry.

What are the major concerns with Indian bureaucratic system?

- **Lacks Result Orientation:** The Indian bureaucracy continues to be driven by process rather than the outcome.
- **Lacks sensitivity & responsiveness to Public's needs:** The disconnect between the common man and the bureaucracy has not reduced as the bureaucrats are more interested in keeping the file perfect
- **Colonial Hangover:** The bureaucracy still continues its legacy of British imperial past as officers sometimes function as part of an occupying power without any awareness of the position on the ground.
- **Lacks Domain Expertise:** In the age of AI and multi-formatted information, bureaucrats generally have inadequate domain knowledge of their areas of work often leading to inefficient policy making.

- **Status-quoist in their attitude:** Serving bureaucrats resist infusion of fresh blood and ideas to guide them in their emerging roles and have inadequate communication especially with the Indian youth.
- **Challenges even with existence of Political Will:** Many ministers say they find their bureaucrats behaving like the permanent opposition, determined to tire out the political executives through excessive reliance on procedures & process.
- For ex: It took more than one year for the government's human resource manager, the department of personnel and training, to make key appointments to the department of military affairs.

Way Ahead

- **Appoint Third ARC:** It is time for government to appoint the third administrative reforms commission to institute cutting-edge reforms in the Indian bureaucracy. And this time, government should make sure that the recommendations are actually implemented - and not just on paper like the second administrative reforms
- **Incentivize better performing civil servants:** It is time for government to separate the wheat from the chaff by incentivising deserving senior officials through an alternative fast-track career progression channel. This will also lower the age profile of the top officials.
- **Alternate System of Promotion:** The government should also consider promotions to higher levels, that is additional secretary or secretary-level posts from a pool of four to five batches together and not on a year-by-year basis as is done now. This will give the government a larger pool of officials to make their selection.
- **Contractual Appointments System:** Perhaps, appointments at additional secretary or secretary-level could also be offered on a contract basis for five to ten years with compensation for premature separation or termination on each side. This will ensure accountability in terms of delivery on the ground.
- **Expand Lateral Entry:** While the government has inducted officers [through lateral entry at joint secretary levels](#) or below, this should be encouraged at an additional secretary or secretary-level as a laggard top official will ensure that the lateral entrant has no work

Conclusion

India should have a new result-oriented bureaucracy when the nation celebrates the 75th year of Independence as the present architecture needs to be torn down and rebuilt

Connecting the dots:

- [Mission Karmayogi](#)

Parliamentary Committees

Context: India's Parliament recently passed the [National Capital Territory of Delhi \(Amendment\) Bill, 2021](#), which significantly increases the powers of the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) of Delhi

Despite the nature of the sweeping changes this bill proposed, it was not sent to a parliamentary committee, and there was no formal consultation with stakeholders, civil society, or experts before it was quickly rushed through both Houses of Parliament

Importance of Committees

- **Thorough analysis of issues:** Most MPs are generalists who rely on advice from experts and stakeholders before taking decisions. Therefore, committees are meant to help MPs seek expertise and give them time to think about issues in detail.
- **Ensures all parties voice their opinion:** All committees have MPs representing different parties, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament
- **Feedback from multiple stakeholders:** When bills are referred to these committees, they are examined closely and inputs are sought from various external stakeholders, including the public.
- **Less burden of populist posture:** By virtue of being closed-door and away from the public eye, discussions in committee meetings are also more collaborative, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.
- **Put pressure on government:** Although committee recommendations are not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations that took place and put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.

Issues

- **Referring bills to committees is not mandatory:** In the Indian system, unfortunately, it is not mandatory for bills to be sent to committees. It's left to the discretion of the Chair — the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and Chairperson in the Rajya Sabha
- **Worrying Trend of sidelining Parliamentary Committees:** Sidelining committees is increasingly becoming the norm in India. Only 25% bills were referred to committees in the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-2019) as compared to 60% in the 14th (2004-2009) and 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14).
- **Risk of weakening Parliament:** In the constitutional scheme of things, Parliament is supposed to maintain oversight on the government and keep its power in check. By circumventing due diligence in Parliament, we run the risk of weakening democracy.
- **Direct discussion not a substitute for committee deliberation:** The 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19) worked for over 1,615 hours, 20% more than the previous Lok Sabha, and passed 133 bills, 15% more than the 15th Lok Sabha. Thus, MPs are spending more time on direct deliberations on the floor of the House. However, these cannot be a substitute for committee deliberations as floor discussion lacks thorough analysis and also most MPs are not subject-matter experts.
- **Brute Majority:** By giving discretionary power to the Chair to decide whether the bill has to be sent to committee or not, the system has been especially rendered weak in a Lok Sabha where the ruling party has a brute majority.

Way Forward

- **Sweden Model:** In countries such as Sweden and Finland, all bills are sent to committees. In Australia, a selection of bills committee, which includes members from the Opposition, is tasked with identifying the bills that should go to committees.
- **Need to uphold quality Governance & Parliament relevance:** Scrutiny by Parliamentary Committees is necessary to uphold the quality of legislation, and by extension, the quality of governance in the country. A strong committee system is probably the only way to ensure Parliament's relevance in the law-making process.

Corporate Governance: Minority Shareholders rights: Tata Vs Mistry

Brief Background of the Tata Vs Mistry dispute

- Cyrus Mistry's family Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) owns 18.46% equity capital in Tata Sons, the main holding company of Tata Group. 66% of Tata Sons is owned by Tata Trusts, currently controlled by Ratan Tata, the group's former Chairman
- December 2012-Appointment of Mistry: Cyrus Mistry is appointed Chairperson of Tata Sons Limited.
- October 2016- Removal of Mistry: He is sacked from the post of Executive Chairperson by most of the Board of Directors.
- February 2017- Case filed against Tata Sons: The shareholders vote for Mistry's removal from the board of Tata Sons during an extraordinary general meeting. Mistry, subsequently, files a suit under various sections of the Companies Act, 2013, alleging oppression and mismanagement in Tata Sons.
- July 2018- Tatas win in NCLT: The Mumbai Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) dismisses Mistry's plea against Tata Sons. While rejecting his allegations, NCLT rules that the Board of Directors are competent enough to remove him as Chairman. The tribunal also states that it found no merit in the arguments on mismanagement in Tata Sons
- December 2019- Tatas lose in NCLAT: The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) overturns the NCLT judgment, and states that Mistry's removal as Chairman of Tata Sons was illegal.
- NCLAT also found that the affairs of Tata Sons were conducted in a manner prejudicial and oppressive to its minority shareholders, namely Cyrus Mistry & his family companies, as well as to the interests of the company itself.
- January 2020- Appeal to SC: Tata Sons and Ratan Tata challenge the NCLAT decision before the Supreme Court saying that the NCLAT verdict undermined Corporate Democracy and the rights of its Board of Directors.
- Subsequently, the Supreme Court stays the NCLAT judgment to reinstate Mistry as the executive chairman of Tata Sons.
- September 2020: The Supreme Court restrains Mistry's Shapoorji Pallonji Group from pledging its shares in Tata Sons to raise funds.
- March 2021: Final Verdict on the case

What were the allegations/ concerns raised by Mistry?

- Rights of Minority Shareholder's oppressed: SP Group had also alleged that Tata Sons was being run and operated in a manner which was "oppressive" and "prejudicial" to the rights of minority shareholders. It was alleged that the removal of Cyrus Mistry meant oppression of minority shareholders.
- Article 75 of the Articles of Association of the Tata Group. Article 75 gives the company the right to purchase shares from a minority or a small shareholder at a fair market value. Fearing that the Tata Group may use it to try and buyout the SP Group, the latter urged the company law tribunals and the Supreme Court to not allow Article 75 to be used.

- Decisions disproportionately impacted minority shareholders: Apart from this, the Mistry camp had also alleged that the Tata Group had taken several commercial decisions which did not yield the desired result and thus resulted in more loss for the minority shareholders than the majority shareholders.

What was the decision of the Supreme Court?

1. No Entitlement to seat on Board:

- Discussing the rights of minority and small shareholders and their importance in the board of a company, the Supreme Court held that minority shareholders or their representatives are not automatically entitled to a seat on the private company's board like a small shareholder's representative.
- This meant that SC set aside NCLAT order and dismissed the appeals of Mistry & SP Group.

2. Small Vs Minority Shareholder:

- SC noted that the provisions contained in the 2013 Companies Act only protects the rights of small shareholders of listed companies by asking such companies to have on their board at least one director elected by such small shareholders
- Small shareholders, according to the Companies Act, is a shareholder or group of shareholders who hold shares of nominal value of not more than Rs 20,000.
- Since the Mistry family and the SP Group were not "small" shareholders, but "minority shareholders", there was no statutory provision which gave them the "right to claim proportionate representation," on the board of Tata Sons.

3. No Right to Proportionate Representation

- SC noted that the right to claim proportionate representation is not available for the SP Group even contractually, in terms of the Articles of Association.
- Neither SP Group nor CPM (Cyrus Pallonji Mistry) can request the Tribunal (NCLAT) to rewrite the contract, by seeking an amendment of the Articles of Association.
- The Articles of Association, as they exist today, are binding upon SP Group and CPM

Impact of the Judgement

- The Supreme Court has not negated the concept of quasi-partnership or a contractual agreement.
- Though the judgment does not directly impact the right of minority shareholders, it does mean that going ahead, such shareholders will have to ensure that they have a contract with the majority shareholders or the promoters of the company to ensure they have adequate representation on the board.

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SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Haryana Job Quota Law (Local Reservation)

Context: Recently the Haryana government notified a new law that requires 75% of private sector jobs in the state, up to a specified salary slab (under Rs 50,000 per month), reserved for local candidate (born in the state or living there for five years)

- **Objective:** The legislation, the government argued, is aimed at boosting local employment particularly for the youth in unskilled jobs.
- **Applicability of the law:** The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020, requires all companies, LLPs, trusts, societies and partnership firms with more than 10 employees to follow these local employment requirements
- **Enforcement Power:** The law specifically empower the district administrations to enforce the new regulations through inspections with a 24-hour notice.

Criticism of the legislation

- **Impractical:** The lack of a sufficiently large qualified domestic workforce in Haryana made the implementation of the new act “impractical”.
- **Balkanisation of India’s labour market:** Such kind of restrictions hampers Prime Minister’s vision of ‘Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat’ that aims, among other things, an integrated and mobile labour market within the country. Free mobility of labour corrects several demographic and economic imbalances between states and curbing it will inhibit overall economic growth and employment generation.
- **Will increase Informalisation:** This move is likely to hurt the low-skilled workers and push the state’s industrial and services sector towards greater “informalisation”. In other words, the same workers will be paid less and have next to nothing social security because they will not be formally on the payrolls
- **Gives encouragement to inspector raj & Corruption:** The provision in the law that requires a firm to seek exemption from the district administration if it cannot find enough qualified workers brings in an element of bureaucratic discretion in the entire process thus paving way to the old inspector Raj, corruption and rent-seeking.
- **Impacts Economic Recovery:** The economic recovery (post-Covid) will definitely be affected by these restrictions
- **Impacts Investments:** The Gurgaon-Manesar belt in Haryana, has attracted high business investments — both in manufacturing and services. Such kind of labour restriction is not in line with free market principles which could hinder investments coming into Haryana
- **Competitive Federalism:** The move could further affect the competitiveness of Haryana thus diverting away investment and industries into more market friendly states like Gujarat & Karnataka
- **Increased Compliance Burden:** Under the regulations, firms and companies would also have to register all of their employees receiving a gross salary of Rs 50,000 or less on a government portal and update it at regular intervals. This is not in line with Union government’s agenda of ease of doing business.
- **Impacts all of State’s Labour Market:** According to the Union government’s own Periodic Labour Force Survey, nearly 97% of workers in the private sector draw a salary of less than Rs 50,000 a month. So the Rs 50,000 monthly salary limit is quite significant and would cover most of the private sector employment in the state.

- **Lacks Consultation:** Majority of industry association members criticised the move also on the grounds that they had not been consulted before the announcement of the change.
- **Lacks time period for preparation:** It is not possible for so many skilled and semi-skilled local workers to become available so quickly. Instead, the government should have been flexible in the implementation of this regulation so that businesses can continue their work “peacefully.”
- **Impacts Expansion plans of small firms:** Industry Organisation are of opinion that the legislation would damage small firms and halt expansion plans. This will lead to job destruction instead of job creation for locals as nobody will expand operations in the state.
- **Against the spirit of free market:** This legislation has renewed the debate on whether the government force should private companies to adopt its reservation policy in jobs.
- **Questions on Constitutionality of law:** While constitutional guarantees for reservation has been limited to public employment (Article 16(4)), attempts to extend it to private sector is contested one. The Constitution has no manifest provision for private employment from which the state draws the power to make laws mandating reservation.
- **State abdicating its responsibility:** The Constitution places the responsibility of ensuring equality of opportunity to all citizens squarely on the state. By mandating private sector to adopt the reservation policy, the state is delegating its role to the citizen which is criticised by some as abdicating its responsibility

What is the government’s rationale in bringing such laws?

- **Needs such policies to achieve substantial equality:** With public sector jobs constituting only a minuscule proportion of all jobs, legislators have talked about extending the legal protections to the private sector to really achieve the constitutional mandate of equality for all citizens
- **Legitimate Right to ask Private Sector to share Burden:** Since private industries use public infrastructure in many ways (infrastructure, subsidised land & credit, etc) the state has a legitimate right to require them to comply with the reservation policy.
- **Similar Reservation in Education was upheld:** A similar argument was made in requiring private schools to comply with the Right to Education Act, which the Supreme Court also upheld.
- **Similar Affirmative Action in other countries:** In the US, although there is no statutory requirement for employers to have quotas, courts can order monetary damages and injunctive relief for victims of discrimination (US Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, colour, national origin, religion, and sex). The Employment Equity Act in Canada also protects minority groups, especially aboriginals from discrimination in federally regulated industries, even in the private sector.

Conclusion

- In July 2019, the Andhra Pradesh government had passed a similar law, which was challenged in court. The AP HC had made a prima facie observation that the move might be unconstitutional, but the challenge is yet to be heard on merits.

Read Related Articles

- Andhra Pradesh [Locals First Policy](#)
- Madhya Pradesh [domicile based quota](#)
- Reservation is [not a fundamental right](#)

Transgender Community Desk at Cyberabad

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Social issues & GS-II – Policies and interventions

In news

- A '[Transgender Community Desk](#)' was inaugurated at Gachibowli Police Station, Telangana.
- It is India's first-of-its-kind gender inclusive community policing initiative.

Key takeaways

- The desk will be managed by a police liaison officer and a transgender person who is designated as community coordinator.
- It will be the focal point for all grievance redressal (violence, discrimination, etc.) among the transgender community of the district.
- It will also provide counselling, legal aid, soft skills training, job placements, etc. in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and District Legal Services Authority.

Related articles:

- [Garima Greh: A Shelter Home for Transgender Persons' e-inaugurated](#)
- [National Council for Transgender Persons](#)

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Welfare schemes

In news

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development recently submitted its report to the Lok Sabha.
- According to the report, the Centre must increase the "meagre" pensions provided for poor senior citizens, widows and disabled people.

Key takeaways

- The Committee observed that under National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), amount of assistance ranging from ₹200 to ₹500 per month is provided under its different components.
- The panel had also previously urged the increase in these pensions in its reports on the Department of Rural Development's (DoRD) demand for grants in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Important value additions

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- It provides financial assistance to the elderly, widows and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.
- **Administered by:** Ministry of Rural Development
- It consists of five sub-schemes:
 - Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)
 - Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)
 - Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)

- National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)
- Annapurna Scheme

Shramik Kalyan Portal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions & GS – III – Employment

In news

- Indian Railways ensures 100% compliance of payment of minimum wages to contract workers through e-application Shramik Kalyan Portal.

Important value additions

Indian Railway Shramik Kalyan

- **Developed and launched:** 1st October, 2018.
- It ensures the compliance of provisions of Minimum Wages Act.
- The contractors are required to regularly upload wage payment data into e-application.
- It ensures that contractual workers of Indian Railways get their rightful dues

Mera Ration Mobile App

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Welfare schemes

In news

- Mera Ration Mobile App was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Key takeaways

- **Target audience:** For the benefit of those ration card holders who move to new places in search of livelihood.
- At present 32 States and Union Territories are covered under [One Nation One Ration Card](#) (ONORC).
- At present, the system covers nearly 69 Crore National Food Security Act- NFSA beneficiaries in the country.

A Kerala Model for Universal Education

Context: India tops the list of countries with out-of-school children. The 2011 Census affirmed that 84 million children in the country do not go to school at all and 47 million children get eliminated even before Class 10.

Did You Know?

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Article 26(1) and (2) by the General Assembly of the UN emphasises in clear terms that every individual has the right to education and that it should aim for holistic development which in turn would evolve respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- Seven decades after the UDHR, 58 million children are out of school globally and more than 100 million children get eliminated from the schooling system before completing primary education

Kerala Model

Kerala is known for its highest literacy rate in the country and one hundred per cent enrolment of children in primary and secondary education. Reasons for success of Kerala Model are:

- **Roots in Colonial Period:** The historic royal rescript of 1817 proclaimed education as the “responsibility” of the state. Simultaneously, it emphasised that “political will” is more important than the political economy to decide the expenditure on education.
- **Strength of Teachers:** With around 46 lakh students, 16,000 schools and 1.69 lakh teachers, the student-teacher ratio and student-school ratio reveal a desirable scenario. With more than 20,000 non-teaching staff, the teachers are not burdened with non-teaching or administrative work and are free to concentrate on their pedagogical roles
- **Consistency of Policies:** The total literacy campaign started by the then Left Front government in 1989. The successful implementation of PRISM (Promoting Regional Schools to International Standards through Multiple Interventions) and whooping allocations to develop one school in each assembly segment to international standards is what can be seen as the reason behind the tectonic shift of 2.35 lakh students from private to public schools.
- **Funding:** Successive governments in Kerala have increased the capital outlay to education and simultaneously **decentralised financing** of education through local bodies. The per capita expenditure on education is also on a steady rise.
- **Comprehensive Intervention:** The Kerala model shows that comprehensive interventions pertaining to nutrition, health, sanitation, and early stimulation can help to achieve sustainable growth in human development.

Challenges in Universalization of Education

The Constitution of India provides for free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age. In pursuance of this Government of India has enacted the Right to Education Act, 2009. However, the goal of universalization of primary education is still far from our reach. The factors that can be attributed to this are as follows:

- **Low Public Spending:** The [Union Budget 2021](#) budget allocated only 2.75 percent of the GDP to education. However, the Incheon Declaration to which India is a signatory, expects member states to spend 4-6% of their GDP on education to achieve SDG4.
- **Privatization of education:** Decline of Public school system and simultaneous rise of expensive private schooling has made a large number of children being eliminated from the system at early stages. Private schooling are also criticised for their low quality, neglect of values, excessive focus on jobs and systemic inefficiencies
- **Qualitative Issue:** Universalization of compulsory education has failed to catch up to the desired target because quality control of primary education has not been maintained. The successive ASER survey reflects the poor state of learning outcomes in primary education.

Way Forward

- **Active Role of State:** To make education universal the state must find resources to provide ancillary services such as school health, mid-day meals, free supply of textbooks, writing materials, school uniform, etc (Similar to comprehensive intervention of Keral Model).

- **Civil Society Participation:** The success of Kerala is made possible thanks to the collective efforts of the various departments of the government, officials, volunteers, NGOs, and friendly associations.
- **Social Auditing:** There should be a Village or Mohalla School Committee in each village or urban area. Such a committee would look after the construction and maintenance of buildings, playgrounds, and school gardens, provision for ancillary services, the purchase of equipment, etc.
- **Increased Commitment:** The kind of commitment or collective will shown for the provisions of electricity, water and roads needs to be developed for education as well.

Conclusion

Unless education becomes an election and emotional issue akin to nationalism, we will have only a few pocket boroughs of royal rescripts like Kerala.

Connecting the dots

- [National Education Policy 2020](#)

Population Stabilization

Context: The National Population Policy 2000 affirmed a commitment to achieve replacement levels of fertility (total fertility rate of 2.1) by 2010.

- **Ten states** — Karnataka, Punjab, Gujarat, Assam, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala — and Jammu and Kashmir, have achieved this goal, albeit much delayed.
- **Kerala and Tamil Nadu** had accomplished it decades earlier.
- **Secular Decline:** This fertility decline over half of India has cut across all sections of society — the privileged and the poor, those educated or not, and the high and low caste.

Key Takeaways from Success of Southern States

- **Question over Prerequisites:** When fertility reduction in the five southern states succeeded, irrespective of literacy and education levels and could permeate all sections, it overturns the conventional wisdom that literacy, education and development are prerequisites for populations to stabilise.
- **Proactiveness of State Governments:** Fertility decline was achieved because southern governments proactively urged families to have only two children, followed by female sterilisation immediately thereafter. Almost the entire state apparatus was marshalled to achieve this objective.

Issue of UP and Bihar

- **Populous States with High Population Growth:** UP and Bihar are 23 per cent of India's population and are projected to grow by over 12 per cent and 20 per cent in the next 15 years. Their high TFR pervades all religious groups.
- **High Fertility:** Women in rural UP are still giving birth to four or more children.

- **Low Contraceptive Usage:** the contraceptive prevalence rate is less than 10 per cent. UP's has an over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception which is one of the factors for low contraceptive rate
- **Migration Factor:** Bihar has the highest fertility rate in the country and also the highest outmigration. Almost half the women in some districts have a migrant husband and empirical evidence shows women's unwillingness to seek contraception in the absence of the husband, resulting in unprotected sex when he returns.
- **Reliance on female sterilisation:** No other country in the world uses female sterilisation as excessively as India. After the 2014 Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh) outrage, when more than 80 sterilisations were conducted in less than six hours and several women died, one expected that states would go slow on compulsory female sterilisation but has in fact not slowed down.

Issues with Population Control (at National Level)

- **Late Adoption of Modern Methods:** Indonesia and Bangladesh introduced injectables right from the late 1980s but India only did so in 2016. Executed properly, one jab renders protection from pregnancy for three months
- **Lack of Political Will:** While national and state policies emphasise male vasectomy, politicians never champion its adoption.
- **Failure of Constitutional Motivation:** The freeze on the state-wise allocation of seats in Parliament until 2026 was extended through the Constitutional (84th Amendment) Act, 2002, to serve "as a motivational measure to pursue population stabilisation" — a goal which has not been achieved. In the absence of further extension, it will be politically destabilising.
- **Impact on Economic Growth:** Demographics will eclipse economic growth and destroy the gains from a young populace.
- **Patriarchy & Sex Ratio:** Son preference, falling sex ratios, and an abhorrence towards begetting a second or third female child are negative developments that hampers population stabilizations
- **Emergence of Son of Soil Narrative:** Southern states that have achieved population stabilization now face the issue of the elderly outstripping the working-age population. As a result, there will be increasing emergence of resistance to people from northern states working in southern states.

Way Ahead

- Incentivise later marriages and child births
- Make contraception easy for women: over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception needs to be swiftly replaced with reliable and easy alternatives
- Promote women's labour force participation
- Stabilisation isn't only about controlling population growth. A balanced sex ratio is essential to secure social cohesion.

Conclusion

The population momentum, if managed properly in the Hindi belt, will remain India's biggest asset until 2055. By 2040, India will be the undisputed king of human capital.

Connecting the dots

- [The Population Worry](#)

Reviewing Reservation

Context: Supreme Court asked states whether they were in favour of extending caste-based reservation beyond the 50 per cent ceiling set by it in **Indra Sawhney case** (nine-judge bench) of 1992.

Background of the issue

- The apex court framed this as one among the several questions to be decided while considering the constitutional validity of a 2018 Maharashtra law
- 2018 Maharashtra law gave 16% reservation to the Maratha community in jobs and admissions by terming them socially and educationally backward class in the state.
- This law got past the scrutiny of the Bombay High Court in June 2019 but the quantum of reservation stood reduced to 12 per cent in admissions and 13 per cent in jobs.
- With the introduction of this Act, the reservation benefits in the state exceeded 50 per cent.
- In addition to Maharashtra, there are three other states – Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Chhattisgarh - which have passed similar laws exceeding the 50 per cent reservation mark and are under challenge in the Supreme Court.

Presently, Constitution Bench will decide on the following broad issues

- **Relook into Reservation limits:** Whether the Indira Sawhney case judgement of 1992 requires a relook by larger bench in the light of subsequent Constitutional amendments, judgements and changed social dynamics of the society.
- **Marata Quota Law:** The SC will have to decide whether the Marata Quota law is covered by the exemption of “exceptional circumstances” by which reservations can cross the 50% mark
- **Federalism and Power of States:** The SC will have to also examine whether 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act deprives a state legislature of its power to enact a legislation to identify socially and economically backward classes within the state to confer quota benefits to them.
- **Article 342A:** The article 342A (power of the President to notify a particular caste as Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC). The SC will look into whether the Article 342A abrogates a State’s power to legislate for or classify “any backward classes of citizens” and thereby, affects the federal policy/structure.

Background for Indra Sawhney Case

- **Mandal Commission:** The Second Backward Classes Commission, famously known as the Mandal Commission, was set up in 1979 to determine the criteria for defining socially and educationally backward classes.
- **OBC Reservation:** The Mandal report identified 52 percent of the population at that time as ‘Socially and Economically Backward Classes’ (SEBCs) and recommended 27 per cent reservation for SEBCs in addition to the previously existing 22.5 per cent reservation for SC/STs.
- **Challenged in Court:** The then V P Singh led-Central government wanted to implement the Mandal Commission report in 1990, but it was challenged in the Supreme Court. The verdict in the Indira Sawhney case, which came up before a nine-judge bench, was delivered in 1992.
- **Ceiling on Reservation with exceptions:** The pronouncement in the Indra Sawhney v Union of India fixed a cap of 50 percent reservation. The Court had, however, said that the cap can be breached under exceptional circumstances.
- **IR Coelho Case:** In this case, SC delivered a unanimous verdict upholding the authority of the judiciary to review any law, which destroy or damage the basic structure as indicated in fundamental rights, even if they have been put in 9th schedule.

102nd Constitution Amendment Act

- 102nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2018 provides constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) (earlier it was statutory body)
- 102nd Constitution Amendment Act inserted new Articles 338 B and 342 A.
- Article 338B provides authority to NCBC to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.
- Article 342 A empowers President to specify socially and educationally backward classes in various states and union territories. He can do this in consultation with Governor of concerned State. However, law enacted by Parliament will be required if list of backward classes is to be amended.

Read Related Articles

- Andhra Pradesh [Locals First Policy](#)
- Madhya Pradesh [domicile based quota](#)
- Reservation is [not a fundamental right](#)

RCE of Comprehensive Scheme for Strengthening of Transmission & Distribution in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions

In news

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Revised Cost Estimate (RCE) of Comprehensive Scheme for Strengthening of Transmission & Distribution in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim at an estimated cost of Rs. 9129 crore.

Key takeaways

- The scheme is being implemented through POWERGRID, a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under Ministry of Power in association with Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- The scheme was initially approved in December, 2014 as a Central Sector Plan Scheme.
- The entire cost of the scheme will be borne by the Central Government
- It is targeted to be commissioned in phased manner by December 2021.
- After commissioning, the created transmission and distribution system will be owned and maintained by the respective State Utilities.
- It is a major step towards economic development of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim through strengthening of Intra - State Transmission and Distribution systems.

Index Monitoring Cell (IMC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions

In news

- Recently, Independent journalist P. Sainath struck a dissenting note in the report submitted by the Index Monitoring Cell (IMC).
- He pointed out that the right to dissent should be the central focus of press freedom.

Important value additions

Index Monitoring Cell (IMC)

- **Set up by:** Information and Broadcasting Ministry
- **Objective:** To improve India's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index and to evolve an objective yardstick to gauge media freedom.
- It is a 15-member committee.
- It has four journalists and government functionaries.
- **Chaired by:** Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia, Principal Director General of the Press Information Bureau

Recommendations of report

- Decriminalising of defamation. India is one of the few countries in the world to criminalise defamation.
- Consent of the Press Council of India is a prerequisite before filing an FIR against the media or a publication.
- Sainath has pointed out that the report failed in its objective to analyse the World Press Freedom Index and India's performance in it with a view to identify areas of strengths and concern related to press freedom in India.

Initiatives for development of Nomadic Tribes

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II - Policies and interventions

In news

- Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment informed Rajya Sabha about initiatives for development of Nomadic Tribes.

Key takeaways

- The Development and Welfare Board for De-notified (DNTs), Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities was constituted in 2019 for three years extendable up to 5 years.
- **Objective:** To promote the socio-economic development of De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities
- The following schemes are being implemented by the Central Government through State Government/UT for the DNTs:-
 - Ambedkar Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship for DNT Boys and Girls.
 - Nanaji Deshmukh Scheme of Construction of Hostels for DNT Boys and Girls.
- A Committee under the Chairmanship of Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog has taken up the task of identification of DNT communities which are yet to be formally classified.
- NITI Aayog has assigned the task of ethnographic survey of 62 tribes to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) to conduct the studies of these communities in different parts of India

The Jharkhand State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2021

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions

In news

- The Jharkhand government announced 75% reservation in private sector jobs with a salary of up to Rs 30,000 for locals.

Key takeaways

- The bill will treat shops, establishments, mines, enterprises, industries, companies, societies, trusts, Limited Liability Partnership firms and any person employing ten or more persons as the private sector and an entity.
- Every employer needs to register employees on a designated portal who are receiving gross monthly salary or wages not more than Rs 30, 000 — or as notified by the government from time to time — within three months of this bill coming into force.
- No local candidate will be eligible to avail 75% benefit without registering herself in the designated portal.
- The bill defines a local candidate as a person who belongs to Jharkhand and is registered on the designated portal.
- The employer may claim exemption where an adequate number of local candidates of the desired skill qualification or proficiency are not available.



Baba's Foundation course (Baba's FC)

FACULTY PROFILE

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WOMEN ISSUE

Rape and Marriage

Context: Recently, Supreme Court bench headed by CJI asked a State government employee whether he would marry a girl he was accused of raping repeatedly while she was a minor.

The accused had also forced her mother to not lodge a police complaint on the promise that he would marry the victim when she turned 18.

The man refused by Supreme Courts proposal saying he was already married.

Implication of remarks(proposal) made by SC

- **Impact on Society:** Words uttered in the highest, most pre-eminent court of the land ripple out into the larger society. SC should have been more cautious before making such proposals.
- **Criticised as Retrograde proposal:** The SC's remarks, unfortunately, risk perpetuating the offensive and retrograde idea of marriage as a payoff for the trauma and violation of rape.
- **Dilution of Offence:** Under the law of the land, rape is a "non-compoundable" crime. That is, the offence cannot be diluted or mitigated by any settlement reached outside court. Making such compromises is considered as dilution of offence.
- **Against SC's own precedence:** In a 2015 judgment in **State of MP vs Madanlal**, the court had unambiguously stated, "In a case of rape or attempt of rape, the conception of compromise under no circumstances can really be thought of". In an earlier judgment in **Shimbu v State of Haryana**, the SC had said, "Rape is not a matter to be left for the parties to compromise and settle."
- **Perpetuating Patriarchy:** Such type of compromises is making violation of women(rape) a matter to be settled between families so to preserve the reputation and honour of male assailants.
- **Against Article 21:** By offering marriage as a solution to a rape victim, the judiciary failed to protect the rights of a girl. Such obscene matchmaking and settlements devalues a woman's worth and her dignity of life.
- **Against Article 14:** Such type of remarks is considered as assault on the autonomy of Indian women as equal citizens. Equal rights activists have always worked hard against misogyny, patriarchal mindsets and other failings such as blaming the victim for rape. This arduous battle for equality becomes even more difficult when people in high offices make offensive remarks
- **Increases Vulnerability:** Such type of compromises exposes the victim to more violence from her husband/assailant
- **Existing Practice:** It is pertinent to note here that [marital rape](#) is not a crime under the Indian Penal Code. Such compromises are routinely peddled by police, village councils and lower courts. But CJI's remarks in open court could perpetuate this inglorious tradition and derail the progress made towards empowerment of women.

Conclusion

When the scars of the Nirbhaya case are still raw, and a series of rape and murders are being reported against minors, especially Dalits, the judiciary's shocking remarks echo a deep-set prejudice against gender equality

Connecting the dots

- [Marital Rape](#)
- [Sex Abuse and Safeguarding our Children](#)

Programmes To Promote Women Entrepreneurship

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Governance & GS – III – Entrepreneurship

In news

- Several schemes have been launched by the Indian Government to promote Women Entrepreneurship. Some of them have been discussed below.

Pradhan Mantri YUVA (PM YUVA) Yojana

- **Ministry:** The Ministry of Skill Development
- **Objective:** Creating an enabling ecosystem through entrepreneurship education, training, advocacy and easy access to entrepreneurship network.

‘Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs and Startups by Women’

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Germany.

Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

- **Ministry:** Ministry of MSME
- It has the target to generate self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro enterprises for non-farm sector.

Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs)

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development
- It is Skill development program
- It involves enabling a trainee to take Bank credit and start his/her own Micro-enterprise.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development
- **Aim:** Eliminating rural poverty through promotion of multiple livelihoods for each rural poor household.

Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)

- Under this Sub-scheme of DAY-NRLM, a total of 194,144 enterprises have been set-up up to 31st January, 2021.

Gender and Sanitation

Context: The [sustainable development goals](#) (Target 6.2) require India “by 2030, to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

Women, Sanitation and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

- **Gender sensitive objective:** The Swachh Bharat Grameen Phase I guidelines (2017) state that “requirements and sensitivities related to gender, including dignity and safety issues, are to be

taken into account at all stages of sanitation programmes from planning to post-implementation.”

- **Guidelines w.r.t gender dimension:** The department of Drinking Water and Sanitation released the guidelines, recognising the gender dimensions of sanitation in India. It emphasised not only the need for women’s participation in planning and implementation of sanitation interventions but also “their leadership in SBM-G committees and institutions”.
- **Guidelines to States:** The states were accordingly expected to ensure adequate representation of women in the village water and sanitation committees (VWSCs), leading to optimal gender outcomes. The SBM-Grameen guidelines (Phase I) specifically recommended that 50 per cent of the members of VWSCs should be women.
- **Women for behavioural change:** The government has also very effectively used over 8 lakh swachhagrahis, mainly women, who for small honorariums work to push through behavioural change at the community level.

Challenges Involved in Gender and Sanitation

- **Risks Involved with Open Defecation:** Women face threats to their life and feel unsafe while seeking a toilet facility or while going out for open defecation. This leads to the consumption of less food and water by the women to minimize the need to exit the home to use toilets.
- **Disproportionate burden on women:** The desire for privacy during bathing and defecation is different in the case of girls and women than men. Thus, the non-availability of proper sanitation facilities creates a helpless situation for females and leads to the risk of faecal-orally transmitted diseases, urogenital tract infections, urinary incontinence, and chronic constipation.
- **Weak Participation and Proxy for men:** In practice, the promoters of swachhta rarely encourage women to participate in water and sanitation committees, which does not guarantee their participation. There were inevitably cases where women were fronts for spouses.

Way Ahead

- **Continued Behavioural Change:** Information, education, and communication, which aims at behaviour change of the masses, is key to the success [Swachh Bharat Mission 2 .0](#) . The mission speaks of sustained behavioral change while embarking on the newer agendas of sustainable solid waste management and safe disposal of wastewater and reuse.
- **Financial and Livelihood Linkage:** There is need to interlink Sanitation & Hygiene with Livelihood: The India Sanitation Coalition has helped link micro-finance with self-help groups run by women for sanitation needs.
- **Tracking Gender Outcomes:** Gender analysis frameworks in development practice supports design, implementation, and measurement that can bridge the gender equality gap in sanitation. A national monitoring and evaluation system to track and measure gender outcomes in SBM is necessary.
- **Gender Sensitization & Training:** There is a need for effective communications and training programs to build the capacity of stakeholders on gender targeting, both on the supply and demand sides of interventions.
- **Involving Civil Society:** Besides the government, the role of non-state actors, including that of institutions like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Unicef and several NGOs, must be lauded as we pursue sustainable sanitation using a powerful gender lens.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that women can help to drive change and bring about lasting change as the jan andolan for swachhta, health and sanitation gains momentum.

Menstruation Taboo

Context: In a PIL Case **Nirjhari Mukul Sinha v. Union Of India**, the Gujarat High Court has passed an order proposing nine guidelines that the state should follow to end menstruation taboo and discriminatory practices pertaining to it.

About the Unfortunate Incident

- In February 2020, 66 girls of Shree Sahjanand Girls Institute (SSGI) in Bhuj Town of Gujarat were made to undress, by the college and hostel authorities, to check if they were menstruating. Two others who said that they were menstruating, were not stripped.
- After the initial probe, Darshana Dholakia, in-charge vice-chancellor of the university to which the college is affiliated, had justified the action, saying the girls were checked because the hostel has a rule that girls on their menstrual cycle are not supposed to take meals with other inmates.
- This soon led to a widespread public outrage leading to the arrest of four and filing of FIR in Gujarat High Court, seeking direction for a law to specifically deal with the exclusionary practice against women on the basis of their menstrual status.

The Court proposed to issue the following directions for the State Government to follow;

- Prohibit social exclusion of women on the basis of their menstrual status at all places, be it private or public, religious or educational
- The State Government should spread awareness among its citizens regarding the social exclusion of women on the basis of their menstrual status through various mediums
- Empowerment of women through education and increasing their role in decision-making can also aid in this regard;
- Sensitization of health workers, ASHA and Anganwadi Workers regarding menstruation biology must also be done so that they can further disseminate this knowledge in the community and mobilize social support against busting menstruation-related myths.
- The State Government should hold campaigns, drives, involve NGOs and other private organizations to spread such awareness;
- The State Government should prohibit all educational institutions, hostels, and living spaces for women-studying working and others, private or public, by whatever name called, from following social exclusion of women on the basis of their menstrual status in any manner;
- The State Government should undertake surprise checks, create an appropriate mechanism and take such other actions, steps as may be necessary to ensure its compliance including the imposition of an appropriate penalty against the erring institution.

Analysis of the issue

- **Form of Untouchability:** It has been argued that treating menstruating women differently amounts to a practice of untouchability.
- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** The practice which is being followed and encouraged of exclusion of women on the basis of their menstrual status is violative of human, legal and fundamental rights of women, more particularly, those as enshrined under Articles 14, 15, 17, 19, and 21 respectively of the Constitution.

- **Stigmatisation of Menstruation:** Menstruation has been stigmatized in our society. This stigma has built up due to the traditional beliefs in impurity of menstruating women and our unwillingness to discuss it normally
- **Daily restrictions faced by women:** Not entering the "puja" room is the major restriction among the urban girls whereas, not entering the kitchen is the main restriction among the rural girls during menstruation. Menstruating girls and women are also restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books
- **Patriarchal beliefs:** The underlying basis for this myth is also the cultural beliefs of impurity associated with menstruation and that it is believed that menstruating women are unhygienic and unclean and hence the food they prepare or handle can get contaminated.
- **Impact on Education:** Large number of girls in many less economically developed countries drop out of school when they begin menstruating (over 23% of girls in India)
- **Impact on Health:** Such taboos about menstruation present in many societies impact on girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health. 88% of women in India sometimes resort to using ashes, newspapers, dried leaves and husk sand to aid absorption. Poor protection and inadequate washing facilities may increase susceptibility to infection.
- **Lacks Awareness and Public debate:** Young girls often grow up with limited knowledge of menstruation because their mothers and other women shy away from discussing the issues with them.
- **Against [Right to Privacy](#):** Exclusion on the basis of menstruation status is not only an infringement of women's bodily autonomy but also an infringement of right to privacy
- **Against Judicial Precedence in [Sabarimala Verdict](#):** The petitioners have relied on the Supreme Court's Sabarimala temple entry judgment where a 4:1 majority bench had held that the temple's practice of excluding women's entry is unconstitutional
- **Gender-unfriendly school culture** and infrastructure and the lack of adequate menstrual protection alternatives and/or clean, safe and private sanitation facilities for female teachers and girls undermine their right to privacy.

Conclusion

However, before issuing appropriate directions, as referred to above, the Court has sought the response of the State Government as well as the Union of India.

Connecting the dots

- [Sabarimala Issue](#)

Energy and Women Empowerment

Interlinkage between Women & Environment

- **Decentralized Power Generation helps women:** In remote regions it is cheaper and more efficient to deploy distributed renewable energy technologies—such as mini-grids, solar pumps, and other standalone productive power systems—rather than extend centralised, grid-based power.

- **Reduces Workload of Women:** Electrical appliances also ease the burden of household chores, which usually fall on women.
- **Saves Time in collecting firewood:** Clean energy for cooking saves the time spent gathering dirty fuels such as firewood or cow dung and reduces exposure to indoor air pollution—responsible for 3.8 million premature deaths a year.
- **Increased Literacy & Productivity:** Light at night makes it possible for women and girls to work and study. Electricity not only helps earn an income but also enhances productivity.
- **Promotes Self-Employment:** Access to reliable electricity and the consequent time savings enable women to avail of opportunities for skill-training, which can help them to earn an income as an employee or even start their own business.
- **Non-farm Employment:** A World Bank paper reports that household electrification in rural India led to a significant albeit small increase in women's non-farm self-employment and had a positive effect on girls' schooling.
- Energy access, however, is not enough; we need greater inclusion of women in the energy workforce as well for equitable outcomes.

Way Ahead

- The energy supply chain gives women opportunities to earn higher wages and upskill vis-à-vis traditional income-generating activities.
- Since many clean energy jobs go to unskilled and semi-skilled workers, they could provide a viable alternative for women, who are less likely to have the education or training required to work in the formal sector.
- A female workforce could also contribute to greater energy access. Since women are part of different social networks vis-à-vis men, their inclusion can help businesses reach out to more households.
- Studies have shown that women perform as well as men in energy supply businesses despite it being a male-dominated sector. Employing women in the industry challenges traditional norms and stereotypes about what women are capable of.
- **Example of Bijulee didis:** For electricity suppliers in Odisha, employing women to enhance customer services has not only shaved off losses but also increased revenues by Rs 7 crore. A network of 120 women, known as bijulee didis, collect bill payments and address users' problems. As a result, an additional 8,000 customers started paying bills on time and over 1,250 houses and 300 businesses got connected to the solar grid.
- For energy access to benefit women, **policies need to be "gender-aware"**, that is, they must account for social hierarchies and differences in energy use among men and women.

Conclusion

Distributed renewable energy can transform women's lives. We need to build upon the connections between energy access, agriculture, water availability and gender equity.

Connecting the dots

- [Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana](#)

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Background

- **Voluntary Termination:** Under the Indian Penal Code, 1860, voluntarily terminating a pregnancy is a criminal offence.
- **Specific Law:** The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (MTP), 1971 allows for aborting the pregnancy by medical doctors (with specified specialisation) on certain grounds.
- **Various Conditions for Medical Termination:** Under the 1971 MTP Act, a pregnancy can be terminated until 20 weeks after conception, on the advice of two doctors, if it will harm the mother, cause grave injury to her mental or physical health (including rape and failure of birth control measures) or in the case of foetal abnormalities or to save woman's life.
- **Systemic push towards illegal service providers:** If the pregnancy has gone over 20 weeks, then women has to seek legal course to terminate the pregnancy. The slow judicial process is thus pushing her to depend on illegal service providers for termination of unwanted pregnancies
- **Argument for amendments in MTP:** Several Writ Petitions have been filed by women seeking permission to abort pregnancies beyond 20-weeks due to foetal abnormalities or rape. It is also argues that with the advancement of medical technology, there is a scope to increase the upper limit for terminating pregnancies

Do You Know?

- A 2015 study by India Journal of Medical Ethics noted that **10-13% of maternal deaths** in India are due to unsafe abortions – the third-highest cause of maternal deaths in India.
- In India, an estimated 15.6 million abortions were performed in 2015. This translates to an **abortion rate of 47 per 1,000 women** aged 15–49
- Currently, slightly fewer than **one in four abortions** are provided in **health facilities**.
- According to a study, about 67% of the countries in the world (which have a federal law regulating pregnancy) require authorisations by at least one health care provider to undergo an abortion.
- The World Health Organisation does not specify any maximum time limit after which a pregnancy should not be terminated

Key Highlights of the Amendment Bill

1. Time Limit for terminating Pregnancy

Time since conception	Requirement for terminating pregnancy	
	MTP Act , 1971	MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020
Up to 12 weeks	Advice of one doctor	Advice of one doctor
12 to 20 weeks	Advice of two doctors	Advice of one doctor
20 to 24 weeks	Not allowed	Two doctors for some categories of pregnant women such as rape/incest victims, differently-abled women and minors.
More than 24 weeks	Not allowed	Medical Board in case of substantial foetal abnormality
Any time during the pregnancy	One doctor, if immediately necessary to save pregnant woman's life	
	Doctor refers to registered medical practitioner with	

experience/training in gynaecology or obstetrics.

2. Termination due to failure of contraceptive method or device:

- Under the Act a pregnancy may be terminated up to 20 weeks by a married woman in the case of failure of contraceptive method or device.
- The Bill allows unmarried women to also terminate a pregnancy for this reason.

3. Medical Boards:

- All state and union territory governments will constitute a Medical Board.
- The Board will decide if a pregnancy may be terminated after 24 weeks due to substantial foetal abnormalities.
- Each Board will have a gynaecologist, paediatrician, radiologist/sonologist, and other members notified by the state government.

4. Privacy

- A registered medical practitioner may only reveal the details of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated to a person authorised by law.
- Violation is punishable with imprisonment up to a year, a fine, or both.

Merits of the bill

- **Upholds Dignity of Women:** The bill fulfils its professed aim of ensuring “dignity, autonomy, confidentiality and justice for women who need to terminate pregnancy”
- **Institutional & Organised Abortion services:** The lacunae in the older enactments led to many quacks and unqualified persons running illegal abortion clinics endangering the lives of many women. It is expected that the new amendments will help tackle these issues and bring more abortions into the organised domain, wherein qualified medical practitioners can take decisions and perform safe abortions.
- **Destigmatizing pregnancies outside marriage:** The Bill also applies to unmarried women, thus removing a regressive clause of the 1971 Act which said that unmarried women could not ask for an abortion citing contraceptive failure as a reason. The bill replaces “any married woman or her husband” with “any woman or her partner” thereby destigmatizing pregnancies outside marriage.
- **Safeguards Reproductive Rights of women:** Allowing unmarried women the right to legally terminate an unwanted pregnancy with a provision to protect her identity will confer reproductive rights to women.
- **Reduces Maternal Mortality Rate:** The bill increase women’s access to legal and safe abortion services which in turn will reduce maternal mortality and morbidity caused by unsafe abortions and associated complications

Concerns/Criticism

1. Ethical Dilemma:

- One opinion is that terminating a pregnancy is the choice of the pregnant woman, and a part of her reproductive rights.
- The other opinion is that the state has an obligation to protect life, and hence should provide for the protection of the foetus.

- Across the world, countries have set varying conditions and time limits for allowing abortions, based on factors such as foetal viability (the point at which the foetus may survive outside the womb), foetal abnormalities, or risk to the pregnant woman.

2. Beyond 24 weeks

- The Bill allows for termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks only in cases where a Medical Board diagnoses substantial foetal abnormalities.
- This implies that for terminating pregnancies due to rape that have crossed the 24-week limit, there is no change in the process: the only recourse is to get permission through a Writ Petition.

3. Time frame for Medical Board's decision not specified

- The Bill allows for the termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks based on the opinion of the Medical Board in the case of substantial foetal abnormalities. The Bill does not provide a time frame within which the Medical Board must make its decision.
- Termination of pregnancies is a time sensitive matter, and delays in decision-making by the Medical Board may result in further complications for the pregnant woman

4. Unclear if transgender persons will be covered

- Some medical studies have shown that there may be cases where persons who identify as transgender (and not women) can become pregnant even after receiving hormone therapy to transition from female to male, and may require termination services.
- Since the Act and the Bill only provide for termination of pregnancies in the case of women, it is unclear if transgender persons will be covered under the Bill.

5. Unavailability of qualified medical professionals to terminate pregnancies

- The All-India Rural Health Statistics (2018-19) indicates there are 1,351 gynaecologists and obstetricians in community health clinics in rural areas across India, and the shortfall is 4,002, i.e., there is a 75% shortage of qualified doctors.
- The shortage of qualified medical professionals may continue to limit the access of women to safe abortion services.
- Note that as per the National Health and Family Survey (2015-16), only 53% of abortions are performed by a registered medical doctor and the balance are conducted by a nurse, auxiliary nurse midwife, *dai*, family member, or self

6. Prejudice against persons with special needs:

- The special classifications of “serious physical or mental abnormalities” and “substantial foetal abnormalities” also reek of societal prejudices against persons with special needs.

Connecting the dots

- Reproductive rights of a women vs Rights (if any) of an unborn child

Permanent Commission for Women

The story so far:

- **Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs. Babita Puniya Case:** The Supreme Court in February 2020 directed the government to ensure that [women officers in the Army be granted permanent commission \(PC\)](#) as well as command postings in all services other than combat.

- **Appeal by Women questing implementation:** Later, questioning the compliance of the Army with the directions in the judgment, around 80 women short service commission officers approached the Supreme Court challenging the arbitrary process, including unjust medical standards, applied to deny permanent commission to women officers
- **Lt. Col. Nitisha vs. Union of India Case:** On 25th March 2021, the Supreme Court held that the Army's selective evaluation process discriminated against and disproportionately affected women officers seeking permanent commission.

Brief Background of issue of Permanent Commission- Click [here](#)

What did the Supreme Court observe?

- SC observed that the pattern of evaluation inherently **caused economic and psychological harm** to women short service commission officers.
- The judgment said the evaluation criteria set by the Army constituted “**systemic discrimination**” against the petitioners.
- SC found several deviations in the standards adopted by the Army for evaluating women officers.
- The court observed that the reliance placed on the women officers' ACR [annual confidential reports] evaluation for determining the grant of permanent commission was unfair.

What is the procedure for granting permanent commission?

- In 1992, the Union Government issued a notification making women eligible for appointment as officers in select non-combat branches.
- In 2008, the government extended the permanent commission to women in two branches — Judge Advocate General (JAG) and Army Educational Corps (AEC).
- In a long legal battle for equality, 322 women officers had approached the top court for granting permanent commission, and the Supreme Court delivered its landmark verdict in February 2020.
- In July 2020, the Defence Ministry issued the government sanction letter, specifying grant of permanent commission to women officers in all streams in which they are presently serving

How did the Army respond to the sanction letter?

- Following the sanction letter, the Army constituted a special selection board for screening women officers for grant of permanent commission who joined the service through the Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) and Short Service Commission Women (SSCW).
- Of the 365 optee officers who were considered fit for permanent commission by the Selection Board, 277 women short service commission officers (WSSCOs) were granted permanent commission after medical scrutiny.
- However, some petitioners said the process followed was arbitrary and challenged it in the top court.

What are the fresh directives?

- **Benchmarking against male batch is irrational:** The Supreme Court noted that the Army process of benchmarking women officers against the officers lowest in merit in the corresponding male batch is “irrational and arbitrary”, and said this requirement should be removed.
- **Criteria for grant of Permanent Commission:** All women officers who have fulfilled the cut-off grade of 60% in the Special Selection Board held in September 2020 shall be entitled to the

grant of permanent commission, the judgment said, subject to their meeting the prescribed medical criteria and receiving disciplinary and vigilance clearance.

- **Equality upheld:** SC stated that in the spirit of true equality with their male counterparts in the corresponding batches, the WSSCOs must be considered medically fit for grant of PC by reliance on their medical fitness, as recorded in the 5th or 10th year of their service.
- **Case of petitioners to be reconsidered:** Other than “non-optees”, the cases of all WSSCOs, including the petitioners who have been rejected on medical grounds, shall be reconsidered within a month and orders for the grant of permanent commission must be issued within two months
- Also, for the **Babita Puniya case**, the court held that for officers within the service bracket of 10 to 14 years who have been denied permanent commission, it has allowed them to continue in service till they attain 20 years of pensionable service.



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.



HEALTH ISSUE

Second Wave of COVID-19

Context: Experts remain divided on the question of whether the slow yet steady rise in the number of [COVID-19](#) cases in the country over the last week of February 2021 is indicative of the onset of a 'second wave'.

But the Centre and some State governments are on the alert against the rising numbers and are reinforcing aggressive testing and proper social and hygiene protocols

What is happening around the globe?

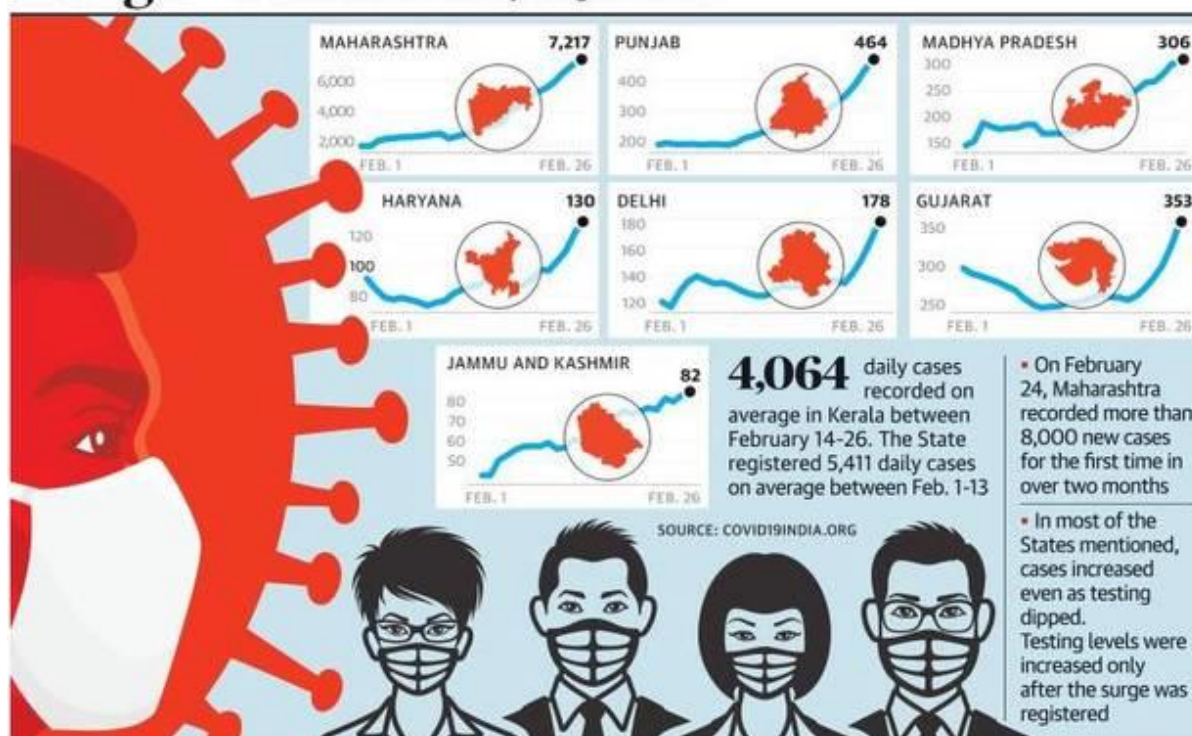
- **Second Wave in Europe:** In Europe, after the first wave in May 2020, the second wave struck in Nov 2020. Experts said every country in Europe that had managed to get away lightly with the first wave was nearly crippled by the second one.
- **Similar Distress in Second Wave:** Even nations that had suffered badly initially, including Italy, were hit hard again. Hospitals started filling up, beds went scarce again, and the death rate started climbing.
- **Government's response w.r.t Second wave:** Stricter lockdowns were introduced, with curfews and restrictions on gatherings in public places; schools were shut down again, as governments struggled to cope with this new wave.
- **Mutated Strains:** In late 2020, the [emergence of newer, mutated strains](#) of the virus in Britain and South Africa meant a faster-spreading variant had established dominance in some countries. However, scientists said there was no evidence to show that the new British strain caused a more severe disease.

Are Cases growing in India?

- After infections peaked in September last year, cases across the country had been steadily declining, with the **exception of Kerala**, an outlier State that continued to see high numbers after having seen initial success in flattening the curve.
- However, in the last week of February this year, the **trend reversed**, with some States beginning to report higher numbers.
- The average increase was around **14,000 new infections per day** and two States, Maharashtra and Punjab, led the increase in the number of cases, even as their testing numbers had dipped over the past few months.
- The Union Health Ministry stated that nearly 86% of the over 16,400 cases recorded in the recent 24-hour time period were from six States and one Union Territory.

Second surge

In several States, COVID-19 cases saw a rise in the second half of February. Both Maharashtra and Punjab recorded significant spikes. In Maharashtra, the average daily cases increased by more than twice in the second half of the month compared to the first half. The charts show the seven-day average of new cases



Source: [The Hindu](#)

What is causing the spike?

- **Cluster-Spreader events:** The spikes in Maharashtra were caused by a series of super-spreader events, or clusters. Experts opine that the rise in the number of cases was not due to a variant of the virus with a tendency to transmit faster, but because of select super-spreader events.
- **Letting down of guards:** In general, there seems to be an impression among people that the country is over the worst phase of the pandemic, and hence, many are letting their guard and masks down.
- **Lack of Strict Regulations:** During the previous surge, strict regulations imposed by States along with fines and penalties for violating protocols helped ensure compliance. But, with the decreasing number of cases, safety measures were overlooked, possibly leading to the clusters that have pushed the numbers up again.
- **May be a blip:** There are others who believe that a 'second wave' is not really a wave, but more of a blip. One reason for this, according to experts, could be the fact that 60% of India's population had already been exposed to the virus and the country may have approached [herd immunity](#).

What is the way ahead?

- There are only two ways of getting immunity from the virus, one is getting infected, and the other is via a vaccine
- It is important to fast track the vaccine programme across the country, but testing is equally important.

- The number of tests must go up again and contact tracing, ideally 20 persons for every case, should be taken up intently.
- Experts call for a renewed emphasis on following safety protocols, such as wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining physical distance to fend off a possible 'second wave' or a sustained hike in the numbers. Draconian total lockdowns are no longer necessary.

Connecting the dots

- [COVID-19 and Herd Immunity](#)

[Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited \(IMPCL\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health; Governance

In news

- Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL) has tied up with the Government e-Market (GeM) portal for selling its products online.

Key takeaways

- GeM has created 31 categories under which IMPCL can upload medicines on the Portal.
- Now, the Ayurvedic and Unani medicines will figure on the portal to hundreds of government sector buyers.
- The prices are finalised by Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure.

Do you know?

- IMPCL is the public sector manufacturing unit of the [Ministry of AYUSH](#).
- It is the only CPSE under [Ministry of AYUSH](#).

Related articles:

- [Ayush Export Promotion Council](#)
- [Ayush Wellness Centre to come under NAM](#)

[World Health Assembly's 1st resolution on Meningitis](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health **In news**

- World Health Assembly endorsed the 1st ever resolution on meningitis prevention and control recently.

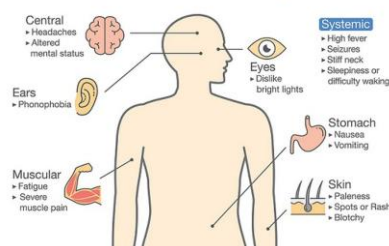
Important value additions

Meningitis

- It is a serious infection of the meninges - the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord
- It is a major global public health issue causing up to 5 million cases each year.
- It can be caused by many different pathogens including bacteria, fungi or viruses.
- The highest global burden is seen with bacterial meningitis.

- **Examples of bacteria:** Streptococcus pneumoniae, Haemophilus influenzae, Neisseria meningitidis
- **Transmission:** Person-to-person through droplets of respiratory or throat secretions from carriers.

Symptoms of Meningitis



Stop TB Partnership Board

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health

In news

- Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare has been appointed Chairman of the Stop TB Partnership Board.
- The Minister will serve a three year term, commencing July 2021.

Important value additions

Stop TB Partnership Board

- Established: 2000.
- **Objective:** To eliminate Tuberculosis as a public health problem.
- The organization was conceived following the meeting of the First Session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Tuberculosis Epidemic held in London in March 1998.
- In 1998, through the Amsterdam Declaration, it gave a call for collaborative action from 20 countries that bear the highest burden of TB.
- It has 1500 partner organization
- **Secretariat:** Geneva, Switzerland.

Key takeaways

- Between January and February 2020, there were 6% more cases reported than in 2019.
- As a result of the lockdown, notifications in the public sector fell by 38% and 44% in the private sector in April and May.
- Of the reported 24.04 lakh TB cases in 2019, treatment success was 82%, mortality rate was 4%.
- The approved budget toward the programme was decreased from ₹3,333 crores in 2019-20 to ₹3,110 crore in 2020-21.
- The report said 20,892 (42%) of patients were initiated on a shorter MDR-TB regimen at the time of diagnosis.
- This is a significant decline from 2019.

Do you know?

- India has committed to eliminating TB by 2025.
- Global deadline is 2030.

Medicine Price Control

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health

In news

- **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority** (NPPA) has fixed the price of 81 medicines, including off-patent anti-diabetic drugs, helping to pass on the benefits to patients.

Key takeaways

- The decision was taken because the five-year price exemption given to these medicines on account of indigenous R&D got over recently.
- Revision in existing ceiling prices of scheduled formulations based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) was also approved by the Authority.
- The revised prices will be effective from April 2021.
- It also decided to retain the revised ceiling price of Heparin injection up to September 2021.

Important value additions

- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.
- It was constituted in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP),
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Government decides to increase the interval between doses of Covishield

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health

In news

- The government has decided to increase the interval between the first and second doses of Covishield to up to 8 weeks in its ongoing vaccination drive against Covid-19.

Key takeaways

- Covishield is Serum Institute of India's version of AZD1222, the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca in collaboration with the University of Oxford.
- Some data from global trials of AZD122 suggests that extending the duration between doses to 12 weeks increased its efficacy much more.
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare took the decision on the recommendation of two expert groups – the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) and National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC).
- The groups, after looking into available scientific evidence from clinical trials of the vaccine, concluded that the protection that it provides against Covid-19 is "enhanced" if the second dose is administered between 6-8 weeks.

Initiatives of National Health Mission (NHM)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health ; Policies and interventions

In news

- The Union Cabinet was apprised on the progress under National Health Mission (NHM) during FY 2019-20.

Key takeaways

NHM has envisaged new Initiatives in 2019-20:

- **Social Awareness and Actions to Neutralize Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS):** To accelerate action to reduce deaths due to childhood pneumonia.
- **Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN):** To provide assured, dignified, respectful and quality healthcare at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services and all existing Schemes for maternal and neonatal health have been brought under one umbrella.
- **Midwifery Services:** To create a cadre of Nurse Practitioners in Midwifery who are skilled in accordance to competencies prescribed by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and are knowledgeable and capable of providing compassionate women-centered, reproductive, maternal and new-born health care services.

School Health and Wellness Ambassadors: has been launched under the AB-HWCs Programme in partnership with Ministry of Education to promote health and well-being through an active lifestyle amongst school children.

National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professionals Bill, 2021

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Health; Education

In news

- The Lok Sabha cleared the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professionals Bill, 2021.
- It was passed by the Rajya Sabha last week.

Key takeaways

- The Bill seeks to regulate and standardise the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals.
- **Definition of 'allied health professional':** An associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment.
- Such a professional should have obtained a diploma or degree under this Bill.
- **Definition of a 'healthcare professional':** A scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, research, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services.
- Such a professional should have obtained a degree under this Bill.
- **Allied and healthcare professions as recognised categories:** Life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals.
- The Bill sets up the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions. It will
 1. frame policies and standards for regulating education and practice,
 2. create and maintain an online Central Register of all registered professionals, and
 3. providing for a uniform entrance and exit examination, among others.
- The Commission will constitute a Professional Council for every recognised category of allied and healthcare professions.

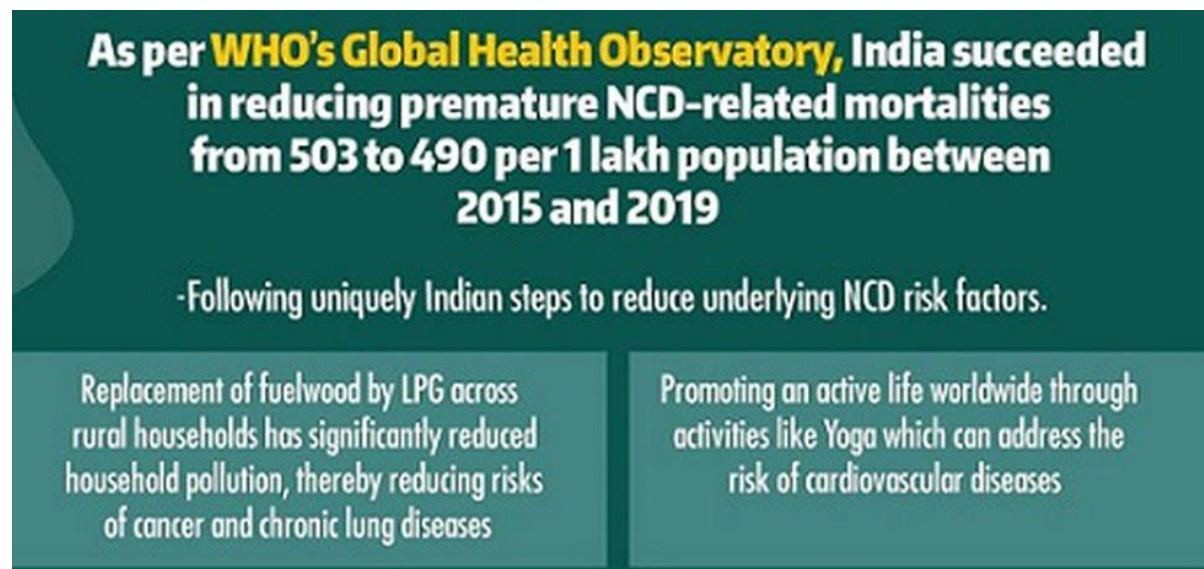
- Within six months from the passage of the Bill, state governments will constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils.

UNITAR commends India's progress in reducing the premature mortality from NDCs

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – International Relations; Health

In news

- UNITAR has commended India's remarkable progress in reducing the premature mortality from [Non-Communicable Diseases](#).



Important value additions

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

- It is a dedicated training arm of the United Nations system.
- **Mandate:** UNITAR provides training and capacity development activities to assist mainly developing countries with special attention to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other groups and communities who are most vulnerable.
- **Founded in:** 1963, following the recommendation of the UN Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly.
- **Governance:** Operated as an autonomous body within the United Nations system
- **Headed by:** Executive Director
- **Funding:** UNITAR is a project-based organization and does not receive any funds from the regular UN budget.
- It is financed entirely from voluntary contributions.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva (Switzerland)

Launch of Tribal TB Initiative

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In news

- 'Tribal TB Initiative' in pursuit of TB Mukht Bharat was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Health



Key takeaways

- A Guidance Note on Joint Action Plan for Tuberculosis (TB) Elimination, a Special Edition of Tribal Ministry's Publication 'ALEKH' on TB, and a document on Tribal Tuberculosis (TB) Initiative was also released.
- Over 104 million tribal population lives in India, across 705 tribes, accounting for 8.6 % of India's population.
- 177 tribal districts were identified as high priority districts where physical remoteness, malnutrition, poor living conditions and lack of awareness contribute to the vulnerability of the tribal population to TB.
- Initially, the activities of the joint plan will focus on 161 districts across 18 identified States.
- This would involve periodic TB active case finding drives and provision of TB Preventive Therapy (IPT) to identified vulnerable population and develop long term mechanisms for vulnerability reduction.

Do you know?

- Lakshadweep and district of Badgam in Jammu and Kashmir have been declared TB Free on World TB Day 2021.
- The government has already increased the Budget allocation for TB in India a four-fold in the last 5 years.

Related articles:

- [India TB report](#)
- [Stop TB Partnership Board](#)

[MoU signed for National Clean Air Programme \(NCAP\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment

In news

- The MoU is signed by representatives of State Pollution Control Boards, Urban Local Bodies and Institutes of Repute (IoRs) for 132 identified cities for implementation of city specific action plans under [National Clean Air Programme \(NCAP\)](#).

Important value additions

- NCAP is a long-term, time-bound, national level strategy to tackle air pollution problem across India in a comprehensive manner.
- It targets to achieve 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter concentrations by 2024 (with 2017 as base year).
- A National Knowledge Network comprising leading air quality specialists has also been constituted as a technical advisory group to support activities under NCAP and guide local IoRs in conducting air quality research.

'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector ' Report

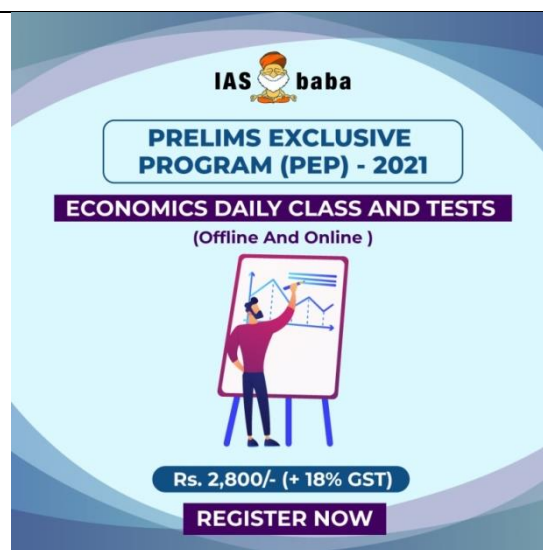
Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Health

In news

- [NITI Aayog](#) Released Report 'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector'.

Key takeaways

- The report outlines the range of investment opportunities in various segments of India's healthcare sector, including hospitals, medical devices and equipment, health insurance, telemedicine, home healthcare and medical value travel.
- India's healthcare industry has been growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of around 22% since 2016.
- At this rate, it is expected to reach USD 372 billion in 2022.
- In the hospital segment, the expansion of private players to tier-2 and tier-3 locations, beyond metropolitan cities, offers an attractive investment opportunity.



GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

E-Daakhil Portal functional in 15 states/UTs

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II – Policies and Interventions; Governance

In news

- E-Daakhil portal for Consumer grievance redressal is now operational in 15 States/UTs.
- **Ministry:** Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution

Key takeaways

- E-filing was launched by National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC) in September, 2020.
- Delhi was the first state to implement it.
- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, has provision for e-filing of consumer complaints in the Consumer Commissions and online payment of the fees for filing a complaint.
- The digital software for filing complaints has features like e-Notice, filing written response by opposite party, alerts via SMS/Email, etc.

Revising Food Security Act

Context: The NITI Aayog recently circulated a discussion paper on a proposed revision in the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013

What is NFSA?

- **Right based framework:** The NFSA provides a legal right to persons belonging to “eligible households” to receive foodgrains at subsidised price— rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse grain at Rs 1/kg — under the [Targeted Public Distribution System](#) (TPDS).
- **Beneficiaries:** Under sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Act, the term “eligible households” comprises two categories — “priority households”, and families covered by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).
- **Benefits:** Priority households are entitled to receive 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month, whereas AAY households are entitled to 35 kg per month at the same prices.
- **Coverage:** The Act has prescribed the coverage under “eligible households” — 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population. On the basis of Census 2011 figures and the national rural and urban coverage ratios, 81.35 crore persons are covered under NFSA currently.
- The percentage coverage under the Targeted Public Distribution System in rural and urban areas for each State shall, subject to sub-section (2) of section 3, be determined by the Central Government.
- The total number of persons to be covered in such rural and urban areas of the State shall be calculated on the basis of the population estimates as per the census of which the relevant figures have been published.
- **Demand from States:** Thus, the number of NFSA beneficiaries was frozen in 2013. However, given the population increase since then, there have been demands from the states and union territories to update the list by ensuring an annual updating system under NFSA,

Why has NITI Aayog proposed?

- **Revision of Coverage Ratios:** NITI Aayog has suggested that the national rural and urban coverage ratio be reduced from the existing 75-50 to 60-40. If this reduction happens, the number of beneficiaries under the NFSA will drop to 71.62 crore (on the basis of the projected population in 2020).
- **Revision of CIP:** Prices at which food is issued to beneficiaries are called central issue prices (CIPs). A revision of CIPs is one of the issues that have been discussed by NITI Aayog.

What is the implication of the revision for the Centre and the states?

- To make these changes in the law, the government will have to amend sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the NFSA. For this, it will **require parliamentary approval**
- **Saving in Food Subsidy Bill:** If the national coverage ratio is revised downward, the Centre can save up to Rs 47,229 crore (as estimated by the NITI Aayog paper). However, the move may be opposed by some of the states.
- **Increased fiscal burden if not revised:** On the other hand, if the rural-urban coverage ratio remains at 75-50, then the total number of people covered will increase from the existing 81.35 crore to 89.52 crore that will result in an additional subsidy requirement of Rs 14,800 crore

Conclusion

States need to deliberate the proposals made by NITI Aayog by keeping in mind the food security of people and its ability to withstand additional fiscal burden.

Connecting the dots

- [COVID and Food Security](#)

NRI quota seats in educational institutions for OCI cardholders

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education; Policies and interventions

In news

- According to a recent gazetted notification, OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) cardholders can lay claim to “only NRI quota seats” in educational institutions based on tests such as NEET, JEE (Mains and Advanced), etc.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

Key takeaways

- OCIs are not entitled to undertake any “missionary, mountaineering, journalism and tabligh activities” without prior permission of the Government of India.
- The notification replaces three previous notifications which did not specify the special permission required for these activities.

Do you know?

- OCI citizens are of Indian origin.
- They are foreign passport holders and are not citizens of India.
- India does not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits through Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs.

Related articles:

- [National Pension system](#)

OTPRMS Certificates to be linked with DigiLocker

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Education; Policies and interventions & GS-III - Sci & Tech

In news

- The Ministry of Education has decided to link the Online Teacher Pupil Registration Management System (OTPRMS) Certificates with DigiLocker.
- **Objective:** To ensure hassle free access to verified OTPRMS Certificates

Key takeaways

- The issued certificates will automatically be transferred to DigiLocker.
- The same may be traced at National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) website.
- The registration fee for obtaining Certificates has been waived off.
- This will enable all stakeholders across India to be digitally empowered facilitating ease of doing business.

Important value additions

DigiLocker

- DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under Digital India Corporation (DIC).
- **Aim:** 'Digital Empowerment' of citizens by providing access to authentic digital documents to citizen's digital document wallet.
- The issued documents in DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents as per Rule 9A of the Information Technology Rules, 2016

Schemes of WCD Ministry under 3 umbrella schemes

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions; Welfare schemes

In news

- All major schemes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development have been classified under 3 umbrella schemes.
- These are Mission Poshan 2.0, Mission Vatsalya and Mission Shakti.

Key takeaways

- **Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0** shall include Umbrella ICDS - [Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, National Creche Scheme](#).
- **Mission VATSALYA** shall include Child Protection Services and Child Welfare Services.
- **Mission Shakti** (Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women) shall include the following:
 - SAMBAL (One Stop Centre, Mahila Police Volunteer, Women's Helpline/Swadhar/Ujjawala/Widow Homes etc.)
 - SAMARTHYA (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Creche, [Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana](#), Gender Budgeting/Research)

Information on tap water supply to government schools

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Education; health; Welfare schemes & GS- III - Infrastructure

In news

- Recently, information on tap water supply was provided to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources.

Key takeaways

- Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply.

Basic need **unmet**

While seven States in the country have 100% tap water coverage in schools, three have abysmally low coverage of less than 15%

States with 100% tap-water coverage

State
Andhra Pradesh
Goa
Tamil Nadu
Haryana
Himachal Pradesh
Telangana
Punjab



Least coverage

State	% of schools with tap water supply
Uttar Pradesh	7.93
West Bengal	10.89
Jharkhand	12.99

- Less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it.
- A campaign related to tap water supply was launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti in October 2020.
- Objective:** To provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for washing hands and in toilets in every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school
- Duration:** 100-day period (till January 10, 2021)
- However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply,

- **Seven States that achieved 100% coverage:** Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab.

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Govt schemes and initiatives; Health and Social Security

In news

- Union Cabinet recently approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN), a **single non-lapsable reserve fund for health** from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.
- In the 2018 Budget, the Central government while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3% Education Cess by 4% Health and Education Cess.
- Major benefits of PMSSN → It will enhance access to universal and affordable health care

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi scheme features

1. A non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account.
2. Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
3. Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare namely, Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)
4. Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies
5. Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017. Administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
6. In any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the MoHFW would be initially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).

Launch of Gram Ujala

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions

In news

- Gram Ujala programme was recently launched in Arrah, Bihar.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Power

Key takeaways

- Under the programme, 7 watts and 12-Watt LED bulbs with 3 years warranty will be given to rural consumers against submission of working Incandescent bulbs.
- LEDs will be available for only Rs 10 each for each household.
- Each household will get up to 5 LEDs.
- In the first phase, 15 million LED bulbs will be distributed across villages of **Aarah** (Bihar), **Varanasi** (Uttar Pradesh), **Vijaywada** (Andhra Pradesh), **Nagpur** (Maharashtra), and village in western Gujarat.
- The Gram Ujala programme will be implemented in villages of the 5 districts only.

- These rural households will also have metres installed in their houses to account for usage.

Do you know?

- The programme will be financed entirely through carbon credits.
- It will be the first such programme in India
- Carbon credits will be prepared under the Shine Program of Activities with an option for verifying under the Voluntary Carbon Standard, depending on the needs of buyers.
- Carbon Credit Buyers will also be sought through an open process based on initial discussions with the market.
- The balance cost and margin on the LED cost will be recouped through the carbon credits earned.



The graphic is a promotional poster for IASbaba's Gurukul. At the top center is the IASbaba logo, featuring a cartoon guru with a white beard and orange turban. Below it, the text 'BABA'S gurukul' is written in a large, stylized font, with 'BABA'S' in blue and 'gurukul' in orange. Underneath this, a brown banner contains the text 'CONNECT TO CONQUER' in white. Below the banner, the text 'The Bond of GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA - Continued...' is written in blue. Further down, another brown banner contains the text 'A NEVER BEFORE INITIATIVE' in white, followed by 'UPSC/IAS 2021 PREPARATION' in blue. The bottom left of the graphic shows an illustration of a guru with a long white beard, wearing a red shawl and white dhoti, sitting on a grey rock and gesturing with his right hand. A small yellow pot sits on the rock next to him. A student with dark hair, wearing an orange shawl and white dhoti, is sitting on the ground in front of the guru with his hands in a prayer position. The bottom right of the graphic features a large brown circle with a white border. Inside the circle, the text 'ONE-TO-ONE MENTORSHIP' is written in white, followed by 'By Mohan Sir' and 'Founder IASbaba' in white.

INTERNATIONAL

Pakistan to Remain on FATF 'Grey List'

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

In news:

- [Financial Action Task Force \(FATF\)](#) has decided to keep Pakistan on its terrorism financing "grey list".

Key takeaways

- Pakistan must demonstrate in taking action against UN-designated terrorists and their associates to get removed from the grey list.
- Once Pakistan completes three unfulfilled tasks, decision will be taken on its present status in June.
- Pakistan has failed to fulfil six out of 27 obligations of the FATF.

Important value additions

- The FATF is an inter-governmental body set up in 1989.
- **Objective:** To combat money laundering, terror financing and other related threats to the international financial system.
- Currently, it has 39 members.
- Pakistan has been on the grey list since June 2018.

Related articles:

[FATF report flags wildlife trade](#)

[FATF decides to keep Pakistan on its grey list](#)

United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP)

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

In news:

- The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has recommended Bangladesh to be removed from the category of Least Developed Country (LDC).

Key takeaways

- Bangladesh has fulfilled the eligibility criteria in terms of per capita income, human assets and economic and environmental vulnerability.
- This is the second consecutive time since 2018 that the CDP has made recommendation for Bangladesh.
- The CDP decides on the LDC status of a country based on three criteria- (1) per capita income; (2) human assets index and economic vulnerability index.
- A country must achieve at least two of the three criteria at two consecutive triennial reviews to be considered for graduation.
- The proposal will be sent to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for endorsement in June to be finally approved by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2021.
- **Impacts:** (1) Preferential provisions in export, provision of subsidy to agriculture and infant industries and access to climate finance are likely to stop after transition from LDC; (2) enhanced

confidence of international financial bodies, improved credit rating and higher FDI are expected to benefit Bangladesh after the transition period is completed.

Important value additions

The Committee for Development Policy

- It is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- **Function:** To provide independent advice to the Council on development policy issues.
- The Committee is also responsible for deciding which countries can be considered least developed countries (LDCs).
- The Committee has 24 members, nominated in their personal capacity by the United Nations Secretary-General and appointed by ECOSOC for a period of three years.

Do you know?

- Bangladesh will get time upto 2026 to prepare for the transition to the status of a developing country.
- Usually countries are given three years for transition but this year due to the Corona pandemic, Bangladesh has been given five years for the process.

QS World University Rankings 2021

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – International Relations; Education

In news

- [QS World University Rankings](#) were announced recently.
- As many as 25 courses by Indian universities have figured in the top 100 globally,

Key takeaways

- Three IITs have entered the top 100 engineering institutes.
- **Engineering and technology category:** IIT-Bombay - 49th position; IIT Delhi (54) and IIT Madras (94).
- MIT, USA has retained its top position.
- **Natural Sciences:** Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore - 92nd; IIT Bombay (114), IIT Madras (187), and IIT Delhi (210).
- **Petroleum engineering programme:** IIT-Madras - 30th;
- **Mineral and mining engineering:** IIT-Bombay - 41st; IIT-Kharagpur - 44th
- **Life sciences and medicine:** AIIMS - 248th.
- **Arts and humanities:** JNU - 159th, Delhi University- 252nd
- **social sciences and management category:** Delhi University - 208th

Do you know?

- QS Rankings by subject calculate performance based on four parameters — academic reputation, employer reputation, research impact and the productivity of an institution's research faculty.

- These rankings offer independent data on the performance of 253 programmes at 52 Indian higher education institutions, across 51 academic disciplines.

BRICS Contact Group on Economic and Trade Issues (CGETI)

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

In news

- The BRICS Contact Group on Economic and Trade Issues (CGETI) held their first meeting under India's Chairship from 9-11 March 2021.

Key takeaways

- **Theme:** BRICS@15: Intra BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation, and Consensus.
- **The deliverables proposed are on:** (1) BRICS Cooperation on Multilateral Trading system including cooperation for the TRIPS Waiver proposal at WTO; (2) Framework for Consumer Protection in E-Commerce; (3) Non-Tariff Measures (NTM) Resolution Mechanism; (4) Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) etc.
- **BRICS** is the acronym for five nations: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Joe Biden's Afghanistan peace plan

Context: The Joe Biden administration has proposed a new peace plan to the Afghan government and the Taliban, seeking to bring violence to a halt and form an interim government.

What is the American proposal?

- **Involving other Stakeholders:** US has proposed a UN-led conference of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. "to discuss a unified approach to support peace in Afghanistan".
- **Written Proposal to enhance Trust:** US will share written proposals with the Afghan leadership and the Taliban to accelerate talks.
- **Comprehensive Ceasefire and Inclusive government:** US has urged both sides to reach a consensus on Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements; find a road map to a new "inclusive government"; and agree on the terms of a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".
- **Negotiations in third country:** US has also proposed a senior level meeting of the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey to discuss power sharing, reduction of violence and other specific goals.

Why the U.S. is making this peace push?

- **Review of Strategy:** The Biden administration is currently reviewing its Afghan strategy. While the review is not completed, there is a consensus within the administration that "accelerating the peace process" is the best way to **advance the shared interests of the U.S. and the Afghan government.**

- **Doha Agreement (US Withdrawal plan):** According to the [agreement the U.S. signed with the Taliban](#) in February 2020, American troops - currently some 2,500 troops are in Afghanistan - are set to leave the country by May 1. The Taliban have warned that if the U.S. troops are not out by the deadline, they will step up fighting.
- **Slow pace of peace talks:** The Taliban and the Afghan government started peace talks in Doha in September 2020 but reached no breakthrough. The Biden administration is concerned about the slow pace of the talks.
- **Restraining Taliban and Regional Stability:** The U.S. assessment is that if American troops are pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban would make quick gains and the security situation will worsen. It hopes that the best way to prevent a complete Taliban takeover is a regional peace process and an interim unity government. The Taliban are yet to respond to America's proposal.

What is the Afghan government's stand?

- **Critical of US's direct talks with Taliban:** The Ghani administration has consistently been critical of the U.S.'s direct outreach to the Taliban. The Trump administration held direct talks with the Taliban, excluding the government. Later, US put pressure on Kabul to release Taliban prisoners as part of [Doha agreement](#).
- **Against making concession to Taliban:** Even when the Doha talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government were under way, Mr. Ghani made it clear that he, as elected President, is the only legitimate representative of the Afghan people and he resisted making concessions to the Taliban.
- **Democratic Process and Internal Interference:** President Ghani reiterated his opposition to any transfer of power except through elections. Afghanistan Vice President Amrullah Saleh, a hardline critic of the Taliban, said the U.S. "can make a decision on their troops, not on the people of Afghanistan".

What's next?

- While the Afghan government's opposition to sharing power with the Taliban is well known, it is not clear whether Mr. Ghani could continue to resist American pressure, especially if the U.S. brings regional powers, including India, on board.
- If the US decides to stick to the Taliban deal and withdraw troops by May, Mr. Ghani would be in a tougher spot. He doesn't have any good options. If he rejects the American offer, the war will continue forever.
- The Taliban have already taken over much of the country's hinterlands and are breathing down the neck of its cities.
- If Afghanistan President Ghani accepts the proposal, he will have to share power with the Taliban and discuss amendments to the Constitution and the future governance framework.
- Either way, the Taliban are set to make gains.

Connecting the dots

- India's projects in Afghanistan – Salma Dam
- Moral impact of deal on anti-India terrorist groups

[Global Centre for Traditional Medicine](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - International Relations; Health

In news

- The World Health Organisation will set up a Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in India.

Key takeaways

- The centre will support WHO's efforts to implement the WHO traditional medicine strategy 2014-2023.
- **Aim of the medicine strategy:** To support countries in developing policies and action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine as part of their journey to universal health coverage.

Community in news: Zo People

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – I – Society & GS- II - International Relations

In news

- Zo community was recently in news.
- A Mizoram-based group representing the community has petitioned Indian President and Prime Minister to impose sanctions on military-ruled Myanmar.

Important value additions

- The Zo people are an ethnic group of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- They are known as "Chin" and "Zomi" in Myanmar, and "Mizo", "Zomi" and "Kuki" in India.
- **In north-eastern India, they are present in:** Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Assam.

Water Quality Testing Framework

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions

In news

- Water Quality Testing Framework was recently rolled out under [Jal Jeevan Mission](#).
- Citizens can now get the water quality in their taps tested at reasonable rates, as part of the framework

Key takeaways

- A network of National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited labs will be set up in every State, district and block over the next year.
- At the panchayat level, teams of women of the village water and sanitation committees will be given field testing kits.
- Limited number of Private players can also be included.
- **Estimated cost:** ₹600 for all 16 water quality parameters
- **Turnaround time for chemical tests:** 24 hours
- **Turnaround time for the biological contaminants:** 48 hours.
- All results of testing will be fed into the Water Quality Information Management System (WQMIS).
- It is a portal developed with the support of the Indian Council of Medical Research.

Air strikes on Sana'a

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

In news

- A Saudi-led military coalition mounted air strikes on [Yemen's capital Sana'a](#).
- Saudi had intercepted 10 drones launched by Houthis before the strikes.



Key takeaways

- Sana'a is the largest city in Yemen.
- Constitutionally, Sana'a is the capital of Yemen.
- In the aftermath of the Houthi occupation, the capital moved to Aden - the former capital of South Yemen.
- Aden is located next to the Sarawat Mountains of Jabal An-Nabi Shu'ayb and Jabal Tiyal, considered to be the highest mountains in the country and amongst the highest in the region.
- Sana'a is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- It has a distinctive architectural character, most notably expressed in its multi-storey buildings decorated with geometric patterns.

Sanctions imposed on China for Uighur abuse

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

In news

- The European Union, USA, Britain, and Canada imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and entities, for human rights abuses against [Uighurs](#) and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang province.
- The sanctions from EU, UK and Canada include travel bans and freezing of assets.

Key takeaways

- It is significant that the Western powers moved together.
- This is the first time the EU has imposed sanctions on China since an arms embargo after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.
- That embargo is still in place.
- EU sanctions show a hardening of stance against its largest trading partner. Also
- China has consistently denied all reports of atrocities against Uighurs, maintaining it is only “deradicalizing” elements of its population in the interests of security.

Do you know?

- Xinjiang has a large number of Uighurs, Muslims of Turkic descent.
- Over the past few decades, more and more Han Chinese have settled in Xinjinag, which saw violent clashes between them and the Uighurs.
- China is now accused of putting over a million people in internment camps to “de-Muslimise” them and make them integrate better in the Communist country.
- Survivors and human rights organisations have alleged physical, psychological and sexual torture.
- People can be sent to the camps for showing any signs of “extremism” — sporting beards, fasting during Ramzan, dressing differently from the majority, sending Eid greetings, praying “too often” etc.

[Blockage of Suez Canal](#)

Context: Global trade has been impacted after a container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal.

About Suez Canal

- Located in Egypt, the artificial sea-level waterway was built between 1859 and 1869 linking the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
- It offers the shortest route between the Atlantic Ocean and lands around the Indian and western Pacific Oceans.
- The canal is one of the busiest waterways in the world, negating the need to navigate around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa and thus cutting distances by up to 7,000 km.
- **Economic Lifeline:** The canal continues to be the lifeline for all trade between the West and East as 10 per cent of the global trade passes through it every year. The average 50 ships that pass through it daily carry about \$9.5 billion worth of goods, every day.

Suez Canal’s Long History

- The canal has existed in one form or the other since construction started under the reign of Senausret III, Pharaoh of Egypt (1887-1849 BC). Many kings who ruled later kept improving and expanding this canal.
- Construction picked up pace around 300 years back as maritime trade between Europe and Asia became crucial for many economies.
- In the mid-1800s, French diplomat and engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps convinced the Egyptian viceroy Said Pasha to support the canal's construction.
- In 1858, the Universal Suez Ship Canal Company was tasked to construct and operate the canal for 99 years, after which rights would be handed to the Egyptian government.
- Despite facing multiple problems ranging from financial difficulties and attempts by the British and Turks to halt construction, the canal was opened for international navigation in 1869.
- The French and British held most of the shares in the canal company. The British used their position to sustain their maritime and colonial interests by maintaining a defensive force along the Suez Canal Zone as part of a 1936 treaty.

Egypt takes over Suez Canal

- In 1954, facing pressure from Egyptian nationalists, the two countries signed a seven-year treaty that led to the withdrawal of British troops.
- In 1956, Egyptian President Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal to pay for the construction of a dam on the Nile. This led to the Suez Crisis with UK, France and Israel mounting an attack on Egypt.
- The conflict ended in 1957 after the United Nations got involved and was followed by the first instance of the UN Peacekeeping Forces being deployed anywhere in the world.
- In 1967, Nasser ordered the peacekeeping forces out of Sinai leading to a new conflict between the two countries. Israelis occupied Sinai and in response, Egypt closed the canal to all shipping.
- The closure lasted until 1975, when the two countries signed a disengagement accord. The canal was the focal point of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, with the Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria.

Impact of longest-ever accidental closure of Suez Canal

- **Blocking of all Traffic:** On March 23rd, due to weather obstructions a giant container ship, MV Ever Given, en route from China to the Netherlands ended up getting stuck in one of the canal's narrow stretches, thus blocking all traffic.
- **Stress on Global Supply Chain:** Over 200 ships are stuck on both sides of the canal putting stress on global supply chains.
- **Increased Oil Prices:** The long-term impacts of this block will depend on how long it lasts, but some countries have already seen a rise in oil prices after the blockage.
- **India- the biggest importer via Suez Canal:** India is the top importer of crude oil and products via the Suez Canal, higher than China, South Korea or Singapore. If the issue is not solved early then it will start to have implications on the bigger trade flow and shipping sectors and will begin to affect refining operations on a broader scale
- **India-US relations:** For India, though, the main hit could be seen on the import and export of ethane with the US, and the imports of crude from Latin America, the uptake of which was recently increased. The longer the closure, the more disruptive the impact is likely to be.

- **Global Dependence on this narrow waterway:** The incident also raises questions about finding solutions to prevent future accidents and reducing the global dependence on this narrow waterway.

China and Iran Sign 25-Year 'Strategic Pact'

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

In news

- China and Iran signed a 25-year “strategic cooperation pact” recently.

Key takeaways

- It includes “political, strategic and economic” components.
- This document can be very effective in deepening relations
- It would establish a blueprint for “reciprocal investments in the fields of transport, ports, energy, industry and services”.
- The agreement comes amid a major push from China to back Iran as it deals with the continuing weight of sanctions
- China is its largest trading partner.

Do you know?

- China and Russia called for the U.S. to “unconditionally return to the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) (JCPOA) as soon as possible and revoke the unilateral sanctions against Iran.
- In this context, they proposed “the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform to converge a new consensus on resolving the security concerns of countries in the region”.

Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)

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

In news

- India will attend the 9th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process on Afghanistan.
- **Location** – Tajikistan

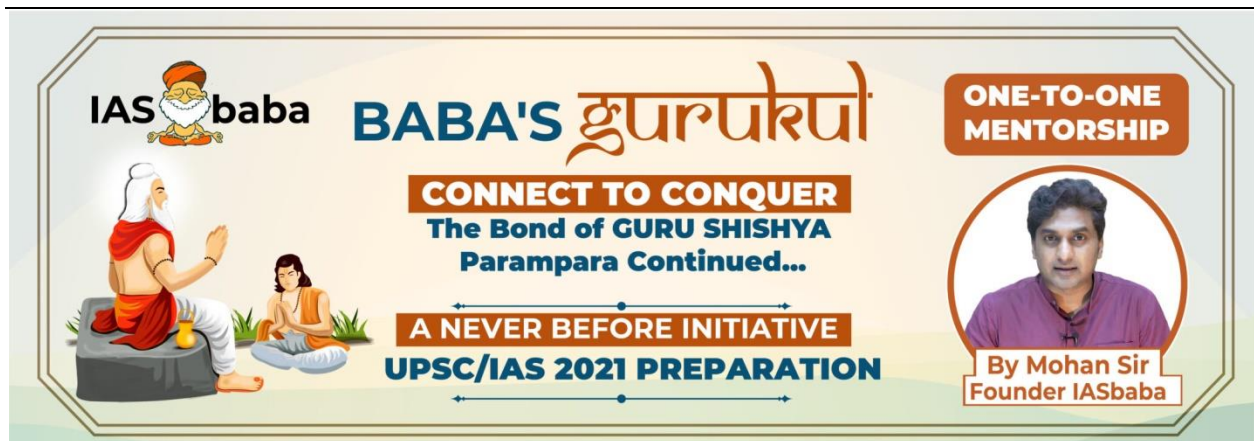
Important value additions

- The Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) is an initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey, which was officially launched at a conference hosted by Turkey in Istanbul in 2011.
- Since then, Afghanistan supported by 14 Participating Countries of the Heart of Asia Region, 16 Supporting Countries beyond the region and 12 Regional and International Organizations are leading and coordinating this Process.
- It is a platform for promoting regional security, economic and political cooperation centred on Afghanistan through dialogue and a set of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).
- **De facto Secretariat:** The Directorate General for Regional Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan
- The geographical area covering the 15 Participating Countries of the HoA-IP is defined as the Heart of Asia Region.

- It is one of the biggest regions in the world with a collective geographical area covering around 27% of the land area of the Earth.

Do you know?

- As the lead country for Trade, Commerce and Investment Confidence Building Measure under HoA-IP, India has made concerted efforts for strengthening regional connectivity for the greater economic integration of Afghanistan with the region.
- A dedicated Air Freight Corridor between cities of India and Afghanistan and operationalisation of Chabahar Port in Iran are steps in that direction.
- External affairs minister also visited the Dushanbe-Chortut Highway Project and lauded the work being done by Border Roads Organisation under Indian grant assistance.
- The 8-lane highway will decongest Dushanbe.



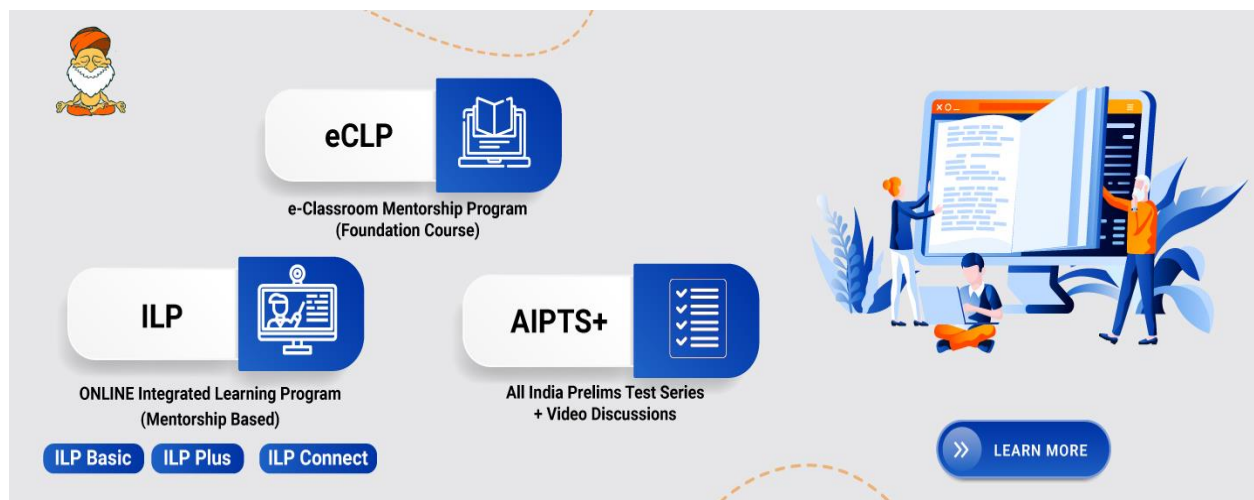
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INDIA AND THE WORLD

Ghana first country to receive vaccine under COVAX

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

In news

- Ghana has become the first country in the world to receive a shipment of coronavirus vaccines under the COVAX program.
- About 600,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine were sent to Accra in Ghana on February 23.
- The vaccine is manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII), Pune which is the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world

Important value additions

- The COVAX program is led by the [vaccine alliance GAVI](#), [WHO](#) and the [Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations \(CEPI\)](#) in partnership with [UNICEF](#), vaccine manufacturers and the World Bank, among others.
- **Aim:** To ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines globally
- It is supposed to be the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history.
- The program wants to vaccinate roughly 20 per cent of the population in the 92 Advance Market Commitment (AMC) countries, which include middle and lower-income nations that cannot afford to pay for COVID-19 vaccines.
- Countries with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than US \$4000 and some other countries eligible under the World Bank International Development Association (IDA) shall be given top priority.

Do you know?

- The AstraZeneca vaccine is known as [Covishield](#) in India.
- It was given Emergency Use Listing (EUL) by the WHO in February, 2021.

Related articles:

- [Vaccine Nationalism](#)
- [Vaccine Diplomacy](#)

India-EU

India's Export Potential to EU

- India has an untapped export potential of \$39.9 billion in the EU and Western Europe.
- The top products with export potential include apparel, gems and jewellery, chemicals, machinery, automobile, pharmaceuticals and plastic. India benefits from tariff preferences under the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for several of these products.
- India is among the major beneficiaries of the EU's GSP, with exports under the GSP valued at nearly \$19.4 billion in 2019, accounting for nearly 37% of India's merchandise exports to the EU.

Concerns

- There are several products where India has export potential in the EU, but these have “graduated” or are at the brink of “graduation” under EU GSP.
- Product graduation applies when average imports of a product from a beneficiary country exceed 17.5% of EU-GSP imports of the same product from all beneficiary countries over three years.
- India’s exports of products such as textiles, inorganic and organic chemicals, gems and jewellery, iron, steel and their articles, base metals and automobiles are already out of the ambit of EU-GSP benefits.
- There is also a likelihood of losing EU-GSP benefits in other categories such as apparel, rubber, electronic items, sports goods and toys due to product graduation.
- India’s competitors in apparel exports such as Bangladesh would continue to receive tariff benefits in the EU under Everything but Arms Initiative.
- Another competitor, Vietnam, concluded a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU in 2019.
- India’s negotiation for a Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement is yet to materialise due to lack of concurrence in areas like automobiles and dairy and marine products.

Way Ahead

- In light of the declining preferential access and the plausible erosion of competitiveness in the EU market, there is clearly a need to deepen trade and investment ties with the region.
- A thorough assessment of the benefits from FTA for domestic producers is warranted, with due consideration to the impact on sensitive sectors, and possibility of inclusion of safeguards such as sunset clause on concessions for some items.
- There should also be provisions for aspects such as investment and non-tariff measures (NTMs).
- India also needs to negotiate on investment-related aspects with the EU to enhance bilateral investments and foster stronger value chains, especially in technology-intensive sectors in which the EU has a comparative advantage.

Conclusion

- Post-Brexit EU finds itself in the midst of a growing need for recalibrating ties with its partner countries.
- Forging stronger ties with the region through a mutually beneficial agreement could help strengthen Indian manufacturing and revitalise the flailing exports.

First Counter-Terrorism Dialogue Between India-Nigeria

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

In news

- The First Strategic and Counter-Terrorism Dialogue was held between India and Nigeria.



Key takeaways

- Discussions were held on the threats and challenges faced by democratic societies from terrorism, extremism, and radicalization.
- Specific areas of cooperation were identified to enhance fight against terrorism.

Do you know?

- Nigeria is a country in West Africa bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west.
- Its southern coast is on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean.
- It's capital is Abuja.

Related articles:

- [Towards a 'healthy' India-Africa partnership](#)

India - Sweden Virtual Summit

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

In news

- Virtual Summit was held between [India and Sweden](#)
- Bilateral issues and other regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest were discussed.



Key takeaways

- The two countries expressed satisfaction at the implementation of the Joint Action Plan and Joint Innovation Partnership
- These were agreed during Indian Prime Minister's visit to Sweden for [India-Nordic Summit in 2018](#).
- Sweden's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) was also welcomed.
- The growing membership the Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT) was appreciated.
- LeadIT was launched during the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019 in New York.

Do you know?

- The Nordic Region consists of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

India–Japan Space Ties

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

In news

- Bilateral meeting between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) was held virtually.

Key takeaways

- Both space agencies reviewed cooperation in earth observation, lunar cooperation and satellite navigation.
- They also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in space situational awareness and professional exchange programmes.
- Both agencies signed an Implementing Arrangement for collaborative activities on rice crop area and air quality monitoring using satellite data.

Chinese Dam On Brahmaputra

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

In news

- According to a draft of China's Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), first dams are to be built on the lower reaches of Yarlung Zangbo river
- Yarlung Zangbo river is the Brahmaputra known in Tibet before it flows into India.

Key takeaways

- The Plan specifically mentions the building of hydropower bases which will be the priority energy projects.
- This marks a new chapter in the hydropower exploitation of the river.
- Other major projects include the construction of coastal nuclear power plants and power transmission channels.

The project is also listed along with the Sichuan-Tibet railway and the national water network.

QUAD Challenges

Context: The Quad, which comprises the U.S., Japan, Australia and India been described by the U.S. as having "essential momentum and important potential".

India's engagement with QUAD

- **China's action:** India's engagement with the Quad goes back to China's expanding footprint in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region over the last few years. China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative was viewed as encroachments into India's strategic space.
- **India's reaction:** India responded with an upgradation of its naval capabilities and enhancement of ties with the Indian Ocean Region littoral states and other major powers in the region.
- **Shared Concern with USA:** Largely as a result of their shared concerns relating to the rise of China, India has been [deepening its security ties with the U.S.](#) focused on interoperability of defence equipment and training based on defence purchases, frequent land and sea exercises.

How has the grouping evolved over time?

- **Initial Reluctance:** India's involvement with the [Quad](#) was initially cautious due to its reluctance to join an overt anti-China coalition.
- **Expanded the scope:** Since November 2017, the joint naval exercises of Quad members are being supplemented by extensive consultations on security issues.
- **Elevation to Ministerial level:** In September 2019, India agreed to elevate the Quad platform to ministerial level.
- **Possibility of Summit level:** It is reported Quad would soon meet at summit level in 2021 thus signalling the importance attached to this grouping by the US administration.

Concerns for India

- **Pulled into ambit of Indo-Pacific:** The U.S.'s focus on the west Pacific due to aggressive Chinese maritime activity gradually pulled India into the ambit of the Indo-Pacific that views the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as an integrated geopolitical space.
- **India's Security concerns ignored:** By affiliating with the U.S.-led maritime coalition, India ignored the principal areas of its security concerns in northern borders. Recently with [border clashes, China](#) has given India a rude reminder that India's security concerns lie in its northern borders, not the west Pacific.

- **Divergence with US:** New Delhi and Washington see eye to eye on maritime strategy, but not on what to do on the Asian mainland.
- **Structural Issues due to QUAD's pivot to US:** The Quad has a core structural problem as well in that it pivots around the U.S. The U.S. is a super-power with global interests, but it is also self-centred in defining and pursuing its interests, even as its policies experience major shifts due to government change or domestic lobbies
- **Doesn't have strategic vision:** Despite rhetoric relating to the promotion of a 'rules-based' world order (the rules being most frequently violated by the U.S. itself), the Quad neither shares a strategic vision nor is it animated by a shared agenda.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy has often been ad hoc, reactive and short term, reflecting the absence of a broad strategic culture. As the global scenario gets more complex and India's ambitions increase, a cohesive strategic vision would give substance and drive to India's pursuit of its interests over the long term.

Connecting the dots

- China's Belt and Road Initiative
- [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#) (SCO)
- [Reviving SAARC to deal with China](#)

Sri Lanka's War on Terror

Context: Srilankan government would soon ban the burqa.

Proposals of the government

- **COVID-19 and Burials:** A government rule that Muslims who died of Covid-19 could not be buried saw community leaders go to court. The outrage it caused among Muslim countries and [UNHRC](#) led the Sri Lankan government to a rethink
- **Inquiry Committee Report:** A Presidential commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the six suicide attacks at churches and hotels in Colombo and in two other places in the country killing 260 people, has submitted its report to President but has not been made public.
- **Burqa Ban:** In the aftermath of 2018 Easter bombings, the Sri Lankan government had temporarily banned the niqab, a face covering worn by some Muslim women, although it had worded that in ambiguous terms as a ban on all face coverings. The burqa ban has been officially linked to national security and Islamist extremism
- **Closure of Madrasas:** Along with Burqa ban, the government has also proposed to shut down 1,000 madrasas.
- **Draconian Terrorism Law:** The government has also armed itself with new regulations under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act to detain for up to two years for the purpose of "deradicalisation" of anyone suspected of harbouring extremist ideas, or for spreading religious, communal or ethnic hatred.

Critical analysis of the proposals

- **Large Section of Minority Population Impacted:** In Sri Lanka, where Muslims comprise less than 10% of the 21 million population — they are mostly Tamil speaking and are mainly engaged in trade and commerce.
- **Collective Punishment:** The ban is likely to increase the feeling among Sri Lankan Muslims that they are being collectively punished for the actions of a few in the community.
- **Invasive restriction of fundamental freedoms:** There is no community edict in Sri Lanka demanding that Muslim women must wear a burqa. But for those who do wear it, as in many other places in the world, it is a matter of personal choice based on identity, or just modesty. Imposing restriction through laws is considered as assault on fundamental freedoms.
- **New widening fault line in Sri Lankan Society:** The Easter attacks and the “othering” of Muslims that followed have set on edge a minority community that was once seen as better integrated in the national and political mainstream than the Tamils. The new proposals by government will further increase the acrimony & distrust between two communities.
- **Switzerland Model:** Sri Lanka’s burqa ban announcement came close on the heels of the March 8 Swiss ban on the garment, which came after a national referendum. In a sharply worded statement, UN Human Rights Council criticised the Swiss ban as “discriminatory” and “deeply regrettable”. Other countries that have banned the burqa include the Netherlands, Denmark and France.

India abstains from voting on Resolution 46/L1

- India abstained from voting on a resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that makes a wide-ranging and damaging commentary on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

Key takeaways

- Resolution 46/L1 has decided, among other things, to “strengthen” the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to collect evidence and develop possible strategies for future accountability processes for gross violations of human rights in Sri Lanka.
- It refers to “persistent” lack of accountability for rights abuses committed through the years by “all parties” in Sri Lanka.
- Most seriously, it expresses a lack of confidence in the ability of the present government to address the shortcomings.
- Among the 14 countries that abstained were Japan, Indonesia, Bahrain and Nepal.
- Among the 11 that voted against were China, Cuba, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia, and Venezuela.

Do you know?

- This is the 8th resolution on Sri Lanka at the Human Rights Council since the end of the war against the LTTE in 2009.
- India’s record of voting on these resolutions shows the ups and downs of New Delhi-Colombo relations, the pressures on coalitions in India, the influence of politics and parties in Tamil Nadu, and the ebb and flow of regional and international geopolitics.

Connecting the dots

- Article 25-30 of Indian Constitution
- [Sri Lanka’s India First Policy](#)

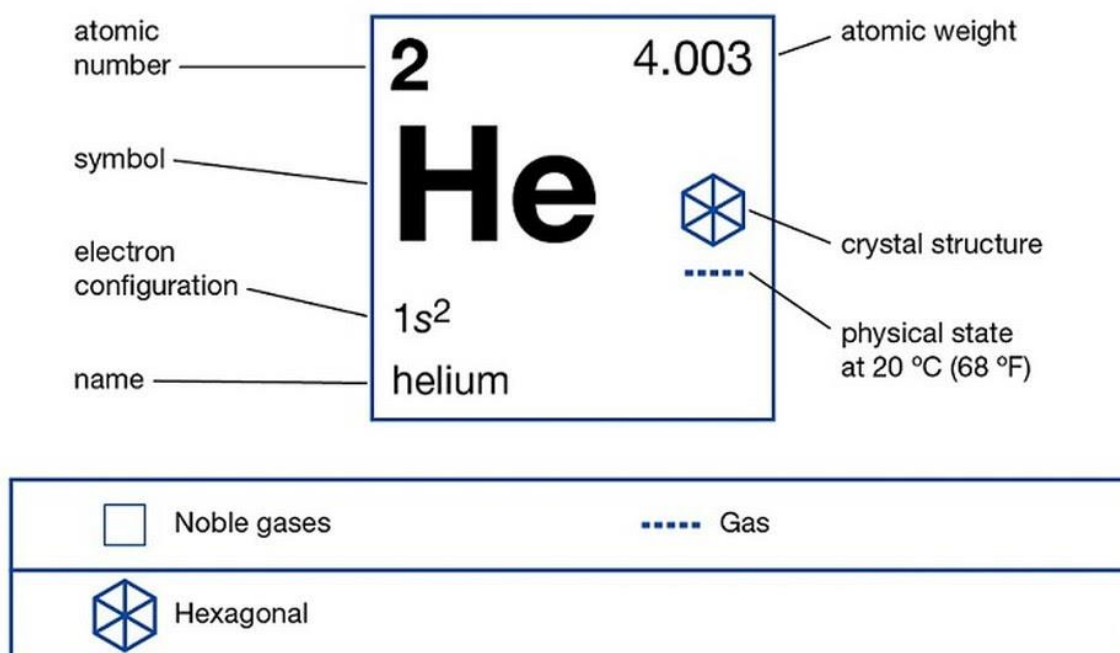
India's Helium import to get affected

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - International Relations & GS-III - Economy

In news

- The USA shall cut off exports of helium from 2021.
- Due to this, the Indian industry stands to lose out heavily since India imports helium

Helium



Important value additions

- Helium is colorless, odourless, tasteless, inert, and a noble gas.
- **Applications:** Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, in rockets and nuclear reactors.
- Dutch physicist Kamerlingh Onnes liquefied Helium by cooling the gas to -270 degrees Celsius.
- India's Rajmahal volcanic basin in Jharkhand is the storehouse of helium trapped for billions of years.
- At present, India is mapping the Rajmahal basin extensively for future exploration and harnessing of helium.

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

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

In news

- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) entered into a partnership with the Government of Denmark to support the India's flagship programme, Jal Jeevan Mission in Uttar Pradesh.

Key takeaways

- **Aim:** To provide strategic technical support to Jal Jeevan Mission (Water program).
- UNOPS shall be focussing on instituting scalable delivery models in focused 11 water-scare districts of Uttar Pradesh in Bundelkhand and Vindhya regions.
- **Aim of Jal Jeevan Mission:** To provide functional household tap connection to every rural household by 2024.
- This coincides with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal-6.

Important value additions

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

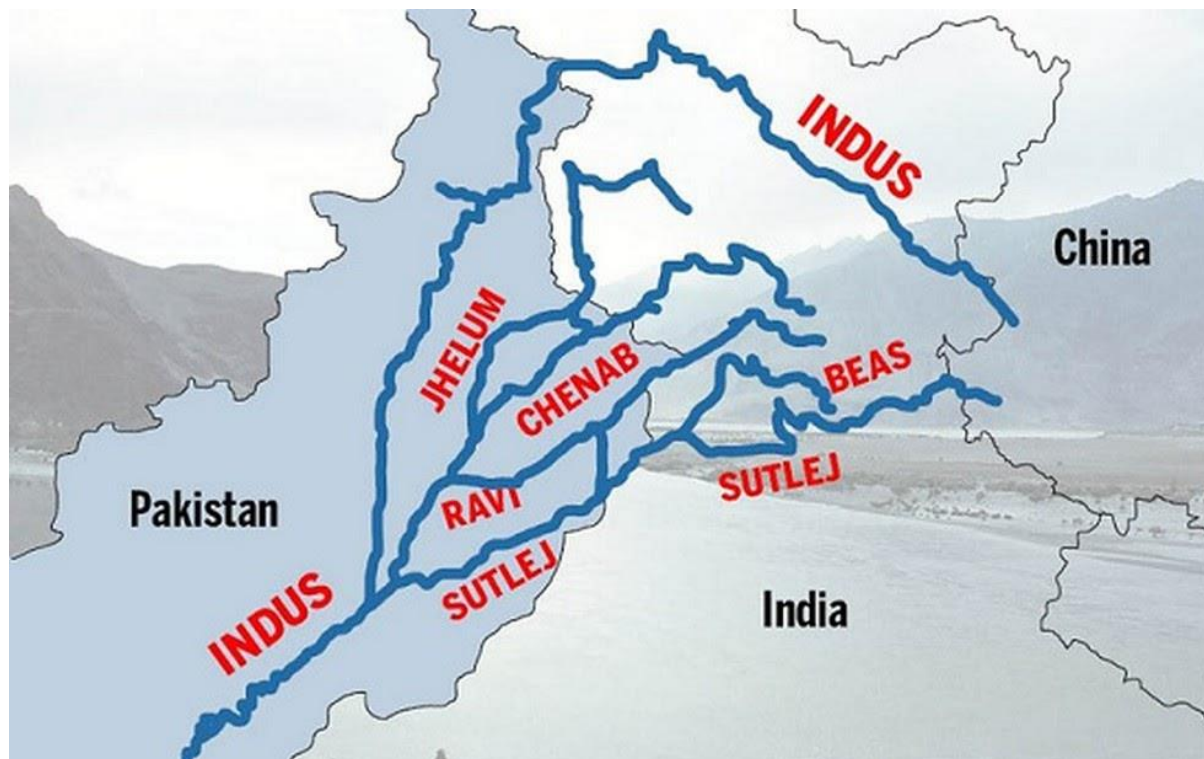
- UNOPS is an operational arm of the United Nations
- It is dedicated to implementing projects for the United Nations System, international financial institutions, governments, and other partners around the world.
- **Headquarters:** UN City campus in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- **Established in:** 1973 as part of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- It became an independent, self-financing organization in 1995.

116th Meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission

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

In news

- After a gap of more than 2.5 years Indian and Pakistani delegations began the 116th Meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC).



Key takeaways

1. PIC is a bilateral commission consisting of officials from India and Pakistan.

2. **Objective:** To implement and manage the goals, objectives and outlines of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) which was signed in September 1960 with World Bank standing guarantee for any dispute resolution.
 - Recent meeting coincided with the National Day of Pakistan.
 - It is being viewed as part of the broader process of normalisation of bilateral ties between the two countries

Do you know?

- National Day of Pakistan commemorates the March 23, 1940 Lahore Resolution which paved the way for the creation of Pakistan.

India – Taiwan Relations

Convergence

- Both countries have increasingly deepened mutual respect underpinned by openness, with democracy and diversity as the key principles for collective growth.
- The shared faith in freedom, human rights, justice, and rule of law continues to embolden their partnership.

Potential for Improving the relationship are:

Economic Ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's huge market provides Taiwan with investment opportunities. Taiwan's reputation as the world leader in semiconductor and electronics complements India's leadership in ITES (Information Technology-Enabled Services). • India's recent strides in the ease of business ranking not only provide Taiwan with lucrative business opportunities but also help it mitigate its over-dependence on one country for investment opportunities.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India and Taiwan need to deepen people-to-people connect. • Tourism is the key tool in this exchange. • The Buddhist pilgrimage tour needs better connectivity and visibility, in addition to showcasing incredible India's diversity. This will accelerate the flow of Taiwanese tourists. • With the Taiwan Tourism Bureau partnering with Mumbai Metro, Taiwan is trying to raise awareness about the country and increase the inflow of Indian tourists.
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's has been in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. • Taiwan's handling of the pandemic and its support to many other countries underlines the need to deepen healthcare cooperation. • India and Taiwan already collaborate in the area of traditional medicine. The time is ripe to expand cooperation in the field of healthcare.
Air Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taiwan could be a valuable partner in dealing with this challenge through its bio-friendly technologies. • Such methods are applied to convert agricultural waste into value-added and environmentally beneficial renewable energy or biochemicals.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be a win-win situation as it will help in dealing with air pollution and also enhance farmers' income. • Further, New Delhi and Taipei can also undertake joint research and development initiatives in the field of organic farming.
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Connecting the dots

- China-Taiwan Relationship
- One Country Two System: It is a constitutional principle of the People's Republic of China describing the governance of Hong Kong and Macau since they became Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of China in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

India-Bangladesh

Context: In the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence.

- [India and Bangladesh](#) signed 5 MoUs in the fields of Disaster Management, trade, NCC, ICT and setting up of sports facilities recently.

Key takeaways

- Foundation stone was laid for infrastructure development for power evacuation facilities from the Rooppur Nuclear power plant.
- The Bangladesh leg of the Banagabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition was inaugurated by the two Prime Ministers.
- It will be taken to other parts of the world including the UN.
- Both the leaders also unveiled the foundation stone for the construction of a memorial at Ashuganj honoring the martyrs of Indian armed forces in the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh.
- India gifted 109 life support ambulances to Bangladesh and also 1.2 million doses of the Covishield vaccine.
- Three border haats were also opened along the India-Bangladesh border.

Border Settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, where enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh.
Security & Insurgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bangladesh government has uprooted anti-India insurgency elements from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful, and allowing India to make a massive redeployment of resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere.
Economic & Trade relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladesh today is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at \$9.21 billion and imports at \$1.04 billion. • India has offered duty free access to multiple Bangladeshi products. • India extended three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years

	amounting to \$8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
Act East Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram (Chittagong) seaports carried by road, rail, and water ways. • This allows landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the Chattogram and Mongla ports.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India. • Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

Concerns in India-Bangladesh relations

- Unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large.
- Border killings are yet to stop.
- National Register of Citizens across the whole of India reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations.
- China, in lieu of its cheque-book diplomacy, is well-entrenched in South Asia, including Bangladesh, with which it enjoys significant economic and defence relations.

Maitri Setu

- Indian Prime Minister inaugurated '[Maitri Setu](#)' between India and Bangladesh.
- **Constructed by:** National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd

Key takeaways

- The bridge 'Maitri Setu' has been built over [Feni river](#).
- The river flows between Tripura and Bangladesh.
- The bridge joins Sabroom (in Tripura) with Ramgarh (in Bangladesh).
- With this bridge, Tripura is set to become the 'Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is 80 km from Sabroom.

Connecting the dots

- [China twist in Teesta Challenge](#)

[India delivers COVID-19 vaccines for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force \(UNPKF\)](#)

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

In news

- India delivered on its promise of 2,00,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF) worldwide, sending a shipment bound for Copenhagen.

Important value additions

UN Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF)

- UN peacekeepers provide security and the political and peace building support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace.

- **Principles:** (1) Consent of the parties; (2) Impartiality; (3) Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate
- **Present status:** There are currently 12 UN peacekeeping operations deployed.

Do you know?

- For its services, UN Peacekeeping has also received the Nobel Peace Prize.
- UN peacekeepers are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets.



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ECONOMY

Labour Code for Informal Sector

Context: Finance Minister in her budget speech referred to the implementation of the [four labour codes](#), closing the process that started 20 years ago.

Do You Know?

- India's estimated 450 million informal workers comprise 90 per cent of its total workforce, with 5-10 million workers added annually.
- Nearly 40 per cent of these employed with MSMEs.

According to Oxfam's latest global report, The Inequality Virus

- Out of the total 122 million who lost their jobs in 2020, 75 per cent, which translates to 92 million jobs, were lost in the informal sector.
- The report further highlights that over 300 informal workers died due to the lockdown, with reasons ranging from starvation, suicide, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care

While there is an urgent need to revive the economy by generating employment, the COVID-19 experience tells us that there is also a need to provide social protection, especially to the 450 million informal sector workers.

Issues

Government diluted the labour laws; then they drafted the rules of the Code on Social Security without really taking into consideration the plight of the informal sector workers.

- **Issues of Exclusion:** While on paper, the draft rules envisage wider coverage through the inclusion of informal sector and gig workers, at present the draft rules apply to manufacturing firms with over 299 workers. This leaves 71 per cent of manufacturing companies out of its purview.
- **Burden of Administrative Processes:** The draft rules mandate the registration of all workers (with Aadhaar cards) on the Shram Suvidha Portal to be able to receive any form of social security benefit. Failure to register (Aadhar –driven exclusion or lack of adequate knowledge about process) will make them ineligible for the benefits. Also, migrant workers face the challenge of mandatory updating information on the online portal at regular intervals.
- **Ambiguity on applicability of benefits:** It is unclear if a migrant worker with an Aadhaar card registered in her/his home state of Bihar be eligible for social security benefits in Gujarat where she/he is currently employed.
- **No-Right Based Framework:** The Code does not emphasize social security as a right, nor does it make reference to its provision as stipulated by the Constitution. In addition, it does not stipulate any appropriate grievance redressal mechanism which will leave millions of workers vulnerable without clear social protections.

ILO Report on Indian Workers

- 'Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19' was recently released.

- **Released by:** International Labour Organisation

Key takeaways

- The Report comments on various issues including on Indian workers having low average wages, longer hours.
- It also reported that the workers in Asia and the Pacific enjoyed the highest real wage growth among all regions over the period 2006–19.
- The report has taken into account the National Floor Level Minimum Wage which is Rs.176/- per day.
- However, actual wages are far higher.
- If the median of the minimum wages in different states is drawn, it would be Rs.269/- per day in India.

Do you know?

Code on Wages, 2019

- It universalises and creates a statutory right of minimum wages for all workers whether in organized or unorganised sector.
- A new concept of statutory floor wage has also been introduced in the Code on Wages.
- The Code also provides that the minimum wages are to be ordinarily reviewed and revised by the appropriate Governments in intervals not exceeding five years.

Conclusion

The Code on Social Security was envisaged as a legal protective measure for a large number of informal workers in India but unless the labour codes are made and implemented keeping in mind the realities of the informal sector workers, it will become impossible to bridge the inequality gap.

Connecting the dots

- [Gig Workers](#) and their challenges
- Gig Economy and [Proposition-22 of USA](#)

Concern over Bond yields

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy

In news

- Rising yields on government securities (G-secs) or bonds in the USA and India have raised concern over the negative impact on other assets like stock markets, gold.
- The yield on 10-year bonds in India moved up from the recent low of 5.76% to 6.20% in line with the rise in US yields, sending concerns through the stock market.

Important value additions

- Bond yield is the return an investor gets on that bond or a particular G-sec.
- **Factors affecting the yield:** Monetary policy of the [RBI](#) (interest Rates), fiscal position of the government and its borrowing programme, global markets, economy, and inflation.
- A fall in interest rates makes bond prices rise, and bond yields fall.
- Rising interest rates cause bond prices to fall, and bond yields to rise.

- So, a rise in bond yields means interest rates in the monetary system have fallen, and the returns for investors have declined.

Channapattana toy makers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- GI tag; Economy

In news:

- The Channapattana toy makers were in news recently.

Important value additions

- Channapatana is a city in Karnataka, India.
- The city is famous for its wooden toys and lacquerware.
- Channapatna is also called Town of toys ("Gombegala nagara").
- The origin of toys is dated back to Tipu Sultan's reign.
- These toys have been given [Geographical Indication tag](#).

Related articles:

- [What is a GI tag?](#)
- [GI tag can help ST entrepreneurs thrive](#)

Municipal Budget

Context: [Union Budget](#) and State Budget receive attention and coverage that is not the case with Municipal Budget.

Why Municipal Budget matters for common man?

- **Impacts Large number of people:** A staggering 4,500+ municipalities in which over 300 million people live present their budgets every year during the budget season.
- **Concerns with everyday matters:** Municipal budgets deal with clean air, clean drinking water, clearing of garbage properly and on time, access to clean toilets at home and in public spaces, wastewater treatment and safe disposal, children and old-age friendly public places etc.
- **Substantial Financial Resource involved:** We don't yet have accurate data, estimates suggest that taken together, these 4,500+ city budgets aggregate to an amount in the range of Rs 1,50,000-1,80,000 crore annually.

Challenges with Municipal Budgets

- **Lacks Citizen Participation:** Most municipal laws don't provide for citizen participation in budgets or transparency in civic works and tenders
- **Not People Friendly:** Budget documents themselves are not easy to read and understand for an average citizen
- **Issue of Transparency & Accountability:** Substantial expenditure in the city happens through parastatal agencies such as development authorities, transport corporations and water supply boards, which have separate budgets which are never discussed in the city council or covered in the media.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

- “Participatory Budgeting” is a concept that was pioneered in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the mid-1980s. It is now practised in one form or other in thousands of cities around the world.
- Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget.
- More recently the MyCityMyBudget campaign, first launched in 2015, is gathering traction in Bengaluru, Mangaluru and Visakhapatnam, as a collaborative effort between respective city corporations and neighbourhood communities.
- In these cities, over 85,000 budget inputs have been crowdsourced from over 80,000 citizens in over 350 wards on a wide range of civic issues. These inputs will be reviewed and incorporated into the city budget.

Merits of Participative Budgeting

- **First Step towards responsive governance:** This is significant because in the government system, allocating budgets is the first step towards getting any piece of work done.
- **Local Solutions:** It facilitates a targeted, hyperlocal focus on budgeting and problem-solving.
- **Enhances Political & Public Trust:** It makes citizens feel like they have a voice in civic governance and thereby builds trust
- **Improves Efficiency:** It addresses inefficiencies arising from misplaced prioritisation of civic works relative to citizen needs.
- **Increased Accountability:** Finally, it improves accountability for civic works at the last mile (as citizens would monitor budget execution).
- **Inclusive Governance:** Children, women, senior citizens, the differently-abled and several interest groups would be able to make a case for their causes and aspirations in Municipal Budget through direct representations and have them fulfilled
- **Helps in better maintenance of assets:** This would foster far greater ownership in communities for civic assets and amenities, thereby resulting in better maintenance and upkeep. At the local level, it is a win-win for communities, elected councillors and the city administration.
- **Strengthens Grassroots Democracy:** Unlike the Union budget, the municipal budget is not just a financial or legal document. It can be an enabler of grass roots democracy in cities and tangible change for communities particularly children, women and the urban poor.

Conclusion

We need greater degrees of citizen engagement and media engagement on Municipal budgets for them to become instruments of real change at a street, neighbourhood and ward level.

Connecting the dots

- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act

CAFE Regulations

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy

In news

- Carmakers from the Society of India Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) recently requested [Ministry for Road Transport](#) to postpone implementation of [BS VI](#) CAFÉ Phase II regulations since the industry is still recovering from the impact of COVID.

Important value additions

- CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) regulations are similar norms to [BS VI](#).
- However, it has a different approach towards reducing the carbon footprint in the exhaust gasses of the vehicle.
- CAFE majorly focuses on COx emissions.
- While, [BS VI](#) focuses on overall emissions which include NOx (Nitrogen Oxides), SOx (Sulphur Oxides).
- **Aim of CAFE regulations:** To reduce the overall COx (Carbon Oxides) from the exhaust of the vehicle.
- The reduced carbon footprint leads to increased fuel economy.
- These regulations were first implemented in India on 1st April 2017 with the introduction of BS4 exhaust emission norms.

Merchant Digitization Summit 2021: Towards Aatma Nirbhar Bharat

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy; IT

In news

- Merchant Digitization Summit 2021: Towards [AatmaNirbhar \(Self Reliance\) Bharat](#) was recently held.
- **Hosts:** The Government of India, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and UN-based Better Than Cash Alliance
- **Special focus:** Himalayan Regions, North East Regions and Aspirational Districts of India.

Important value additions

Better Than Cash Alliance

- Based at the [United Nations](#).
- It is a partnership of governments, companies and international organizations.
- It accelerates the transition from cash to responsible digital payments.
- It has 75 members.
- The Alliance Secretariat works with members to digitize payments by:
 1. Providing advisory services based on their priorities.
 2. Sharing action-oriented research and fostering peer learning on responsible practices.
 3. Conducting advocacy at national, regional and global level.
- It was created in 2012.
- **Launched by:** United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Citigroup, the Ford Foundation, the Omidyar Network, and Visa Inc.

Related articles:

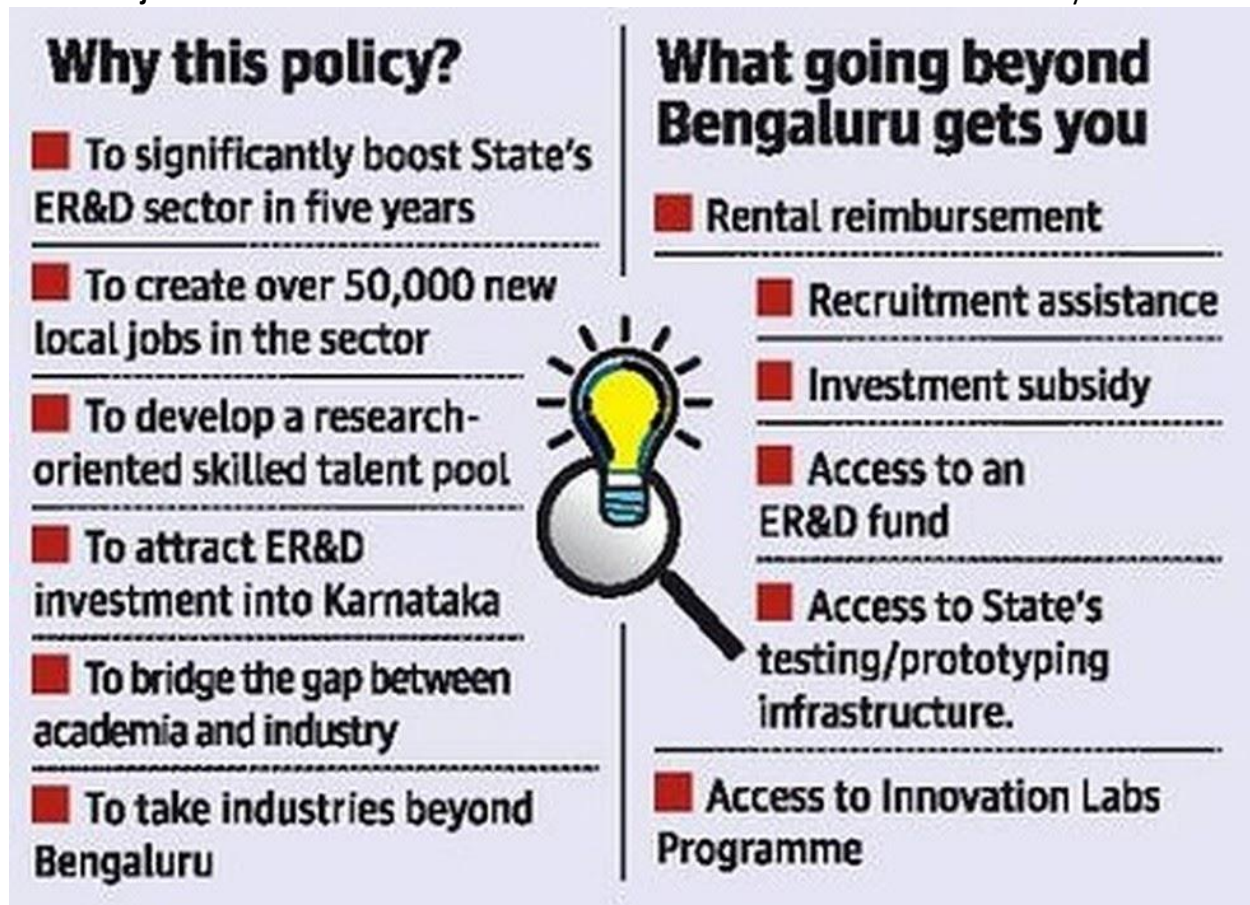
- [ARISE – Atal New India Challenge launched](#)
- [Aatmanirbhar Bharat 3.0](#)

Karnataka's Engineering Research Policy

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Sci & tech; economy

In news

- India's first Engineering Research & Development (ER&D) Policy was launched recently by Karnataka.
- **Objective:** To raise Karnataka's contribution to the sector to 45% in the next five years.



Key takeaways

- The policy has the potential to create over 50,000 jobs in the ER&D space in five years.
- ER&D has the potential to become a \$100-billion industry in India in the next five years.
- The sector is the fastest growing industry in India with a CAGR of 12.8%.
- The global engineering research and development industry is also expected to reach \$2 trillion by 2025.
- **Five key focus sectors:** Aerospace and defence; auto, auto components and EV; biotechnology, pharma and medical devices; semiconductors, telecom, ESDM; and software products.

Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy; Taxation

In news

- ; (CRCL), New Delhi was recently recognized as a Regional Customs Laboratory (RCL) of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) for Asia-Pacific Region.

Important value additions

Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL)

- CRCL is under the administrative control of Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs.
- Established in 1939
- With its recognition as RCL, CRCL joins a select group of Customs Laboratories in the region like those in Japan & Korea.

World Customs Organization (WCO)

- Established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC).
- It is an independent intergovernmental body
- **Mission:** To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations
- **Headquarter:** Brussels, Belgium.

Privatization

At independence, India adopted a mixed economy model. In this context, the Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) were established on a socialistic pattern of development.

However, due to the poor performance of several PSEs and the consequent huge fiscal deficits, the issue of privatisation has come to the forefront.

In India, privatisation is sought to be achieved through two measures:

- The disinvestment of the government's equity in public sector undertakings (selling off PSUs to Private Sector)
- The opening up of hitherto closed areas to private participation.

Merits of Privatizations & Disinvestment

- Improves the efficiency of PSUs
- Attracts Foreign Investment
- Improve financial discipline of PSUs
- Facilitate modernization of PSUs
- Reduces fiscal burden on govt in maintaining PSU
- Signals to the market that govt is promoting free-market principle

Criticism

Social Justice

- Privatisation policy betrays social justice.
- PSUs have historically played an active role in developing backward regions.
- Importantly, through reservations, PSUs have ensured high-quality jobs for Dalits, Adivasis and Other Backward Classes.
- Once PSUs are privatised or disinvested to below 50% government ownership, reservations for these historically marginalised sections will become history.
- Disregard to how PSU employees will cope with the lay-offs that will inevitably follow.

Banks

- India's experience with Yes Bank and other private sector banks hardly suggests that privatisation will eliminate greed and corruption in banking.
- It was the resilience of nationalised banks that helped save us from the worst effects of the global recession in 2008-09.
- Public sector banks have also been central to expanding financial inclusion to the unbanked in India over the last five decades
- Rural branches that serve a public purpose more than generating profits will possibly be shut down by the corporates.

Conclusion

Government should make sure that its welfare agenda is not ignored while tweaking its privatization policies.

Spectrum Auctions

Context: Recently, government concluded its first auction of telecommunications spectrum in five years generating a revenue of ₹77,815 crore from the exercise.

Key Outcomes of the auction

- Reliance Jio accounted for close to 60% of the spectrum bought, followed by Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea.
- On offer was over 2,308 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum valued for the auction by the government at ₹3.92 lakh crore, and bids were successfully received for 37% or 855.6 MHz.

How has the industry been since the last auction?

- **More Competitors in 2016:** During 2016 auctions participants then included Tata Teleservices, Idea Cellular, Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India, Reliance Communications and Aircel.
- **Consolidation of Sector:** In the last few years, there has been a consolidation in the industry, as a result of which there are only three major players now — Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea.
- **Moving towards Duopoly:** Jio and Bharti Airtel are, by increasing their market share, shaping the industry toward “a near two-player structure”. On the other hand, Vodafone Idea is struggling financially.
- **Financial Stress in Sector:** In recent years, while the user base has grown, the industry itself has witnessed unforeseen financial stress in the form of an important court case against it i.e. [Supreme Court verdict on AGR issue](#)

Why was an auction needed now?

- All three players needed to renew some of their spectrum as the validity was set to expire later this year.

Wasn't this for the 5G rollout?

- No. The auction for that is likely to happen later. In the auction that was held on March 1 and 2, the government offered spectrum for 4G in the following bands: 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz and 2,500 MHz.

What do these bands stand for?

- To explain this, we have to begin with the term 'spectrum', which, in this context, stands for the portion of the electromagnetic wave range that is suitable for communication purposes. As this is a huge economic resource, which also provides unimaginable benefits to any population, it is controlled by the government.
- Spectrum bands have different characteristics, and this makes them suitable for different purposes.
- In general, low-frequency transmissions can travel greater distances before losing their integrity, and they can pass through dense objects more easily. Less data can be transmitted over these radio waves, however.
- Higher-frequency transmissions carry more data, but are poorer at penetrating obstacles.
- In this context, hertz is a measure of the number of cycles per second, and 1 megahertz stands for 1 million hertz. Telecom providers cover their bases by using both low and high-frequency bands.

Why did the 700 MHz band have no takers?

- The 700 MHz band, as also 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,300 MHz bands, are seen playing an important role in the 5G rollout (the fifth generation of mobile networks that promises to connect everybody as also everything much faster and at much lower latency).
- The 700 MHz band was not expected to find any takers given its **prohibitive floor price**.
- Some see this as an opening for the government **to scale down the reserve price** when it comes up for bidding in future. Also, the "king" in 5G, the C-band, which is the band between 3,300 MHz and 4,200 MHz, was not on offer in this round of auctions.

How did this auction compare to the last round?

- In 2016, about 40% of the 2,355 MHz of spectrum (at a reserve price of ₹5.6 lakh crore) was sold, giving the government ₹65,789 crore in revenue. This time, the Centre has managed to get more.
- The government said the revenue generated by the auction has exceeded its expectations, which was about ₹45,000 crore.
- The expectations were low because of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the top three telecom players were looking to renew expiring spectrum and consolidate holdings in select bands.

Connecting the dots

- 2020 [Economics Prize on Auction](#) Theory

AT1 bonds: SEBI New Norms

Context: The decision of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to slap restrictions on mutual fund (MF) investments in additional tier-1 (AT1) bonds has raised a storm in the MF and banking sectors.

The Finance Ministry has asked the regulator to withdraw the changes as it could lead to disruption in the investments of mutual funds and the fund-raising plans of banks.

What are AT1 bonds? What's total outstanding in these bonds?

- AT1 Bonds stand for additional tier-1 bonds.
- These are **unsecured bonds** which have perpetual tenure. In other words, the bonds have no maturity date.
- They have **call option**, which can be used by the banks to buy these bonds back from investors.
- These bonds are typically **used by banks to bolster their core or tier-1 capital**.
- AT1 bonds are subordinate to all other debt and only senior to common equity.
- **Mutual funds (MFs) are among the largest investors** in perpetual debt instruments, and hold over Rs 35,000 crore of the outstanding additional tier-I bond issuances of Rs 90,000 crore.

What action has been taken by the Sebi recently and why?

- **100-year Instrument:** In a recent circular, the Sebi told mutual funds to value these perpetual bonds as a 100-year instrument. This essentially means MFs have to make the assumption that these bonds would be redeemed in 100 years.
- **Limit Ownership:** The regulator also asked MFs to limit the ownership of the bonds at 10 per cent of the assets of a scheme.
- **Linkage with [Yes Bank Crisis](#):** According to the SEBI, these instruments could be riskier than other debt instruments. The SEBI has probably made this decision after the RBI allowed a write-off of Rs 8,400 crore on AT1 bonds issued by Yes Bank Ltd after it was rescued by SBI

What is the impact of this decision?

- **Increased Risk:** Typically, MFs have treated the date of the call option on AT1 bonds as maturity date. Now, if these bonds are treated as 100-year bonds, it raises the risk in these bonds as they become ultra long-term.
- **Increases Volatility in Bond Prices:** This could also lead to volatility in the prices of these bonds as the risk increases the yields on these bonds rises. Bond yields and bond prices move in opposite directions and therefore, higher yield will drive down the price of bond, which in turn will lead to a decrease in the net asset value of MF schemes holding these bonds.
- **Push MF to engage in Panic Selling:** Moreover, these bonds are not liquid and it will be difficult for MFs to sell these to meet redemption pressure. Potential redemptions on account of this new rule would lead to mutual fund houses engaging in panic selling of the bonds in the secondary market leading to widening of yields
- **Impacts Fund Raising Capability of Banks:** AT1 bonds have emerged as the capital instrument of choice for state banks as they strive to shore up capital ratios. If there are restrictions on investments by mutual funds in such bonds, banks will find it tough to raise capital at a time when they need funds in the wake of the soaring bad assets.

Why has the Finance Ministry asked SEBI to review the decision?

- The Finance Ministry has sought withdrawal of valuation norms for AT1 bonds prescribed by the SEBI for mutual fund houses as it might lead to mutual funds making losses and exiting from these bonds, **affecting capital raising plans of PSU banks**.

- The government doesn't want a disruption in the fund mobilisation exercise of banks at a time when two **PSU banks are on the privatisation block**.
- Banks are yet to receive the proposed capital injection in FY21 although they will need more capital to face the asset-quality challenges in the foreseeable future.

Cairn tax ruling

Context: In December 2020, a three-member tribunal at the [Permanent Court of Arbitration](#) in the Netherlands ruled against India in its long-running tax dispute with the U.K.-based oil and gas company Cairn Energy Plc and a subsidiary, Cairn UK Holdings Ltd. The tribunal ordered India to pay about \$1.4 billion to the company.

Action by Cairn:

- Cairn Energy has successfully moved courts in five countries- The Netherlands, France, Canada, USA and UK, **to recognise its claim** as per the arbitration award.
- Such a recognition by courts **opens the door for Cairn Energy to seize assets of the Indian government** in these jurisdictions by way of enforcing its claim, in case the latter doesn't pay its dues.

What is the case about?

- The year in reference, 2006-07, was one in which big corporate changes and developments took place in Cairn Energy.
- It was the year in which it not only undertook a corporate reorganisation, but also floated an Indian subsidiary, Cairn India, which in early 2007 got listed on the Indian bourses.
- Through the corporate reorganisation process, Cairn Energy had transferred all of its India assets, which were until then held by nine subsidiaries in various countries, to the newly-formed Cairn India.
- But the tax authorities claimed that **in the process of this reorganisation, Cairn Energy had made capital gains** worth ₹24,500 crore. This, the department asserted, was the basis of the tax demand of 1.6 billions USD.
- In 2011, the U.K.-based **Vedanta Resources bought a nearly 60% stake in Cairn India**. In fact, four years after this, Cairn India received a tax notice for not withholding tax for the gains ascribed to its former parent company.

What happened after the tax claims in the Cairn Energy dispute?

- After receiving a draft assessment order from the tax authorities, Cairn UK Holdings Ltd. appealed before the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal. The tribunal, while providing the company relief from back-dated interest demands, however, upheld the main tax demand.
- The company had initiated proceedings of arbitration under the **U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty**.
- But during this time, "the government sold Cairn's almost 5% holding in Vedanta Ltd" (the residual stake the firm owned after selling Cairn India), "seized dividends totalling ₹1,140 crore due to it from those shareholdings", and "set off a ₹1,590-crore tax refund against the demand".

What was the main argument of Cairn Energy during the arbitration?

- The claimants, Cairn Energy and Cairn UK Holdings, argued that till the amendment was made to **tax retrospectively in 2012**, there was **no tax on indirect transfers** (transfer by a non-resident of shares in non-Indian companies which indirectly held assets in India).
- They also said the government **had approved the 2006 reorganisation**.
- The application of the 2012 amendments, they alleged, constituted manifest breaches of the **U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty**.

What was India's defence during the arbitration?

- India's counter to the main charge of Cairn Energy was that its 2006 transactions were taxable irrespective of the 2012 amendments.
- It argued that "Indian law has long permitted taxation where a transaction has a strong economic nexus with India".
- It said even if it is retrospective, it is "valid and binding applying the longstanding constitutional, legislative and legal framework in which the claimants have invested".

What did the arbitration tribunal rule?

- The tribunal said the tax demand violated the U.K.-India bilateral investment treaty. The tribunal said India "failed to accord Cairn Energy's **investments fair and equitable treatment**" under the bilateral protection pact it had with the United Kingdom.
- It also ordered India to compensate Cairn Energy and its subsidiary for "the total harm suffered" as a result of the breaches of the treaty.

What next?

It has been reported in the media that India will appeal against the tribunal's decision.

Connecting the dots

- [Vodafone Case](#)

New Umbrella Entities (NUE)

Context: The RBI has set a deadline of March 31 for firms to submit their applications for setting up new umbrella entities (NUEs)

What are NUEs?

- As envisaged by the RBI, an NUE will be a non-profit entity that will set-up, manage and operate new payment systems, especially in the retail space such as ATMs, white-label PoS; Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.
- NUE should take care of developmental objectives like enhancement of awareness about the payment systems.
- NUE should operate in clearing and settlement systems, identify and manage relevant risks such as settlement, credit, liquidity and operational and preserve the integrity of the systems.
- In addition to this, they will develop new payment methods, standards and technologies as well as operate clearing and settlement systems.
- NUE can carry on any other business as suitable to further strengthen the retail payments ecosystem in the country.

- It is an idea floated by the Reserve Bank of India to create an alternate mechanism to the existing National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

Which players are planning to set up NUEs?

- Only those entities that are **owned and controlled by Indian citizens** with at least three years of experience in the payments segment can become promoters of NUEs.
- Also, foreign investment is allowed in NUEs as long as they comply with the existing guidelines.
- Several companies have either tied up banks or major tech players to apply for NUEs.

What is the need for NUEs?

- Currently, the umbrella entity for providing retail payments system is NPCI, which is a non-profit entity, owned by banks.
- NPCI operates settlement systems such as UPI, AEPS, RuPay, Fastag, etc.
- Players in the payments space have indicated the various pitfalls of NPCI being the only entity managing all of retail payments systems in India.
- RBI's plan to allow other organisations to set up umbrella entities for payments systems aims to **expand the competitive landscape in this area**.
- For the players planning to establish these NUEs, the aim is to get an even **bigger share in the digital payments sector**.

Connecting the dots

- [UPI- India's Digital Payment Revolution](#)

Draft Plan for District-Wise Export Promotion

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Economy

In news

- The government has readied a draft district-wise export promotion plan for 451 districts after identifying such products and services which have export potential

Key takeaways

- Government has aimed for double-digit export growth from 500 districts over 3-5 years.
- States are asked to prepare an annual 'export ranking index' of districts on export competitiveness with the assistance of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).
- While foreign trade constitutes 45% of India's GDP, most export promotion efforts are driven by the Centre.
- The district-specific approach involves the States in identifying potential export sectors and the logistics bottlenecks to be fixed.
- In the initial phase, products and services with export potential in each district have been identified and an institutional mechanism of State and District Export Promotion Committees (SEPC) is being created, with an action plan to grow exports from each district.
- District Export Promotion Committees have been notified in the districts of all the States except West Bengal.

World Summit on Information Society Forum 2021

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

In news

- Union Telecom Minister represented India at the World Summit on Information Society Forum 2021.

Key takeaways

- Under the flagship program BharatNet, nearly 6,00,000 villages are being connected through laying of more than 4,00,000 Km length of optical fiber cable and use of satellite communication services.
- Through submarine cable networks small and remote islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep and other inaccessible areas are being connected with funding from Government.
- Establishment of ITU Area office and Innovation Centre in India with involvement of SMEs, Academia and Startups in the region will go a long way in development of technologies, standards and solutions best suited for rural and remote areas of developing nations.

Important value additions

World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021

- It represents one of the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community.
- **Co-organized by:** International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD.

Empowering MSMEs digitally

Context: A significant major contributor to the India growth story is going to be manufacturing. Manufacturing by small units, cottage units and MSMEs, if effectively facilitated, will be the game changer



Existing and Revised Definition of MSMEs

Existing MSME Classification			
Criteria : Investment in Plant & Machinery or Equipment			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Mfg. Enterprises	Investment < Rs. 25 lac	Investment < Rs. 5 cr.	Investment < Rs. 10 cr.
Services Enterprise	Investment < Rs. 10 lac	Investment < Rs. 2 cr.	Investment < Rs. 5 cr.

Revised MSME Classification			
Composite Criteria : Investment And Annual Turnover			
Classification	Micro	Small	Medium
Manufacturing & Services	Investment < Rs. 1 cr. and Turnover < Rs. 5 cr.	Investment < Rs. 10 cr. and Turnover < Rs. 50 cr.	Investment < Rs. 20 cr. and Turnover < Rs. 100 cr.

Benefits of MSMEs

- **Contribution to GDP:** Nearly 6.3 crore MSMEs in India contribute one-third to the GDP of the country
- **Livelihood to large sections of society:** MSME sector is a critical source of livelihood and provides nearly 110 million jobs
- **Regional Balanced Development:** As per data from the Ministry of MSME, almost 51% of Indian MSMEs are based in rural areas. Empowering them and helping them grow will bridge the urban-rural divide in our country.
- **Huge Potential & Focus of government:** The government of India (in 2019) envisioned that the sector would account for half of India's GDP and add 50 million fresh jobs over the next five years.

Issues Faced by MSMEs

- **Untapped Potential:** MSMEs contribute 55% and 60% to the GDP of Germany and China respectively is a clear indication that India still has a long way to go in its MSME journey.
- **Credit supply shortage to MSMEs:** The formal credit available to this sector is ₹16 trillion. The viable credit gap is ₹20 trillion against a total demand of ₹36 trillion.
- **Lack of Formalisation Amongst MSMEs:** Almost 86% of the manufacturing MSMEs operating in the country are unregistered. Even today, out of the 6.3 crore MSMEs only about 1.1 crores are registered with Goods and Services Tax regime.
- **Technological Disruption:** India's MSME sector is based on outdated and inefficient technology, which hampers its productivity & competitiveness. New technologies like [Artificial Intelligence](#), Data Analytics, Robotics and related technologies (collectively called as Industry Revolution 4.0) is a bigger challenge for MSMEs than for organized large-scale manufacturing.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Getting construction permits, enforcing contracts, paying taxes, starting a business and trading across borders continue to constrain doing business.

- **Scaling issues:** The MSME space is virtually a micro space formed by a plethora of small and local shops and hence, scaling them up is a problem, especially when fund access is challenging.

For MSMEs to be sustainable and effective, the need of the hour is

- **Better automation** in the production process for greater efficiencies on the input side
- **More channels for accessing greater markets** and opportunities to become a part of the national and global supply chains.
- **E-commerce marketplaces** are today the best possible enablers for this transformation at minimal cost, innovation and investment

MSMEs and E-Commerce

- **Aligned with Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan:** The Prime Minister has given the slogan of “vocal for local” and spoken several times about his vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. E-commerce can contribute significantly in achieving this vision
- **Growing E-commerce Space in India:** Studies suggest that the India’s e-commerce market is expected to expand to USD 84 billion by 2021 from USD 24 billion in 2017.
- **Access to larger markets:** E-commerce allows for products even from hinterlands to get to the national market, thus, providing opportunities to artisans and small sellers from Tier-2/3 towns to sell online to customers beyond their local catchment.
- **Enhances Supply Chain Efficiency:** By investing in supply chains, the e-commerce sector provides opportunities for MSMEs to partner them in supply and delivery networks and thus help improve their supply chain efficiencies
- **Promotes Entrepreneurship:** Start-ups and young brands are also finding opportunities to enter into e-commerce sector by connecting with MSMEs and build national brands and even going global.
- **Additional income generation:** Many offline stores are also adopting e-commerce to leverage these opportunities and the traditional and modern retail models are moving towards more offline and online collaborations. All these leads to increased business and thus additional income

What steps are required in building a robust E-commerce-MSME sector?

1. Ease of Doing Business online

- First, we need to address the roadblocks that the e-commerce sector suffers in terms of ease of doing business online.
- Sellers on e-commerce marketplaces do not get advantage of GST threshold exemption (of Rs 40 lakh) for intra-state supplies that offline sellers enjoy because they have to “compulsorily register” even though their turnover is low.

2. Doing away with Physical Presence Requirement

- The government would do well in simplifying “Principal Place of Business” (PPoB) requirement especially for online sellers by making it digital and not requiring physical presence to expand their reach outside their home state.
- Today, the sellers, as in offline, are required to have a physical PPoB which, given the nature of e-commerce, is not practical.
- It is better to replace physical PPoB with Place of Communication.
- Eliminating the need for state specific physical PPoB requirement will facilitate sellers to get state-level GST with a single national place of business.

3. Handholding support

- MSMEs need to be provided handholding support to understand how e-commerce functions.
- The government can collaborate with e-commerce entities to leverage their expertise and scale to create special on-boarding programmes, hold series of awareness sessions, provide common but important services like imaging and cataloguing, etc.
- These can be provided by state governments.

4. Tweaking Policies & Schemes

- Equally important is to examine the existing schemes and benefits for MSMEs, which were formulated with an offline, physical market in mind, and tweak them to include the special needs to leverage online sales channels.
- For example, MSMEs could be given fiscal incentives to access markets and invest in digital marketing. The objective is to incentivise those who shift to the digital mode.
- There is a need to dovetail the skilling policy and programmes with the requirements of the e-commerce sector to meet future demand of the sector.

5. Build infrastructure

- Building infrastructure — both physical and digital infrastructure is important for digital transformation.
- The road and telecom network will facilitate not just access to the consumer but also enable the seller from remote areas to enter the larger national market as well as the export market.
- A robust logistic network and warehouse chains created by e-commerce platforms enable similar access and reach.
- The National Logistics Policy should focus on e-commerce sector needs.

6. Export Potential

Government needs to take specific steps to increase exports via e-commerce like

- Identify products that have potential for the export market
- Connect e-commerce with export-oriented manufacturing clusters
- Encourage tie-ups with sector-specific export promotion councils
- Leverage existing SEZs to create e-commerce export zones.

7. Leveraging Existing Indian Postal Network

- India Posts can play a significant role by creating e-commerce specific small parcel solutions at competitive rates, building a parcel tracking system, and partnering with foreign post offices to enable customs clearances.

8. E-Commerce and Foreign Trade Policy (FTP):

- The Foreign Trade Policy should identify the areas required by online sellers to succeed in global markets and include e-commerce export specific provisions in the upcoming revised policy.
- It may include: Specific policy provisions providing incentives for e-commerce exports and Enabling end to end digitization for e-commerce exports.

Conclusion

MSMEs if effectively facilitated by digitisation, will be the game changer to accelerate economic growth, employment, income levels and enhance supply chain efficiencies. Digital proficiency for MSMEs is vital to set foot in the online market successfully. Without that, the sector cannot be future ready.

Connecting the dots

- Production Linked Incentive Scheme

Central Scrutiny Centre (CSC); IEPFA Mobile App

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy

In news

- Central Scrutiny Centre (CSC) and Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority's (IEPFA) Mobile App were launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Corporate Affairs (MCA)

Important value additions

Central Scrutiny Centre (CSC)

- To ensure that the data quality is uncompromised and free from flaws, CSC was launched.
- CSC will scrutinize certain Straight Through Process (STP) Forms filed by the corporates on the MCA21 registry and flag the companies for more in-depth scrutiny.

Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority's (IEPFA) Mobile App

- **Aim:** Achieving the goal of financial literacy, spreading investors' awareness, education, and protection among investors.
- It will have the facility of tracking the status and progress of the IEPF claim refund process.
- It also provides a mechanism for investors and common citizens to report on the suspected fraudulent schemes.

2nd Tranche of Commercial Coal Mining

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy

In news

- India launched its 2nd Tranche of auction for commercial coal mining offering 67 mines for sale of coal.
- Union Coal Minister launched the auction process.

Key takeaways

- This is the highest number of mines on offer in a particular tranche of auction after commencement of the auction regime since 2014.
- Out of the total 67 mines offered by the Ministry of Coal, 23 mines are under CM(SP) Act and 44 under MMDR Act.
- The coal mines on offer are spread across 6 States Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Do you know?

Rolling auction

- Government of India is moving towards adopting a 'Rolling Auction' mechanism for conducting future auctions.

- Coal is the first mineral resource where Rolling Auction mechanism is being implemented in which a pool of coal blocks will always remain available for auctions.

Place in news: Cape of Good Hope

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I - Geography & GS – III – Economy

In news

- With \$200 billion of India's trade flows with Europe, North America and South America at risk due to the blockage of the Suez Canal, the Department of Commerce is planning re-routing shipments through the Cape of Good Hope.



Important value additions

- The Cape of Good Hope is a rocky headland on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.
- A common misconception is that the Cape of Good Hope is the southern tip of Africa.
- Contemporary geographic knowledge instead states the southernmost point of Africa is Cape Agulhas.
- When following the western side of the African coastline from the equator, however, the Cape of Good Hope marks the point where a ship begins to travel more eastward than southward.

Cape Agulhas

- Cape Agulhas is a rocky headland in Western Cape, South Africa.
- It is the geographic southern tip of the African continent and the beginning of the dividing line between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy

In news

- The Central government plans to issue a 14-digit identification number to every plot of land in India within a year.

Key takeaways

- It will subsequently integrate its land records database with revenue court records and bank records, and Aadhaar numbers on a voluntary basis.
- The Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) scheme has been launched in 10 States in 2021
- It will be rolled out across India by March 2022
- It is being described as “the Aadhaar for land” — a number that would uniquely identify every surveyed parcel of land and prevent land fraud, especially in rural India
- The identification will be based on the longitude and latitude of the land parcel, and is dependent on detailed surveys and geo-referenced cadastral maps.
- This is the next step in the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP), which began in 2008 and has been extended several times as its scope grew.



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AGRICULTURE

CSIR Floriculture Mission

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Sci & tech; Agriculture

In news

- Recently, CSIR Floriculture Mission has been approved.
- It will be implemented in 21 States/UTs.

Key takeaways

- Available knowledge base in CSIR Institutes will be utilized and leveraged to help Indian farmers and industry re-position itself to meet the import requirements.
- Floriculture, or flower farming, is a discipline of horticulture concerned with the cultivation of flowering and ornamental plants for gardens and for floristry.
- **Implemented by:** CSIR in collaboration with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)- Directorate of Floriculture; KVIC; APEDA, TRIFED; Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC), Kannauj, Ministry of MSME and Universities.
- Despite the fact that India has diverse agro-climatic and edaphic conditions, and rich plant diversity, it shares only 0.6% of global floriculture market.
- At least 1200 million USD worth of floriculture products are being imported by India.

Agriculture Voltage Technology by Agricultural Ministry

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions & GS – III – Technology; Agriculture

In news

- Union Minister of Agriculture informed Lok Sabha about the Agriculture Voltage Technology.

Key takeaways

- Agri-voltaic system of 105 KW capacity was developed by ICAR-Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur.
- This technology can increase the income of farmers by generation of electricity and growing of cash crops simultaneously.
- Under component-I of [KUSUM \(Kisan Urja Suraksha Utthan Mahabhiyan\) scheme](#), there is a provision for installation of agri-voltaic system in farmers' fields with a capacity ranging from 500 KW to 2 MW.
- National Solar Energy Federation of India (NSEFI) has also documented 13 operational agri-voltaic systems in India.

Agroforestry In The Silk Sector

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Agriculture; Economy

In news

- A MoU was signed between the [Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare](#) and [Central Silk Board](#).
- It is about a convergence model for the implementation of Agroforestry in the silk sector under the Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme.
- **Objective:** Augmentation of [sericulture](#) host plants ([Mulberry](#), Asan, Arjuna, Som, Soalu, Kesseru, BadaKesseru, Phanat) to be cultivated both as block plantations and border plantations on farmlands.

Important value additions

The Central Silk Board (CSB)

- It is a Statutory Body.
- **Established:** 1948
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Textiles
- **Headquarter:** Bengaluru

Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme

- **Implemented by:** The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC & FW) since 2016-17
- This scheme is a part of the recommendation of the National Agroforestry Policy 2014.
- India is the first country to have such a comprehensive policy
- It was launched at the World Agroforestry Congress held in Delhi in February 2014.
- At present, the scheme is being implemented in 20 States and 2 UTs.
- **Aim:** To encourage farmers to plant multi-purpose trees together with the agriculture crops for climate resilience and an additional source of income to the farmers.

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ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Nag River Pollution Abatement Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment; Pollution
In news

- The [Nag River](#) Pollution Abatement Project has been approved at a cost of Rs. 2,117.54 crores.

Key takeaways

- The project was approved under the [National River Conservation Plan](#).
- It will be implemented by the [National River Conservation Directorate \(NRCD\)](#).
- It will reduce the pollution level in terms of untreated sewage, flowing solid waste and other impurities flowing into the Nag river and its tributaries.

Do you know?

- The Nag River is a river flowing through Nagpur, Maharashtra.
- The city derives its name from the Nag river
- Forming a part of the Kanhan-Pench river system, the Nag River originates in Lava hills near wadi.

Related articles:

- [National Ganga Council \(NGC\)](#)

Climate Action

Unless climate change is tagged as a primary culprit, climate action will continue to falter.

Himalayan Glacier Melt & Global Warming

- The melting of the Himalayan glaciers that prompted the [floods and landslides in Uttarakhand](#) have the fingerprints of global warming.
- **Reduced Albedo:** As glacier cover is replaced by water or land, the amount of light reflected decreases further aggravating warming of atmosphere

Extreme Cold in Texas & Global Warming

- The extreme cold weather in Texas, is connected to Arctic-peninsula warming, at a rate almost twice the global average.
- **Polar Vortex:** Usually, there is a collection of winds around the Arctic keeping the cold locked far to the north. But global warming has caused gaps in these protective winds, allowing intensely cold air to move south — a phenomenon that is accelerating.

Concerns

- **India's Climate Vulnerability:** While HSBC ranks India at the top among 67 nations in climate vulnerability (2018), Germanwatch ranks India fifth among 181 nations in terms of climate risks (2020). But public spending does not reflect these perils.

- **Impact of accumulated Carbon:** Even if major economies speed up climate mitigation, catastrophes like Uttarakhand will become more frequent due to the accumulated carbon emissions in the atmosphere.
- **Diluting of climate safeguards:** Studies had flagged ice loss across the Himalayas, and the dangers to densely populated catchments, but policy response has been lacking. Similarly, Kerala ignored a landmark study calling for regulation of mining, quarrying and dam construction in ecologically sensitive places, which contributed to the massive floods and landslides in 2018 and 2019.

Way Ahead

- **Shift to Cleaner Energy Sources:** Decisive switch is needed from highly polluting coal and petroleum to cleaner and renewable power sources.
- **Need to announce Carbon Neutrality:** India should announce a carbon neutrality target. China announced its [Climate Neutrality targets](#) in Oct 2020, likewise EU & Japan have also made announcements.
- **Climate Budgeting:** Explicitly including policies for climate mitigation in the government budget, along with energy, roads, health and education. Specifically, growth targets should include timelines for switching to cleaner energy.
- **Climate Finance Mobilisation:** The government needs to launch a major campaign to mobilise climate finance both from domestic and international sources. India's Central and State governments must increase allocations for risk reduction, such as better defences against floods, or agricultural innovations to withstand droughts

Connecting the dots

- [Paris Climate Deal](#)

[Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity

In news

- A three-member panel constituted by the Orissa High Court made a field trip to the Gahirmatha marine sanctuary to assess the measures taken for the conservation of endangered [olive ridley sea turtles](#).

Key takeaways

- According to an environment magazine's report, 800 [olive ridley turtles](#) died since January due to negligence of the States Forest and Fisheries department.
- The olive ridley turtles turn up in millions for mass nesting along the Odisha coast every year.
- Gahirmatha beach off Bay of Bengal coast in Odisha is acclaimed as the world's largest nesting ground of these turtles.

[Failure to set up Independent Environment Regulator](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment

In news

- The Supreme Court has asked the government to explain why it had not set up an “independent environment regulator” to oversee green clearances.

Key takeaways

- In ‘Lafarge mining case’, the SC had ordered the setting up of a national environment regulatory body to ensure independent oversight of green clearances.
- Such a regulator should appraise projects, enforce environmental conditions for approvals and to impose penalties on polluters.
- SC had made it clear that till such mechanism was put in place, the Environment Ministry (MoEF) should prepare a panel of accredited institutions from which alone the project proponent should obtain the Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the Terms of Reference to be formulated by the MoEF.

ICAR receives King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment

In news

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has received King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award of FAO.
- ICAR received the award for its excellent contributions in “Soil Health Awareness” on the theme “Stop soil erosion, save our future” during 2020.

Important value additions

King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award

- **Launched in:** 2018
- It acknowledges individuals or institutions that raise public awareness of soils
- **Sponsored by:** Kingdom of Thailand
- It is named after King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand

Seabuckthorn

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity; Environment

In news

- The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to start planting seabuckthorn in the cold desert areas of the state.

Important value additions Seabuckthorn

- It is a shrub which produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry.
- In India, it is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region, generally in dry areas such as the cold deserts of Ladakh and Spiti.
- In Himachal Pradesh, it is locally called chharma.
- **Ecological, medicinal and economic benefits:** (1) Treating stomach, heart and skin problems; (2) Its fruit and leaves are rich in vitamins, carotenoids and omega fatty acids; (3) Helps troops in acclimatising to high-altitude; (4) Important source of fuelwood and fodder; (5) Prevents soil-

erosion; (6) Checks siltation in rivers; (7) Helps preserve floral biodiversity; (8) Used in making juices, jams, nutritional capsules etc.

Bamboosa Bambos likely to threaten Nilgiri biosphere

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment; Biodiversity

In news

- The flowering of bamboo inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) may pose a threat to wildlife in the Nilgiri biosphere, a major tiger and elephant habitat.

Key takeaways

- The bamboo groves in the Wayanad forest are the mainstay of herbivores in the Nilgiri biosphere during summer.
- With the onset of the summer, migration of wild animals starts from the adjacent sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to Wayanad due to shortage of fodder and water.
- The flowering may adversely affect migration, especially by elephants, wild gaur, and other lower herbivores due to the mass destruction of bamboo groves after the flowering.

Important value additions

- It is a tall, bright-green coloured spiny bamboo species, which grows in thickets consisting of a large number of heavily branched, closely growing culms.
- Bamboosa bambos is a monocarpic (flowering only once) plant.
- **Family:** Poaceae family (grass family).
- Its flowering cycle varies from 40 to 60 years.
- It is also known as the giant thorny bamboo, Indian thorny bamboo, spiny bamboo, or thorny bamboo.
- It is a species of clumping bamboo native to southern Asia.

Do you know?

- The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an animal sanctuary in Wayanad, Kerala, India.

IQ Air's Global air pollution Report

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment; Pollution

In news

- A report on Global air pollution was released from IQ Air.
- It is a Swiss air quality technology company specialising in protection against airborne pollutants, and developing air quality monitoring and air cleaning products.

Key takeaways

- Delhi remained the most polluted capital city in the world.
- India, on the whole, had improved its average annual PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels in 2020 than in 2019.
- India is the third most polluted country in 2020.

- Bangladesh and Pakistan have worse average PM2.5 levels than India.
- China ranked 11th in the latest report, a deterioration from the 14th in the previous edition of the report.
- Amongst cities, Hotan in China was the most polluted, followed by Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh.
- Of the 15 most polluted cities, 13 were in India.
- The pollution levels are weighted averages, meaning that the population of a country influences the pollution values reported.
84% of all monitored countries observed air quality improvements.
- However, of the 106 monitored countries, only 24 met the WHO's annual guidelines for PM 2.5.

Hidden Pandemic of Single Use Plastic

Context: Plastics have been deployed in great quantities as a shield against COVID. But little attention has been paid to where the increased plastic waste will end up

COVID-19 and Single Use Plastic

- **Ambitious Goal before COVID-19 Pandemic:** In 2019, Union Government committed to completely [phase out single-use plastics by 2022](#). The commitment called for better arrangements to collect, store, and recycle single-use plastic. The pandemic halted and, in some cases, reversed much of this progress.
- **Plastic became ubiquitous in wake of COVID-19:** Masks, sanitiser bottles, personal protective equipment, food packaging, water bottles- all used plastic.
- **Concern over Microplastics:** In time, this plastic will disintegrate into tiny particles of less than five millimetres — known as [microplastics](#) — and move through water bodies and farm soil to enter the food we eat and the air we breathe.
- **Very Low Recycling:** only 9 per cent of all plastic ever produced has been recycled, while 79 per cent of all plastic produced can be found in the world's landfills and in our air, water, soil, and other natural systems.
- **Indispensability:** Plastic is still important. Its central role in durable goods, medicine and food safety means that it is not practical to get rid of entirely. Instead, we must be more thoughtful about where, when and how we use it.

Way Ahead

There are several steps we can take right now, even during the struggle against COVID-19, keeping in mind that above all we should avoid single-use plastics as much as possible.

- **Increased Collection:** We should ensure that waste collection operates at the same pace as waste generation.
- **Segregation at early stage:** we must be able to segregate waste and used plastic early in the waste-to-value cycle so that the plastic remains suitable for treatment and recycling. Some source segregation efforts became more normalised during the pandemic and this trend should continue. It will make recycling much easier and more economically viable.
- **Encourage Environment Friendly alternatives:** Government should promote alternatives to single-use plastics where they exist and develop alternatives where they do not exist. Business

models that avoid plastic waste through alternative product delivery systems, promote circularity, and use plastic waste should be encouraged.

- **Coordination amongst stakeholders:** Considering that plastic pollution is a truly society-wide problem, it is important for government, businesses, and civil society to coordinate to find solutions.
- **Policy Framework:** Union government should come up with National Action Plan for Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution in Rivers for effective decision-making processes and actions at the national, regional and local level.

Connecting the dots

- The [lacunae of Plastic Ban](#)

Digital Green Certificates by EU

Context: On March 17, 2021, the European Commission proposed to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe and free movement of citizens within the European Union (EU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The certificates are expected to be rolled out by the summer, after countries have had the time to set up the required digital infrastructure.

So, what exactly is the Digital Green Certificate?

- **No danger of COVID-19 transmission:** A Digital Green Certificate is proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result or has recovered from COVID-19.
- **Digital Format & Free:** The key features of the certificate are that it will be in digital or paper format complete with a QR code and will be free of charge.
- **Issuing Authorities:** The certificate can be issued by authorities, including hospitals, testing centres and health authorities.
- **Lifting of restrictions in coordinated manner:** Once the proposal for digital certificates is finalised, it will be accepted in all EU countries and will help to ensure that the restrictions imposed in different areas within the EU can be lifted in a coordinated manner.
- **Eligibility:** All EU citizens or third-country nationals who are legally staying in the EU will be able to use these digital certificates and thereby will be exempted from free movement restrictions.
- **Notifying Commission:** In case an EU member country requires a person to quarantine or undergo a test, it will have to notify the Commission and all other member states justifying its decision

What is the need for such a document?

- **Waives free movement restrictions:** In the EU and across the world, the tourism industry has been severely impacted due to the spread of the disease. Many countries have, therefore, been contemplating digital certificates or passports that will be proof that a person has been vaccinated or has recovered from COVID-19.
- **Israel's Vaccine Passport Model:** In February, Israel became the first country to issue certificates called "vaccine passports" that will allow vaccinated individuals to use some facilities and attend events.

- **Global Practice:** Denmark also said that it was in the process of rolling out digital passports that would act as proof for those individuals who have been vaccinated. Even so, as early as May 2020, countries such as Chile had proposed “release certificates” meant for those who had recovered from COVID-19

Concerns

- **Stance of WHO:** However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had advised against using such certificates because of lack of evidence that a person infected with Covid-19 could not get the infection again.
- **Possibility of re-infection:** However, it is now known that re-infection in case of COVID-19 is rare. Research published in the journal Lancet recently points out that most people who have had COVID-19 are protected from re-infection for at least a period of six months. However, the study says that elderly patients are more prone to reinfections.

Connecting the dots

Can SAARC/BIMSTEC Nations also come with such certificates which helps movement in the subcontinent leading to faster integration of Nations in post-COVID-19 situation?

Himachal Pradesh Water Crisis

Context: Himachal Pradesh State Water Minister repeatedly warned the Legislative Assembly that State is likely to face an acute water scarcity

Why is the state with perennial sources of water such as Sutlej and Beas rivers staring at a water crisis?

- **Deficient Rain and Snow:** Himachal Pradesh received less snow and rain this winter. After winter, melt-water from glaciers and the snow cover regularly feeds the groundwater as well as other downhill water sources such as springs, wells, rivers etc. But water sources have already started drying up this year due to deficient snowfall.
- **69% less than normal precipitation:** According to the Indian Meteorological Department, the state received only 59 millimetres of precipitation this winter (January 1 to February 28), which was 69 per cent less than normal.
- **Increasing demand:** Generally, over the decades, demand for water has been growing due to increasing population in the state, with people now relying more on piped water supply schemes rather than traditional sources such as springs and bawries etc.
- **Climate Change:** Rainfall patterns, too, have become erratic. During dry periods, water sources dry up quickly in some areas, especially in the Shiwalik hills where the water-holding capacity of the soil is low.

Similar type of situation before also

- Himachal had received deficient snowfall in 2018, too, when drinking **water shortage in the capital town of Shimla in summer** had invited global media attention.
- The situation has been better in Shimla since then because its water supply source from Gumma stream has been augmented to provide 10 million litres daily (mld) more water to the city.
- The extent of the problem this year will become clearer in the coming summer months, but government claimed that it has never been so dry before in Himachal so early during the year. There are parts of Beas river which can now simply be crossed by wading through on foot

What are the proposed solutions?

- Installation of hand-pumps and borewells was stopped last year in view of depleting water table. But it will be resumed now wherever necessary.
- Water harvesting tanks will be built throughout the state and all MLAs are required to start building rainwater harvesting structures in their constituencies.
- A large number of habitations in Himachal Pradesh are not connected by road, but the connected villages will be provided water tankers during periods of shortage
- Government will try to explore the option of “snow harvesting” in the higher reaches.

Connecting the dots

- [India's Water Crisis](#)
- [Urbanisation and Water Crisis](#)

Vehicle Scrappage Policy

Context: It is estimated that 17 lakh medium and heavy commercial vehicles were more than 15 years old and remained without a valid fitness certificate

About the Policy

- **Fitness Tests:** The new policy provides for fitness tests after the completion of 20 years in the case of privately owned vehicles and 15 years in the case of commercial vehicles. Any vehicle that fails the fitness test or does not manage renewal of its registration certificate may be declared as an End of Life Vehicle.
- **Government Vehicles:** All government vehicles and those owned by PSUs will be de-registered after 15 years.
- **Phased manner of implementation:** The policy will kick-in for government vehicles from April 1, 2022. Mandatory fitness testing for heavy commercial vehicles will start from April 1, 2023, and for all other categories of vehicles, including personal vehicles, it will start in phases from June 1, 2024.
- **Incentives for Scrapping:** Policy includes Central advisories to States to give up to 25% rebate in road tax for personal vehicles and up to 15% rebate for commercial vehicles. The government will also offer waiver of registration fees on the purchase of new vehicles.
- **Incentive for automakers:** Central government to issue advisory to auto makers to offer the incentive of a 5% rebate for those who buy a new vehicle after producing a scrapping certificate.
- **Disincentivizing Older Vehicles:** Older vehicles pollute the environment 10 to 12 times more. As a disincentive, increased re-registration fees would be applicable for vehicles 15 years or older from the initial date registration.

Benefits of the Policy

- **Boosts Automobile Sector:** The policy pushes for buying of new vehicles by phasing out older vehicles. It is estimated that automobile industry in India will see a jump in turnover to ₹10 lakh crore from ₹4.5 lakh crore.
- **Increase government's revenue** collection from the sale of new vehicles.
- **Help reduce pollution:** Older vehicles are known to pollute environment 10-12 times more than new vehicles, thus this policy is a step in reducing pollution.

- **Improve fuel efficiency:** Older vehicles performance is lower thereby consuming more fuel. Replacing older vehicles with new vehicles will therefore boost fuel efficiency of the economy.
- **Spare Parts Prices will fall:** The prices of auto components would fall substantially with the recycling of metal and plastic parts.
- **Post-COVID Recovery:** Vehicle scrapping and replacement is seen internationally as a route to rejuvenate COVID-19-affected economies by privileging green technologies, notably electric vehicles (EVs)
- **Creates Recycling Ecosystem:** The policy will pave the way for the creation of an ecosystem of vehicular scrapping facilities and a market for recycled raw materials.
- **Helps achieve [Paris Climate Goals](#):** The policy is also seen as an initiative to achieve net zero emissions by mid-century under [Paris Agreement commitments](#).

Challenges

- **Enforcement will be key** to get them scrapped once they are found unfit for use and to stop them from moving to smaller towns.
- **Federal Challenges:** All the States should be on board.
- **Backing of manufacturers** is also essential who stand to benefit from a spurt in demand.
- **Heavy commercial vehicles**, which contribute disproportionately to pollution — 1.7 million lack fitness certificates — pose the biggest challenge.
- **Disproportionately impacts small operators:** Many of these cannot be replaced quickly in the absence of financial arrangements for small operators, who have opposed the new measures.
- **Advisory Nature of incentives:** Interestingly, the discounts against scrapping certificates are merely an advisory and not a mandate, i.e. it will be up to automakers' to offer discounts at all.

What more can be done?

- States must also come on board to provide road tax and registration concessions, while the automobile industry is expected to sweeten the deal with genuine discounts on new vehicles.
- The Centre has to arrive at a balance and have incentives that reward manufacturers of vehicles that are the most fuel-efficient.
- Failure to prioritise fuel efficiency and mandate even higher standards and enhance taxes on fuel guzzlers will only repeat the mistakes of vehicle exchange programmes abroad, where full environmental benefits could not be realised, and taxpayers ended up subsidising inefficiency.

Conclusion

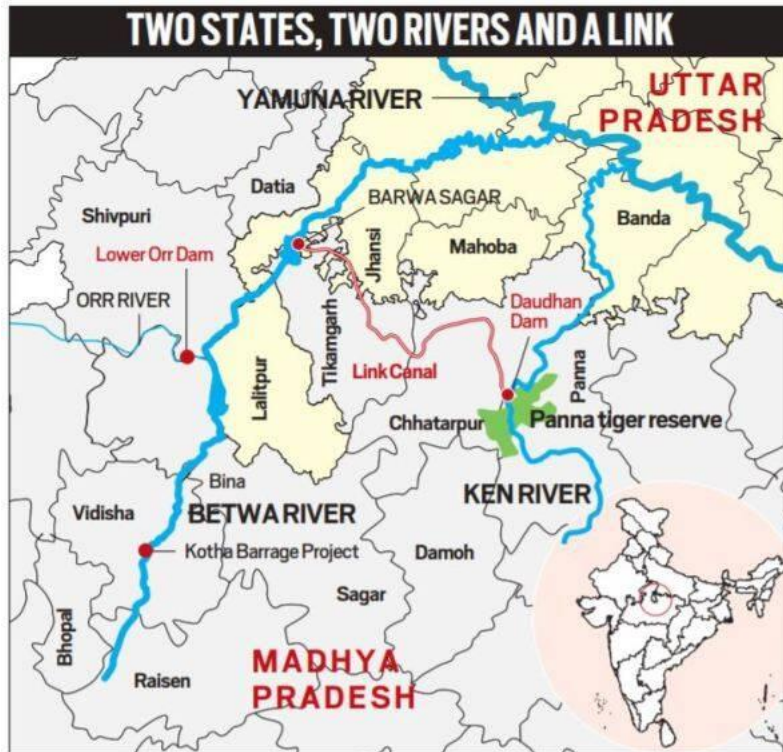
- Ecological scrapping, as a concept, must lead to high rates of materials recovery, reduce air pollution, mining and pressure on the environment.

Connecting the dots

- Electric Vehicles Vs Hydrogen Fuel Cell based Vehicles

[Ken-Betwa Interlinking Project](#)

Context: A memorandum of agreement was signed between Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP).



Source: [Indian Express](#)

What is the Ken Betwa Link Project?

- **Interlinking of rivers:** The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers. Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna
- **First Phase:** The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases. Under Phase-I, one of the components — **Daudhan dam complex** and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses — will be completed.
- **Second Phase:** While in the Phase-II, three components — **Lower Orr dam**, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage — will be constructed.
- **Estimated Cost:** According to the Comprehensive Detailed Project Report, the cost of Ken-Betwa Link Project is estimated at Rs 35,111.24 crore at 2017-18 prices.
- **Region Benefitted:** The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This project is going to immensely benefit this backward region and help bridge the regional imbalance.
- **Panna Tiger Reserve Affected:** Out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project, 4,206 ha of area lies within the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve
- **Environmental Concerns:** A report of the forest advisory committee said that an estimated 4.6 million trees will be cut down for the project which will adversely affect the rain in the already dry Bundelkhand region.
- **Clearance Requirement:** Generally, 4-5 types of clearances are required for the interlinking of river projects. These are:
 - Techno-economic (given by the Central Water Commission)
 - Forest Clearance and Environmental clearance (Ministry of Environment & Forests)

- Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plan of Tribal Population (Ministry of Tribal Affairs)
- Wildlife clearance (Central Empowered Committee)

Benefits of Ken-Betwa Project

The project is expected to provide

- Annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares,
- Drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people
- Generate 103 mw of hydropower.
- It will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.

Are there previous examples of river-linking in India?

- In the past, several river linking projects have been taken up. For instance, under the Periyar Project, transfer of water from Periyar basin to Vaigai basin was envisaged.
- It was commissioned in 1895. Similarly, other projects such as Parambikulam Aliyar, Kurnool Cudappah Canal, Telugu Ganga Project, and Ravi-Beas-Sutlej were undertaken

Recent developments on interlinking of rivers in India

- In the 1970s, the idea of transferring surplus water from a river to water-deficit area was mooted by the then Union Irrigation Minister (earlier the Jal Shakti Ministry was known as Ministry of Irrigation) **Dr K L Rao**.
- Dr. Rao, who himself was an engineer, suggested construction of a **National Water Grid** for transferring water from water-rich areas to water-deficit areas.
- Similarly, Captain Dinshaw J Dastur proposed the Garland Canal to redistribute water from one area to another. However, the government did not pursue these two ideas further.
- It was in August, 1980 that the Ministry of Irrigation prepared a **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for water resources development envisaging inter basin water transfer in the country.
- The NPP comprised two components: (i) Himalayan Rivers Development; and (ii) Peninsular Rivers Development.
- Based on the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) identified 30 river links—16 under Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component.
- Later, the river linking idea was revived under the then Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government.
- Ken Betwa Link Project is one of the 16 river linking projects under the Peninsular component.

Connecting the dots

Do you think river interlinking is the most suitable way forward for water management in India? Critically examine.

Launch of Climate Data Service Portal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Environment

In news

- Climate Data Services Portal of India Meteorological Department (IMD) was inaugurated on World Meteorological Day
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Earth Science

Key takeaways

- **Developed by:** IMD, Pune
- It has user-friendly platforms for climate data management and supply to the users
- It complements fully automated climate data management process
- The major components:
 1. Real-Time monitoring of weather observations recorded by IMD Observatories.
 2. Encapsulated IMD Metadata Portal, other reports and dashboards
 3. Online access to meteorological data through Data Supply Portal.
 4. Free download facility for Gridded Temperature and Rainfall Data of India.
 5. Climatological Tables, Extremes and Normal.
 6. Information on Monsoon Rainfall and Cyclone frequencies.
 7. Data analytics and info graphics

AEG12 inhibits family of viruses

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity; Sci & Tech

In news

- According to scientists at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and their collaborator, a mosquito protein, called AEG12, strongly inhibits the family of viruses that cause yellow fever, dengue, West Nile, and Zika, and also weakly inhibits coronaviruses,

Key takeaways

- The researchers found that AEG12 works by destabilising the viral envelope, breaking its protective covering.
- The protein does not affect viruses that do not have an envelope.
- At the molecular level, AEG12 rips out the lipids
- The findings could lead to therapeutics against viruses that affect millions of people around the world.
- While the researchers demonstrated that AEG12 was most effective against flaviviruses — the family of viruses to which Zika, West Nile, and others belong — they felt it is possible AEG12 could be effective against SARS-CoV-2.
- But, it will take years of bioengineering to make AEG12 a viable therapy for Covid-19.

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Dr. Akash Shankar, IAS
AIR 78, CSE 2018.
Interview Topper - scored 204 in Personality test.

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Species in news: Himalayan Serow

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity; Environment

In news

- [Himalayan serow](#) was spotted in the Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam recently

Important value additions

- The Himalayan serow is a subspecies of the mainland serow native to the Himalayas.
- **Common name:** Himalayan Serow
- **Scientific name:** *Capricornis sumatraensis* thar.
- **Local name:** Jingal, Yemu
- It has an appearance of a goat with long, donkey like ears.
- It has a habit of standing with forelegs making it an ungainly goat antelope.
- Its coarse coat varies from black to red.
- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable
- It is listed in CITES Appendix I
- It is listed under Schedule I of The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which provides absolute protection.



Do you know?

- Previously assessed as 'near threatened', the Himalayan serow is now been categorised as 'vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List.

Hypnea Indica; Hypnea Bullata: Two new species of seaweed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity

In news

- Two new species of seaweed have been discovered by a group of marine biologists from Central University of Punjab, Bathinda.

Key takeaways

- Named *Hypnea indica* (after India) and *Hypnea bullata* (because of the blisterlike marks on its body – bullate), the seaweeds are part of the genus *Hypnea* or red seaweeds.
- *Hypnea indica* was discovered in Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, and Somnath Pathan and Sivrajpur in Gujarat.
- *Hypnea bullata* was discovered from Kanyakumari and Diu island of Daman and Diu.
- They grow in the intertidal regions of the coast, namely the area that is submerged during the high tide and exposed during low tides.
- The genus *Hypnea* consists of calcareous, erect, branched red seaweeds.

Nacaduba Sinhala Ramaswamii Sadasivan

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity

In news

- A group of lepidopterists have found a new butterfly species in India.

**Key takeaways**

- The species is named *Nacaduba sinhala ramaswamii* Sadasivan,
- It was discovered in the Agasthyamalais in the Western Ghats
- The new taxon of Lycaenid butterflies belongs to the *Nacaduba* genus.
- Line Blues are small butterflies belonging to the subfamily Lycaenidae.
- Their distribution ranges from India and Sri Lanka to the whole of south-eastern Asia, Australia and Samoa.
- It is the first time that a butterfly species was discovered by an all-Indian research team from the Western Ghats.

Do you know?

- Lepidopterology is a branch of entomology concerning the scientific study of moths and the three superfamilies of butterflies.
- Someone who studies in this field is a lepidopterist or an aurelian.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Trishul Military Airbase under UDAN scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Infrastructure

In news

- The First flight from Delhi to the newly upgraded Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly Airport, Uttar Pradesh, was recently flagged off.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Civil Aviation

Key takeaways

- The up gradation has been done under the [Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik \(RCS-UDAN\)](#).
- Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly belongs to the Indian Air Force and the land was handed over to the Airport Authority of India for construction of the interim civil aviation operations.
- Alliance Air was awarded the Delhi - Bareilly route under the UDAN-4 bidding process last year.

Related articles:

- [Direct flight between Kalaburagi to Tirupati](#)
- [UDAN Calls for objective assessment & transparency of scheme](#)

Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Energy Resources

In news

- Lok Sabha was informed about [SATAT scheme](#).
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Petroleum

Important value additions

- [SATAT scheme](#) was launched on October 01, 2018
- Oil and Gas Marketing Companies (OGMCs) are inviting Expression of Interest (EoI) from potential entrepreneurs to procure Compressed Bio Gas (CBG).
- **Provisions under scheme:** (1) Assured price for offtake of CBG with long term agreements by OGMCs; (2) Inclusion of bio manures produced from CBG plants as Fermented Organic Manure (FOM) under Fertilizer Control Order 1985; (3) Inclusion of CBG projects under Priority Sector Lending by RBI
- 9 CBG plants have been commissioned and have started supply of CBG.
- These plants are located in Andhra Pradesh (1 No.), Gujarat (3 No.), Haryana (1 No.), Maharashtra (3 No.) and Tamil Nadu (1 No.).
- These plants are set up by entrepreneurs and private companies who have raised financial resources to develop these plants.

Licensing conditions for telecom companies amended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Infrastructure; Telecommunications

In news

- The [Department of Telecommunications \(DoT\)](#) has amended the licensing conditions for telecom companies.
- Now, these will include defence and national security as parameters when purchasing 'trusted telecom products' and sourcing equipment from 'trusted telecom equipment sources'.

Key takeaways

- This means that the designated authority can cite these two aspects (Defence and national security) and ask telecom companies not to use products which it has deemed unsafe at any time.
- The new norms will come in force from June 15, 2021.
- After Enforcement, telecom companies will not be able to use any products that do not appear on the trusted telecom equipment source list or the trusted telecom product list.
- If a telecom company wishes to expand its network by using any equipment that does not come from a trusted source, it will have to take prior permission from the National Cyber Security Coordinator.

Do you know?

- In December 2020, India's Cabinet Committee on Security approved the setting up of "National Security Directive on telecommunication sector."
- **Objective:** To classify telecom products and their sources under the 'trusted' and 'non-trusted' categories.
- The list of products telecom companies will be allowed to use in their network would be approved by the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC).
- NCSC will make its decision based on the approval of a committee headed by the deputy National Security Advisor (NSA).

[All India Tourist Vehicles Authorization and Permit Rules, 2021](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – II – Policies and interventions & GS-III - Infrastructure

In news

- All India Tourist Vehicles Authorization and Permit Rules, 2021 were released recently.
- Under it, any tourist vehicle operator may apply for an "All India Tourist Authorization/Permit" through online mode.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

Key takeaways

- It will be issued, after relevant documents are submitted and fees deposited, within 30 days of submission.
- It will be applicable from 01 April 2021.
- The new rules shall promote tourism across the States and grow their revenues.

100 MW floating solar power plant at Ramagundam

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Infrastructure; Environment and Renewable Energy

In news

- NTPC is developing country's biggest floating solar power plant (by generation capacity) in the reservoir of its thermal plant at Ramagundam (in Telangana)

Do you know?

- India is already on track to reach its goal of 175 GW of installed renewable capacity by 2022. India has also targeted 450 GW by 2030.

One Nation, One Gas Grid

Context: In January 2021, Prime Minister inaugurated the [450-km natural gas pipeline](#) between Kochi in Kerala to Mangaluru in Karnataka. The event marks an important milestone towards the creation of 'One Nation One Gas Grid'

Key Features of the pipeline

- **Constructed by:** The 450-km pipeline has been built by GAIL (India) Ltd
- **Transportation capacity:** 12 million standard cubic metres per day
- **Destination:** It will carry natural gas from the liquefied natural gas (LNG) regassification terminal at Kochi to Mangaluru
- **Geographical Challenges:** 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.
- **End Users:** 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.
- **Employment:** The construction of this pipeline has generated 1.2 million man days of employment

One Nation, One Gas Grid

- The Indian Power system for planning and operational purposes is divided into five regional grids.
- One Nation, One Gas Grid refers to the integration of these regional grids thus establishing a National Grid for providing energy produced by natural gas to various stakeholders like the central government, the state governments, the public and the private sectors.

NATURAL GAS INFRASTRUCTURE OF INDIA

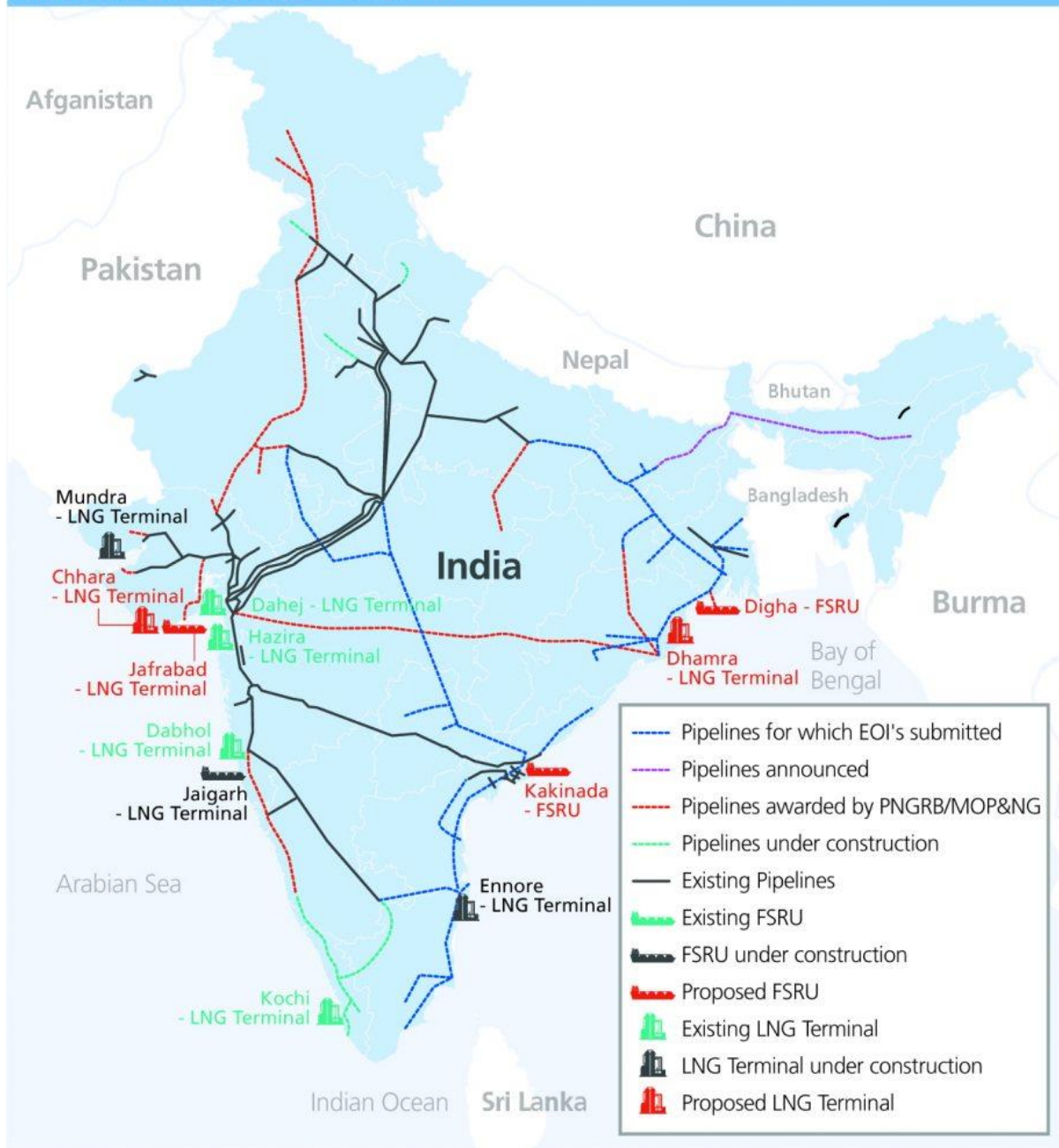


Image Source: [ICIS](#)

Benefits of One Nation One Grid

- **Connecting the nation:** With one nation and one gas grid, the energy produced from natural gas will be supplied to the whole country via a single source.
- **Helps Accelerate Rapid Expansion:** In the 27 years before 2014, only a 15,000 km natural gas pipeline was built. But currently work is underway on more than 16,000 km of gas pipeline nationwide which will be complete in the next 5-6 years
- **Addresses regional imbalance:** It will help in improving the regional imbalance of gas availability as currently the natural gas is only in limited pockets of the country.

- **Gas Based Economy:** The grid will be step towards gas-based economy by increasing the share of natural gas in India's primary energy mix from 6.2 percent to 15 percent by 2030.
- **Cleaner environment:** In times when conventional Sources are depleting and mining is being extended to a greater depth and area, natural gas can prove to be a boon by preventing deforestation and desertification.
- **Helps achieve Paris Climate Goal:** India has made a commitment in [COP21 Paris Convention](#) in December 2015 that by 2030, it would reduce carbon emission by 33% of 2005 levels. Natural gas, as domestic kitchen fuel, as fuel for transport sector as well as a fuel for industries and commercial units, can play a significant role in reducing carbon emission.

Way Ahead

- Investing in natural gas should be more encouraged with focus on smaller firms
- Government should also indulge in educating people about the natural gas economy and its benefits.
- There is a need more LNG terminals for more upstream production of gas
- Various players like Union Government, Private Players, State Governments, R&D Organisations (ex: CSIR) and Foreign Players needs to collaborate effectively to make this programme a success.

Connecting the dots

- [Natural Gas Marketing Reforms](#)

[NITI Aayog's 'sustainable' vision for Great Nicobar Island](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Infrastructure; Environment

In news

- More than 150 sq. km. (18%) of land is being made available for Phase I of a [NITI Aayog](#)-piloted 'holistic' and 'sustainable' vision for Great Nicobar Island.
- The island is the southernmost in the [Andaman and Nicobar](#) group.



Key takeaways

- It will cover nearly a quarter of its coastline.
- The overall plan envisages the use of a major portion being pristine forest and coastal systems.
- Projects to be executed include an airport complex, a transshipment port (TSP) at South Bay, a parallel-to-the-coast mass rapid transport system, a free trade zone, and a warehousing complex on the southwestern coast.
- **Nodal agency:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)
- In January 2021, the [Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife](#) (NBWL) denotified the entire Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to allow for the port there.

Do you know?

- [Nicobar megapode](#) is the globally endangered bird unique to the Nicobars.
- The proposed project areas are important foraging grounds for the [Shompen community](#)

[e-Tendering Portal-PRANIT](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Infrastructure

In news

- Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a central PSU under Ministry of Power has established an e-Tendering Portal-PRANIT.

Key takeaways

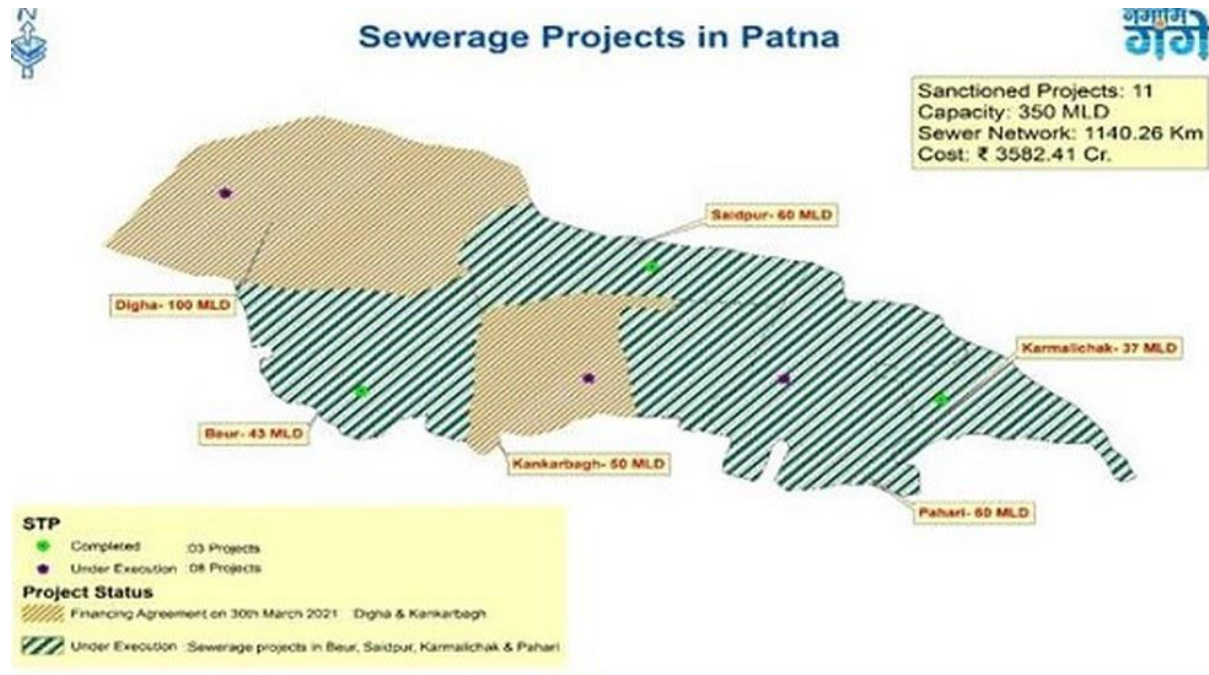
- It will lead to less paperwork and ease of operation, making the tendering process more transparent.
 - **Certified by:** Standardisation, Testing and Quality Certification Directorate (STQC), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
 - POWERGRID is now the only organization in India to have an eProcurement solution on SAP Supplier Relationship Management (SRM), complying with all applicable requirements relating to security and transparency as stipulated by STQC.
-

Digha & Kankarbagh Sewage Projects

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Infrastructure

In news

- Financing agreements for developing STPs and Sewerage networks for Digha and Kankarbagh zones of Patna were signed recently.



Key takeaways

- The scope of the project includes development of Sewage Treatment Plants of 150 MLD capacity along with sewerage network of over 453 km in the Digha and Kankarbagh zones of Patna, one of the most populous cities on the banks of the river Ganga.
- This is the first of its kind project which comprises a mix of Design, Build, Operate and Transfer ('DBOT') scope and [Hybrid Annuity Model](#) (HAM) scope.
- With its implementation, all the sewage zones of Patna city will be covered with sewerage network and sewage treatment capacity.
- It shall help in achieving the objective of the [Namami Gange](#) program of preventing any untreated wastewater entering the river Ganga.

Related articles:

[Mega development projects under Namami Gange Mission](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Launch of Amazonia-1 Satellite

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Sci & Tech; Space

In news

- The [ISRO](#) recently launched [Amazonia-1 satellite](#) of Brazil and 18 Co-passenger satellites through [PSLV-C51 rocket](#).

Key takeaways

- PSLV-C51 is the 53rd mission of [PSLV](#).
- Amazonia-1 is the primary satellite of the launch.
- PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 is the first dedicated commercial mission of [NewSpace India Limited \(NSIL\)](#).
- NSIL is a Government of India company under Department of Space.
- Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite of National Institute for Space Research (INPE).
- This satellite would provide remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.

Related articles:

- [CMS-01 successfully launched by PSLV-C50](#)
- [Successes of ISRO](#)

TLR 7/8: Covaxin's Key molecule developed by Indian lab

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Sci & Tech; Achievements of Indians

In news:

- The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) lab helped in the development of key molecule for [COVAXIN](#).

Key takeaways

- Covaxin is the indigenous vaccine developed by the Bharat Biotech International Limited.
- It is a highly purified, whole virion, inactivated SARS-Cov-2.
- It has been formulated with 'Algel-IMDG', which contains chemically absorbed TLR7/8 as an adjuvant onto aluminium hydroxide gel to generate the requisite type of immune responses without damaging the body.

Related articles:

[Towards an effective vaccination distribution policy](#)

Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Economy; Science & Technology

In news

- Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC) System has been commissioned in Western Railway Trains in Mumbai.

Key takeaways

- The Mobile Train Radio Communication system is an effective and a technologically advanced communication system.
- It can play an important role in preventing train accidents and reducing delays through effective communication.
- MTRC acts in a similar way to that of Air traffic control (ARC) for aircrafts.
- The system will monitor, track and aid in communication between the trains and the control room.
- This is the first time that MTRC is commissioned in Indian Railways.
- The new system has already been installed in 90 out of 100 rakes running between Churchgate and Virar.

Mobilising electric Vehicle financing in India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Technology; Environment

In news

- A new report 'Mobilising Electric Vehicle Financing in India' was recently released.
- **Released by:** [NITI Aayog](#) and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) India

Key takeaways

- It highlights the role of finance in India's transition to [electric vehicles](#) (EVs).
- It has also analysed that the transition will require a capital investment of USD 266 billion in EVs, charging infrastructure, and batteries over the next decade.
- Consumers currently face several challenges, such as high interest rates, high insurance rates, and low loan-to-value ratios.
- 10 solutions have been identified to address these challenges.
- Financial institutions such as banks and NBFCs, and the industry and government will be able to adopt solutions.

Related articles:

- [Electric vehicles](#)
- [Impact of electric vehicles on auto industry](#)

Genome Mapping in Indian Ocean

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Environment; Sci & Tech

In news

- Genome Mapping in Indian Ocean shall be taken up by Scientists from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Panaji, Goa.

Key takeaways

- Onboard research vessel Sindhu Sadhana, the team will traverse over 10,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean to reveal the internal working of the ocean at a cellular level.
- It is the first-of-its-kind research project in India.

- **Objective:** Understanding the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.
- **Duration:** 3 years

Martian Blueberries find a parallel on Earth

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Space; Sci & Tech

In news

- According to a recent research paper, Martian ‘blueberries’ find a parallel on Earth.

Key takeaways

- In 2004, NASA’s Mars exploration rover ‘Opportunity’ found several small spheres on the planet, informally named Martian blueberries.
- Opportunity’s spectrometers noted they were made of iron oxide compounds called haematites.
- Presence of haematites suggests that there was water present on Mars.
- Haematite is known to form in oxidising environments.

Do you know?

- Study of the Jhuran formation in Gujarat (which is between 145 and 201 million years old) of the haematite concretions revealed that they resemble the ones on Mars.

National Institutes of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Education & GS-III - Sci & Tech

In news

- The Rajya Sabha passed the National Institutes of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019.

Key takeaways

- The Bill declares certain institutes of food technology, entrepreneurship, and management as institutions of national importance.
- These institutes are: (1) National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Kundli, in Haryana; (2) Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology, Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu.
- The Bill declares these institutes as National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management.

Launch of Project Re-HAB

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Biodiversity; Environment

In news

- Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees) was recently launched in Kodagu, Karnataka.
- **Launched by:** [The Khadi and Village Industries Commission \(KVIC\)](#)
- **Objective:** To prevent elephant attacks in human habitations using honeybees.

Key takeaways

- It entails installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages.
- These spots are located on the periphery of the Nagarhole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zone.
- It is believed that elephants' fear of the bees will prevent them from transgressing into human landscape.
- Project Re-HAB is a sub-mission of the KVIC's National Honey Mission.

Responsible Artificial Intelligence

Context: AI can leapfrog us toward eradicating hunger, poverty and disease — opening up new and hitherto unimaginable pathways for climate change mitigation, education and scientific discovery.

Benefits and Potential

- **Multi-sectoral applications:** Already, AI has helped increase crop yields, raised business productivity, improved access to credit and made cancer detection faster and more precise.
- **Boosts Economic Growth:** It could contribute more than \$15 trillion to the world economy by 2030, adding 14% to global GDP. Google has identified over 2,600 use cases of “AI for good” worldwide.
- **Enabler for SDGs:** A study published in Nature reviewing the impact of AI on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finds that AI may act as an enabler on 134 — or 79% — of all SDG targets.

Concerns and Challenges

- **Big Carbon Footprint:** AI requires massive computational capacity, which means more power-hungry data centres — and a big carbon footprint.
- **Loss of low income jobs:** Robotics and AI companies are building intelligent machines that perform tasks typically carried out by low-income workers: self-service kiosks to replace cashiers, fruit-picking robots to replace field workers, etc. Many desk jobs will also be edged out by AI, such as accountants, financial traders and middle managers.
- **Widens Inequalities:** AI could compound digital exclusion. Without clear policies on reskilling workers, the promise of new opportunities will in fact create serious new inequalities.
- **Strengthen the Divide between North & South:** Investment is likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established, widening gaps among and within countries.
- **Can reinforce existing prejudices:** AI-enhanced recruitment engine, based on existing workforce profiles, taught itself that male candidates were preferable to female. AI facial recognition and surveillance technology discriminating against people of colour and minorities.
- **Privacy Concerns:** AI also presents serious data privacy concerns. Cambridge Analytica — algorithms and big data were used to alter voting decisions.

Way Ahead

- Only a “whole of society” approach to AI governance will enable us to develop broad-based ethical principles, cultures and codes of conduct.
- Given the global reach of AI, such a “whole of society” approach must rest on a “whole of world” approach.
- Need for multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation so AI is used in a manner that is “trustworthy, human rights-based, safe and sustainable, and promotes peace”.
- Digital future cannot be optimised for good without multi-stakeholder governance structures that ensure the dividends are fair, inclusive, and just.

Connecting the dots

- [Blockchain Technology and Voting](#)

CALM2 mutations

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Sci & Tech; Biotechnology

In news

- In Australia, Leading scientists and medical experts are calling for the pardon of convicted child killer Kathleen Folbigg after a recent study showed that her victims (her own children) may have died of natural causes.

Key takeaways

- Medical experts have argued that her children died due to a rare genetic defect.
- They inherited a genetic mutation from their mother called CALM2.
- CALM-2 mutations are known to cause sudden death due to [cardiac arrest](#).
- Calmodulin 2 is a protein that is encoded by the CALM2 gene in humans.
- Mutations in CALM2 are associated to cardiac arrhythmias.

NewSpace India Limited to operate space assets of ISRO

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Policies and interventions & GS-III - Space; Sci & Tech

In news

- The [NewSpace India Limited](#) will own and operate capital intensive space assets of ISRO as part of the space reforms process.
- [NASA](#) and [ISRO](#) are collaborating on developing a satellite called NISAR.
- It will detect movements of Earth's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.

Key takeaways

- NewSpace India Limited is in advance stage of discussion with the Department of Space to take ownership of two new communication satellites for commercial purpose.
- The transponders on these satellites will be leased to the private companies with DTH and Broadband services.
- The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR.
- SAR here refers to the synthetic aperture radar that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth.

- Also, SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images.
- Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness, which means that it can collect data day and night in any weather.
- NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.

Important value additions

- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) is a Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) of Government of India.
- It is a commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and a subsidiary company of Department of Science.
- **Established in:** 2019
- **Administrative control:** Department of Space (DoS) and the Company Act 2013.
- **Objective:** To scale up industry participation in Indian space programmes.
- **Headquarter:** Bengaluru.

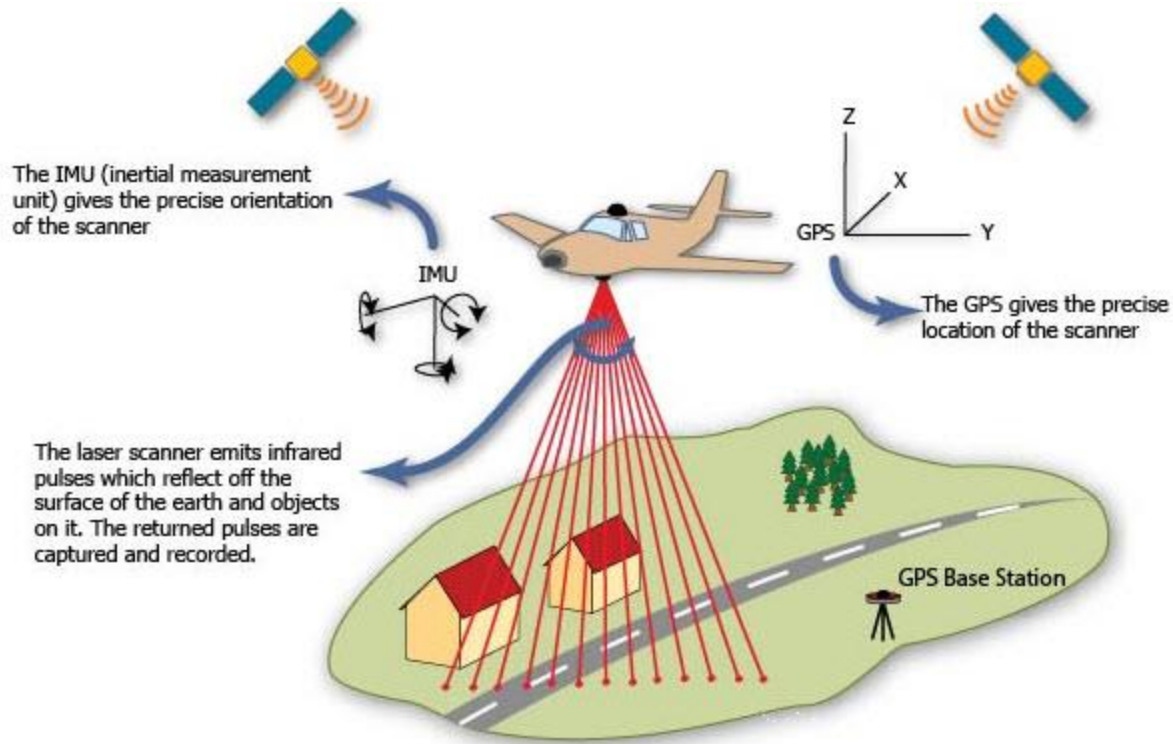
Related articles:

- [CMS-01 successfully launched by PSLV-C50](#)
- [Successes of ISRO](#)

LIDAR

Light detection and ranging (LiDAR) is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges to the Earth.

- LiDAR uses a pulsed laser to calculate an object's variable distances from the earth surface.
- LiDAR follows a simple principle — throw laser light at an object on the earth surface and calculate the time it takes to return to the LiDAR source. Given the speed at which the light travels (approximately 186,000 miles per second), the process of measuring the exact distance through LiDAR appears to be incredibly fast.
- These light pulses — put together with the information collected by the airborne system — generate accurate 3D information about the earth surface and the target object.
- There are three primary components of a LiDAR instrument — the scanner, laser and GPS receiver. Other elements that play a vital role in the data collection and analysis are the photodetector and optics.
- Two Types: Airborne LiDAR installed on a helicopter or drone for collecting data and Terrestrial LiDAR systems installed on moving vehicles or tripods on the earth surface for collecting accurate data points.



Applications of LiDAR

- **Oceanography:** LiDAR technology is used to map the land and is used to measure seafloor and riverbed elevations. LiDAR is also used for calculating phytoplankton fluorescence and biomass in the ocean surface, which otherwise is very challenging.
- **Digital Elevation or Terrain Model:** Terrain elevations play a crucial role during the construction of roads, large buildings and bridges. LiDAR technology has x, y and z coordinates, which makes it incredibly easy to produce the 3D representation of elevations to ensure that concerned parties can draw necessary conclusions more easily.
- **Agriculture:** Typical applications of LiDAR technology in the agriculture sector include analysis of yield rates, crop scouting and seed dispersions. Besides this, it is also used for campaign planning, mapping under the forest canopy, and more.
- **Security:** LiDAR is used by military for carrying out various security operations near the national borders.
- **Rescue Missions:** When the authorities want to know the exact depth of the ocean's surface to locate any object in the case of a maritime accident or for research purposes, they use LiDAR technology to accomplish their mission

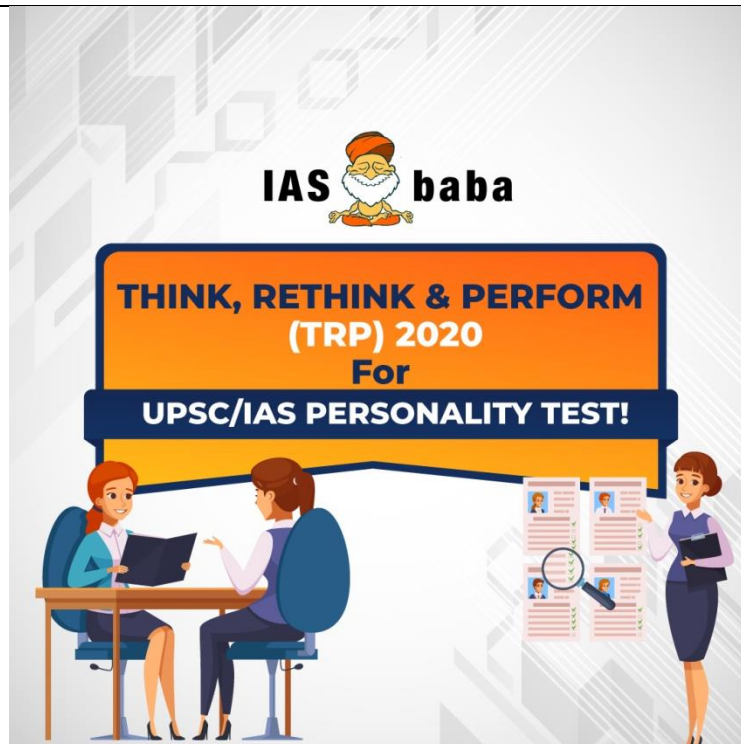
Advantages of using LiDAR

- **Data can be collected quickly and with high accuracy:** LiDAR is an airborne sensing technology which makes data collection fast and comes with extremely high accuracy as a result of the positional advantage.
- **Surface Data has a higher sample density:** LiDAR gives a much higher surface density compared to other methods of data collection such as photogrammetry. This improves results for some kinds of applications such as flood plain delineation.
- **Capable of collecting elevation data in a dense forest:** LiDAR technology is capable of collecting elevation data from a densely populated forest thanks to the high penetrative abilities. This means it can map even the densely forested areas.

- **Can be used day and night:** LiDAR technology can be used day and night thanks to the active illumination sensor. It is not affected by light variations such as darkness and light. This improves its efficiency.
- **It is not affected by extreme weather:** LiDAR technology is independent of extreme weather conditions such as extreme sunlight and other weather scenarios. This means that data can still be collected under these conditions and sent for analysis.
- Does not have any geometry distortions
- It can be integrated with other data sources
- It has minimum human dependence
- Surface data has a higher sample density
- Can be used to map inaccessible and featureless areas

Disadvantages of LiDAR

- High operating costs in some applications
- Ineffective during heavy rain or low hanging clouds because of the effects of refraction. However, the data collected can still be used for analysis.
- Degraded at high sun angles and reflections
- Unreliable for turbulent breaking waves as it will affect the reflection of pulses
- No International protocols
- Very large data sets which are difficult to interpret.
- The laser beams may affect human eye in cases where the beam is powerful
- Requires skilled data analysis techniques
- Low operating altitude of between 500-2000m



DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Simlipal Forest Fires

Context: The Simlipal forest reserve area frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions. A fire which started in the biosphere reserve area in February 2021 was raging for nearly a week that was finally brought under control.

About Simlipal Reserve

- **Location:** Similipal, which derives its name from 'Simul' (silk cotton) tree and is situated in the northern part of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district.
- **Protection:** It is a national park and a tiger reserve. Also, Similipal and the adjoining areas, comprising 5,569 sq km, was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India on June 22, 1994, and lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghats
- **Rich in Biodiversity:** Similipal is the abode of 94 species of orchids and about 3,000 species of plants, 12 species of amphibians, 29 species of reptiles, 264 species of birds and 42 species of mammals. Sal is the dominant tree species.
- **Human Settlements:** The transition zone of the reserve has 1,200 villages with a total population of about 4.5 lakh. Tribals constitute about 73 per cent of the population.

How fire prone is Simlipal forest?

- Generally, with the onset of summers and towards the end of autumn, the forest area remains vulnerable to forest fires.
- They are a recurrent **annual phenomenon**, but are also brought under control due to short span of precipitation. The months of January and February **witness rainfall** of 10.8 and 21 mm, respectively.
- This duration coincides with the **shedding of deciduous forests** in the forest areas. The fallen leaves are more vulnerable to catching fire and facilitate the spreading of these forest fires quickly over the entire forest area.

Causes of forest fires

- **Natural causes** such as lighting or even soaring temperatures can sometimes result in these fires. With dried leaves and tree trunks, even a spark can lead to a raging fire.
- **Poaching:** Most of the fires can be attributed to man-made factors. Instances of poaching and hunting wherein the poachers set a small patch of forest on fire to divert the wild animals can lead to such fires.
- **Collection of mahua flowers:** jungle areas are also set on fire by villagers to clear the dry leaves on the ground for easy collection of mahua flowers. These flowers are used to prepare a drink which is addictive in nature.
- **Traditional Practices:** Villagers also believe burning patches of sal trees will lead to better growth when planted again.
- **Climate Change:** This year, along with man-made factors, an advanced heat wave with the early onset of summer further deteriorated the condition.

How are these forest fires controlled and prevented?

Such fires are generally brought under control by natural rains. some of the methods to prevent fires include

- Forecasting fire-prone days
- Creating fire lines: The forest fire lines which are strips kept clear of vegetation, help break the forest into compartments to prevent fires from spreading.
- Clearing sites of dried biomass
- Crackdown on poachers
- Including community members to mitigate incidents of fire

Connecting the dots

- [Australia Wildfires](#)
- [Amazon rainforest fires](#)

Mandatory provision of Airbags

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Disaster Management

In news

- A Gazette notification has been issued regarding mandatory provision of an airbag for passengers seated on the front seat of a vehicle, next to the driver.
- **Ministry:** [Ministry of Road Transport and Highways](#)

Key takeaways

- Vehicles manufactured on and after the April 1, 2021 (new models) and August 31, 2021 (existing models) shall be fitted with airbags.
- This safety feature is based on suggestions of the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety.
- It is compulsory for all existing models in the M1 category — passenger motor vehicles having not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's.

Important value additions

Airbags

- An airbag pops up as a protective cushion between the passenger and the car's dashboard during a collision.
- In moderate to severe frontal crashes, front airbags are designed to inflate in order to prevent a person's head and chest from contacting hard structures in the vehicle.

Do you know?

- As per a recent World Bank report, India accounts for 10% of all road crash victims in the world.
 - Some of the other safety features in automobiles are:
 1. Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS)
 2. Speed Alert System
 3. Reverse Parking Sensors
 4. Driver and passenger seat belt reminder
 5. Manual override for central locking system
-

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

China's cyber eye and India

Context: Recently, a cyber intelligence firm claims Chinese government-linked hacking group has targeted the makers of the two vaccines currently used in [India's Covid-19 vaccination](#) programme.

Stone Panda & vaccines

- Chinese hacker group known as Stone Panda had “identified gaps and vulnerabilities in the IT infrastructure and supply chain software of Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India.
- These companies have developed Covaxin and Covishield, which are currently being used in the national vaccination campaign. They are also in the process of testing additional Covid-19 vaccines that could add value to efforts around the world.
- Increased Cyber Attacks:** Some Indian companies involved in Covid-19 vaccine development have told that they have noticed a nearly hundred-fold increase in cyberattack attempts by foreign entities from countries like China and Russia over the last six months.

Possible Reasons:

- One major factor is the border clash between the two countries in June 2020.
- These attempts could also be part of a long-term strategy - to test and lay the grounds for further operations in the future.
- They can also be used as diversionary tactic.
- When vaccine companies are targeted, the motive could be competition. The motivation behind Stone Panda's attack against SII and Bharat Biotech's IT systems was to extract the companies' intellectual property and gain a “competitive advantage over Indian pharmaceutical companies”.

A look at the various surveillance and hacking attempts, and their implications:

- Monitoring Digital Footprint in September 2020:** Amid [souring relations between India and China](#) last year, evidence emerged in September of a Chinese government-linked company's attempt to monitor the digital footprint of thousands of Indian citizens.
- Red Echo & ShadowPad: Malware threat in Power Infrastructure:** In November, the government was apprised of a malware threat in segments of its power infrastructure — malware that was last month linked to a Chinese state-backed firm.

Implications

- Maintenance of “information library”:** Those monitored during September 2020 included not only influential political and industrial figures, but bureaucrats in key positions, judges, scientists and academicians, journalists, actors, sportspersons, religious figures, activists etc.
- Database is liable for Tactical Manoeuvring:** The collection of such data does not violate any rules under the Information Technology Act of 2000, as nearly all of this data is available in the public domain. However, cybersecurity experts are of opinion that the information collected could be put together for tactical manoeuvring, targeting the individuals under surveillance or their institutions.
- Attack on Stability & Integrity of Power grid:** Red Echo's attempts to target the country's load despatch centres of the Power System Operation Corporation Ltd (POSOCO) through its ShadowPad malware, negatively impacts the smooth operation of the country's power grid.

Challenges

- India has not voluntarily made information about these attempts public. This could leave other companies and government bodies may be in the dark about their vulnerability to such attacks.
- There is also little clarity on the government's chain of command where cybersecurity issues are concerned, as different agencies deal with this issue. This makes it difficult to understand who all to approach in the event of such cyber threats.

Connecting the dots

- [Vaccine Nationalism](#)

[Maritime India Summit 2021](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Defence and Security

In news

- Indian Prime Minister recently inaugurated the '[Maritime India Summit 2021](#)'.

Key highlights of the summit

- The Maritime India Vision 2030 outlines the priorities of the Government.
- Capacity of major ports has increased from 870 million tonnes (2014) to 1550 million tonnes.
- Mega ports with world class infrastructure are being developed in Vadhavan, Paradip and Deendayal Port in Kandla.
- India aims to operationalise 23 waterways by 2030.
- India has 189 lighthouses across its vast coastline.
- It has formulated a programme for developing tourism in the land adjacent to 78 lighthouses.
- Steps are being taken to introduce urban water transport systems in key states and cities such as Kochi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Goa.
- To encourage domestic shipbuilding, approval has been given to the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy for Indian Shipyards.
- The [Ministry of Port Shipping and Waterways](#) has created a list of 400 investable projects having investment potential of \$ 31 billion.
- **The Sagar-Manthan:** Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre has been launched.
- It is an information system for enhancing maritime safety, search and rescue capabilities, security and marine environment protection.
- Government is in the process of installing solar and wind-based power systems at all the major ports across the country.
- It aims to increase usage of renewable energy to more than 60% of total energy by 2030 in three phases across Indian ports.

[Negev Light Machine Guns \(LMGs\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Defence and Security

In news

- The Indian Army will induct the first lot of new Light Machine Guns (LMG) from Israel.

Key takeaways

- The contracted Negev 7.62X51 mm LMG is a combat proven weapon.

- It is currently used by several countries around the globe.
- This LMG will greatly enhance the lethality and range of a soldier

Fuel cell-based Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Defence and Security

In news

- Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System was recently developed by [DRDO](#).
- It is an important milestone.

Key takeaways

- The system is being developed by Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) of DRDO.
- AIP has a force multiplier effect on lethality of a diesel electric submarine.
- It enhances the submerged endurance of the boat.
- AIP also has merits in performance compared to other technologies.
- AIP of NMRL is unique as the hydrogen is generated onboard.

Increase in arrests under UAPA Act

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Terrorism

In news

- According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), number of persons arrested under the UAPA ([Unlawful Activities \[Prevention\] Act](#)) in 2019 has increased by over 72% as compared to year 2015.

Key takeaways

- In 2019, the highest number of arrests were made in Uttar Pradesh (498), Manipur (386), Tamil Nadu (308), J & K (227) and Jharkhand (202).
- Only 2.2 % of cases registered under the UAPA between 2016-2019 ended in convictions by court.
- Cases under the UAPA are investigated by the State police and the National Investigation Agency (NIA).
- Under the UAPA, getting bail is rare and the investigating agency has up to 180 days to file a charge sheet

Lateral Surveillance: Cyber Crime Volunteers Program

Context:

- Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), launched the Cyber Crime Volunteers Program with the aim to allow citizens to register themselves as “Cyber Crime Volunteers” in the role of “Unlawful Content Flaggers”.
- The programme targets to rope in around 500 persons to flag unlawful content on the Internet.
- It will help law enforcement agencies in identifying, reporting and in the removal of illegal/unlawful online content.

- The State Nodal Officer of States/UTs also reserves the right to take legal action against the Volunteer, in case of violation of terms and conditions of the Program.

Lateral Surveillance

- This form of surveillance, which enables citizens to “watch over” one another is called lateral surveillance.
- While surveillance of any kind shows an imbalance of power between the person who surveils, and the one under surveillance, lateral surveillance specifically ensures that the imbalance of power no longer exists.

Concern

- **Cause for Lateral Surveillance:** Wherever the state identifies that it “cannot be everywhere”, it deploys this mechanism. The problem arises when it is organised and state-sponsored.
- **Hurts Privacy:** Lateral surveillance is used to further emotional objectives such as community building and strengthening relationships with neighbours where emotional and social factors act as a driving force, thus creating a situation where privacy may be undermined for the betterment of the community.
- **Social Discriminatory:** Surveillance technologies not only act as a tool for social control but also as a tool for social exclusion. Lateral surveillance thus makes it easier to discriminate between those who conform to the social norms of the majority.
- **Culture of Distrust:** State-sponsored lateral surveillance is harmful as it creates a culture of ‘hate’, ‘fear’ and ‘constant suspicion’ against an ‘enemy’. This culture places a duty on people to ‘keep an eye out’ for ‘their own safety’ and this heightens the fear of crime in society.
- **Widen Faultlines in Society:** Such perceived threats have a tendency to increase intolerance, prejudice, xenophobia and casteism in our society, while also violating the fundamental right to privacy, and, consequently, the expression of free speech and behaviour.

Connecting the dots

- [New IT Rules](#)

Milan-2T

Part of: GS Prelims and GS – III – Defence and Security

In news

- Acquisition Wing of Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed a contract with Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU) Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for the supply of MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs) to the Indian Army

Key takeaways

- The Milan-2T is a Tandem Warhead ATGM with a range of 1,850 metres, produced by BDL under license from MBDA Missile Systems, France.
- These missiles can be fired from the ground as well as vehicle-based launchers
- These can also be deployed in Anti-Tank Role for both offensive & defensive tasks.
- Induction of these missiles will further enhance the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces which will be completed in three years.
- It is a step in achieving the goal of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ in the defense sector.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Purnagiri Temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purnagiri Temple was recently in news. Tanakpur (Uttarakhand)-Delhi Junction Special train was recently flagged off. Pilgrims visiting Purnagiri temple will be benefitted with improved connectivity. On the Annapurna range, the temple organises the Purnagiri Mela in Uttarakhand on Navratri. The temple is situated at a distance of 20Km from Tanakpur, on the right bank of the river Kali in Champawat, Uttarakhand. Purnairi Devi temple is one of the 108 Siddha Peeths.
2. National Science Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Science Day is celebrated on 28th of February. It is celebrated to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect'. On this day, Physicist CV Raman announced the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930. The day is aimed at spreading the message of the importance of science and its application in human life. Theme: 'Future of Science and Technology and Innovation: Impact on Education Skills and Work'.
3. Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) will perform at an airshow at the Galle Face in Colombo from March 3 to 5 as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF). The team was formed in 1996 with Kiran Mk-II aircraft. SKAT team was resurrected in 2015 with the Hawk advanced jet trainers. The SKAT team, also known as 52 Squadron or The Sharks, is based in Bidar.
4. St. George's Orthodox Church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The centuries-old St. George's Orthodox Church is located at Cheppad, Kerala It is now set to become a Centrally-protected monument of national importance with Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recognition. The church is one of the rarest in Kerala. It has traditional Kerala church architectural pattern with rare and beautiful mural paintings on the walls of the altar. These paintings blend Persian and Kerala mural art styles,
5. Exercise Desert Flag VI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian Air Force is participating for the first time in Exercise Desert Flag

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It involves air forces of UAE, USA, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Bahrain. • It is an annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise. • Hosted by: United Arab Emirates Air Force. • The IAF is participating with six Su-30 MKI, two C-17 and one IL-78 tanker aircrafts. • Aim: To provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.
6. INS Karanj	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Navy's third stealth Scorpene class Submarine INS Karanj has been commissioned at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai. • The Scorpene Submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world. • More deadly and stealthier than their predecessors, these submarines are equipped with potent weapons and sensors to neutralise any threat above or below the sea surface.
7. Dustlik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The India – Uzbekistan joint military exercise "DUSTLIK II" commenced in Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet (Uttarakhand). • Both contingents will be sharing their expertise and skills in the field of counter terrorist operations in mountainous/rural/urban scenario under UN mandate. • This is the Second Edition of annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies.
8. Baralacha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bara-lacha la is also known as Bara-lacha Pass. • It is a high mountain pass in Zaskar Range. • It connects Lahaul district in Himachal Pradesh to Leh district in Ladakh. • It is situated along the Leh–Manali Highway. • The pass also acts as a water-divide between the Bhaga river and the Yunam river. • The Bhaga river, a tributary of the Chenab river, originates from Surya taal lake.
9. Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Committee has been formed to commemorate 75 years of India's independence • The committee is called Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav. • 5 pillars have been decided for the celebration of the 75 years. • 5 Pillars: Freedom Struggle, Ideas at 75, Achievements at 75, Actions at 75 and Resolve at 75.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of the National Committee: Governors, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers, political leaders, scientists, officials, media personalities, spiritual Leaders and eminent persons from other walks of life.
10. Gandhi Peace Prize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gandhi Peace Prize for the Year 2019 and 2020 were announced. The Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019: (Late) His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman. Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by Government of India since 1995 The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex. The Jury for Gandhi Peace Prize is chaired by Prime Minister ,and comprises of two ex-officio members, the Chief Justice of India and Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha. The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.
11. Indo-Korean Friendship Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's First Indo-Korean Friendship Park was jointly inaugurated by Republic of Korea and India at Delhi Cantonment. It is in Delhi Cantonment. The park is significant for it being a symbol of strong India-South Korea friendly relations. It is also a monument to India's contributions as part of 21 countries which participated in Korean war 1950-53, under the aegis of the UN. One of the pillars in the park encompasses Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's narration of Korea as "The Lamp of the East" which was published in Korean daily "Dong-A-Ilbo" in 1929.
12. Vajra Prahar 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 11th edition of Indo-US Joint Special Forces Exercise VAJRA PRAHAR was conducted recently at Bakloh, HP The joint exercise is conducted alternatively between India and the United States. Objective: To share the best practices and experiences in areas such as joint mission planning and operational tactics and to improve interoperability between the Special Forces

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 National Science Day is celebrated to commemorate the discovery of which of the following?

- a) Discovery of zero
- b) Raman effect
- c) Pythagoras theorem
- d) Thorium reserves in India

Q.2 GAVI vaccine alliance is a programme between which of the following countries?

- a) Indian and USA
- b) USA and Russia
- c) UK and USA
- d) None of the above

Q.3 Amazonia-1 satellite recently launched by ISRO through PSLV-C51 rocket belongs to which of the following country?

- a) China
- b) Japan
- c) UAE
- d) Brazil

Q.4 FATF was founded to tackle which of the following?

- a) Money laundering
- b) Terror financing
- c) Illegal trade of exotic species
- d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.5 Consider the following statements regarding bond yields:

1. A fall in interest rates makes bond prices rise, and bond yields fall.
2. Rising interest rates cause bond prices to fall, and bond yields to rise.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6 The Committee for Development Policy is a subsidiary body of which of the following?

- a) United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
- b) United Nations Economic and Social Council
- c) World Health Organisation
- d) International Monetary Fund

Q.7 AOs is the major tribe of which of the following state?

- a) Nagaland
- b) Manipur
- c) Mizoram
- d) Meghalaya

Q.8 Consider the following statements regarding Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC) System:

1. Mumbai has become the first state to have this system.
2. It can play an important role in preventing train accidents and reducing delays through effective communication.

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.9 Sugamya Bharat App is launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Power
- b) Ministry of Environment
- c) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

d) Ministry of Minority affairs

Q.10 Consider the following statements regarding BS-VI:

1. The BS-VI grade fuel has 10 ppm sulphur.
2. BS VI can bring Particulate Matter in diesel cars down by 80%.
3. On-board diagnostics (OBD) is mandatory for all vehicles under BS-VI.

Which of the above are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.11 India's first Engineering Research & Development (ER&D) Policy was launched recently by:

- a) Gujarat
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Karnataka
- d) Telangana

Q.12 PRASHAD Scheme is associated with which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Power
- d) Ministry of Tourism

Q.13 What is the objective of PRASHAD Scheme?

- a) Integrated development of identified rural schools
- b) Integrated development of identified National highways
- c) Integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations
- d) Integrated development of identified railway stations

Q.14 Nag River was in news recently. It flows through which of the following?

- a) Nagpur
- b) Nagaland
- c) Uttarakhand

d) Ahmedabad

Q.15 Where is World Customs Organization (WCO) headquartered?

- a) Brussels
- b) Amsterdam
- c) New York
- d) New Delhi

Q.16 Consider the following statements regarding Himalayan serow:

1. Its IUCN Status is Near threatened.
2. It is listed in CITES Appendix I.

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.17 Horticulture is concerned with the cultivation of which of the following?

- a) Bees
- b) Silk worms
- c) Flowering and ornamental plants only
- d) Fruits, vegetables, Flowering and ornamental plants

Q.18 Ease of Living Index 2020 is released by which of the following?

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- d) Ministry of MEMSs

Q.19 Which of the following is/are covered under Ministry of AYUSH?

1. Ayurveda
2. Yoga & Naturopathy
3. Unani
4. Siddha
5. Homoeopathy
6. Allopathy

Select the correct code:

- a) 2,3,4 and 5 only
- b) 2, 3, 5 and 6 only
- c) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Q.20 Which of the following does not fall into Nordic region?

- a) Denmark
- b) Norway
- c) Sweden
- d) None of the above

Q.21 India's first Transgender community desk was inaugurated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Madhya Pradesh
- b) Telangana
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Gujarat

Q.22 Consider the following statements regarding Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme

1. This scheme is a part of the recommendation of the National Agroforestry Policy 2014.
2. India is the first country to have such a comprehensive policy

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23 Consider the following statements regarding Central Silk Board (CSB)

1. It is an autonomous body.
2. It functions under Ministry of Agriculture.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24 Consider the following safety features:

1. Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS)
2. Speed Alert System
3. Reverse Parking Sensors
4. Manual override for central locking system

These are associated with which of the following?

- a) Aircrafts
- b) Seaplanes
- c) Automobiles
- d) Ships

Q.25 Singorgarh Fort was recently in news. It is situated in?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Gujarat
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Q.26 Which among the following is the most unique feature of Dholavira site of the Indus Valley Civilization?

- a) Its cities were horizontally divided in multiple parts
- b) Its cities were unevenly divided
- c) Its cities were divided into 3 parts
- d) None of these

Q.27 Which of the following is the prime objective of UDAN scheme?

- a) To make flights run on time.
- b) To increase number of international flights from India
- c) To make flights affordable for common man
- d) To provide hygienic and affordable food to flight passengers.

Q.28 SATAT scheme has been launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of MSMEs
- b) Ministry of Petroleum
- c) Ministry of textiles
- d) Ministry of Education

Q.29 Devara Kaadu, recently in news, is associated with which of the following?

- a) Sacred groves
- b) Sacred river
- c) Sacred tribe
- d) Sacred marriage

Q.30 Indira Sawhney verdict is associated with which of the following?

- a) Fundamental rights
- b) Basic structure of the Constitution
- c) Emergency provisions
- d) 50% reservation in jobs and education

Q.31 Consider the following challenges faced by consumers of electric vehicles:

1. High interest rates
2. High insurance rates
3. Low loan-to-value ratios.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) All of the above

Q.32 Consider the following statements regarding Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System:

1. It is developed by DRDO.
2. Hydrogen generated onboard makes AIP unique.

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.33 Which of the following Ministry is responsible for KUSUM scheme?

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Agriculture
- d) Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE).

Q.34 Maitri Setu bridge has been built between which of the following countries?

- a) India and nepal
- b) India and Myanmar
- c) Bhutan and Nepal
- d) India and Bangladesh

Q.35 Feni river flows between which of the following?

- a) Tripura and Mizoram
- b) Tripura and Bangladesh
- c) Tripura and Nagaland
- d) Tripura and Meghalaya

Q.36 Consider the following statements regarding recently amended licensing conditions for telecom companies:

1. Defence and national security are new parameters for purchasing trusted telecom products
2. The list of products telecom companies are allowed to use are approved by the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC).

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.37 Which of the following is not a member of QUAD

- a) Japan
- b) USA
- c) India Both 1 and 2
- d) China

Q.38 Bamiyan Valley is situated in which of the following country?

- a) India
- b) Afghanistan
- c) Canada

d) Brazil

Q.39 Consider the following statements regarding Bamiyan Buddhas:

1. They are great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
2. UNESCO included their remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003

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.40 Which of the following article deals with State Election Commission?

- a) Article 243K
- b) Article 240K
- c) Article 244K
- d) Article 217

Q.41 Jhuran formation is found in which of the following state of India?

- a) Odisha
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Assam
- d) Gujarat

Q.42 Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is located in :

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Andhra Pradesh
- d) Meghalaya

Q.43 Citizens can now get the water quality in their taps tested at reasonable rates, as part of the Water Quality Testing Framework, under which of the following?

- a) Swacchh Bharat Abhiyan
- b) Jal Jeevan Mission

c) Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

d) Aatmanirbhar Bharat

Q.44 Bhaona is a traditional form of entertainment, with religious messages. It is prevalent in which of the following state of India?

- a) Odisha
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Assam
- d) Gujarat

Q.45 Project Re-HAB is launched by which of the following?

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) NITI Aayog
- c) Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)
- d) ISRO

Q.46 Consider the following statements regarding Great Indian Bustard:

1. Its population is mostly confined to Gujarat and Maharashtra.
2. It is listed in critically endangered category of IUCN

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.47 Consider the following statements regarding DigiLocker:

1. It is a flagship initiative of Ministry of Science and Technology.
2. The issued documents in DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents.

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.48 Comoros archipelago is situated in which of the following Ocean?

- a) Indian Ocean
- b) Atlantic Ocean
- c) Pacific Ocean
- d) Arctic Ocean

Q.49 According to IQ Air's Global air pollution Report, which of the following country has the most polluted cities in the top 15?

- a) China
- b) India
- c) Bangladesh
- d) Pakistan

Q.50 Consider the following statements regarding recently passed the insurance Amendment Bill 2021:

1. It increases the maximum foreign investment allowed in an insurance company from 49 % to 100%.
2. The act allows for investors to hold up to 49% of the capital in an insurance company that must be owned and controlled by an Indian entity

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.51 Consider the following statements regarding vehicle scrapping policy:

1. It provides for fitness test after the completion of 20 years in the case of commercial vehicles and 15 years in the case of private vehicles
2. Any vehicle that fails the fitness test may be declared as an end of life vehicle

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.52 Consider the following statements regarding NewSpace India Limited:

1. It aims to scale up industry participation in Indian space programmes.
2. It comes under administrative control of ISRO.

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.53 Which of the following are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

1. Great Andamanese
2. Onge
3. Jarawa
4. Shompens
5. Sentinelese

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2, 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q.54 Consider the following statements regarding Helium gas:

1. It is an inert gas.
2. India's Rajmahal volcanic basin in Rajasthan is the storehouse of helium trapped for billions of 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.55 Consider the following statements regarding Gram Ujala programme:

1. Each household will get up to 10 LEDs.

2. In the first phase, LED bulbs will be distributed in states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat

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.56 What other viruses belong to the coronavirus family?

- a) SARS and HIV
- b) MERS and influenza
- c) SARS and MERS
- d) None of the above

Q.57 Consider the following statements:

- 1. Foreign trade constitutes 45% of India's GDP with most export promotion efforts driven by the Centre.
- 2. State and District Export Promotion Committees (SEPC) are being created to grow exports from each district.

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.58 United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has entered into a partnership with which of the following country to support India's flagship programme, Jal Jeevan Mission in Uttar Pradesh?

- a) USA
- b) Israel
- c) France
- d) Denmark

Q.59 Consider the following statements:

- 1. Xorai is a conical hat made of bamboo and covered with dried tokou

2. Jaapi is made of bell-metal. It essentially is a tray with a stand at the bottom, with or without a cover.

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.60 Uighurs, often seen in news, belong to which of the following Country?

- a) Hong Kong
- b) Japan
- c) Turkey
- d) China

Q.61 Consider the following statements regarding initiatives under National Health Mission:

- 1. Social Awareness and Actions to Neutralize Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS) was launched to accelerate action to reduce deaths due to childhood pneumonia.
- 2. Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN) was launched to provide assured, dignified, respectful and quality healthcare at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services.

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.62 The causative agent of tuberculosis is:

- a) Virus
- b) Bacterium
- c) Malnutrition
- d) Protozoan

Q.63 Consider the following statements:

1. Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan.
2. World Bank was the standing guarantee for any dispute resolution.

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.64 Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution deals with which of the following?

- a) administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- b) administration of tribal areas in parts of India
- c) Emoluments of Chief Justice of India
- d) Anti-defection law

Q.65 Index Monitoring Cell (IMC) was set up by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Environment
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- d) Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Q.66 Consider the following Statements regarding appointment of Chief Justice of India (CJI):

1. Law Minister has to seek recommendation of the outgoing CJI for appointment of new CJI
2. Indian Constitution lays down complete procedure for appointment of CJI.

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.67 Which of the following is the southernmost tip of Africa?

- a) Cape of Good Hope
- b) Cape Agulhas
- c) Cape Hangklip

- d) Cape Point

Q.68 Tigray region, often seen in news, belongs to which of the following country?

- a) Eritrea
- b) Ethiopia
- c) Sudan
- d) Libya

Q.69 Tribal TB initiative was launched recently by which of the following?

- a) Ministry of Health
- b) Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- c) Ministry of Science and technology
- d) Ministry of Economy

Q.70 Consider the following statements regarding NISAR, which was recently in news:

1. It will be jointly developed by ISRO and Japanese space agency, JAXA
2. It will detect movements of Earth's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.

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.71 Consider the following statements:

1. Newly discovered *Hypnea Indica* and *Hypnea Bullata* grow in the intertidal regions of the coast.
2. The genus *Hypnea* consists of calcareous, erect, branched red seaweeds.

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.72 Heart of Asia - Istanbul process is an initiative of which of the following countries?

- a) Afghanistan and Tajikistan
- b) Afghanistan and India
- c) Turkey and India
- d) Afghanistan and Turkey

Q.73 Resolution 46/L1, recently seen in news, is associated with which of the following?

- a) Human Rights abuse in Sri Lanka
- b) Myanmar coup
- c) Saudi Arabia's resolution against Houthis
- d) United Nations' resolution to fight covid-19

Q.74 Chhatrasal convention centre was recently inaugurated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Madhya Pradesh
- b) Uttar Pradesh
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Chhattisgarh

Q.75 Consider the following statements regarding Namami Gange:

- 1. It aims at providing comprehensive and sustainable solutions for a cleaner

ecosystem along the stretch of towns and villages on the Ganga stem.

- 2. It is being implemented by NITI Aayog.

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.76 Hybrid Annuity Model is a mix of which of the PPP models:

- 1. EPC – Engineering Procurement and Construction
- 2. BOT – Build Operate Transfer
- 3. DBFO – Design Build Finance Operate
- 4. BOO – Build Own Operate

Select the correct answer from codes given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1,2 and 3 Only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1 and 4 only

Q.77 Nacaduba Sinhala Ramaswamii Sadasivan, a new butterfly species, recently in news, was found in which of the following region of India?

- a) Eastern Ghats
- b) Western Ghats
- c) Himalayas
- d) North East

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4	B	24	C	44	D	64	A
5	C	25	D	45	A	65	D
6	B	26	C	46	B	66	A
7	A	27	C	47	D	67	B
8	C	28	B	48	B	68	B
9	C	29	A	49	B	69	A
10	D	30	D	50	B	70	B
11	C	31	D	51	B	71	C
12	D	32	C	52	A	72	D
13	C	33	D	53	D	73	A
14	A	34	D	54	A	74	A
15	A	35	B	55	B	75	A
16	B	36	C	56	C	76	A
17	D	37	D	57	C	77	B
18	C	38	B	58	D		
19	C	39	C	59	D		
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