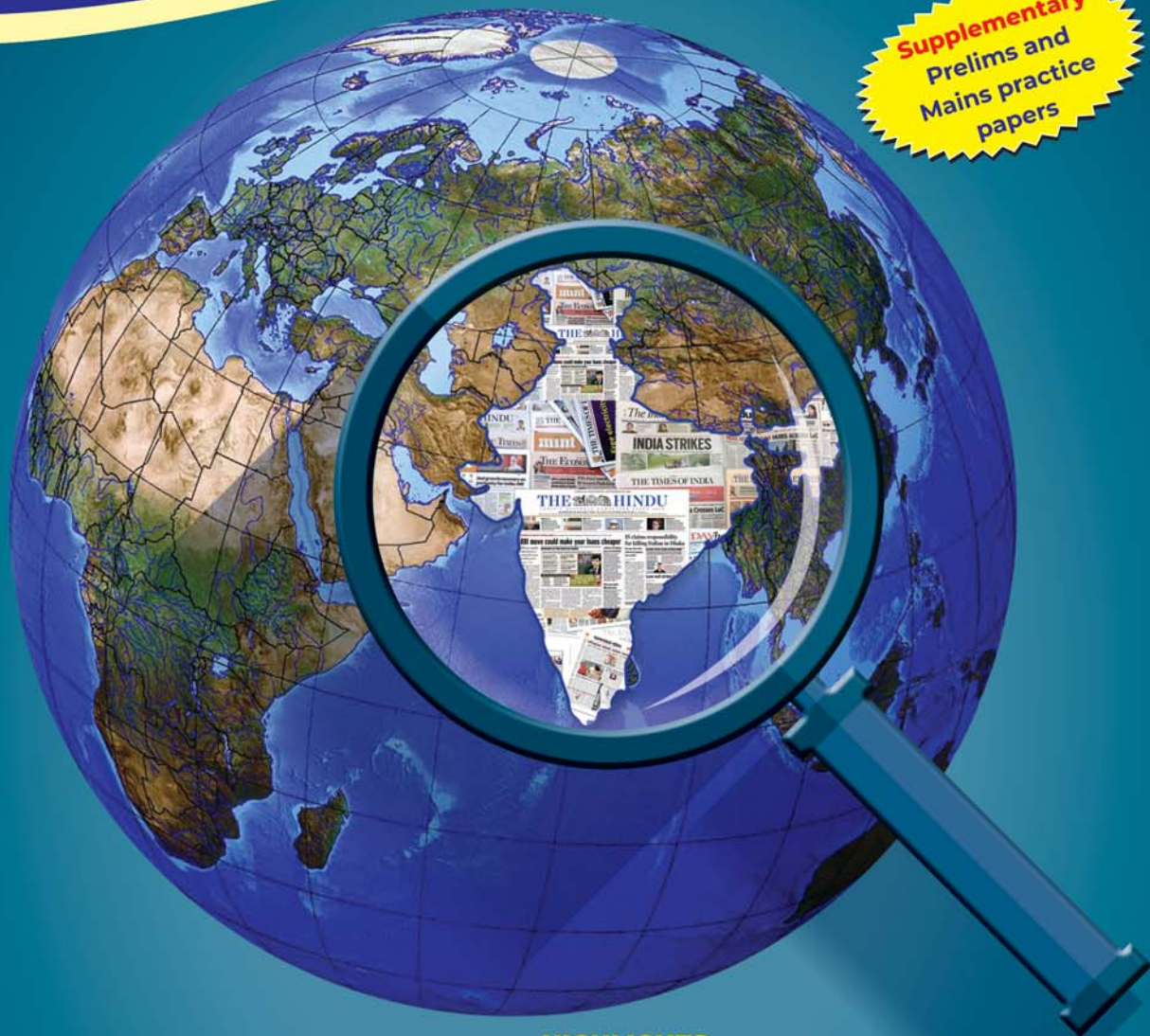


**MARCH 2021**

**Supplementary**  
Prelims and  
Mains practice  
papers



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## Comprehensive NEWS Analysis

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### **Editor-in-Chief**

Srikanth Vinnakota

### **Editor**

B. James Jayaraj

### **Sub- editors**

A. Deepthi

B. Naveen

B. Suneel Kumar

Ch. Pradeep Kumar

### **Design Team**

M. Sathvik

B. Roja

P. Roja

T. Venkatesh

B. Nitesh



### **Analog IAS Publications**

1-2-288/32, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor,  
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### **Dear Students,**

As part of my academic career I have had the good fortune of meeting some of the most amazing and highly motivated students. Of Course they had different aspirations in life. Some of them wanted to be Civil Servants and some wanted to be Mathematicians just to name a few vocations (there are many more). But what all of them had in common was their quest for knowledge. But as times change and young blood flows in, a plethora of changes took place in the learning ecosystem too. In this time and age of the digital uprising a new generation is taking over the reigns from the present, namely "The Millennials".



**Srikanth Vinnakota**  
Editor-in-Chief

Now coming to "The Millennials". They are a different brand altogether. Apart from their "out-of-the-box" career choices what seems interesting to me is the breath of fresh air they bring into all the conventional employment. I am truly inspired by their grit and determination in learning something new altogether like picking up a new language or playing an instrument or staying updated on day to day events happening somewhere else in the world. Also I believe that this attitude is needed these days because finding formal employment through regular means is getting difficult day by day because of the kind of competition that is there for such jobs. In that case having the knowledge of diverse topics would be "the feather in the hat" if not more to be able to not just secure employment for self but to be able to give employment to others as well. The aim of our magazine 'Samiksha' is to equip the reader with this kind of information which is diverse, authentic and useful not only in the present day but also for the future.

Our publishing team which is a dynamic amalgamation of young and the experienced, puts together all the important happening of a month for you. The information is collected from authentic sources and the views expressed are carefully curated keeping in view the realities of our day and age. We pay utmost attention to the fact that our reader can be a college going student or a Civil Services Aspirant or for the matter of fact any other person who is just curious. We try our best to give a comprehensive 360 Degree view of the given topic and cover it in all dimensions possible. We deem it as our privilege to be able to serve the young of our society. In the words of Desiderius Erasmus; "The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth."

*I take your leave and wish you happy reading.*



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# The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process

External Affairs Minister of India attended the 9th Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

- ★ He called for a “double peace”— which means peace within Afghanistan and peace around Afghanistan and also said India supports the Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN).

## Key Points

- ★ The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP):
  - ❑ It was founded in November, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.
  - ❑ It provides a platform for sincere and results-oriented regional cooperation by placing Afghanistan at its center, in recognition of the fact that a secure and stable Afghanistan is vital to the prosperity of the Heart of Asia region.
  - ❑ This platform was established to address the shared challenges and interests of

Afghanistan and its neighbors and regional partners.

- ❑ The Heart of Asia comprises 15 participating countries, 17 supporting countries, and 12 supporting regional and international organizations.
- ★ India is a participating country.
  - ❑ Since its inception the process has become a cardinal element in regional cooperation and has created a platform for Afghanistan’s near and extended neighbors, international supporters and organizations to engage in constructive dialogue and to address the existing and emerging regional challenges through regional cooperation with Afghanistan at its core.

## Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN):

- ❑ It refers to the talks between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents with the goal of bringing

an end to nearly two decades of a conflict that has laid waste to the country and killed tens of thousands of combatants and civilians.

- ❑ The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.
- ❑ The negotiations will cover a variety of issues, including the rights of women, free speech, and changes to the country’s constitution.
- ❑ The talks would also lay out the fate of tens of thousands of Taliban fighters as well as the heavily armed militias belonging to Afghanistan’s warlords who have amassed wealth and power since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001.

## Regional Connectivity

### Initiatives:

- During the conference, the Afghanistan President appreciated the number of regional connectivity initiatives including the Chabahar port project, as well as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline.

### India's Stand:

- India believes any peace process must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, has to respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and preserve the progress made in the

establishment of a democratic Islamic Republic in Afghanistan.

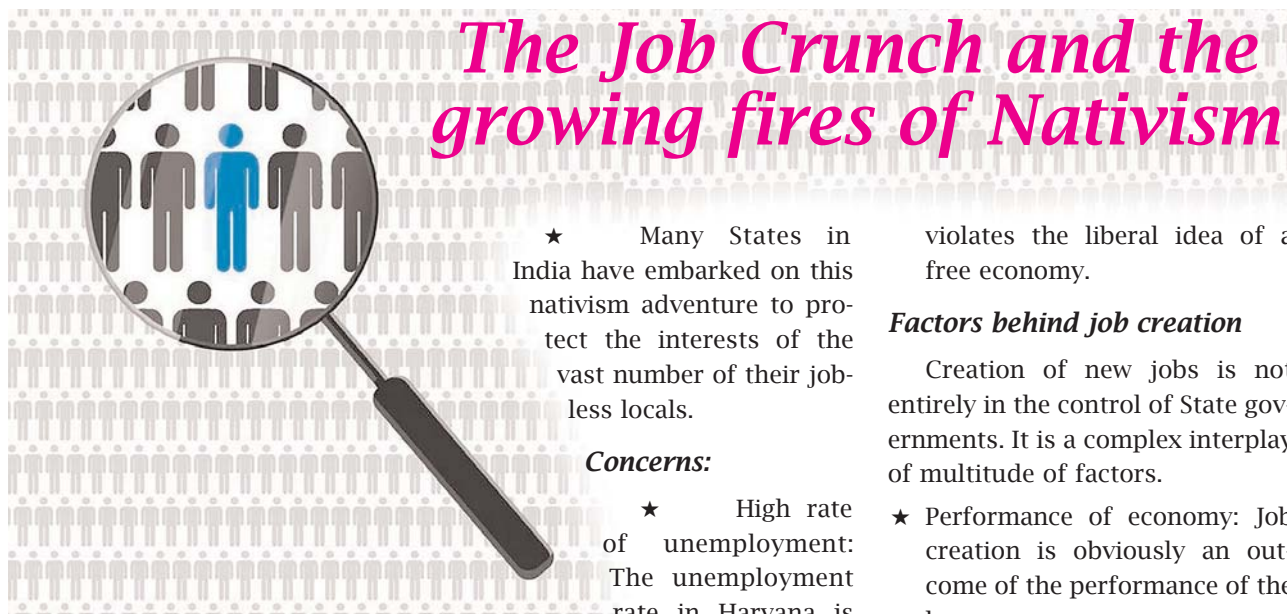
- The interests of minorities, women and vulnerable sections of society must be preserved and the issue of violence across the country and its neighbourhood has to be effectively addressed.

### TAPI Pipeline

- ★ TAPI Pipeline, also called Peace pipeline, is a 1,814km natural gas pipeline that originates from Turkmenistan and passes through Afghanistan and Pakistan to reach India.
- ★ It aims to monetise Turkmenistan's gas reserves and supply

them to neighbouring countries to promote the use of natural gas and improve energy security.

- ★ The project is being developed by TAPI Pipeline Company (TPCL), a consortium established by four individual state-owned gas companies Turkmengaz (Turkmenistan), Afghan Gas (Afghanistan), Interstate Gas Service (Pakistan), and Gas Authority of India and Indian Oil (India).
- ★ The four countries signed an Inter Government Agreement (IGA) and Gas Pipeline Framework Agreements (GPFA) in December 2010 for the development of the pipeline.



## The Job Crunch and the growing fires of Nativism

- ★ Many States in India have embarked on this nativism adventure to protect the interests of the vast number of their jobless locals.

### Concerns:

- ★ High rate of unemployment: The unemployment rate in Haryana is the highest of all States in India, as per data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).
- ★ World history warns us that when such a vast majority of adults are jobless, it inevitably leads to social revolutions and political upheavals.
- ★ Free market principle: Reservation of jobs for locals

violates the liberal idea of a free economy.

### Factors behind job creation

Creation of new jobs is not entirely in the control of State governments. It is a complex interplay of multitude of factors.

- ★ Performance of economy: Job creation is obviously an outcome of the performance of the larger economy.
- It needs abundant high quality skilled and unskilled labour, land at affordable prices, uninterrupted supply of electricity, water and other such 'ease of business' facilities for its expansion.
- ★ Critical factors: Fiscal autonomy

The Haryana government has recently passed legislation that mandates companies in Haryana to provide jobs to local Haryanvis first, before hiring people from outside the State.

- ★ The cabinet of the government of Jharkhand approved similar legislation to reserve jobs for Jharkhand residents.



- ❑ After the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), State governments in India have lost their fiscal autonomy and have no powers to provide any tax concessions to businesses.
- ❑ In America, States compete against each other vigorously using tax concessions and land offers to bring new jobs to their States.
- ❑ The most critical factor in the choice of a location for a large business is what economists term as the 'agglomeration effect'.
- ❑ It is the ecosystem of supply chain, talent, good living conditions and so on.
- ❑ A State with an already well-established network of suppliers, people, schools, etc. are at a greater advantage to attract even more business-

es than the States that are left behind.

- ★ Limited powers of state: The Chief Minister of a State in India has limited control over the management of the larger economy and thereby, attract new investors and businesses who can create jobs.
  - ❑ State governments also have the ability to provide land at affordable prices or for free to attract investments.
  - ❑ The availability of skilled local labour is a function of many decades of social progress of the State.
- ★ Inter-state disparities
  - ❑ The three richest large States (Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) are three times richer than the three poorest large States (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), in per-

capita income, compared to 1.4 times in 1970.

- ❑ This gap between the richer and poorer States in India is only widening rapidly due to the agglomeration impact of modern economic development paradigms.
- ★ Subnationalism: Subnationalism is the policy of asserting the interest of one's own state/region/province, as separate from the interest of the nation and the common interest of all other states/ regions/ provinces.
  - ❑ All the above discussed factors propagate nativistic sub-nationalism among the various States of India.

The economic playing fields for the various States should be levelled and much greater fiscal freedom be provided to the States. Then the states will be able to create jobs


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## Right to Bail

The Supreme Court asked judges to protect personal liberty and the right of ordinary people to bail.

### **Key takeaways from the SC judgement:**

- ★ Undertrials: Common citizens without the means or resources to move the High Courts or the Supreme Court were languishing in jails as undertrials.
  - ❑ Undertrials remained behind bars while their bail applications were lobbed from one rung of courts to another.
  - ❑ Courts were the “first line of defence”- against the deprivation of citizens’ personal liberty.
- ★ Importance of bail: It is through the instrumentality of bail that our criminal justice system’s primordial interest in preserving the presumption of

innocence finds its most eloquent expression.

- ❑ The primary purpose of bail is to ensure the accused person’s compliance with investigation, and subsequent presence at the trial if they are released after arrest.
- ❑ The refusal to grant bail deprives individuals of liberty by confining them in jails without trial and conviction.
- ★ Pending bail pleas: The SC highlighted that 91,568 bail pleas were pending in High Courts, while 1.96 lakh bail applications were pending in the district courts.
- ★ Importance of the district judiciary: The district judiciary was only “subordinate”- in hierarchy.
  - ❑ The district judiciary must be alive to the situation as it prevails on the ground - in the jails and police stations where human dignity has no

protector.

- ★ Liberty survives by
  - ❑ the vigilance of her citizens and the media and
  - ❑ in courts alive to the rule of [and not by] law.
  - ❑ Liberty is a casualty when one of these components is working improperly.
- ★ Arnab Goswami case: It declared that the “doors of the Supreme Court cannot be closed to a citizen who is able to establish prima facie that the instrumentality of the State is being weaponised for using the force of criminal law.
  - ❑ It said the High Court did not take into account the “disconnect between the FIR and the provisions of Section 306 IPC [abetment to suicide]”-.
  - ❑ Duty of High Court: The High Court should not foreclose itself from the exercise of the power when a citizen has been arbitrarily deprived of their personal



liberty in an excess of State power.

### ***Undertrials in India-NCRB report***

- ★ While undertrials in Indian prisons increased from 67 per cent in 2015 to 69 per cent in 2019, capacity in jails increased by 1.9 per cent during this period, according to 2017 data on jails released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).
- ★ It says there are more than 3 lakh cases pending investigations for more than one year.
- ★ The report says in more than 40% of cases with fast-track courts, these courts have taken more than three years to finish the trial.
- ★ Of the 38,000-odd cases that fast-track courts completed in 2017, over 4,500 cases had been running for 5-10 years.
- ★ In only around 11,500 cases was the trial completed within one year.
- ★ In courts as a whole, 2,71,779 cases were pending trial at the end of 2017.

### ***Concerns:***

The refusal to grant bail deprives individuals of liberty by confining them in jails without trial and conviction

- ★ Judicial discretion
  - ❑ The power to grant bail is a discretionary power vested in judges and it is meant to be exercised liberally.
  - ❑ Subordinate courts routinely reject bail for specific offences like minor excise offences.
- ★ Marginalised communities: Two-thirds of India's prison population comprise undertri-

als from Dalit, Adivasi and Other Backward Classes communities, often accused of minor offences.

- ★ Pendency of bails: The accused persons are required to approach the High Court or the Supreme Court in case of rejection by the subordinate courts. Consequently, most accused persons remain incarcerated as undertrials for extended periods of time.
  - ❑ The pendency of bail applications has particularly increased during the pandemic "" both due to the shutting down of courts and the exacerbation of arrests for minor offences by the police.
- ★ **High bail amounts:**
  - ❑ A bail typically requires sureties to furnish a bond for some property valued at the amount determined by the concerned judge.
  - ❑ The bail amount in subordinate courts, even for petty offences punishable by less than three years, is a minimum of ₹10,000. In cases of bail before the High Courts and the Supreme Court, this amount usually exceeds ₹130,000.
  - ❑ This is a form of injustice when a majority of citizens are landless with meagre incomes.
  - ❑ Official data from the Socio-Economic Caste Census pegs rural landlessness at 57%.
  - ❑ Therefore, those without assets, even when granted bail, end up languishing in jails or incur debt by paying others to stand as fake

sureties to secure their freedom.

- ❑ A bogey of middlemen has also emerged due to these high bail amounts.

### ★ Preposterous Bail conditions

- ❑ Bail indiscretions by judges of lower courts and High Courts have passed by with little accountability or oversight by the apex court.
- ❑ Courts introspect little about standards of liberty, reasonableness and proportionality when deciding bail matters.

### ***Way forward:***

Bail reform must begin by addressing two key facets of the criminal justice system: judicial discretion and monetary surety bonds.

- ★ In the 1978 Supreme Court case of *Moti Ram v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, the court identified the issue of unreasonably high sureties as a human rights problem.
  - ❑ The court then suggested that surety amounts be determined by considering relevant variables such as the socio-economic location of the accused person.
- ★ Addressing judicial discretion: A report by the Centre for Law and Policy Research recommends the creation of checklists to address individual discretion while deciding bail applications.
- ★ The grant of bail on a personal bond without sureties i.e., release on one's own guarantee without any monetary amounts, although permissible

in law, is rare. It should be in frequent practice

## India's Education Policies

The union cabinet recently approved the new National Education Policy, making way for large scale, transformational reforms in both school and higher education sectors.

### More on News:

- ★ The policy marks the fourth major policy initiative in education since Independence and is the first education policy of the 21st century and replaces the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986.
- ★ In June 2017 a 'Committee for the Draft National Education Policy' was constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. K. Kasturirangan, which submitted the Draft National Education Policy, 2019.

### Background: Evolution of education system in India

- ★ Historically, the system of education evolved in the provinces.
  - ❑ During British period, the Central Advisory Board of Education was created to coordinate regional responses to common issues.
  - ❑ The 'advisory' character of this administrative mechanism meant that the Board served mainly as a discussion forum.
- ★ University Education Commission (1948-49): After independence, the first significant step taken by the Government of India in the field of education was the appointment of the University

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES IS NOW MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

<p><b>FOR SCHOOLS</b>  <b>From 10+2 to 5+3+3+4:</b> Current 10+2 structure in which policy covered schooling from Class 1 to 10 (age 6-16) and then Class 11-12 (age 16-18) gives way to 5 years of foundational education, 3 of preparatory, 3 of middle &amp; 4 years of secondary schooling</p> <p><b>Multi-Stream:</b> Flexibility to choose subjects across streams; all subjects to be offered at two levels of proficiency</p> <p><b>Diluted Board:</b> Board exams to test only core competencies; could become modular (object and subjective) and will be offered twice a year</p> <p><b>Multilingual:</b> 3-language policy to continue with preference for local language medium of instruction till class 8</p> <p><b>Bag-Less Days:</b> School students to have 10 bag-less days in a year during which they are exposed to a vocation of choice (i.e. informal internship)</p>	<p><b>FOR COLLEGES</b>  <b>SAT-Like College Test:</b> National Testing Agency to conduct common college entrance exam twice a year</p> <p><b>4-Year Bachelor:</b> 4-year multi-disciplinary bachelor's programme to be preferred; mid-term dropouts to be given credit with option to complete degree after a break</p> <p><b>No Affiliation:</b> Over next 15 years colleges will be given graded autonomy to give degrees, affiliation with universities to end, so would deemed university status</p> <p><b>Fee Cap:</b> Proposal to cap fee charged by private institutions of higher learning</p> <p><b>Going Global:</b> Top-rated global universities to be facilitated to come to India, top Indian institutions to be encouraged to go global</p>
---	--

Education Commission in 1948 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan.

- ★ Secondary Education Commission (1952-53): The Government of India set up the Secondary Education Commission in 1952, under the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar.
- ★ 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976- Education in Concurrent List
  - ❑ The Indian constitution in its original enactment defined education as a state subject.
  - ❑ But unlike some other federal countries, India chose to have a Ministry of Education at the Centre. The Centre was expected to articulate aims and standards.
  - ❑ Under Article 42 of the constitution, an amendment was added in 1976 and education became a concurrent list subject which enables the central government to legislate it in the manner suited to it.
- ★ Education Commission (1964-66) under Dr. D. S. Kothari

- ❑ The Commission had submitted its Report on 29 June 1966; its recommendations were accommodated in India's first National Policy on Education in 1968.

### ★ 1968 NPE:

- ❑ Compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, as specified by the Constitution of India.
- ❑ Better training and qualification of teachers.
- ❑ Pay more attention on learning of regional languages, outlining the "three language formula" to be applied in secondary education and that was:
  - \* Hindi
  - \* English
  - \* Regional language

### ★ National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986:

- ❑ It emphasised national concerns and perspective without specifically referring to provincial practices that indicated strong divergence.
- ❑ Engagement with the States remained a function of the Planning Commission.



★ Programme of Action (PoA) 1992, under the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986:

❑ Under this Government of India has laid down a Three - Exam Scheme For admission to Engineering and Architecture/Planning programmes:

★ Rise of private sector: After liberalisation in 1991, a burgeoning private sector had begun to push public policy.

❑ The rapidly expanding and globalising urban middle class had already begun to secede from the public system, posing the awkward question of why education cannot be sold if there are willing buyers.

★ Three systems: India now has three systems.

❑ There is a Central system, running an exam board that has an all-India reach through affiliation with English-medium private schools catering to regional elites.

\* The Central system also includes advanced professional institutes and universities.

❑ State system: Institutes run by the States belong to the second system. It also features provincial secondary boards affiliating schools teaching in State languages.

❑ Private system: The third system is based on purely private investment. Internationally accredited school boards and globally connected private universities are part of this third system. These institutions represent a new level of freedom from state norms.

★ Right to Education Act- a bridge between public and private systems:

❑ An explicit attempt was made under the Right to Education (RTE) Act to bridge the first two systems.

❑ The Constitution (Eighty-sixth) Amendment Act has now inserted Article 21A in the Constitution which makes education a Fundamental Right for Children in the age group of 6-14 years.

The Act mandates that even private educational institutions have to reserve 25 per cent seats for children from weaker sections.

### **Concerns:**

★ Centre's dominating role:

❑ The NPE, 2020 didn't fully acknowledge the variety prevailing in states and the legacies those practices are rooted in.

❑ For education to fulfil its social role, it must respond to the specific milieu in which the young are growing up.

★ States' old ways: States have their own social worlds to deal with, and they often prefer to carry on with the ways they became familiar with in colonial days.

❑ A prime example is the continuation of intermediate or junior colleges in several States more than half a century after the report by Kothari Commission.

★ Social justice: Inequalities have become sharper with the rise in overall prosperity. In higher education, an RTE like attempt to balance private autonomy

with an obligation to provide social justice is yet to be made.

★ Coordination: The new policy document underestimates the problem of reconciling the three systems.

❑ Accreditation norms and recognition procedures create a semblance of public accountability.

❑ Coordination among the three systems has proved unmanageable, even in purely functional terms.

★ Top down approach: In higher education, NPE, 2020 proposes nationally codified and administered measures to oversee institutional transformation across State capitals and district towns.

❑ The idea of a monolithic regulatory architecture to control a system that is privatising at a rapid pace is impulsive. Functional uniformity is unlikely to offer any real solution.

★ Economic policy favours greater private enterprise in higher education. How to reconcile this push with the necessity of equitable public education is a nagging question.

★ Autonomy: It cannot be interpreted in financial terms alone. The many different ways in which the States have maintained their colleges and universities cannot all be regarded as signs of a dysfunctional or failing system.

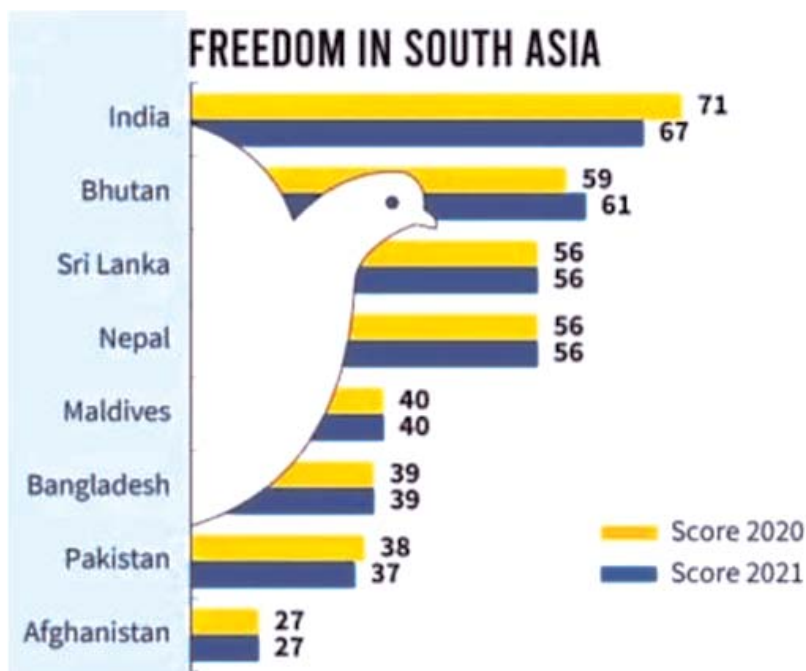
❑ If failure is the criterion for choice of remedy, gradations of failure will have to be determined first and their causes studied before remedial steps are contemplated.

- ★ At the school level too, the new policy proposes a post-RTE structural shift, ignoring the fact that the RTE itself has not yet been fully implemented.

### Way forward:

The government should accept that one size does not fit all.

- ★ Defining aim and vision: We must ask what kind of human being and society we want before we draft a policy in education.
  - ❑ We also need a systemic vision: both for recovery from institutional decay and for future progress.
- ★ Coordination between different systems: There should be a reliable mechanism to reconcile the marking standards of different Boards and universities.
  - ❑ Coordination is required in adherence to social responsibilities in a period of rapid economic change.
- ★ Social vision: Education must mediate between different social strata divided by caste and economic status.
  - ❑ Further progress of this role called for continued financial support for the implementation of RTE and policy guidance for the proper use of this support so that regional disparities diminish.
  - ❑ The recent attempt made by Tamil Nadu to create a modest quota in NEET for students who attended government schools points towards an endemic problem exacerbated by centralisation.



## Freedom in the World 2021 Report

The Freedom in the World 2021 report has downgraded India's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free'.

- \* Pointing to a decline in global democracy over the last 15 years, the report said that nearly 75% of the world's population lived in a country that faced deterioration over the last year.
- \* The most free countries in the world, with a score of 100, are Finland, Norway and Sweden, while the least free with a score of 1 are Tibet and Syria.

### Key Points

- \* About the Report:
  - ❑ Published By:
- ★ USA based human rights watchdog Freedom House, which is largely funded through USA government grants, has been tracking the course of democracy since 1941.

❑ Scores are Based on:

- ★ Political rights indicators such as the electoral process, political pluralism and participation and government functioning.
- ★ Civil liberties indicators related to freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights.
- ★ Countries are declared as "free"-, "partly free"- or "not free"-.
- \* India's Score:
  - ❑ India's score was 67, a drop from 71/100 from last year (reflecting 2019 data) downgrading it from the free category last year (i.e., based on 2020 data).

\* Reasons for India's Fall:

### Freedom of Media:

- ★ Attacks on press freedom have escalated dramatically, and reporting has become significantly less ambitious in recent years, citing the use of security,



defamation, sedition and contempt of court laws to quiet critical media voices.

### ***Elevation of Hindu Nationalist Interests:***

- ★ India appears to have abandoned its potential to serve as a global democratic leader, elevating narrow Hindu nationalist interests at the expense of its founding values of inclusion and equal rights for all.

### ***Internet Freedom:***

- ★ In a year when social media censorship has been hotly seated, while the government shut down Internet connectivity in Kashmir as well as on Delhi's borders, India's Internet freedom score dropped to just 51.

### ***Covid Response:***

- ★ Response to Covid-19 included a hamfisted lockdown that resulted in the dangerous and unplanned displacement of millions of internal migrant workers.
- ★ It added that Muslims were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the virus and faced attacks by vigilante mobs.

### ***Crackdown on Protesters:***

- ★ The government intensified its crackdown on protesters opposed to a discriminatory citizenship law and arrested dozens of journalists who aired criticism of the official pandemic response.

### ***Laws:***

- ★ Uttar Pradesh's law prohibiting forced religious conversion through interfaith marriage was also listed as a concern.

## ***Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan***

The Union Education Minister chaired a review meeting on Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

### ***Key Points***

- \* About the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan:

### ***Aim:***

It aims at providing strategic funding to higher education institutions throughout the country.

- ★ The scheme is being operated in mission mode for funding state universities and colleges to achieve the aims of equity, access and excellence.
- Funding: It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in October 2013.
- ★ Since 2016-17, the government has spent an average of Rs. 1,500 crore every year on RUSA.

### ***Objectives:***

- ★ Improve the overall quality of state institutions by conforming to the prescribed norms and standards.
- ★ Adoption of accreditation (certification of competency) as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- ★ Promoting autonomy in state universities and improving governance in institutions.
- ★ Ensure reforms in the affiliation, academic and examination system.
- ★ Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and

ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.

- ★ Create an enabling atmosphere for research in the higher education system.
- ★ Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by setting up institutions in unserved and underserved areas.
- ★ Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities to the disadvantaged.

### ***Highlights of the Meeting:***

- Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): Need to draw plans on educating additional 3.5 crore students to increase GER to 50% by 2035.

### ***GER:***

- ★ India's higher education enrollment is calculated in terms of GER, which is the ratio of population in the 18-23 age group to the number of people enrolled in higher education.
- ★ According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), the GER in higher education has increased from 25.8% in 2017-18 to 26.3% in 2018-19, while in absolute terms the enrolment increased from 3.66 crores to 3.74 crore students.
- Focus on Local Skills: A total of 7 crore students with employable skills that suit local conditions should pass out from colleges and Universities. Education should lead to local employment. Education in Degree College should be aligned with the "One district one product (ODOP)" plan.

- ❑ Monitoring: The University Grants Commission will monitor the progress of work done by Institutions which received funding under the RUSA Scheme.

## Rights of Overseas Citizens of India

Recently, the government has notified a consolidated list of rights of the Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).

- \* The rights and restrictions are not new, they have been notified previously in 2005, 2007, and 2009. They were also mentioned in an OCI brochure published by the Ministry of Home Affairs in November 2019.

### Key Points

#### Multiple Entry Lifelong Visa:

- ❑ OCI cardholders will be entitled to get multiple entry lifelong visas for visiting India for any purpose.

#### Prior Permission:

- ❑ OCI cards would need prior permission for a set of activities that include research, journalism, mountaineering, missionary or Tablighi work, and visits to restricted areas.

#### Parity with Non Resident Indians (NRIs):

- ❑ OCI cardholders will enjoy parity with NRIs in adoption of children, appearing in competitive exams, purchase or sale of immovable property barring agricultural land and farmhouses, and pursuing professions such as doctors, lawyers, architects, and chartered accountants.

#### Parity with Indian Nationals

- ❑ They have parity with Indian nationals in the matter of domestic air fares, entry fees to monuments and public places.

#### Entrance Exams and Admissions:

- ❑ OCIs can appear for all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or such other tests to make them eligible for admission only against any NRI seat or any supernumerary seat.
- ❑ The OCI cardholder shall not be eligible for admission against any seat reserved exclusively for Indian citizens.

#### Other Economic, Financial and Educational fields:

- ❑ In respect of all other economic, financial and educational fields not specified in the latest notification or the rights and privileges not covered by the notifications made by the Reserve Bank of India under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, the OCI cardholder shall have the same rights and privileges as a foreigner.

#### Exemption:

- ❑ They are exempted from registration with the Foreigners' Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) for any length of stay in India.

- ★ Foreigners visiting India who hold long-term visas (more than 180 days) are required to register their presence in India with the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO).

#### Restrictions:

- ❑ There will be no restriction in visiting religious places and attending normal religious activities like attending religious discourses.
- ❑ However, preaching religious ideologies, making speeches in religious places, distribution of audio or visual display/pamphlets pertaining to religious ideologies, spreading conversion etc. will not be allowed.

#### Overseas Citizen of India

#### The Ministry of Home Affairs defines an OCI as a person who:

- ❑ Was a citizen of India on or after 26th January 1950; or
- ❑ Was eligible to become a citizen of India on 26th January 1950; or
- ❑ Is a child or grandchild of such a person, among other eligibility criteria.
- ★ According to Section 7A of the OCI card rules, an applicant is not eligible for the OCI card if he, his parents or grandparents have ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh. The category was introduced by the government in 2005.
- ★ The Government of India via Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2015 merged the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) category with OCI category in 2015.



## Non Resident Indian

- ★ A Non-Resident Indian (NRI) means a person resident outside India who is a citizen of India or is a person of Indian origin.
  - ❑ An Indian citizen residing outside India for a combined total of at least 183 days in a financial year is considered to be an NRI.
- ★ NRIs enjoy voting rights and are required to pay and file the income tax return on their Indian income like resident Indians.
  - ❑ NRI is more of a technical classification for taxation purposes and investment purposes.
- ★ However, in case an NRI wishes to take up foreign citizenship, he/she will have to give up Indian citizenship as the Indian constitution does not allow dual citizenship.
  - ❑ A person cannot hold Indian as well as foreign citizenship simultaneously.

## QS World Subject Rankings 2021

25 programmes offered by higher education institutions in India ranked among the top 100 in the world in their respective subject categories, according to the latest edition (11th) of the QS World University Rankings by Subject.

### Key Points

- ★ About the QS World Subject Rankings:
  - ❑ Quacquarelli Symonds (QS): It is a leading global career and education network for ambitious professionals

looking to further their personal and professional development.

- ★ QS develops and successfully implements methods of comparative data collection and analysis used to highlight institutions' strengths.
  - ❑ QS World University Rankings: It is an annual publication of university rankings which comprises the global overall and subject rankings.
- ★ Six parameters and their weightage for the evaluation:
  - ★ Academic Reputation (40%)
  - ★ Employer Reputation (10%)
  - ★ Faculty/Student Ratio (20%)
  - ★ Citations per faculty (20%)
  - ★ International Faculty Ratio (5%)
  - ★ International Student Ratio (5%)
- ❑ QS World University Rankings by Subject: It calculates performance based on four parameters – academic reputation, employer reputation, research impact (citations per paper) and the productivity of an institution's research faculty.

### Top Performers:

- ❑ Globally Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT-USA) and Harvard (USA) are among top performers, Russia and China record best-ever performances.

### India's Performance:

- ❑ The 2021 QS's global university performance comparison offered independent data on the performance of 253 programs at 52 Indian higher education institutions, across 51 academic disciplines.

- ❑ The number of Indian universities/institutes in the top 100 subject rankings has increased from 8 to 12 this year.
- ★ 12 Indian institutions that have made it to the top 100 of the world - IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IISC Bangalore, IIT Guwahati, IIM Bangalore, IIM Ahmedabad, JNU, Anna University, University of Delhi and OP Jindal University.
- ★ IIT-Bombay has cornered more top 100 positions than any other Indian institution.
  - ❑ Except one, all the 25 programmes are in institutions run by either the state or union government. However, last year, this number stood at 26.
- ★ 17 of the 25 globally ranked Indian programmes are in engineering. IIT-Madras's Petroleum Engineering programme registered the best performance among Indian institutes - 30th in the world.
  - ❑ The government-run Institutions of Eminence (IoE) remains significantly better-represented in the rankings than the private ones.
- ★ OP Jindal Global University has entered the global top-100 for law (76th). This is the only top-100 result achieved by a private IoE.
- ★ IoE: It is a government's scheme to provide the regulatory architecture for setting up or upgrading of 20 Institutions (10 from public sector and 10 from the private sector) as world-class teaching and research institutions.

- ❑ The All India Institute of Medical Sciences remained the only institution in the top 300 in the area of life sciences and medicine, but also dropped more than 10 places.

### **Analysis:**

- ❑ One of the biggest challenges faced by India is providing high-quality tertiary education in the face of exploding demand - this much was recognized by last year's National Education Policy (NEP), which set the ambitious target of a 50% gross enrolment ratio by 2035.
- ★ It should therefore be small cause for concern that the number of Indian programs featuring across 51 subject rankings has actually decreased over the last year - from 235 to 233.
- ★ While this is a minor decrease, it is indicative of the fact that expanding provision in a way that does not sacrifice quality remains a highly-challenging task.
- ❑ A number of programs at India's privately-run prospective Institutions of Eminence have made progress this year, demonstrating the positive role that well-regulated private provision can have in enhancing India's higher education sector.
- ❑ India remains at the forefront of global environmental science research. Data indicates that India ranks 5th in terms of its research footprint in this field -

behind only Germany, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- ❑ Commonalities between nations that are improving and nations that are not (three factors):
- ★ First, an international outlook "both in terms of faculty body and research relationships" correlates strongly with improved performance.
- ★ Second, rising universities have received strong targeted investment from governments over a decade or more particularly in China, Russia, and Singapore.
- ★ Third, improving relationships with industry is correlated with better employment, research, and innovation outcomes.

## **Fast-track Courts to Clear Dishonoured Cheque Cases**

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has proposed setting up fast-track courts for a limited time to clear dishonoured cheque cases.

- ★ Earlier the Supreme Court has suggested forming a committee to resolve the problem of pendency of cheque bounce cases.

### **Key Points**

- ★ Supreme Court Proposal: Set up fast-track courts under Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act, 2018.
- ❑ Power to establish additional courts: The government has both power and an obligation under Article 247 of the Constitution to set up "additional courts" to better the administration of laws enacted by Parliament,

including the Negotiable Instruments Act, which deals with cheques.

- ★ Article 247: It gives power to Parliament to establish certain additional courts for the better administration of laws made by it or of any existing laws with respect to a matter enumerated in the Union List.
- ★ Pendency of Dishonoured Cheque Cases: The pendency of cheque bounce cases forms 30% to 40% of the backlog in trial courts and a sizable chunk of the pile-up in High Courts.

### **Negotiable Instrument**

- ★ These are signed documents that promise a sum of payment to a specified person or the assignee.
- ★ It is transferable in nature, allowing the holder to take the funds as cash or use them in a manner appropriate for the transaction or according to their preference.
- ★ Promissory notes, bills of exchange, and cheques are categorised as the negotiable instruments.

### **Dishonoured Cheque**

- ★ A cheque is said to be dishonoured, if the banks give the amount to the payee. While, if the bank refuses to pay the amount to the payee, the cheque is said to be dishonoured.
- ❑ In other words, dishonour of cheque is a condition in which the bank refuses to pay the amount of cheque to the payee.
- ❑ The dishonour of cheque is a criminal offence and is punishable by imprisonment.

ment up to two years or with monetary penalty or with both.

#### ★ **Cheque:**

It is a negotiable instrument. Cheques are not negotiable by any person other than the payee. The cheques have to be deposited into the payee's bank account.

- ❑ The author of the cheque is called 'drawer', the person in whose favour, the cheque is drawn is called 'payee', and the bank who is directed to pay the amount is known as 'drawee'.

#### **Pendency of Cases in Judiciary**

★ According to the Economic Survey 2018-19 there are about 3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system, especially in district and subordinate courts.

- ❑ About 87.54% of the total pendency of cases is in the district and subordinate courts.
- ❑ More than 64% of all cases are pending for more than 1 year.
- ❑ The average disposal time for civil and criminal cases in Indian District & Subordinate courts in 2018 was 4.4 fold and 6 fold higher respectively when compared with the average of Council of Europe members (2016).
- ❑ A Case Clearance Rate of 100% (i.e. zero accumulation) can be achieved with the addition of merely 2,279 judges in the lower courts, 93 in High Courts and only one in the Supreme Court, which is already within sanctioned strength and

only needs filling of vacancies.

#### ★ **Reforms Suggested:**

- ❑ Increased number of working days.
- ❑ Establishment of Indian Courts and Tribunal Services to focus on the administrative aspects of the legal system.
- ❑ Deployment of technology to improve efficiency of the courts, e.g. eCourts Mission Mode Project and the National Judicial Data Grid being rolled-out in phases by the Ministry of Law and Justice.
- ❑ Better Case and Court Management: Professional Court Managers as suggested by the 13th Finance Commission. Court managers or equivalent professionals are the need of the hour and justice delivery can improve only if the courts accept and adopt professional help in their administration.
- ❑ Setting up of Tribunals, Fast Track Courts and Special Courts to dispense important cases at the earliest.
- ❑ Mechanisms such as ADR (Alternate Dispute Resolution), Lok Adalats, Gram Nyayalayas should be effectively utilised.

#### **Way Forward**

★ There should be wide introspection through extensive discussions, debates and consultations to identify the root causes of delays in our justice delivery system and provide meaningful solutions to improve the justice delivery system in India.

★ Judicial reforms, if taken seriously, expeditious and effective justice can see the light of day and improve India's standing in the reports of the World Bank and other institutions and organisations that study judicial processes.

## **Vaccine Passports**

Governments around the world are exploring the potential use of vaccine passports as a way of reopening the economy by identifying those protected against the coronavirus.

#### **Key Points**

★ **About Vaccine Passports:**

- ❑ A vaccine passport is an e-certificate that stores and records jabs and Covid-19 test status.
- ★ It can be kept in a smartphone app or in other digital formats.
- ★ Its contents can be flashed at security checkpoints when people travel across borders.
- ❑ The idea is modelled on the proof of vaccination that several countries required even before the pandemic.
- ★ Travellers from many African countries to the USA or India are required to submit proof that they have been vaccinated against diseases such as yellow fever.
- ❑ In February 2021, Israel became the first country to introduce a certification system that allows those who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 to access certain facilities and events.
- ★ **Function of Vaccine Passports:**
  - ❑ Will digitise vaccination records across countries.



- ❑ Supposed to function as proof that the holder has been vaccinated against Covid-19 and is, therefore, safe.
- ★ Potential Beneficiary of the Vaccine Passports:
  - ❑ The primary benefit will be to the tourism and the hospitality industries, which are both seen as being at the heart of Covid-19 spread and are the worst hit by the pandemic.
  - ❑ The international air travel, which suffered massively because of the outbreak.
- ★ Similar Initiative: Several associations and non-profits have been issuing their own versions for international travel:
  - ❑ IATA Travel Pass: The global trade body representing airlines (The International Air Transport Association) is developing an app called IATA Travel Pass that will provide airlines and other aviation industry stakeholders with a common platform to check for the proof of vaccination and its validity.
  - ❑ CommonPass: Non-profit Commons Project has been trying out an app called CommonPass, which contains a passenger's vaccination record.
- ★ Concerns Raised in Instituting Vaccine Passport:
  - ❑ WHO's Stand:
- ★ The World Health Organisation (WHO) is against the introduction of Covid-19 vaccination proofs as a requirement for international travel.
- ★ There are still critical unknown facts regarding the efficacy of

vaccination in reducing transmission.

- ❑ Lack of Uniformity: The major difficulty in implementation will be the lack of uniformity across jurisdictions in requirement and issuance of proofs of vaccination.
- ❑ Inadequate Availability of Vaccines: Preferential vaccination of travellers could result in inadequate supplies of vaccines for priority populations considered at high risk of severe Covid-19 disease.
- ★ Introducing a requirement of vaccination as a condition for travel has the potential to hinder equitable global access to a limited vaccine supply and would be unlikely to maximize the benefits of vaccination for individual societies and overall global health.
- ❑ Perpetuate Discrimination and Inequality: Experts argue that vaccine passports, in any form, might make travel inequitable. Adoption of these digital passports can perpetuate discrimination and inequality, increasing the divide between socio economic groups.
- ★ Rich countries that have already bought millions of doses from pharmaceutical companies are ahead in the race. The poorer nations may have to wait for months, if not years, to start inoculations.
- ★ This means that if vaccine passports become a norm, then these lower-income nations will lose out on the advantage.
- ★ It will lead to exclusion of the younger generation who would

be last in line to be vaccinated.

- ❑ Privacy Concerns: These are mainly digital certificates that are accessed by a particular service provider to check for proof of vaccination, there is a possibility that they would be used by authorities to track the movement of their holders.

## ***Rajya Sabha passes MTP Bill, 2020***

The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 that increases the time period within which an abortion may be carried out.

- ★ The Bill was passed in March last year in the Lok Sabha.
- ★ Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said the amendments in the Bill had been made after studying global practices and wide consultation within the country.
- ★ During the debate, however, many of the Opposition members, while welcoming the Bill, pointed out the severe lacunae and problems with its approach.
- ★ Shiv Sena leader Priyanka Chaturvedi said it was wrong to say the Bill was based on a "rights based" approach. Instead, it had a "need based" approach.

### ***Abortion in India***

- ★ According to a study by the Guttmacher Institute in 2018, 50% of pregnancies in six of the larger Indian states (Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh) are unintended.
- ★ Data from the National Family

Health Survey (NFHS) IV shows that just 47.8% of couples in the country use modern contraceptive methods. It also found that 55% pregnancies in Assam, 48% in Bihar, 53% in Gujarat, 50% in Madhya Pradesh, 43% in Tamil Nadu and 49% in Uttar Pradesh remain unintended.

- ★ This is important because many of these unintended pregnancies result in abortions and the availability of cheap and safe abortion services is one of the indicators of a robust health system.
- ★ Even after 50 years of the incorporation of the MTP act, 1971 and the vindication of women's right to abort, abortion in India still remains a hotly debated and taboo issue.
- ★ According to the Abortion Assessment Project which was one of the most extensive Indian studies on abortion that lasted from 2000 to 2004, out of the total abortions that took place in India, 56 % of them were unsafe.
- ★ Statistically, out of the 6.4 million annual abortions, 3.6 million were unsafe.
- ★ The mortality from these unsafe abortions contributed to up to 13% of the total maternal deaths in the country.
- ★ It is due to such reasons that the Government decided to amend the MTP Act, 1971 and introduced the MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

### ***MTP Act, 1971***

- ★ The Act allows for aborting the pregnancy by medical doctors (with specified specialisation) on certain grounds.
- ★ A pregnancy may be terminated up to 12 weeks based on the

opinion of one doctor, and between 12 to 20 weeks it can be done based on the opinion of two doctors.

- ★ Beyond 20 weeks, the termination is not allowed.
- ★ The termination of the pregnancy is permitted only when its continuance would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman, cause grave injury to her mental or physical health (including rape and failure of birth control measures), or in the case of foetal abnormalities.
- ★ Termination is also allowed at any point during the pregnancy if there is an immediate necessity to save the woman's life.

### ***MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020***

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 seeks to amend the MTP Act, 1971. It expands access of women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds and aims to increase upper gestation limit for termination of pregnancy under certain conditions and to strengthen access to comprehensive abortion care, under strict conditions, without compromising service and quality of safe abortion.

### ***Salient features of the Proposed Amendments:***

1. It seeks to extend the upper limit for permitting abortions from 20 weeks to 24 under special circumstances.
2. The "special categories of women" include rape survivors, victims of incest, the differently abled and minors.
3. The Bill proposes a require-

ment of the opinion of one registered medical practitioner (RMP) for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation from the current law of 12 weeks.

4. It also provides for the requirement of opinion of two RMPs for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks. Currently, this is applicable for 12-20 weeks.
5. 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.
6. 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.

### ***Issues with the Bill:***

1. It does not give women control over their own bodies. The requirement of authentication by one or more doctors for terminating the pregnancy shows that it is not based on any request or isn't at the pregnant person's will but on a doctor's opinion.
2. Medical boards can rely on the facts of the case but personal beliefs could impact the medical board's opinion, which is one of the biggest

challenges in having a third-party opinion on a decision which is very personal.

3. It fails to consider any other reason such as personal choice, a sudden change in circumstances due to separation from or death of a partner, and domestic violence.
4. It uses the word “women” throughout, denying access to safe abortion to transgender, intersex and gender diverse persons.

### ***Need and Significance of the Law***

- ★ The present abortion law i.e. the MTP Act, 1971, which is about five decades old, permits abortion only up to a maximum foetal gestation period of 20 weeks.
- ★ In recent years, there have been strong demands to raise the foetal gestation period for abortion beyond 20 weeks.
- ★ The law will be a forward moving step towards the empowerment of women especially those who bear the consequences of pregnancy and child birth due to some unwanted incidents with them like rape as reproductive health forms an integral part of women's life.
- ★ Deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions are largely preventable provided services are performed legally by trained practitioners.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ Abortion has to be established as a right of the pregnant person, who should have the sole choice to decide in such matters.

- ★ A key problem that needs to be tackled is the availability of trained medical professionals.
- ★ The law still needs to be widened in perspective to include people other than women so that unsafe abortions that have ill impacts on the pregnant person's health are eliminated.

## ***Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers moved in Lok Sabha***

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

### ***Background:***

- ★ Delhi is a Union Territory with a legislature and it came into being in 1991 under Article

239AA of the Constitution inserted by the Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991.

- ★ As per the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly of Delhi has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police and land.
- ★ The Delhi government has on many occasions challenged the Central government regarding administrative matters in the Capital.

### ***Objective of the Bill:***

- ★ For structural clarity: Section 44 of the 1991 Act deals with conduct of business and there is no structural mechanism for effective time-bound implementation of the said section.
  - Section 44 of the 1991 Act says that all executive

## **AAP vs LG WHAT THE SC VERDICT SAYS**

- LG has no independent decision-making power and cannot act as an obstructionist to policy decisions taken by AAP govt
- Delhi govt must be allowed to legislate and govern other issues and LG cannot stall decisions mechanically
- Constitution mandates the council of ministers headed by Delhi chief minister to communicate all decisions to LG but they do not require LG's concurrence. LG can only refer it to President if he has difference of opinion but he cannot sit on it
- LG and Delhi govt must work in a harmonious manner





actions of the L-G, whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the L-G.

- ★ The constitution bench of the Supreme Court has interpreted the provisions of article 239AA of the Constitution relating to the structure of governance in the NCT of Delhi.
- ★ In order to give effect to the interpretation made by the apex court, the Bill seeks to amend Section 21 of the Act and clarify the expression "Government".
- ★ The 2019 verdict by the SC upheld as "legalâ-- the MHA's notification authorising the L-G to exercise powers in relation to services and directing the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) police not to take cognisance of offences against Central government officials.

#### **Key points:**

- ★ The Bill proposes to amend Sections 21, 24, 33 and 44 of the 1991 Act.
- ★ It proposed that "government"-in the national capital territory of Delhi means the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.
- ★ The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G of Delhi even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.
  - ❑ It also seeks to ensure that the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunityâ-- to give her/his opinion before any decision taken by the Council of Ministers (or the Delhi Cabinet) is implemented.

- ❑ T is provided under proviso to clause (4) of article 239AA of the Constitution.
- ❑ Article 239AA of the Constitution says the Council of Ministers will aid and advise the L-G in matters where the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws except where the L-G can exercise discretion.
- ★ It also seeks to provide for rules made by the Legislative Assembly of Delhi to be consistent with the rules of the House of the People.
  - ❑ The Bill seeks to amend Section 33 of the Act that empowered the Delhi Assembly to make rules to conduct its business by inserting the clause that it shall not be inconsistent with the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the House of People.

- ★ The amendment to Section 24 says that the L-G will not assent any bill passed by the Delhi Assembly that "covers any of the matters which falls outside the purview of the powers conferred on the Legislative Assembly."

### ***The Limits of POCS***

The Madras High Court recently allowed a petition seeking to quash a case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor.

- ★ The court reasoned that adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during this time.

- ★ The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest.

#### **Background:**

- ★ Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape.
- ★ A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others.
- ★ Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This means that any sex with a minor is rape.

#### **Concerns:**

Sexual tendencies of adolescents

- ★ By ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relations.
- ★ The Statement of Objects and Reasons of POCSO states that the law was enacted pursuant to Article 15 of the Constitution, which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from sexual assault,

sexual harassment, and pornography.

- ★ Possibility of consent: The Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha) criticised the clause providing for the possibility of consent in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18.
- ★ Adolescents susceptible to abuse: It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence, instead of putting victims on trial.
  - ❑ While adolescents can and do choose to have sex, it is a fact that they are still children, and their nascent sexual autonomy is susceptible to abuse.
  - ❑ This contradiction created by the very nature of adolescence has led to inconsistent and unprincipled adjudication.

#### Way forward

- ★ Reconsideration: The verdict highlighted the urgent need for

a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people.

- ★ Balance between autonomy and vulnerability: Courts need to be able to strike a balance between the limited but developing capacity of adolescents to consent to sexual interaction and their vulnerability to being groomed, abused, and exploited.
- ★ Legislative clarity: the legislature must provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address, so that valid conclusions may be drawn about what is the intent of the law, and what is clearly outside its purpose.

#### *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012:*

- ★ It was enacted to protect the children against offences like sexual abuse, sexual harassment and pornography.
- ★ The act mandates that investigation in the cases is to be com-

pleted in two months (from the date of registration of FIR) and trial in six months.

- ★ The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age.
- ★ POCSO states a sexual assault is to be considered aggravated if-
  - ❑ The abused child is mentally ill or,
  - ❑ When the abuse is committed by
- ★ A member of the armed forces or Security forces
- ★ A public servant
- ★ A person in a position of trust or authority of the child, like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor or a person-management or staff of a hospital - whether Government or private.
- ★ It prescribes rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and also fine as punishment for aggravated penetrative sexual assault.
- ★ It also makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system.
- ★ The Act also makes it mandatory to report such cases.
  - ❑ It makes it the legal duty of a person aware of the offence to report the sexual abuse.
  - ❑ In case he fails to do so, the person can be punished with six months imprisonment or fine.
- ★ It also prescribes punishment to the people who traffic children for sexual purposes.

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT

- Police said there is a new trend where parents use the Pocsso Act to separate young couples
- Most cases registered under the act involve teenagers who are in love and elope or if the girl gets pregnant
- Policemen said girls do give statement against their boyfriends due to parental pressure. But, some do it to save their relationship



#### POCSO CASES IN EKM

Year	City	Rural
2018	115	155
2015	50	100

- ★ The Act also provides for punishment against false complaints or untrue information.
- ★ The act was amended in 2019.
- ★ Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape.
- ★ A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others.
- ★ Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This means that any sex with a minor is rape.

## SC says Govt Officials can't be appointed SECs

The Supreme Court said that a government employee or bureaucrat cannot be appointed as Election Commissioner.

- ★ It ordered the Goa government to appoint an independent election commissioner.
- ★ The state government had given additional charge of State Election Commissioner to the state's Law Secretary.
- ★ The top court also directed all state election commissioners across the country, who currently hold additional charge, to step down immediately

### State Election Commission:

The Constitution of India vests in the State Election Commission, consisting of a State Election Commissioner, the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of all elections to the Panchayats and the Municipalities (Articles 243K, 243ZA).

The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor.

- ★ Article 243K(1): It states that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats (Municipalities under Article 243ZA) shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.
- ★ Article 243K(2): It states that the tenure and appointment will be directed as per the law made by the state legislature.
  - However, State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his/her office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court.
- ★ As per Article 243(C3) the Governor, when so requested by the State Election Commission, makes available to the State Election Commission such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the SEC.
- ★ Part-IX and Part-IXA were incorporated through the amendment no.73 and no.74 in the constitution of India covering provisions regarding the

Panchayats and Municipalities respectively.

- ★ These parts cover constitutions of Panchayats and Municipality including their elections by the State Election Commission.

### Functions:

- ★ State election commission carries out activities related to
  - preparation of wards / election division as per local bodies rules,
  - decision of boundaries and distribution of seats along with preparation of voters list for the local bodies organizations like Gram Panchayat, Taluka and District Panchayat / Municipality and Municipal Corporation of the state and conducting general / mid-term / bye-elections and supervising them.
- ★ For all these functions, the authority is vested in the State Election Commission.
- ★ State election commission has empowered the collectors for all activities related to elections of Gram Panchayat.
- ★ The delimitation and allocation of seats for various reserved categories, voter's list, election programs and other related activities are carrying out by State Election Commission.

## Universalisation of Education in India

The Union Budget 2021-2022 has allocated only 2.75 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education. It is understandable that education being on Concurrent List needs to be prioritised more in the state budget. But



the crunch in allocation is not only about the management of revenues and finances. While, states like 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.

- ★ Therefore, the given information emphasised that “political willâ-- is more important than the “political economyâ-- to decide the expenditure on education.
- ★ A democratic welfare state ensconced in “liberalâ-- economics cannot defend the steady and continuous fall in public spending on education and levying of education cess on its people. 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. 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.

### ***Universal Access to Education***

- ★ Universal access to education is the ability of all people to have

equal opportunity in education regardless of their gender, race, class, sexuality or physical or mental disabilities.

- ★ Education acts as catalyst for social progress. It is a human right. Education is required to reduce poverty, improving health, encouraging peace and democracy and gender equality.

### ***Kerala's Universal Education Model***

- ★ “The state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the speed of enlightenment among them, that by diffusing education, they might become better subjects and public servants
- ★ The above statement is neither from any United Nations (UN) declaration nor from the budget speech of any finance minister of a “welfareâ-- state. This is from Kerala's royal rescript by the regent queen of Travancore, Rani Gouri Parvati Bai in 1817, whose bicentenary commemorated in 2017.
- ★ Kerala is known for its highest literacy rate in the country and one hundred per cent enrolment of children in primary and secondary education. With around 46 lakh students, 16,000 schools and 1.69 lakh teachers, the student-teacher ratio and studentschool 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. Along with another flagship programme

for adult education, Athulyam helped Kerala to achieve universalisation of primary education

- ★ It is the fruition of 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.
- ★ Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has written extensively on the “Kerala Modelâ-- of education and attributes Kerala's economic and social success to the consistency with which school education expanded, based on sustained public policies and action.
- ★ 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.
- ★ The Kerala model shows that comprehensive interventions pertaining to nutrition, health, sanitation, and early simulation can help to achieve sustainable growth in human development.

### ***Challenges***

- ★ India is a signatory to the Incheon Declaration. It expects member states to spend 4-6 per cent of their GDP on education to achieve SDG4. However, the

Union Budget 2021- 2022 has allocated only 2.75 per cent of the GDP to education.

- ★ Many reports and available data showed a rise in the privatisation of education with a large number of children being eliminated from the system at early stages, cost of education going up due to systemic inefficiencies and students committing suicide for want of data and laptops.
- ★ Achieving the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) poses three main challenges:
  - a) Access to basic education for the un-reached segments and social groups;
  - b) Qualitative improvement in content and processes so as to raise learning achievements,
  - c) High drop-out and low retention ratio in primary and upper primary schools.
- ★ While aiming at providing quality education to all sections of the society, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, other backward communities and minorities are some of the groups, which need special attention.
- ★ The challenge for providing quality education involves improving the preparation, motivation and deployment of teachers; improving the quality of text books; making education relevant to society needs; improving infrastructural facilities at educational institutions and strengthening management and institutional capacity of the educational institutions especially at State, district and lower levels.

### **Way Forward**

- ★ Primary education deserves the highest priority for arising the competence of the average worker and for increasing National productivity. The provision for Universal Elementary Education is crucial for spreading mass literacy, which is a basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure and the effective functioning of democratic institution. It also represents an indispensable first step towards the provisions of equality of opportunity to all citizens.
- ★ Further, some experts argued that, to make education universal the state must find resources to provide ancillary services such as school health, mid-day meals, free supply of text books, writing materials, school uniform etc.
- ★ As far as Kerala's universal education model is concerned, this model of education needs to be emulated at a national level.

### **National Commission for Allied, Healthcare Professions Bill**

The Lok Sabha on March 24 passed the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professionals Bill, 2021, that seeks to set up a commission to regulate the allied healthcare sector, standardise training and qualifications across the country.

- ★ The Rajya Sabha has already passed the Bill on March 16.
- ★ The legislation got bipartisan support across the party lines in the Lok Sabha.

- ★ It is aimed at fulfilling long pending demands of the sector and enhances employment opportunities for professionals.
- ★ The group of allied professionals is large, and the bill is trying to regulate this field by providing dignity to their roles.
- ★ The Health minister laid emphasis on the role played by the paramedics and allied health workers during the Covid19 pandemic.

### **National Commission for Allied, Healthcare Professions Bill**

- ★ The Bill has defined an 'allied health professional' as an associate, technician, or technologist who is 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.
- ★ A 'healthcare professional' defined under the Bill includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, does 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 that are mentioned in the Bill include professionals working in life sciences, trauma and burn care, surgical and anaesthesia related technology, physiotherapists, and nutrition science.
- ★ The National Commission for Allied, Healthcare Professions Bill seeks to establish a

National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professionals.

- ★ The Commission will regulate and standardise the education and practice of allied and healthcare professionals.
- ★ The functions of this newly proposed Commission will include framing of standards for education and practice, creating and maintaining an online Central Register of all registered professionals, providing basic standards of education, and providing for a uniform entrance and exit examination.
- ★ Only those who are enrolled in the National Register or a State register as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner will be allowed to practise as an allied and healthcare practitioner, under the new law.
- ★ The new law aims to increase employment opportunities for the allied and healthcare professionals and also provide dignity to their valuable works.
- ★ In the current situation across the world and India, there is an immense demand for the qualified healthcare professionals and the new law will provide necessary impetus in providing affordable healthcare to the people.

#### **FUNCTIONS OF THE NEWLY PROPOSED COMMISSION**

- ★ The new Commission will perform the following functions:
- ★ Frame the policies and standards for regulating education and practice;
- ★ Create and maintain an online Central Register of all the registered professionals.
- ★ Provide the basic standards of education, courses, curriculum,

staff qualifications, examination, training, maximum fee payable for various categories, and

- ★ Provide for a uniform entrance and exit examination, among others.
- ★ This new Commission will constitute a Professional Council for every recognised category of the allied and healthcare professions.
- ★ This Council will consist of a President of the Council, and 4-24 members who will represent each profession in the recognised category.
- ★ The Commission also has the power to delegate any of its functions to these Professional Councils if it requires.
- ★ Within 6 months from the passage of this Bill, every state government is required to constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils.

#### **These State Councils will consist of:**

- a. The Chairperson- who will have at least 25 years of experience in the field of allied and healthcare science,
- b. One member who will represent the medical sciences in the state government,
- c. Two members to represent the state medical colleges,
- d. Two members to represent the charitable institutions, and
- e. Two members from each of the recognised categories of allied and healthcare professions who will be nominated by the state government, among others.

#### **Functions of the State Councils**

1. They will enforce the Professional Code of conduct and ethics that is to be observed by allied healthcare professionals.
  2. They will maintain the Registers in respective states,
  3. They will carry on inspection of the allied and healthcare institutions, and
  4. They will ensure uniform entry and exit examinations.
- ★ Establishment of New Institutions/ Changes in existing institutions
  - ★ Prior permission of the newly established State Council will be required to:
    - ★ establish a new institution, or
    - ★ open new courses or increase the admission capacity, or admission of a new batch of students in the existing institutions.
  - ★ If such permission is not sought, then any qualification granted to a student from such an institution will not be recognised under the Bill.
  - ★ Offences and Penalties under the Bill
  - ★ No person is allowed to practice as a qualified allied and healthcare practitioner other than those enrolled in a State Register or the National Register under the new law.
  - ★ Any person who does not adhere to this provision will be punished with a fine of Rs 50,000.

#### **Significance of the Bill**

- ★ It will help in generating employment opportunities



especially in a situation where unemployment levels in the county is already high.

- ★ It helps to provide dignity to those involved in allied and healthcare sectors.
- ★ It aims to integrate the allied and healthcare sector into the mainstream.
- ★ This legislation is expected to benefit an estimated 9 lakhs allied and healthcare-related professionals and thousands of other professionals joining the workforce annually.
- ★ The Bill will help make healthcare a multi-disciplinary system with patients in focus.
- ★ All the standards in the Bill have been coded by international yardsticks and there will be representations from all states and union territories on the commission established under the Bill. This will help in enhancing their standards and skills.
- ★ It will provide uniformity of service across institutions.

### **Way Forward**

- ★ Faster implementation of the provisions under the Bill.
- ★ Increasing the number of professionals involved in the allied and healthcare sectors.
- ★ Adequate emphasis on professional medical personnel.
- ★ Addressing other issues related to the healthcare sector like infrastructure requirements, increase in budget outlay, increasing the research and development focused on healthcare innovations, etc.

## **Notify health policy on rare diseases: HC**

Delhi High Court recently asked the Center to finalise and notify the National Health policy for rare diseases by March 31st.

- ★ The Court also notified the government to set up a National Consortium for Research, Development and Therapeutics (NCRDT) for treatment of such rare diseases.
- ★ Acting on the petitions concerning children suffering from rare diseases the Court asked the government to consider Increasing the budget for rare diseases for the coming financial year.
- ★ It said that the national consortium for research development and therapeutics should consist of the Department of biotechnology, the Indian council of medical research, the council of scientific and industrial research, the drugs controller general of India and the related ministries and departments.

### **What are Rare diseases?**

- ★ According to the World Health Organization rare disease is defined as an often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder that has a prevalence of one or less per 1000 population.
- ★ The Indian council of medical research defines disease as one in 2500 people or less.

### **Prevalence of rare diseases**

- ★ It has been estimated that globally around 6000 to 8000 rare diseases exist with new rare diseases being reported in the medical literature regularly.

- ★ However, 80% of all rare disease patients are affected by approximately 350 rare diseases.
- ★ Due to lack of epidemiological data, exact figures on the burden of rare diseases and morbidity and mortality associated with them is not available for India.
- ★ But if we apply the international estimates of 6 to 8% of the population being affected by rare diseases then India can have something between 72 to 96 million people affected by rare diseases.

### **Policy on rare diseases in India**

- ★ The union Ministry of Health and family welfare recently published a national policy for treatment of 450 rare diseases.
- ★ According to the policy out of all the rare diseases in the world there are less than 5% that have appropriate therapies available to treat them.
- ★ In India roughly 450 rare diseases have been recorded till now of which the most common include hemophilia, thalassemia, sickle cell anemia, autoimmune diseases, gaucher disease, and cystic fibrosis.
- ★ Statistics show that India has closed 2 about 50-100 million people that are affected by rare diseases in a population above 1.3 billion people and almost 80% of the affected population are children.

### **key provisions of the new policy on rare diseases**

- ★ According to the policy, rare diseases include genetic diseases, rare cancers, infectious tropical diseases and degenerative diseases.

- ★ The policy divides rare diseases into 3 categories
- ★ diseases that require one time curative treatment
- ★ diseases that require long term treatment but where the cost of the treatment is low
- ★ diseases that need long term treatments and the cost of the treatment is high
- ★ The new policy provides for lowering the incidence of rare diseases based on an integrated preventive strategy.
- ★ The aim of the new policy is to provide access to affordable healthcare to the patients suffering from rare diseases which are amenable to one time treatment.
- ★ The policy provides for crowd funding for treatment of high cost rare diseases. This implies that if the government cannot fully finance the treatment for the rare disease, donations from prospective individual or corporate donors who are willing to support can be sought.
- ★ The policy provides a financial support of maximum Rupees 15 lakh to each patient under the umbrella scheme of Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi on which the beneficiaries will not be limited to families only below the poverty line. However, it will be limited to the beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- ★ The policy aims to create a patient registry for diseases housed in the Indian Council of Medical Research.
- ★ The policy aims to certify certain medical institutes as Center of Excellence for Rare

Diseases. These are AIIMS, New Delhi, Sanjay Gandhi postgraduate Institute of medical science, Lucknow, King Edward medical hospital, Mumbai and four others.

- ★ Annual treatment expenses for certain diseases like the Hurler Syndrome, Gaucher's disease, Wolman disease may vary from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore. For such diseases, a digital platform is to be set up to raise donations and corporate funding.
- ★ It proposes an inter-ministerial consultative committee to be set up at national level. This committee will be led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- ★ It also aims to create an Administrative Committee that will develop guidelines to determine which rare diseases to fund.

### ***Remaining Concerns***

- ★ The lack of an Indian centralized clinical registry of rare disease patients results in some patients taking up to seven years to be diagnosed accurately.
- ★ The socio economic burden of rare diseases is immensely high.
- ★ The draft in existence has mentioned that financial assistance will be provided for rare diseases that run up to Rs 15 lakh but only to those patients that have curative therapy and fall under Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi scheme of PMJDY.
- ★ At the diagnosis and treatment level, the policy should address physician training, availability

of affordable diagnosis, standard treatment protocols, and availability of drugs to reduce the rare disease burden.

- ★ In addition to the above concerns it must be realised that the treatment of any disease requires well trained medical professionals and the current shortage of them in India is going to be a huge challenge to be tackled.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ The government needs to formulate a comprehensive policy that addresses all the concerns related to treatment of rare diseases.
- ★ The funding limit of rupees 15 lakh should be a flexible one as the treatment of the rare diseases can have varying costs.
- ★ The first and foremost requirement is to build upon the medical infrastructure that includes both physical and human infrastructure.
- ★ Given the low volumes at which the drugs needed to treat such diseases would be consumed, pharmaceutical companies will have little commercial incentive to produce them. Therefore, a nationwide policy on orphan drugs is needed to incentivise these players.
- ★ Although the proportion of rare diseases is much less than the other diseases, it does not reduce the importance of the life of a person affected by rare diseases. Thus national policy would remove this adverse distinction and would make government committed equally to all people.

## The Juvenile Justice Amendment Bill, 2021

Recently, the Lok Sabha passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021 that seeks to strengthen and streamline the provisions for protection and adoption of children.

- ★ The Bill amends the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and contains provisions related to children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection.

### Key Points

#### Need of the Amendment:

- ❑ The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) audit of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) in 2020, 90% of which are run by NGOs, found that 39% CCIs were not registered, even after the 2015 amendment was brought in.
- ❑ It also found that less than 20% CCIs, especially for girls, had not been set up in some states, 26% child welfare officers were not there.
- ❑ Moreover, three-fifths have no toilets, one-tenth have no drinking water and 15% homes don't have provisions of separate beds, no diet plans.
- ❑ Rehabilitation of children is not a priority for childcare homes and children are reportedly kept in such institutions to get funds.

#### Key Amendments Proposed by the Bill:

- ❑ Serious offences: Serious offences will also include

offences for which maximum punishment is imprisonment of more than seven years, and minimum punishment is not prescribed or is of less than seven years.

- ★ Serious offences are those for which the punishment under the Indian Penal Code or any other law for the time being is imprisonment between three and seven years.
- ★ Juvenile Justice Board inquires about a child who is accused of a serious offence.

#### Non-cognizable Offences:

- ★ The present Act provides that an offence which is punishable with imprisonment between three to seven years to be cognizable (where arrest is allowed without warrant) and non-bailable.
- ★ The Bill amends this to provide that such offences will be non-cognizable.
  - ❑ Adoption: Presently, the adoption order issued by the court establishes that the child belongs to the adoptive parents. The Bill provides that instead of the court, the District Magistrate (including Additional District Magistrate) will issue such adoption orders.
  - ❑ Appeals: The Bill provides that any person aggrieved by an adoption order passed by the District Magistrate may file an appeal before the Divisional Commissioner, within 30 days from the date of passage of such order.
- ★ Such appeals should be disposed within four weeks from

the date of filing of the appeal.

- ❑ Additional Functions of the District Magistrate: These include: (i) supervising the District Child Protection Unit, and (ii) conducting a quarterly review of the functioning of the Child Welfare Committee.
- ❑ Designated Court: The Bill proposes that all offences under the earlier Act be tried in children's court.
- ❑ Child Welfare Committees (CWCs): It provides that a person will not be eligible to be a member of the CWC if he/she
  - ★ has any record of violation of human rights or child rights,
  - ★ has been convicted of an offence involving moral turpitude,
  - ★ has been removed or dismissed from service of the central government, or any state government, or a government undertaking,
  - ★ is part of the management of a child care institution in a district.
- ❑ Removal of Members: The appointment of any member of the committee shall be terminated by the state government after an inquiry if they fail to attend the proceedings of the CWCs consecutively for three months without any valid reason or if they fail to attend less than three-fourths of the sittings in a year.
- ★ Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
- ★ The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act,



2015 replaced the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.

★ **Change in Nomenclature:**

- ❑ The Act changes the nomenclature from 'juvenile' to 'child' or 'child in conflict with law'. Also, it removes the negative connotation associated with the word "juvenile".
- ❑ It also includes several new and clear definitions such as orphaned, abandoned and surrendered children; and petty, serious and heinous offences committed by children.

★ **Special Provisions for Age 16-18 years:**

- ❑ Included special provisions to tackle child offenders committing heinous offences in the age group of 16-18 years.

**Mandatory Constitution of the JJ Board:**

- ❑ It mandates setting up Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees in every district. Both must have at least one woman member each.

**Adoption Related Clauses:**

- ❑ A separate new chapter on Adoption to streamline adoption procedures for an orphan, abandoned and surrendered children.
- ❑ Also, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) was granted the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.
- ❑ The Act states that the adoption of a child is final

on the issuance of an adoption order by the court. Currently, there are 629 adoption cases pending in various courts.

**Child Care Institutions (CCI):**

- ❑ All Child Care Institutions, whether run by State Government or by voluntary or non-governmental organisations are to be mandatorily registered under the Act within 6 months from the date of commencement of the Act.

**New tools needed to control spread of TB**

Experts have warned that there is a need for new tools to control the increasing pace of spread of tuberculosis (TB) and also improve the cure rate of the disease.

- ★ Those with lower immunity are prone to develop tuberculosis and TB patients with low immunity may develop COVID-19.
- ★ There is a need for new interventions like vaccines and new drugs that would help reduce burden of TB.
- ★ Nearly 55% of the TB cases emerge due to malnutrition, which also hampers response to drugs.
- ★ The use of masks during the pandemic has reduced cases of TB and chronic respiratory diseases. It is a useful tool to prevent spread of TB.
- ★ There is a need to follow a balanced nutritious diet post treatment.

**About Tuberculosis(TB)**

- ★ TB remains the world's deadliest infectious killer. Each day, over 4000 people lose their

lives to TB and close to 30,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease.

- ★ It is caused by the bacillus *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, TB is an infectious disease. In most cases, TB affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect other sites(non-pulmonary TB).
- ★ It is a contagion disease, which spreads when the people who are sick with pulmonary TB expel bacteria into the air, for example by coughing.
- ★ Rapid molecular test, Sputum smear microscopy, Culture-based methods are some of the diagnostic tests for TB.
- ★ Without treatment, the mortality rate from TB is high.

**Initiatives of WHO:**

- ★ Find. Treat. All. #EndTB: A joint initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) with the Global Fund and Stop TB Partnership, with the aim of accelerating the TB response and ensuring access to care, in line with WHO's overall drive towards Universal Health Coverage.
- ★ A global TB report: Published by the WHO every year since 1997.

**Initiatives in India:**

1. There is a free treatment of TB in India.
2. India aims to eliminate TB by 2025, while the UN aims to eliminate TB by 2030.
3. Mass BCG vaccination to prevent TB.
4. Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) was launched in 1993, offering free diagnosis and treat-

ment for patients, rescuing them from otherwise sure death.

5. A Rs 12,000 cr allocation of fund over the next 3 years to fight TB.
6. A public campaign: TB Harega Desh Jeetega.

## ***Dormant Parliament, fading business***

The Budget session of 2020 was curtailed ahead of the lockdown imposed following the novel coronavirus pandemic.

- ★ A short 18-day monsoon session ended after 10 days as several Members of Parliament and Parliament staff got affected by COVID-19, and the winter session was cancelled.
- ★ As a result, the fiscal year 2020-21 saw the Lok Sabha sitting for 34 days (and the Rajya Sabha for 33), the lowest ever.

### ***Constitutional background:***

Parliamentary System of Government in India

- ★ The Constitution of India established a parliamentary form of government in which the Executive is held responsible to the Parliament for its acts.
- ★ Article 79 :There shall be a Parliament for the Union which shall consist of the President and two Houses to be known respectively as the Council of States and the House of the People.
- ★ Articles 74 and 75 deal with the parliamentary system of government at the Union level.
- ★ Articles 163 and 164 contain provisions with regard to the States.

### ***Parliamentary control over executive:***

- ★ The council of ministers are responsible to the Lok Sabha. They continue in office so long as they enjoy the confidence of the majority members in the Lok Sabha.
- ★ Any withdrawal from the consolidated fund of India can not be done without the approval of the Parliament.
- ★ Motions: While no confidence motion can be moved in the Lok Sabha only, there are other motions to control the executives like censure motion, privilege motion.
- ★ Committees: Parliamentary committees are established to study and deal with various matters that cannot be directly handled by the legislature due to their volume. They also monitor the functioning of the executive branch.
  - E.g. Public Accounts Committee is a standing committee of Parliament to make sure that the expenditures done out of public purse by the executives are well intentioned and appropriate as per the needs of the welfare of citizens of India.
- ★ Question hour and zero hour: to address the questions of MPs who are representatives of the people of India.

### ***Concerns:***

- ★ No legislative scrutiny: During the session, 13 Bills were introduced, and not even one of them was referred to a parliamentary committee for examination.

- In all, 13 Bills were introduced in this session, and eight of them were passed within the session.
- This quick work should be read as a sign of abdication by Parliament of its duty to scrutinise Bills, rather than as a sign of efficiency.
- This development also highlights the decline in the efficacy of committees.
- The percentage of Bills referred to committees declined from 60% and 71% in the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-09) and the 15th Lok Sabha, respectively, to 27% in the 16th Lok Sabha and just 11% in the current one.

### ★ Money Bill classification

- A money bill is defined by Article 110 of the Constitution, as a draft law that contains only provisions that deal with all or any of the matters listed therein.
- The last few years have seen the dubious practice of marking Bills as 'Money Bills' and getting them past the Rajya Sabha.
- In case of a Money Bill, the Rajya Sabha cannot make any amendments, and has only recommendatory powers.
- Some of the earlier Acts, including the Aadhaar Act and Finance Act, have been referred to a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court.

- ★ Lesser discussion on budget: During this session, the Union Budget was presented, discussed and passed.

❑ The Constitution requires the Lok Sabha to approve the expenditure Budget (in the form of demand for grants) of each department and Ministry.

❑ The Lok Sabha had listed the budget of just five Ministries for detailed discussion and discussed only three of these; 76% of the total Budget was approved without any discussion.

★ The missing Deputy Speaker

❑ A striking feature of the current Lok Sabha is the absence of a Deputy Speaker.

❑ Article 93 of the Constitution states that “... The House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker.”

### ***Significance of consulting House panels***

★ Parliamentary committees have often done a stellar job. For example, the committee that examined the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code suggested many changes to make the Code work better, and which were all incorporated in the final law.

★ Similarly, amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act were based on the recommendations of the Committee.

### ***Parliamentary scrutiny is key***

★ Parliament has the central role in our democracy as the representative body that checks the work of the government.

★ It is also expected to examine all legislative proposals in detail, understand their nuances and implications of the provisions, and decide on the appropriate way forward.

### ***Way forward***

★ System of research support to Members of Parliament should be created.

★ Sufficient time should be provided for MPs to examine issues.

★ All Bills and budgets should be examined by committees and public feedback is taken.

★ Parliament can adopt remote working and technological solutions, as several other countries did.

★ It would be useful if the Court can give a clear interpretation of the definition of Money Bills and provide guide rails within which Bills have to stay to be termed as such.

★ In order to fulfil its constitutional mandate, it is imperative that Parliament functions effectively. In sum, Parliament needs to ensure sufficient scrutiny over the proposals and actions of the government.

## ***A valley divided by CAA cross currents***

The railway station in Silchar, the political hub of Bengali dominated Barak Valley comprising Christine assembly seats in Assam, is more than a terminal for train travelers. named as the Bhasha shaheed station, which takes the local people back to May 1961 when the police shot down 11 peo-

ple who protested against the imposition of Assamese through legislation in October 1960.

★ The psychological divide between the Valley and the Assamese speaking Brahmaputra Valley has remained since then.

★ the government claims to have bridged this divide by taking upon Barak, Brahmaputra, Hills and the Plains along equally.

★ but the citizenship amendment act appears to have divided the two valleys. While the Brahmaputra Valley has largely been against it, many in the Barak Valley have supported it.

★ The CAA seeks to fast track the citizenship of non-Muslims who have fled religious persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan and took refuge in India till December 31 2014.

### ***CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019***

★ The act seeks to amend the citizenship act, 1955 which provides various ways in which citizenship may be required in India. it provides for citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalization, and by incorporation of the territory into India. The act of 1955 also prohibits illegal migrants from acquiring the Indian citizenship.

★ The citizenship amendment act of 2019 amends the act of 1955 to provide citizenship to the Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, RCS and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who have entered India on or before December 31, 2014.



- ★ The act provides that these people will not be treated as illegal migrants.
- ★ In order to get this benefit, they must also have been exempted from the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 by the central government.
- ★ The 1920 act mandates foreigners to carry a passport and the 1946 act regulates the entry and the departure of foreigners in India.
- ★ The act says that on acquiring citizenship: I) the percent shall be deemed to be Indian citizens from the date of their entry into India, and II) all the legal proceedings against such persons in respect of their illegal migration or citizenship will be closed.
- ★ Exceptions under the act- the provisions of the act will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, or Tripura as they are included in the 6th schedule of the constitution. These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong in Assam, Garo Hills in Meghalaya, Chakma district in Mizoram, and Tripura tribal areas district. The act shall also not be applicable to the areas under the inner line permit system which regulates the visit of Indians to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland.

### ***Citizenship in India***

The constitution of India does not define the term citizen. however, the details of various categories of persons who are entitled to Indian citizenship are given in Part 2 of the constitution from articles 5 to 11.

#### 1. Article 5

- ★ It provided for citizenship on the commencement of the constitution.
- ★ All those who were domiciled and born in India were given Indian citizenship.
- ★ Even those who were domiciled but not born in India, but either of whose parents were born in India were considered as Indian citizens.
- ★ Anyone who had been an ordinary resident for more than five years was also entitled to apply for Indian citizenship.

#### 2. Article 6

- ★ This article provides for citizenship rights of those persons who have migrated to India from Pakistan.
- ★ It laid down that anyone who migrated to India before July 19 1949, would automatically become a citizen of India if either of his parents or grandparents were born in India.
- ★ But those who entered India after this date had to register themselves.

#### 3. Article 7

- ★ This article provides for rights of citizenship of certain migrants to Pakistan.
- ★ It lays down that those who had migrated to Pakistan after March 1st 1947 but later returned on resettlement permits will be included within the citizenship net.
- ★ The law was more sympathetic to those who migrated from Pakistan and called them refugees than to those who in a state of confusion were stranded in Pakistan or went there but decided to return soon.

#### 4. Article 8

- ★ It provides for citizenship of

certain persons of Indian origin who reside outside India.

- ★ It lays down that any person of Indian origin who resides outside India, who are either of whose parents or grandparents but born in India can register themselves as Indian citizens within the Indian diplomatic mission.

#### 5. Article 9

- ★ It provides that if any person voluntarily acquires the citizenship of any foreign state, then he or she will no longer be a citizen of India.

#### 6. Article 10

- ★ it lays down that every person who is what is deemed to be an Indian citizen under any of the foregoing provisions of Part 2 of the Indian constitution shall, subject to provisions of any law that may be made by the parliament, continue to be such a citizen.

#### 7. Article 11

- ★ It empowers the parliament of India to make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all matters related to it.

Acts and amendments regarding citizenship in India

#### 1. Citizenship act 1955

- ★ It lays down the provisions for the acquisition under termination of Indian citizenship.
- ★ There are four ways in which Indian citizenship can be acquired. These include- birth, descent, registration and naturalization.
- ★ Birth
- ★ Every person who was born in India on or after 26th January 1950 but before 1st August 1987 is an Indian citizen irre-

spective of the nationality of his or her parents.

- ★ Every person who is born in India between 1.07.1987 and 02.12.2004 is a citizen of India given that either of his or her parents is an Indian citizen at the time of his or her birth.
- ★ Every person born in India on or after 3.12.2004 is a citizen of India given that both of his or her parents are Indian citizens or at least one parent is an Indian citizen and the other is not an illegal migrant at the time of birth.
- ★ Registration- rules for acquiring citizenship by registration are:
- ★ A person of Indian origin who has been a resident of India for seven years before applying for the registration.
- ★ A person of Indian origin who is a resident of any country outside undivided India.
- ★ A person who has been married to an Indian citizen and is ordinarily a resident of India for seven years before the application for registration.
- ★ Minor children of persons who are citizens of India.
- ★ Descent:
- ★ A person who is born outside India on or after January 26, 1950 is a citizen of India by descent if his or her father was a citizen of India by birth.
- ★ A person who is born outside India on or after December 10, 1992 but before December 3, 2004 is a citizen of India if either of his or her parents was a citizen of India by birth.
- ★ If a person who was born outside India on or after December

3, 2004 has to acquire Indian citizenship, his or her parents have to declare that the minor does not hold a passport of any other country and his or her birth has been registered at an Indian consulate within one year of birth.

### ***Naturalization:***

- ★ A person can acquire Indian citizenship by naturalisation if he or she is ordinarily a resident of India for 12 years (throughout 12 months preceding the date of application and 11 years in the aggregate) and also fulfills the qualifications that are laid down in the 3rd schedule of the citizenship act.
- ★ The act does not provide for dual citizenship or dual nationality.

### ***Amendments to the Act***

- ★ This act has been amended five times- in 1986, 2003, 2005, 2015 and 2019.
- ★ Through these amendments the parliament has narrowed down the wider and universal principles of Indian citizenship based on the fact of birth.
- ★ The 1986 amendment added the condition that those who were born in India on or after January 26, 1950 but before July 1, 1987 shall be an Indian citizen. It also laid down that those who are born after July 1st 1987 and the 4th December 4th 2003, in addition to one's own birth in India can get citizenship only if either of his or her parents are an Indian citizen at the time of birth.
- ★ The 2003 amendment made the above condition more stringent keeping in view the infiltration from the neighbouring country

Bangladesh. with the laid down that those born on or after December 4th 2004, in addition to the fact of their own birth, both of their parents should be indent citizens on one parent must be an Indian citizen and the other should not be an illegal migrant.

- ★ With these restrictive amendments, India has almost moved towards the narrow principle of jus sanguinis or blood relationship.

## ***Poll bond sale can go ahead: SC***

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds prior to the assembly elections in crucial states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

- ★ A 3-judge bench led by the Chief Justice of India Sharad A Bobde, said the scheme began in 2018 and continued in 2019 and 2020 without any impediments.
- ★ The Chief Justice of India also mentioned that the court found no reason to stall the sale of electoral bonds now.
- ★ The judgement came on an urgent application moved by an NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms represented by Advocate Prashant Bhushan, to stay the sale of the electoral bonds scheduled between April 1 and 10.
- ★ The NGO also represented by advocate Neha Rathi voiced serious apprehension that the sale of bonds before the Elections would further increase illegal and illicit funding of political parties through the shell companies.

- ★ The court agreed that the scheme protects the identity of purchasers of electoral bonds in a cloak of anonymity, but highlighted that such purchases happened only through regular banking channels.
- ★ The State Bank of India would eventually know the identity of the buyer.
- ★ Under clause seven of the scheme the buyers have to apply in a prescribed form either physically or online disclosing their particulars.
- ★ The court rubbished the charge of electoral bonds facilitating anonymous and hefty donations from corporate houses to political parties, as anyone who buys the bonds has to fulfil KYC norms.
- ★ As the purchase of electoral bonds is through banking channels it would be easy to trace the money spent on buying the electoral bonds from the expense sheets of the companies.
- ★ Mr. Bhushan had argued that electoral bonds purchased using white money so banking channels could be repurchased by anonymous entity using black cash.
- ★ However, the court responded that this contention arises out of ignorance of the scheme. Under clause 14 of the scheme the bonds are not tradeable. Moreover, the first buyer will not stand to gain anything out of that sale except losing white money for the black.
- ★ The court debunked the fears that electoral bonds would help or incorporate houses influence the domestic electoral politics. It said that the bonds

could be purchased only by a person who is a citizen of India or is incorporated or established in India.

### ***What are electoral bonds?***

- ★ Electoral bonds are instruments or securities that are used for the purpose of donating funds to the political parties.
- ★ This scheme was introduced in India in 2018.
- ★ The electoral bonds are based on the lines of bearer bonds or promissory notes wherein the issuer of the bond that is the bank is the custodian and pays the one who holds the bond that is the political parties.

### ***Features of electoral bonds***

- ★ Such bonds are issued by the notified banks and the State Bank of India is the notified bank for electoral bonds.
- ★ The one who wishes to donate to the political parties has to approach the bank and purchase the electoral bonds.
- ★ The donor is permitted to buy the bonds through cheque or through digital payments. This is to make sure that the identity of the donor is protected which if revealed may get caught up in political rivalry especially if the donors are from the business fraternity.
- ★ The political party that receives the donation in the form of electoral bonds has to encash it in the account that has been registered with the election Commission of India.
- ★ The electoral bonds are issued in multiples of Rs. 1000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakhs, and Rs. 1 crore without any

maximum limit.

- ★ Every party that is registered under section 29 a of the Representation of People's Act, 1951 and has secured at least 1% of the total votes held in the most recent Lok Sabha or state elections, will be allotted a verified account by the election Commission of India. The transactions of electoral bonds can be made only via this account.

### ***Significance of electoral bonds***

- ★ The electoral bonds help in rooting out the current system of largely anonymous cash donations that are made to the political parties.
- ★ Such bonds are made to cope with the practise of using black money for the purpose of electoral funding.
- ★ The feature of the donor furnishing KYC details to the bank makes it a more transparent tool for electoral funding than cash.
- ★ The electoral bonds protect the donors off political parties against any post poll intimidation or harassment by the political opponents as it has the feature of assured anonymity.
- ★ Since the validity of these bonds is just 15 days from the date of their issue the chances of them being misused are reduced.
- ★ These bonds also offered tax advantage to the donors thus making them an attractive Tool for political donations.

### ***Concerns associated with electoral bonds***

- ★ The purpose of these bonds was to ensure transparency but



they have promoted opacity since the ordinary citizens do not get to know about who is donating how much money to which political party and the bonds increase the anonymity of the political donations.

- ★ These bonds do not have the feature of the Election Commission of India checking the violation of provisions in the Representation of People's Act, as any donation received by a political party to an electoral bond has been taken out of the ambit of reporting under the contribution report.
- ★ The 2018 amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) that allows political parties to receive funding from foreign companies with a majority stake in Indian companies can lead to Indian policies being influenced by the foreign companies, thus hampering the development in India.
- ★ The elimination of a cap of 7.5% on corporate donations, elimination of requirement to reveal political contributions and profit and loss statements and also the elimination of provision that a Corporation must be three years in existence, has undercut the intent of the scheme which was to curb the use of black money for political donations.
- ★ It conceals the identity of corporates and money bags from public scrutiny, thus defeating the objective of transparency.
- ★ Since these bonds assure secrecy and anonymity, this can lead to an increase in cases of round tripping and tax evasion.

- ★ The sale of electoral bonds has become an avenue for shell corporations and entities to park illicit money and even proceeds of bribes with political parties.
- ★ The data obtained through RTI application shows that the illegal sale windows have been open in the past to benefit certain political parties.

### *Way forward*

- ★ There must be a switch to complete digital transactions for the purpose of electoral funding.
- ★ The donations that are above a certain limit should be made public to break the Nexus between the corporates and the political parties.
- ★ The political parties and the funding they receive should be brought under the ambit of right to information.
- ★ A national electoral fund should be established where the donors can contribute and the funds can be distributed among different political parties.
- ★ audits of the accounts belong to the political parties should be conducted on a regular basis.
- ★ Shell companies should be removed from the roles of ministry of corporate affairs by either striking off by registrar of companies or by voluntary strike offs.

## *RTI Requests Rejections*

The Centre has rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central

Information Commission (CIC)'s annual report.

- ★ Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15.

### *Key Points*

- ★ Rejection without Reason: Almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the Right to Information (RTI) Act.
  - These rejections are classified under the 'Others' category in the CIC data.
  - The Finance Ministry alone rejected 40% of its total RTI requests without providing a valid reason under the Act.
  - More than 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office, the Delhi High Court, the Comptroller and Auditor General, among others fell into the "Others" category.
- ★ Maximum Rejections: The Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received.
  - The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.

### *Ground for Rejection of the RTI Requests:*

- Section 8(1) deals with the exemption from disclosure of information:
- ★ If it is related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or

lead to incitement of an offence,

- ★ Information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property,
- ★ Information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person,
- ★ Information which would impede the process of investigation or prosecution of offenders,
- ★ Information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest.
- ★ Of the permissible grounds for rejection, Section 8(1) was used in around 46% of the cases.

#### **Section 9:**

- ★ It empowers the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer to reject a request for information which involves an infringement of copyright.

#### **Section 24:**

- ★ It exempts information related to security and intelligence organisations except allegations of corruption and human rights violations.
- ★ Around one in five (20%) permissible rejections coming under this category.

Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019

- ★ It provided that the Chief Information Commissioner and an Information Commissioner (of Centre as well as States) shall hold office for such terms as prescribed by the Central Government.
  - ❑ Before this amendment,

their term was fixed for 5 years.

- ★ It provided that the salary, allowances and other service conditions of the Chief Information Commissioner and an Information Commissioner (of Centre as well as States) shall be such as prescribed by the Central Government.
  - ❑ Before this amendment, the salary, allowances and other service conditions of the Chief Information Commissioner were similar to those of the Chief Election Commissioner and that of an Information Commissioner were similar to those of an Election Commissioner (State Election Commissioners in case of States).

- ★ It removed the provisions regarding deductions in salary of the Chief Information Commissioner, an Information Commissioner, the State Chief Information Commissioner and a State Information Commissioner due to pension or any other retirement benefits received by them for their previous government service. Central Information Commission

#### **Established:**

- ❑ The Central Information Commission was established by the Central Government in 2005, under the provisions of the Right to Information Act (2005). It is not a constitutional body.

#### **Members:**

- ❑ The Commission consists of a Chief Information Commissioner and not more

than ten Information Commissioners.

- ★ At present (2019), the Commission has six Information Commissioners apart from the Chief Information Commissioner.

#### **Appointment:**

- ❑ They are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

#### **Tenure:**

- ❑ The Chief Information Commissioner and an Information Commissioner shall hold office for such terms as prescribed by the Central Government or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- ❑ They are not eligible for reappointment.

#### **Power and Functions of CIC:**

- ❑ It is the duty of the Commission to receive and inquire into a complaint from any person regarding information request under RTI, 2005.
- ❑ The Commission can order an inquiry into any matter if there are reasonable grounds (suo-moto power).
- ❑ While inquiring, the Commission has the powers of a civil court in respect of summoning, requiring documents etc.

## Shifting Health to the Concurrent List

Fifteenth Finance Commission Chairman N.K. Singh said that health should be shifted to the Concurrent list under the Constitution. Presently, 'Health' is under the State List.

- ★ He also pitched for a Developmental Finance Institution (DFI) dedicated to healthcare investments.

### Key Points

- ★ Arguments for Shifting 'Health' to the Concurrent List:
  - ❑ Centre with Greater Flexibility: Bringing health into the Concurrent list would give the Centre greater flexibility to enact regulatory changes and reinforce the obligation of all stakeholders towards providing better healthcare.
  - ❑ Rationalisation and Streamlining of the Multiple Acts: There is a multiplicity of Acts, rules and regulations, and mushrooming institutions, yet the regulation of the sector is far from adequate.
- ★ With the health in the concurrent list, uniformity of acts can be ensured.
  - ❑ Centre Expertise to States: The Central government is also technically better equipped to come up with the health schemes because it has the assistance of multiple research bodies and departments dedicated to the management of public health.
- ★ States on the other hand do not have the technical expertise to

independently design comprehensive public health policies.

### Arguments Against Shifting 'Health' to the Concurrent List:

- ❑ Right to Health: It is neither necessary nor sufficient to guarantee the provision of accessible, affordable and adequate healthcare for all.
- ★ Besides, the right to health is, arguably, already provided for via the Constitution's Article 21 that guarantees protection of life and liberty.
  - ❑ Challenges Federal Structure: Shifting ever more subjects from the states to the Centre would erode India's federal nature and impair efficiency by abandoning the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that any task should be left to the level of government best placed to do it.
- ★ Trust Cooperative Federalism: The centre must direct its energies to designing policy that would help states deliver on their constitutional mandate to provide adequate, accessible and affordable healthcare for all.
  - ❑ More Burden With Centre: The Centre has onerous responsibilities of its own, for which it struggles to find resources. Taking more functions would help neither the states nor the Centre discharge their constitutional obligations.
  - ❑ Encourage States: The Centre devolves 41% of the taxes it collects to the states. The Centre should encourage the states to do

what they are supposed to do, while the Centre optimises use of its own resources, focusing on its obligations.

- ★ Health being a state subject does not preclude the Centre offering constructive support.
- ★ The NITI Aayog's Health Index, financial assistance through the insurance-based programme Ayushman Bharat, improved regulatory environment for healthcare providers and medical education are examples of such support that can nudge states in the right direction.

### Developmental Finance Institution (DFI) for Health Care:

- ❑ A health sector-specific DFI is much needed on the same lines as that of DFIs for other sectors like National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development - NABARD (agriculture), National Housing Bank- NHB (Housing) and Tourism Finance Corporation of India Ltd. - TFCI (tourism).
- ❑ Such a DFI would increase health care access in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and also come with technical assistance that ensures proper usage of funds.

### Other Suggestions by N.K. Singh:

- ❑ Increase the government spending on health to 2.5% of GDP by 2025.
- ❑ Primary healthcare should be a fundamental commitment of all States in particular and should be allocated



at least two-thirds of health spending.

- ❑ To have a standardisation of health care codes for both the Centre and states.
- ❑ Forming an All India Medical and Health Service.
- ★ Given the inter-state disparity in the availability of medical doctors, it is essential to constitute the Service as is envisaged under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 1951.
- ❑ Emphasised the importance of universalising healthcare insurance, as a large section of the society still remain uncovered.

### ***Need for Universalisation of Healthcare Insurance:***

- ❑ Existing Insurance Coverage: The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) covers the bottom two income quintiles and commercial insurance largely covers top-income quintiles, thereby creating a 'missing middle' class in between.
- ❑ Missing Middle: This refers to people in the middle two income quintiles, where the population is not rich enough to afford commercial insurance and not poor enough to be covered under government-sponsored health insurance

schemes.


### ***About Concurrent List***

***The subject-wise distribution of legislative power is given in the three lists of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution:***



- ❑ List-I- the Union List
- ❑ List-II- the State List
- ❑ List-III- the Concurrent List
- ★ Both, the Parliament and state legislature can make laws with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the Concurrent List.
- ★ It includes the matters on which uniformity of legislation throughout the country is desirable but not essential.
- ★ However State legislation operates to the extent that it is not in conflict with the Central legislation. At times, the very pres-

ence of a central legislation can negate the state's ability to legislate.


- ★ This list has at present 52 subjects (originally 47) like criminal law and procedure, civil procedure, marriage and divorce, population control and family planning, electricity, labour welfare, economic and social planning, drugs, newspapers, books and printing press, and others.
- ★ The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 transferred five subjects to Concurrent List from State List i.e education, forests, weights and measures, protection of wild animals and birds, and administration of justice; constitution and organisation of all courts except the Supreme Court and the High Courts.



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## **Pakistan's Prime Minister visits Sri Lanka**

Recently, Pakistan's Prime Minister visited Sri Lanka. It is the first Pakistani PM visit to Sri Lanka since 2016 and first visit by any head of government to Sri Lanka since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

### **Key Points**

#### **Sri Lanka-Pakistan Relationship (Background):**

##### **Trade:**

- ★ Sri Lanka and Pakistan have a free trade agreement dating back to 2005. Pakistan is Sri Lanka's second largest trading partner in South Asia after India.

##### **Culture:**

- ★ Over the last decade, Pakistan has also tried to work on a cultural connection with Sri Lanka by highlighting its ancient Buddhist connections and sites.

##### **Defence Cooperation:**

- ★ Defence ties are a strong pillar of the Sri Lanka-Pakistan bilateral relationship.
- ★ During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Sri Lanka allowed refuelling of Pakistani Jets.
- ★ In its Civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, Sri Lanka turned to Pakistan for arms and ammunition, as well as

training for its fighter pilots, in the last stages of the war.

- ★ Recently, Sri Lanka participated in Pakistan's multi-nation naval exercise Aman-21.

##### **About the Visit:**

- Defence Credit Line Facility:
- ★ Pakistan has offered a USD 50 million new credit line to Sri Lanka to boost cooperation in defence and security sectors.

##### **Enhancing Cultural Ties:**

- ★ Pakistan will set up a centre for the study of Asian cultures and civilisation at Peradeniya University in Kandy.
- ★ Sri Lanka also named a sports institute in Colombo after Pakistan's PM, highlighting the cricket connection between the two countries.

##### **Significance of the Visit:**

- For Pakistan:
- ★ Enhancing Trade Ties:
- ★ Pakistan invited Sri Lanka to "take advantage" of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor to enhance trade ties. In the past, Colombo had pitched for an economic corridor overland for access to countries beyond.

##### **For Sri Lanka:**

- ★ Seeking Support in UNHRC:
- ★ Recently, Sri Lanka has made an appeal to the member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to

reject the impending resolution on the island nation's human rights accountability and reconciliation.

- ★ Sri Lanka is facing a new UNHRC resolution calling on it to hold human rights abusers to account and deliver justice to victims of the 26-year civil war (1983-2009) between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgent group fighting for Tamilian minorities.
- ★ Balancing Ties with India and Pakistan:
- ★ It provided an opportunity to Sri Lanka to balance its ties with India and Pakistan.
- ★ Sri Lanka cancelled Pakistan's PM address to the Parliament over concerns that he would raise the Kashmir issue.
- ★ Repairing Anti-Muslim Image:
- ★ This visit may repair the damage of Sri Lanka's image in the Islamic world as it recently denied burials of bodies of Muslims who have died of Covid-19.
- ★ Muslims, who make up about 11% of Sri Lanka's population, have had tense relations with the Sinhala Buddhist majority for much of the last decade, with riots shattering the uneasy calm every few years.

## Concerns For India

### Hamper Efforts of Isolating Pakistan:

- ❑ As Sri Lanka's closest neighbour with strong, all encompassing ties, India has not perceived Pakistan as a serious rival in Colombo so far.
- ❑ However, this visit signalled that despite India's best efforts at "isolating"-Pakistan, it has friends in the neighbourhood.

### Increasing Closeness to China:

- ❑ Pakistan's PM visit soon after Sri Lanka's abrupt withdrawal from a tripartite agreement (along with Japan and India) for the development of the East Container Terminal at Colombo port, and the award of a contract to a Chinese company to set up a hybrid renewable energy in an island off Jaffna is a reason for concern for India.

### Threatening India's Interests in Indian Ocean Region:

- ❑ Increasing convergence of interests between Sri Lanka, China, and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean region is a matter of concern.
- ❑ Sri Lanka's role is central in accomplishment of India's strategic vision (SAGAR) for the Indian Ocean, and countering China's String of Pearls strategy.
- ❑ Pakistan's extension of the line of credit to Sri Lanka comes close on the heels of India extending USD 50 million line of credit to neighbouring Maldives for strengthening navy capabilities

ties and USD 100 million to Mauritius for shoring up coastal defences.

### Connectivity:

- ❑ The Gwadar port is connected to China's Xinjiang province by the CPEC which in turn is a strand of the ambitious multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative launched by China in 2013.
- ❑ The latest invitation to Sri Lanka from Pakistan comes as India is trying to get work restarted on Chabahar port in Iran which New Delhi sees as a route to landlocked Central Asia and Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan.

### Concerns over Radicalisation by Pakistan:

- ❑ Sporadically, the Indian security establishment has voiced concerns about Pakistan's role in the radicalisation of Muslims especially in Eastern Sri Lanka.

### Way Forward

- ★ Sri Lanka has learnt to balance its ties with India and Pakistan expertly, signalling to both that it treats the two relationships separately. India too should not get threatened by Sri Lanka-Pakistan ties instead it should readjust alignments in its interests. Reviving a trilateral maritime dialogue with Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 2020 is a positive step in that direction.
- ★ India should also consider adding to the mix an old idea proposed first by former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe an overland economic corridor through

India that would provide Sri Lanka a land route to Central Asia and beyond.

## India's UN journey

India was approaching its two-year term on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with "a strong commitment to reformed multilateralism", India's Permanent Representative to the UN said.

- ★ India was elected by United Nations (UN) member-countries overwhelmingly for a non-permanent seat to the 15-member UN Security Council (UNSC) for a two year-term.
- ★ India had been elected "unopposed"- as it was "the sole candidate for the Asia-Pacific seat.
- ★ UNSC has five permanent members and 10 non-permanent ones.
- ★ The UNSC comprises its five permanent members: the UK, US, Russia, France and China.
- ★ The new incoming members are: India, Ireland, Mexico, Kenya and Norway.
- ★ Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam are its other current non-permanent members.

### Agenda for India at UN

- ★ India comes into the Security Council as the largest democracy representing 1/6th of humanity and with a strong commitment to
  - ❑ reformed multilateralism,
  - ❑ rule of law,
  - ❑ a fair and equitable international system and
  - ❑ to peace, security and development.



- ★ India would be a voice for the developing world and use its tenure to foster “human-centric and inclusive”- solutions to issues of peace and security.

### **Background:**

- ★ United Nations Day is celebrated on 24 October each year.
- ★ On June 26, 1945, India became one of the first 50 countries to sign the UN charter.
- ★ The United Nations officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when the UN Charter had been ratified by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and by a majority of other signatories.
- ★ India joined the United Nations after ratifying the UN Charter on October 30, 1945.

### **India and United nations**

India’s experience of Seven and a half decades at the UN may be divided in three distinct phases.

The first phase: until the end of the Cold War in 1989

- ★ India enhanced its diplomatic influence as a moderating force in easing armed conflicts in Asia and Africa by disentangling them from the superpower rivalry.
- ★ Common causes: India strove to utilise the UN only to focus on common causes such as anti-colonialism, anti-racism, nuclear disarmament, environment conservation and equitable economic development.
  - ❑ In 1988, India proposed a bold three-phase plan to eliminate nuclear weapons from the surface of earth.
- ★ Bilateral issues: India also realised that the UN could not

be relied upon to impartially resolve vital security disputes such as Jammu and Kashmir.

- ❑ It resisted attempts by neighbouring countries to raise bilateral problems which was reflected during the Bangladesh liberation war and after.
- ❑ After the India-China war debacle India redesigned its diplomatic style to privilege bilateral contacts over the third party role by the UN.

### **Second phase (1990s): A demanding decade**

- ★ It was the most difficult decade for India in the UN because of
  - ❑ The sudden end of the Cold War,
  - ❑ The disintegration of the Soviet Union and
  - ❑ The resultant emergence of the United States as the unrivalled power in world politics.
  - ❑ Unstable coalition governments
  - ❑ The balance of payments crisis which constrained the country’s capability to be active in the Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly.
- ★ A change in India’s foreign policy was reflected in voting patterns at the UN. India showed pragmatism in enabling the toughest terms on Iraq even after eviction from occupied Kuwait, or in reversing the hitherto stated position on Zionism as racism.
- ★ Internationalisation of Kashmir issue: Growing militancy in Kashmir in the early 1990s emboldened Pakistan to internationalise the dispute with accusations about gross human

rights violations by India.

- ❑ India had to work hard to seek favours from Iran and China in the Human Rights Commission to checkmate Pakistan.

- ★ The threat to the UN’s sovereignty principle by NATO intervention against Yugoslavia in 1999 without the authorisation of the UNSC deeply disturbed India.
- ★ Diplomatic difficulties: India suffered a humiliating defeat in the hands of Japan in the 1996 contest for a non-permanent seat in the UNSC.
- ★ Against NPT and CTBT: India resolutely stood against indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995, and it stoutly rejected the back-door introduction for adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996.
  - ❑ India surprised the world in 1998 with its Pokhran nuclear weapon tests, ignoring the likely adverse reaction from the nuclear club.

### **Third phase (The 21st century): India shining at UN**

- ★ The impressive economic performance due to economic liberalisation and globalisation policies, helped a great deal in strengthening India’s profile.
- ★ India contributes its reliable and substantial troop contributions to several peacekeeping operations in African conflict theatres.
- ★ India has emerged as a responsible stakeholder in non-traditional security issue areas such as
  - ❑ the spread of small and light weapons,

- ❑ the threat of non-state actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and
- ❑ the impact of climate change.
- ★ Humanitarian and funding assistance: India has scaled up its contributions to development and humanitarian agencies, while India's share to the UN assessed budget has registered a hike from 0.34% to 0.83%.
- ★ The successful electoral contests for various prestigious slots in the UNSC, the Human Rights Council, the World Court, and functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, highlight India's growing popularity.

### **Challenges for India at UN:**

- ★ Security Council expansion
  - ❑ India has long sought a permanent seat at the Council.
  - ❑ It is also a proponent of other UNSC reforms such as increasing the number of permanent (currently five) and non-permanent (currently 10) seats and ensuring greater representation for Africa.
  - ❑ The move has been stuck for more than 25 years because of a lack of unity among the regional formations.
  - ❑ It also includes stout opposition from some 30 middle powers such as Italy and Pakistan which fear losing out to regional rivals in the event of an addition of permanent seats.
- ★ The draft Comprehensive Convention on International

Terrorism: India proposed the draft but it encountered reservations from among Islamic and other countries on provisions regarding definition of terrorist and the convention's application to state armed forces.

- ★ Volatile global situation
  - ❑ The Trump administration's disdain towards multilateral institutions,
  - ❑ The changing U.S.-China equation,
  - ❑ China's growing political isolation on account of the spread of the novel coronavirus, and
  - ❑ China's aggressive territorial forays in eastern Ladakh and the South China Sea,
  - ❑ An unabated economic slowdown

### **Way forward:**

India's future role will probably depend on its ability to weather the impact of the multiple crises it now faces. This is pertinent as India will soon begin its two-year term as a non-permanent UNSC member.

- ★ Its areas of priority will continue to be the
  - ❑ Upholding of Charter principles,
  - ❑ Mounting effective punitive measures against those who support, finance and sponsor terrorists,
  - ❑ Striving for securing due say to the troop contributing countries in the management of peace operations.
- ★ If China succeeds in convening a formal meeting on Kashmir to please Pakistan, India may have to choose either to abstain in

the vote since it is a party to the dispute or vote against any unfavourable proposal that might be tabled.

- ❑ The growing proximity with the U.S. may prompt India not to stay neutral in order to counterbalance China.
- ★ Compromise on UN reforms: Although India enjoys by far the greatest support, the only realistic possibility seems to settle for a compromise, i.e. a new category of members elected for a longer duration than the present non-permanent members without veto power.

## **Houthis Attacked Riyadh**

Recently, a ballistic missile attack by the Houthis on the Saudi capital Riyadh was destroyed by the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Iranian-aligned Houthi group.

### **Key Points**

### **Reasons for Recent Attack:**

### **Taking Advantage:**

- ★ The Houthis are winning, they have made significant advances on the ground, especially in Jawf province along the Saudi border.
- ★ They are now poised to attack the city of Marib, the last stronghold of the Yemeni government in the north.

### **Iran's Support:**

- ★ Iran is involved in Houthi decision making. Tehran (capital of Iran) undoubtedly wants the Saudi kingdom to remain embroiled in the Yemeni chaos.
- ★ Saudi Arabia and Iran have



been engaged in proxy wars with each other for 40 years, since the Iranian revolution. Yemen is now among the victims of that conflict.

### Background:

#### Yemen Conflict:

- ★ Since 2014, Yemen has been facing a multi-sided conflict involving local, regional, and international actors.
- ★ The Houthis, a group of Zaidi Shia Muslims who ruled a kingdom there for nearly 1,000 years, used widespread anger against President Hadi's decision to postpone long-awaited elections and his stalled negotiations over a new constitution.
- ★ They marched from their stronghold of Saada province to the capital Sanaa and surrounded the presidential palace, placing Hadi under house arrest.

#### Saudi Arabia's Intervention:

- ★ A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen in March 2015, at Hadi's request, after the Houthis continued to sweep the south and threatened to conquer the last government stronghold of Aden, prompting one of the world's worst humanitarian crises ever.

#### Ceasefire:

- ★ Yemen Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia-backed forces loyal to the President of Yemen agreed to a United Nations-mediated ceasefire agreement in 2018.

#### Resurgence of Houthi Attacks:

- ★ In 2019, the Yemen's Shia Houthi rebels, violating the ceasefire, attacked Aramco crude oil production in Saudi Arabia.

#### Concerns:

- Yemen is strategically important because it sits on a strait linking the Red Sea with the

Gulf of Aden, through which much of the world's oil shipments pass.

- It also worries the West because of the threat of attacks - such as from al-Qaeda or IS affiliates-emanating from the country as it becomes more unstable.
- The Houthis have escalated cross-border attacks on the kingdom even after the United States delisted the rebels as terrorists and stepped up efforts to de-escalate the six-year conflict.
- The conflict is also seen as part of a regional power struggle between Shia-ruled Iran and Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia.

#### India's Interest:

- For India, it is a challenge which cannot be washed away taking into consideration the oil security and 8 million expats living in the region with more than USD 80 billion of incoming remittance annually.

#### Indian Initiatives:

##### Operation Rahat:

- ★ India launched a massive air and sea operation to evacuate over 4000 Indian nationals from Yemen in April 2015.

##### Humanitarian Assistance:

- ★ India has provided food and medical aid to Yemen in the past and thousands of Yemeni nationals have availed of medical treatment in India over the past few years.
- ★ India also continues to facilitate education of a large num-

ber of Yemeni nationals in various Indian institutions.

## India-USA Bilateral Trade

According to annual reports of US Trade Representative (USTR), India's recent emphasis on import substitution through the 'Make in India' campaign is one the several challenges facing the bilateral trade relationship.

### Key Points

#### Bilateral Trade between India and USA:

- ❑ In 2019-20, the bilateral trade between the USA and India stood at USD 88.75 billion.
- ❑ The USA is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus.
- ❑ India's trade surplus with the USA increased to USD 17.42 billion in 2019-20 from USD 16.86 billion in 2018-19.
- ❑ For the USA, India was the sixth largest supplier of services imports.
- ❑ India's large market, economic growth, and progress towards development make it an essential market for USA exporters.

#### Issues in the Trade Relationship:

- ❑ Tariffs: Both the countries cite market barriers including both tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as multiple practices and regulations that disadvantage foreign companies.
- ❑ Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) Programme: Effective from June 2019, the USA decided to withdraw duty-free bene-

fits to Indian exporters under the GSP programme.

- ❑ Services: A key issue for India is the USA's temporary visa policies, which affect Indian nationals working in the United States.
- ★ India also continues to seek a "totalization agreement"- to coordinate social security protection for workers who split their careers between the two countries.
- ❑ Agriculture: Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers in India limit USA agricultural exports.
- ★ Each side also sees the other's agricultural support programs as market-distorting.
- ❑ Intellectual Property (IP): The two sides differ on how to balance IP protection to incentivize innovation and support other policy goals, such as access to medicines.
- ★ India remains on the "Special 301"- Priority Watch List for 2020, based on concerns owing to its treatment of patents, infringement rates, and protection of trade secrets.
- ❑ "Forced" Localization: The United States continues to press India on its "forced"-localization practices.
- ★ Initiatives to grow India's manufacturing base and support jobs include requirements for in-country data storage, domestic content (such as laws protecting India's solar sector), and domestic testing in some sectors.
- ★ India's new data localization requirements for electronic payment service suppliers such as MasterCard, Visa, etc.
- ❑ Investment: US concerns about investment barriers

remain nevertheless, heightened by new Indian restrictions on how e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Walmart owned Flipkart conduct business.

- ❑ Defense Trade: The United States urges more reforms in India's defense offsets policy and higher Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) caps in its defense sector.

### Generalized System of Preferences

- ★ The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a USA trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.
- ★ GSP was instituted on 1st January, 1976, by the Trade Act of 1974.

### Way Forward

- ★ There is a huge potential to boost bilateral trade between the countries especially on account of increasing anti-China sentiment in both the nations.
- ★ Thus, the negotiation should focus on the resolution of various non-tariff barriers and other market access improvements as early as possible.

## India-Bangladesh Bilateral Meet

Recently, India's External Affairs Minister visited Bangladesh for a bilateral meet.

- ★ This meeting comes ahead of Indian Prime Minister's visit to



Bangladesh scheduled in March 2021.

- ★ Earlier a 122-member contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces has participated in the 72nd Republic Day parade, commemorating 50 years of the 1971 India-Pakistan war that led to the liberation of Bangladesh.

### **Key Points**

#### **Bangladesh's Stand:**

□ Resolution of Problems:

- ★ Problems between neighbouring countries should be resolved through discussions and negotiations.

#### **Prioritising Each Others Benefit:**

- ★ Need to focus on possible ways to materialise commitments and accommodate each other's priorities in a mutually beneficial manner.

#### **Cooperation During Covid-19:**

- ★ Bangladesh acknowledged the collaborative initiative of the two countries in implementing the vaccination programme against the ongoing pandemic.
- ★ Bangladesh purchased the Covid vaccine from Serum Institute of India.
- ★ Bangladesh is the largest recipient of 9 million doses of Made in India vaccine.

#### **Multidimensional Relationship:**

- ★ Both countries are committed to expand their relationship in all dimensions, ranging from security, trade, transport and connectivity, culture, people-to-people ties, energy, joint development of our shared resources and defence.

#### **India's Stand**

□ Congratulated Bangladesh

- ★ On its graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status.
- ★ Bangladesh has been on the United Nations (UN) Least Developed Countries list since 1975.
- ★ Bangladesh fulfilled all the criteria necessary for its elevation to a developing country in 2018.
- ★ Therefore the UN has recommended graduation of Bangladesh from the category of Least Developed Country (LDC).
- ★ Once it receives the final recommendation, Bangladesh will formally graduate to the developing nation bracket in 2026.

#### **More than Strategic Partners:**

- ★ India-Bangladesh relations transcend strategic partnership, and bonding of both the countries is central to the realisation of a dream of a peaceful, prosperous and progressive South Asia.

#### **Continued Interaction During Covid:**

- ★ Despite the Covid pandemic, interactions and consultations continued unabated such as:
- ★ India and Bangladesh had a Virtual Summit in December 2020.
- ★ A Joint Consultative Commission between the two Foreign Ministers in September 2020.

#### **Teesta Issue:**

- ★ India and Bangladesh would have a meeting of Water Resources secretaries to discuss the Teesta issue.

#### **Development of Connectivity:**

- ★ India is keen to focus on the development of connectivity with Bangladesh and beyond for next 20 years to change the region's geo-economic scenario.

#### **Bangladesh Central to India's Policies:**

- ★ Bangladesh was central to India's Neighbourhood First policy and increasingly relevant to the country's Act East Policy.
- ★ Bangladesh as a key neighbour and a valued partner not only in South Asia but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

#### **Progress on Ground Situation:**

- ★ Practical progress has been made on the ground.
- ★ Conducting a trial run of container cargo through Chattogram port to Agartala.
- ★ Adding two new protocol routes to inland waterways connecting Tripura to the national waterways.
- ★ Handing over 10 broad gauge locomotives.
- ★ Forming a Joint venture in the energy sector.

#### **Way Forward**

- ★ A year after the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019-National Register of Citizens (NRC) issue strained the robust ties between the two countries, quiet diplomacy appears to have worked. India must keep up the partnership that allows for economic growth and improved developmental parameters for both countries.
- ★ Deepening relationship with Bangladesh has become a necessity in the face of shifting

geo-economics. Bangladesh, with its growing economic success provides a vital partnership in the region.

- ❑ The two countries share 54 transboundary rivers, and water management is the key to prosperity.
- ★ Bangladesh-India relations have reached a stage of maturity. There is scope for India-Bangladesh ties to move to the next level, based on cooperation, coordination and consolidation.
- ★ It is important to address specific issues like Teesta and to respond to Dhaka's call for help on the Rohingya issue.

## India - Sweden Virtual Summit

Indian Prime Minister held a Virtual Summit with the Prime Minister of Sweden to discuss bilateral issues and other regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest.

- ★ The Summit provided an opportunity to discuss the international situation and response to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as regional and global issues of mutual importance including climate action, sustainable development, gender equality, counter-terrorism and disaster resilient infrastructure, among others.

### Key Points

#### ★ *Highlights of the Summit:*

- ❑ Economic Cooperation:
- ★ Welcomed the launch of a second joint industrial R&D call on Smart and Sustainable Cities, Transport Systems, Clean Technologies and Digitalization

and Internet of Things under India-Sweden Collaborative Industrial Research & Development Programme.

- ★ Confirmed the ambition to scale up bilateral research and innovation on Circular Economy including the themes of Health and Life Sciences and Waste to Wealth during 2021.

#### *Cooperation in Other Sectors:*

- ★ Welcomed the creation of a Sweden-India Health Hub at AIIMS-Jodhpur.
- ★ Noted advances in hydrogen research and their possible applications, i.e. in the Energy and other key industries.

#### *Cooperation at Multilateral Forums:*

- ★ Welcomed Sweden's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- ★ Sweden congratulated India on its eighth term as an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2021-2022.
- ★ Reaffirmed the importance of the urgent reform of the UN Security Council, including its expansion not only to sustain credibility of multilateralism but also to deliver on the several serious common challenges facing humanity.
- ★ India thanked Sweden for its support to India's permanent membership of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council.
- ★ India congratulated Sweden on assuming the Chairmanship of the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

#### *Climate Action:*

- ★ Welcomed the USA re-entry

into the Paris agreement which gives new momentum to global climate action ahead of COP 26 to be held in Glasgow, UK.

- ★ Agreed to continue their outreach to expand the membership of the Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT).
- ★ Agreed further to intensify their collaboration within the framework of the Arctic Council to address global environmental protection and combating climate change.

#### *Security:*

- ★ Welcomed the finalization of the General Security Agreement in 2019 on the exchange and mutual protection of classified information, enabling a comprehensive partnership in all defence sectors.
- ★ Indian Prime Minister invited Swedish defence firms to participate in the "Make in India programme", especially in the two Defence Production Corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

#### *India - Sweden Relations*

- ❑ Political Relations: The first India-Nordic Summit took place in the year 2018.
- ★ The King and Queen of Sweden gave a Royal Visit to India in December, 2019.
- ❑ Economic and Commercial relations: The bilateral trade between two countries presently stands around USD 2 billion. After China and Japan, India is Sweden's third largest trade partner in Asia.
- ★ The main items of Indian exports to Sweden are articles

of apparel, clothing accessories; textiles yarn, fabrics, made-ups; manufactures of metals; road vehicles; general industrial machinery and equipment.

- ★ The main items of Indian imports from Sweden are pulp and waste paper; road vehicles; paper and paper board, general industrial machinery and equipment etc.

□ Being a member of European Union, Sweden can play an important role in India's partnership with the European Union and EU countries.

□ The close relations will further the values of democracy, rule of law, pluralism, equality, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights.

## India's Role in Afghan Peace Process

Recently, the USA President has envisaged a New Peace Initiative (Plan) to decide on the roadmap for peace in Afghanistan.

- ★ Under the plan, the USA proposed a regional conference under the United Nations auspices with foreign ministers of the USA, India, Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran to discuss a "unified approach"- on Afghanistan.

### Key Points

#### USA President's New Peace Initiative:

□ Delay in Withdrawal of Troops: This peace plan has kept open the possibility that the USA troops, currently deployed in



Afghanistan, might stay on for a longer time.

- ★ Under the earlier USA- Taliban Deal, the USA had promised to withdraw all troops by May, 2021.

□ Immediate Action: The USA is pressing the Taliban to accept an immediate agreement to reduce violence for 90 days that will provide the space for the peace initiative.

□ Inclusive Process: The USA will not be "dictating terms"- to the Afghan parties, but facilitating an inclusive interim government, an agreement on the "foundational principles"- for a new political order, and a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".

□ Turkey's Role: The USA is asking Turkey to convene a meeting of the government in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan) and the Taliban to finalise a peace settlement.

□ Unified Approach: The USA

asked the United Nations to convene a meeting of the foreign ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States to develop a "unified approach" to peace in Afghanistan.

#### India's Role in Peace Process Through "Unified Approach":-

- India is an important player in the peace process it has also been acknowledged by the USA.
- India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are inclusive and Afghan-led, Afghanowned and Afghan-controlled.
- India has invested heavily in infrastructure developments, training security forces and supplying them with necessary equipment.
- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan since it has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan's development.

- ❑ India hopes to have a role in setting the terms especially concerning terrorism, violence, women's rights and democratic values.

### ***India's Interest in Afghanistan:***

- ❑ Economic and Strategic Interest: Afghanistan is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
- ★ Anyone who is in power in Afghanistan controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia (via Afghanistan).
- ❑ Developmental Projects: The massive reconstruction plans for the country to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.
- ★ Major projects include the Afghan Parliament, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, and the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam).
- ★ Also India's assistance of more than USD 3 billion in projects, hundreds of small development projects (of schools, hospitals and water projects) have cemented its position in Afghanistan.
- ❑ Security Interest: India has been the victim of state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region (e.g. Haqqani network). Thus, setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan can help tackling Pakistan supported terrorism.

### ***Challenges:***

- ❑ The Afghan government as well as Taliban are unwilling for any power sharing.
- ★ Taliban is even not willing to give up its sanctuaries in

Pakistan. Nor will it accept any dilution of the strict Islamic system that it wants to enforce.

- ❑ Also, the Taliban is fragmented or divided internally. It is composed of various regional and tribal groups acting semi-autonomously.
- ★ Therefore, it is possible that some of them may continue to engage in violence impacting the peace process and dialogue.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ An independent, sovereign, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive Afghanistan is crucial for peace and stability in the region.
- ★ In order to ensure the same, the Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- ★ Also, there is a need for the global community to fight against the global concern of terrorism. In this context, it high time to adopt the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (proposed by India at UN in 1996).
- ★ Though the new initiative by the USA is a good step, the road ahead would not be easy. Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan will require patience and compromise among all parties.

### ***Falling Rupee Reserves of Iran***

Recently, Indian merchants have almost entirely stopped signing new export contracts with Iranian buyers due to caution about Iran's falling rupee reserves with Indian banks.

- ★ Earlier in 2020, the Ministry of External Affairs informed that India is no longer involved in the Farzad-B gas field project

of Iran. The reasons included policy changes by the Iranian government, Iran's uncertain finances, and the USA sanctions situation.

- ★ In 2020, Iran also passed a bill allowing the government to slash four zeros from the Rial and authorizing its replacement with another basic unit of currency called the toman (redenomination).

### ***Key Points***

#### ***Falling Reserves:***

- ❑ Iran's rupee reserves in India's UCO and IDBI Bank, the two lenders authorised to facilitate rupee trade, have depleted significantly.

#### ***Reasons:***

- ❑ Under the USA sanctions, Iran is unable to use US dollars to transact oil sales.
- ❑ Iran previously had a deal to sell oil to India in exchange for rupees, which it used to import critical goods, including agricultural commodities, but India stopped buying Tehran's oil in May 2019 after a US sanctions waiver expired.
- ❑ Iran continued using its rupees to buy goods from India, but after 22 months of no crude sales, Iran's rupee reserves have fallen.

- ★ Iran's reserves have reduced significantly and will be over soon probably because trade has stopped.

#### ***Implications:***

- ❑ Apprehension of Exporters:
- ★ Exporters are not sure whether they would be paid on time for new shipments and they are avoiding dealing with Iran since payments are getting delayed.



### ***Falling Indian Exports:***

- ★ India's overall exports to Iran fell 42% in 2020 from a year ago to USD 2.2 billion, the lowest in over a decade.
- ★ The fall is continuing in 2021 and in January this year exports more than halved from a year ago to USD 100.20 million.

### ***Growing Influence of China:***

- ★ Recently signed deals between Iran and China will vastly expand Chinese presence in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and dozens of other projects.

### ***Saving India's Interests:***

- ★ The China Iran strategic partnership fructifying USD 400 billion deal may be an impediment for Indian entry routes into Afghanistan through Chabahar and further connectivity to International North South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), although Iran has not given any signals of disruption of these projects.

### ***India's Role in the Region:***

- ★ Maintaining ties with Iran even as it forges a new relationship with Saudi Arabia and Israel is critical for its balancing policy in West Asia.

### ***Avoiding Sectarian Tension:***

- ★ Since India is home to sizable populations of both Shia and Sunni Muslims and seeks to isolate itself from any sectarian tensions in the region, India should do well to neither completely break off ties with Iran nor go against the United States outright.

### ***India's Energy security:***

- ★ India has stopped purchasing Iranian oil, which accounts for around 90% of its imports from the Islamic nation.
- ★ India was Iran's leading oil client after China until mid-2018.

### ***Peaceful Afghanistan:***

- ★ India, having made significant investments in Afghanistan, will always hope for an Afghan elected, Afghan led, Afghan owned peace and reconciliation process and a popular democratic government in Afghanistan.
- ★ However, India has to be watchful of Iran - Pakistan- China axis developing in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan, with tentacles in the form of terror groups inside it.

### ***Pakistan's Influence:***

- ★ Pakistan is very active in the Middle-east. Using the platform of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and making connections with the particular Arab countries, Pakistan is trying to get support on the Kashmir issue.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ In 2019, New Delhi seems to have weighed in favor of Indo-USA ties by deciding to halt oil imports from Iran. However, it will have to find a way, either by persuading Washington to grant an exemption or by circumventing USA sanctions like it did in 2012-13, to continue its relationship with Iran in

order to secure its energy supply and its regional foreign policy objectives.

- ★ India is very reliant upon Middle East oil and gas and must maintain cordial relations with most of the major suppliers, including Iran, UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Iraq.

## ***India Israel joint venture KRAS rolls out***

Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems (KRAS), a joint venture between Kalyani Strategic Systems Ltd and Israel-based Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd, Tuesday rolled out its first batch of the 1000 midsection Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) kits to the Indian Army and Indian Air Force.

- ★ These missile sections will then be 'forwarded' to Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), a defence PSU, for further and future integration.
- ★ KRAS will not only help in building products for the Indian armed forces but at the same time also trigger and help in achieving the government's target of exports from India.
- ★ The event marked the beginning of the journey of an MSME Indian company that is committed not only to the "Make-in-India"- concept but also taking its stride towards the larger "Atma Nirbharta" (self-reliance) idea.
- ★ In this effort the company has fused Rafael's state-of-the-art technology with the engineering excellence of the Kalyani Group.

## **India- Israel Relations**

### **History**

- ★ India formally recognised Israel in 1950, but the formal relations between the two countries began only in January 1992, when full diplomatic ties between them were established.
- ★ Ezer Weizman became the first President of Israel to visit India in 1997. The then home minister Lal Krishna Advani was the first Indian minister to visit Israel in 2000. Following this in the same year, Jaswant Singh became the first foreign minister of India to visit the country. Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India in 2003.

### **Current Relations**

- ★ The current Prime Ministers of both India and Israel- Mr. Narendra Modi and Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu have exchanged some significant visits to each other's countries and have expanded the cooperation between the two countries.
- ★ India sees Israel as a potential friend for stronger cooperation in the future.
- ★ India is currently the largest buyer of military equipment from Israel, which, in turn, is the second-largest defence supplier to India, after Russia.

### **India- Israel Cooperation**

- ★ Political Cooperation- during the visit of PM Modi to Israel in 2017, the two countries upgraded the diplomatic relationship to a strategic level and several agreements/ MoUs were signed across multiple sectors,

eg- agriculture. An increase in the high-level exchanges in recent times has expanded cooperation in areas like trade, agriculture, science and technology and security.

- ★ Economic Cooperation- India is the tenth-largest trade partner of Israel in the world, and the third-largest from Asia.
- ★ Defence Cooperation- The strong defence ties between India and Israel are driven by their respective national interests i.e. India's long-sought goals of military modernisation, and Israel's comparative advantage in commercialising its arms industries. The ambit of the defence cooperation between the two countries has expanded to include other areas like space, counter-terrorism, and cyber security and intelligence sharing besides just sale of Israeli arms to India. Recently, India has collaborated with the Israeli defence companies under the new liberalized FDI rule in India.
- ★ Cooperation in Agriculture - in 20p6, the Ministers of Agriculture from both India and Israel signed a long-term cooperation and training deal, that has since then been supervised by field experts from Mashav, an international development program of Israel's Foreign Ministry. Since 2006 the agriculture cooperation has further expanded to an Indo-Israel Agriculture Project in 2008, Agreement on development of water systems in 2011 and finally in 2014, the operation of 10 Centres of Excellence throughout India offering free training sessions on efficient

agricultural techniques using Israeli technological expertise to the farmers. Some of these techniques are vertical farming, drip irrigation and soil solarization.

- ★ Investment- Israel's investments in India are in the areas of defense, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies etc. Moreover, Israel is also setting up R&D centres or production units in India. India's investments in Israel mostly include those in drip-irrigation, pharmaceuticals, wastewater treatment, IT etc.
- ★ Cooperation in Science and Technology - both the countries signed a Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement in 1993 under which the S&T institutions undertook joint research. Later in 2005, an MoU was signed for setting up an i4RD fund to encourage bilateral investments in industrial research and development and specific projects. Under the agreement, at least one Indian and one Israeli company must be collaborating on a project for it to be qualified for the fund. In 2012, the two countries signed a 5 year and \$50 mn academic research agreement to promote collaborative research in various fields like medical technology, IT, social and welfare sciences, humanities and arts.
- ★ Education- over the years, several public and private Indian universities have entered into academic agreements with Israel's educational institutions. Israel also offers post-doctoral scholarships to Indian and Chinese students in all fields for three years. India too

offers scholarships to Israelis every year and an equal number of scholarships are offered by Israel for 10-month programmes in specialised fields of study.

- ★ Diaspora - Another important factor in bilateral ties is the Indian diaspora in Israel. Most Jewish Indians, about 80,000, have all moved there, and in India there are just about 4,000-5,000 left.
- ★ Space Collaboration- India and Israel signed a cooperative agreement to promote space collaboration in 2002. Moreover, India has successfully launched TecSAR and RISAT-2 radar imaging satellites of Israel using the PSLV developed by ISRO.

### **Concerns Ahead**

- ★ Israel Palestine Conflict- the Israel Palestine conflict has remained unresolved since years and though India has de-hyphenated the bilateral relations with the two countries and advocates for a two state solution but in recent years the closeness between India and Israel can dilute India's stand.
- ★ The connectivity between the two countries is still an issue.
- ★ The bilateral trade between the two countries has not yet diversified with diamonds and chemicals constituting a larger portion of the trade.
- ★ Factors like Arab- Israeli conflict have somewhat limited the relations between the two countries to reach their maximum potential.

### **Way Forward**

- ★ Facilitating Technological cooperation between the two countries.

★ With the signing of the Abraham Accord by UAE, Bahrain and Israel, India has an opportunity to further boost relations with Israel.

- ★ Diversification of the trade bill.
- ★ Investments to boost tourism, education and cultural ties and building bridges with the Indian diaspora in Israel.

## **India- Bangladesh talks on Water sharing**

Top officials of the water resources ministries of India and Bangladesh met here on Tuesday to discuss issues related to river water-sharing and flood forecasting and to enhance cooperation on controlling pollution in trans-boundary water bodies.

- ★ The Indian delegation was headed by Jal Shakti Ministry secretary Pankaj Kumar, while senior secretary Kabir Bin Anwar led the Bangladeshi side.
- ★ Discussions also took place to further cooperation in the area of flood forecasting. It included talks on cooperation over flood forecasting of the Atrai, Punarbhaba and Tangon rivers that enter India from Bangladesh.
- ★ A system of transmission of flood forecasting data on major rivers like the Ganga, Teesta, Brahmaputra and the Barak during the monsoon season from India to Bangladesh already exists.
- ★ There were discussions also about controlling pollution in the trans boundary rivers. Bangladesh pointed out the pollution issue in the Akhaura canal.

★ Discussions were also about drawing water from the Feni river for Sabroom town in Tripura.

### **India Bangladesh Relations**

In 2021, the bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh has completed 50 years since 1971 along with the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan. India was one of the first countries to recognise Bangladesh and establish diplomatic relations immediately after its independence.

### **Significance of Bangladesh for India**

1. Enhancing connectivity - due to its strategic geopolitical location, Bangladesh acts as a gateway to South-East Asia. It is a central component to various regional connectivity projects such as the Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal initiative. Bangladesh also plays a major role in the connectivity to the North eastern part of India.
2. Trade partner - Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and is an important destination for Indian exports.
3. Security - India shares an extensive and porous border with Bangladesh. This has made the cool position between the two countries to shill for effective border management and tackling transnational crimes such as smuggling of arms narcotics fake Indian currencies and trafficking of women and children.
4. Development of North eastern region- transit and

transshipment to the North eastern region through Bangladesh helps increase the connectivity to the North eastern region and ensure peace, stability and economic development of the region. It has also helped in taming the insurgency problem in the North eastern states of India.

### ***Irritants in India Bangladesh relations***

1. River water disputes- India and Bangladesh share about 54 transboundary rivers and Bangladesh lies downstream in the majority of these River streams. This has given rise to the concerns in Bangladesh over sharing of River waters interlinking of rivers on building of dams in India. For example the distal water River dispute.
2. Trade imbalance- Bangladesh has often complained about the bilateral trade tilts towards India.
3. China factor- in recent years The Chinese influence over Bangladesh has increased tremendously like enhancing the list of products for duty free access into its markets and providing massive loans for developmental projects.
4. Issue in border management - loss of civilian lives at the border and smuggling of arms narcotics and fake currency has been a matter of concern.
5. Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019- the new citizenship law granting Indian citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from

Bangladesh indirectly implied the poor treatment for religious minorities in Bangladesh and this brought negative publicity for Dhaka

### ***Water Sharing Disputes***

- ★ Water remains a politically contested issue in much of South Asia due to The region facing scarcity of water and agrarian difficulties. This is due to the increasing demands for water and energy owing to the rapid industrialization currently in South Asia.
- ★ Over-extraction of groundwater is a major concern in the region, with an estimated 23 million pumps in use across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- ★ In addition to this, arsenic contamination and salinity Has affected more than 60% of the groundwater in the Indo-Gangetic plain region.
- ★ Under such circumstances, the increasing need for power and stable water levels could prompt reconsideration in bilateral water-sharing treaties in future.

### ***Indo Bangladesh Water sharing disputes***

- ★ The India Bangladesh river dispute arises due to the sharing of the Teesta river water.
- ★ The river originates in the Himalayas and flows through Sikkim and West Bengal and finally merges with the Brahmaputra in Assam.
- ★ It is the most contentious issue between India and Bangladesh, who mostly are friendly to each other in other crucial areas.

- ★ The Teesta river covers about the entire floodplains of Sikkim, while draining 2,800 sq km of Bangladesh, thus providing a lifeline for several people.
- ★ Even for West Bengal, the Teesta is considered to be the lifeline of the state with half-a-dozen districts of North Bengal dependent on it.
- ★ Bangladesh has sought for an “equitable” distribution of Teesta waters from India, on the lines of the Ganga Water Treaty, 1996 which was an agreement to share the surface waters at the Farakka Barrage near their mutual border.
- ★ However, such demand has not been conceded to yet due to opposition from the state of West Bengal.
- ★ In the year 2015, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Dhaka, there were some expectations that the issue will be taken forward on a fair and equitable water sharing agreement.
- ★ But the Teesta remains an unfinished project, as in India individual states have significant influence over trans-boundary agreements. This arrangement sometimes impedes the policymaking process. For example, one of the key stakeholders of the Teesta agreement, West Bengal is yet to endorse the deal.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ Both the countries can adopt a basin wide approach in formulating a new framework for the sharing of River waters.
- ★ A Teesta Water Sharing panel can be formed with members from both the countries to reach a fair and equitable



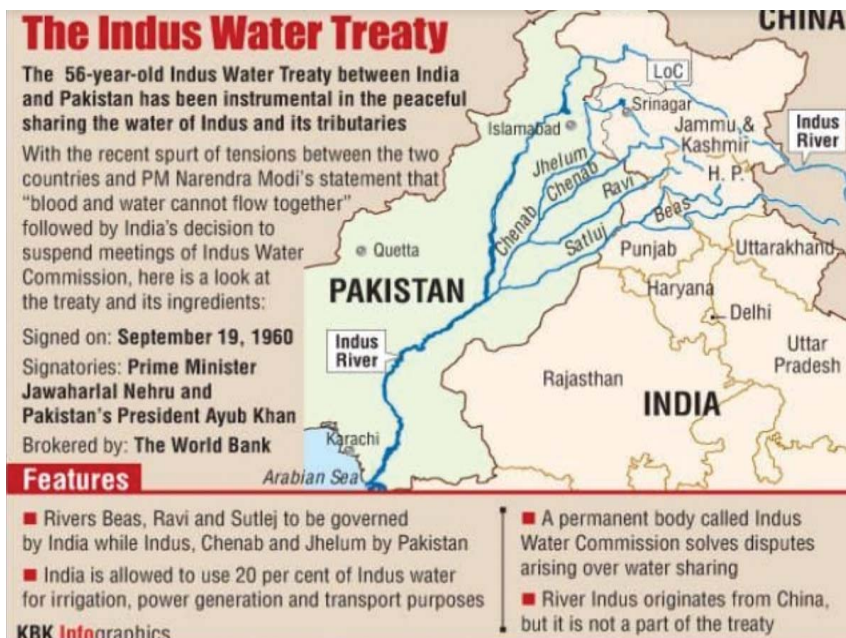
agreement that is acceptable to both the countries.

- ★ Allowing work permits to resolve the migration issue in a manner that does not adversely affect the society and economy of both countries.
- ★ India should expedite the implementation of projects including India Bangladesh friendship pipeline, Maitree Super Thermal Project, etc. to highlight the highest priority India attaches to Bangladesh under India's Neighbourhood First Policy.
- ★ Addressing the issues of non tariff barriers and trade facilitation including port restrictions, procedural bottlenecks, etc. for reducing the trade imbalance.
- ★ Effective implementation of the ongoing coordinated border management plan.
- ★ India at this juncture cannot afford to have another hostile neighbour in the form of Bangladesh and hence, adequate measures should be taken to resolve the existing concerns and strategically build the partnership with the neighbouring country.

## Indus Commissioners of India, Pak to meet

The Indus Commissioners of India and Pakistan will meet to discuss a host of issues, including Islamabad's concerns to the design of Indian hydropower projects on the Chenab River.

- ★ This will be the annual meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission.
- ★ Under the provisions of the Indus Water Treaty, both the



commissioners are required to meet at least once a year alternately in India and Pakistan.

- ★ Under the Treaty, India has been given the right to generate hydroelectricity through a run of the river projects on the western rivers subject to specific criteria for design and operation.
- ★ It also gives the right to Pakistan to raise concerns on the design of Indian hydroelectric projects on western rivers.

### Hydropower projects in Ladakh:

- ★ They are Durbuk Shyok (19 MW), Shankoo (18.5 MW), Nimu Chilling (24 MW), Rongdo (12 MW), Ratan Nag (10.5 MW) for Leh, while Mangdum Sangra (19 MW), Kargil Hunderman (25 MW) and Tamasha (12 MW).

### Indus water treaty

- ★ Indus Water Treaty (IWT) signed on September 19, 1960, between India and Pakistan and brokered by the World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and

Development) which fixed and delimited the rights and obligations of both countries concerning the use of the waters of the Indus River system.

- ★ Geographical location: The origination of the Indus River from southwestern Tibet Autonomous Region of China and flows through the disputed Kashmir region and then into Pakistan to drain into the Arabian Sea.
- ★ Distribution: IWT deals with river Indus and its five tributaries. Eastern following rivers like Sutlej, Beas and Ravi were given to India whereas Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum.
- ★ Under the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty, all the waters of the eastern rivers the Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi is allocated to India for unrestricted use.
- ★ The waters of western rivers Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab is largely for Pakistan.
- ★ Permanent Indus Commission: This unique treaty led down the

formation of PIC which was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty.

- ★ Significance: The treaty administers how river Indus and its tributaries that flow in both countries will be utilized.
- ★ The treaty allocates 80% of the water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan and India is allowed to use 20 per cent of its water for irrigation, power generation, and transport purposes.

## First Quad Summit

Indian Prime Minister joined the U.S. President Joseph Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga for a virtual summit of the Quadrilateral Framework (Quad).

- ★ Access to COVID-19 vaccines, cooperation on technology, and climate change were at the top of the agenda.
- ★ It is the first meeting of leaders of the Indo-Pacific grouping. The 'Quad', has been taken to the "apex level".
- ★ A joint statement, titled 'The Spirit of the Quad', was released.

### Key points:

- ★ Shared values: Quad is united by our democratic values and our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
  - ❑ The Indo-Pacific region should be governed in accordance to human rights.
  - ❑ The region should be governed by international law, committed to upholding universal values and free from coercion.

- ★ Global good: Its agenda, covering areas like vaccines, climate change, and emerging technologies make the Quad a force for global good.

- ❑ The member nations agreed to ensure "equitable"-access to vaccines to counter the pandemic.
- ❑ Japan, U.S. and Australia will finance the vaccine initiative.
- ❑ There was wholesome appreciation of the Vaccine Maitri initiative.

- ★ Outcomes: The vaccine expert working group, a critical and emerging technology working group, and a climate working group for technology, capacity building and climate finance have been cleared during the summit.

### Significance:

- ★ Improving political prospects:
  - ❑ It widened the forum's focus away from military security and towards the provision of public goods in the vast Indo-Pacific littoral. It has improved its own long-term political prospects.
  - ❑ The decision to pool their resources "American technology, Japanese finance, Indian production capacity and Australia's logistics capability" and produce a billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine for distribution in the Indo-Pacific helps the four countries develop a new narrative for the Quad.
- ★ Countering Chinese narrative:
  - ❑ The leaders of the four nations made it clear that the Quad is neither a mili-

tary alliance nor an anti-China coalition.

- ❑ China has labeled the forum as the "Asian NATO"- and the harbinger of a "new Cold War".
- ❑ The Chinese leadership dismissed it as transient "sea-foam".
- ❑ The repurposing of the Quad to deal with shared challenges in the Indo-Pacific ensures the forum's political sustainability over the longer term.

### Way forward:

- ★ Addressing pandemic challenge: The challenges posed by the pandemic presented a perfect setting for the Quad nations to demonstrate their commitment to the broader agenda that is in tune with the urgent requirements of the region.
- ★ Mutual beneficial relationship with China: All four Quad nations have huge stakes in a productive, peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship with China that has risen to become the world's second largest economic and military power.
- ★ It is up to Beijing now to rethink its current aggressive policies and seek cooperative relations with its Asian neighbours and the US. But if China continues to pursue hegemony, the Quad is bound to become an inevitable balancing force.

### Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

- ★ Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the informal strategic dialogue with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous"-

Indo-Pacific region.

- ★ It is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.
- ★ It has a shared objective of ensuring a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.
- ★ The idea of grouping was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.

## *Casting the Asian dice on a West Asia board*

A contingent of the Indian Air Force is participating in a multi-nation exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) named Desert Flag (March 3-27).

- ★ Other than India and the UAE, Bahrain, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and the United States are also participating.

Significance of India's involvement

- ★ The involvement of contingents from India and South Korea showcases the growing interests of Asian economies.
- ★ Saudi Arabia was India's top supplier of oil followed by Iraq.
- ★ As net importers of crude oil, these Asian economies rely heavily on the West Asian states for their supplies.
- ★ They have increased stakes in the safety and security of the region from the perspective of political and economic stability.
- ★ India has stakes in the protection of vital sea lanes in areas such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea stretching out into the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean.
- ★ India's security footprint in

West Asia has seen a steady increase, and energy security and safe passage of sea routes are one of the main driving factors.

- ★ The Indian Navy has made multiple port calls from the UAE and Kuwait to Iran and Qatar in recent years.
- ★ In 2020, India had also planned its first bilateral naval exercise with Saudi Arabia.

## *Tensions in West Asia*

- ★ The sixth edition of Desert Flag this year takes place as tensions between Iran and the U.S. peak.
- ★ The signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020 between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain, is designed to counter Tehran's growing influence in the region, and the wars in Syria and Yemen.

Receding U.S. hold

- ★ January 2021 marked the first time since 1985 that the U.S. did not import oil from Riyadh.
- ★ There are growing concerns in Asian capitals over an eroding U.S. security blanket in the region.

## *Iran tensions*

- ★ There is pressure on Iran to restart the 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) increases.
- ★ In 2013, an Indian oil tanker named MT Dosh Shanti was confiscated near the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian forces. This was also the time when Iran was under sanctions, and looking for oil payments from India, which New Delhi could not complete due to the sanctions.

- ★ Iran confiscated a South Korean tanker also from near the Strait of Hormuz, due to an argument over billions of dollars' worth of oil payments frozen due to sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme.

## *Way forward*

- ★ Experts have even suggested an idea equitable to an 'importers OPEC', or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Asian states which today have a much larger stake in West Asia's oil than the West.
- ★ Regional states will become more responsible for their own security, and as Asian economies become stronger stakeholders, their geopolitics will become more visible across this geography.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

- ★ The Iran nuclear deal (formally the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) was signed between Iran and the P5 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) plus Germany and the European Union.
- ★ Under the deal, Tehran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for relief from the US and other economic sanctions.
- ★ The P5+1 refers to the UN Security Council's five permanent members (the P5); namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; plus Germany.
- ★ The United States unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA objecting to the Iran's ballistic missile program or its involvement in regional conflicts, sunset clauses of the deal which

critics say provide Iran with a patient pathway to acquiring nuclear weapons.

## **India abstains in U.N. Human Rights Council vote on Sri Lanka**

India abstained from a crucial vote on Sri Lanka's rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

- ★ The resolution on 'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' was adopted after 22 states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour.
- ★ Sri Lanka rejected the resolution as "politically motivated".
- ★ 11 countries, including China, Pakistan, Russia and Bangladesh, voted against the resolution, and in support of the Sri Lankan government.
- ★ The Sri Lanka resolution was the first to be voted on using the extraordinary e-voting procedures established for the UNHRC 46th Session, which has been held virtually.

### **Objectives of resolution: Probing war crimes**

- ★ The UN aims to collect and preserve evidence of war crimes in the country, committed by the armed forces and the LTTE.
- ★ Process envisaged in the resolution aims to prosecute war criminals through an international evidence gathering and investigation mechanism.

### **Rationale behind India's move:**

- ★ India must have decided to abstain after "careful consideration" of following factors:
- of supporting the Tamils for

equality, justice, dignity and peace, and

- ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

### **U.N. Human Rights Council**

- ★ UNHRC was reconstituted from its predecessor organisation, the UN Commission on Human Rights to help overcome the "credibility deficit" of the previous organisation.
- ★ Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- ★ UN Human Rights is part of the United Nations Secretariat, and its headquarters in Geneva, as well as an office in New York.
- ★ The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations.

### **Membership**

- ★ Under the Human Rights Council's rules, seats are allocated to regions to ensure geographical representation.
- ★ The Council is made of 47 Member States, which are elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly of the United Nations through direct and secret ballot.
- ★ The General Assembly takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- ★ Members of the Council serve for a period of three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

### **Functions:**

- ★ The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) that emerged from the 2005 UN reform process.
- ★ The UNHRC passes non-binding resolutions on human rights issues through UPR.
- ★ It collaborates with Governments, parliaments, judicial authorities, police and prison officials, National Human Rights Institutions, NGOs and a broad range of other civil society actors, in addition to United Nations partners, to build awareness of and respect for human rights.
- ★ Since Governments have the primary responsibility to protect human rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides expertise and technical training to Governments to help implement international human rights standards on the ground.

## **Diplomatic Potential of India's Knowledge Economy**

The launch of Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) comes weeks after India allowed the export of COVID-19 vaccine to Brazil, as part of its "vaccine maitri" diplomacy.

- ★ India's current global diplomacy in the fields of space and pharmaceuticals, engaging several countries around the world, is the fruit of 50 years of sustained state support for "atmanirbharta"- in both fields.
- ★ Taken together, these two examples of technological and



scientific cooperation draw attention to the diplomatic potential of India's knowledge economy.

### ***Knowledge-based Products and India's Potential***

- ★ The credit for India's competitive pricing of satellite launches and pharmaceuticals exports goes entirely to Indian engineering, scientific and technological talent that has pursued world-class standards at a fraction of the cost incurred in developed economies
- ★ The willingness of high-quality Indian scientists, engineers, biotechnologists, pharmacologists and such like to work in India at Indian rates of compensation, not tempted by better paying jobs abroad, has allowed organisations like ISRO and Serum Institute of India to do the work they now do.
- ★ India's demonstrated potential to be a low-cost global provider of knowledge-based products had prompted the developed West, especially the US, to deploy policies aimed at curbing the development of Indian capabilities.
- ★ Unilateral sanctions were imposed to deny Indian industry access to technology and markets and a multilateral regime for intellectual property rights (IPRs) protection was created, under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation to thwart indigenous technology development. Indian capabilities in space and pharma grew in the face of such constraints.
- ★ The ability of Indian space and pharma to offer much-needed products to other developing countries goes to the credit of

the people who serve in these industries. The Indian familiarity with the English language and the still good quality of teaching in mathematics and statistics has enabled Indian firms to remain competitive in data processing, business process outsourcing and software services

### ***Knowledge-based Diplomacy and India's Potential***

- ★ India's more broad-based capability for knowledge-based diplomacy has, however, significantly decreased over the past quarter century rather than increased. Consider the fact that as early as in the 1950s, many developing countries looked to India to access development-oriented knowledge. Students from across Asia and Africa sought admission to Indian universities for post-graduate courses.
- ★ Indian expertise was sought by global organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). The government of South Korea even sent its economists to the Indian Planning Commission till the early 1960s to be trained in long-term planning. By the 1970s, Korea was beginning to overtake India as a modern industrial economy.
- ★ There were many other fields in which Indian expertise was sought in the past and where India lags behind today. Railways is one. Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), which incidentally was established in 1974,

had acquired a global profile with business in Africa and Asia. The development of India's dairy and livestock economy also attracted global interest. Indian science and technology had something to offer the developing world that the developed economies of the West were either unwilling to provide or did so at much higher cost.

- ★ Further, the biggest setback in the global appeal of India's knowledge economy has been in higher education. Overseas students were drawn to Indian universities and institutions because they offered good quality education at a fraction of the cost of developed country institutions. The appeal of education in India for overseas students has waned.
- ★ Even South Asian students, from countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, who preferred to come to India in the 1960s and 1970s no longer do so. Indian institutions attract fewer foreign students not just because the quality of education offered in most institutions is below par, but that the creature comforts provided and the social environment offered here is no longer as cosmopolitan as it used to be.
- ★ The growing assertion of narrow-minded ideologies only makes Indian campuses even less attractive to overseas students and scholars.
- ★ The implication for India is clear. To truly have a strong economy, India needs to make sure that on a long term and meaningful level it has knowledge systems that power the economy. And on this count,

Indian universities are not able to deliver.

- ★ Therefore, India lost this leadership in the knowledge economy, barring sectors like space, pharma and information-technology, for two reasons.
  - a) First, a flight of Indian talent that began in the 1970s and has since accelerated. This has sharply increased in recent years.
  - b) Second, China has emerged as a major competitor offering equally good, if not better quality, S&T products and services at lower cost. While India has maintained its lead in IT software, China has developed competitive capabilities in space, pharma, railways and several other knowledge-based industries.

### Way Forward

- ★ Space and pharma are at the apex of a narrow pyramid of the knowledge economy. If ISRO's global competitiveness is a tribute to public policy and government support, the global success of the pharma sector is a tribute to private enterprise and middleclass talent in pharmacology and biotechnology. Their global success points to the diplomatic potential of the knowledge industry and to India's "soft power".
- ★ However, the fact that they are the exception rather than the rule points to the lack of political and intellectual support to the development of India's knowledge base and an inadequate commitment to excellence

## Suez Canal Traffic Resumes

Salvage teams on Monday set free a colossal container ship that has halted global trade through the Suez Canal bringing an end to a crisis that for nearly a week had clogged one of the world's most vital maritime arteries.

- ★ Helped by the peak of high tide, flotilla of tugboats managed to wrench the bulbous bow of the skyscraper sized ever given from the canal Sandy bank, but it had been firmly launched since last Tuesday.
- ★ The obstruction created a massive traffic jam in the vital passage, holding up \$9 billion each day in global cradle straining supply chains already burdened by the coronavirus pandemic.
- ★ The freeing of the vessel came after dredgers vacuumed up sand and mud from the vessel's bow and 10 tugboats pushed and pulled the vessel for five days managing to partially refloat it at dawn.
- ★ Millions of barrels of oil and liquified natural gas flow through the artery from the Persian Gulf to Europe and North America. Goods made in China furniture, clothes, supermarket basics bound for Europe also must go through the canal, or else take the detour around Africa.
- ★ The unprecedented shutdown threatened to disrupt oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Middle East and had raised fears of extended delays, goods shortages and rising costs for the consumers.

- ★ The salvage operation successfully relied on tugs and dredgers alone, allowing authorities to avoid the far more complex and lengthy task of lightening the vessel by offloading its 20,000 containers.

### The Suez Canal

- ★ The Suez Canal is an artificial sea level waterway that runs North to South across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
- ★ The canal extends 193 km (120 miles) between Port Said in the north and Suez in the south, with dredged approach channels north of Port Said, into the Mediterranean, and south of Suez.
- ★ It separates the African continent from the Asian continent.
- ★ and all provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands that lie around the Indian and the western Pacific oceans.
- ★ It is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes that carries over 12% of the World Trade by volume.
- ★ It acts as a crucial link for oil, natural gas and cargo that are being shipped from the East to West.
- ★ According to the data provided by the Suez Canal Authority, nearly 19,000 ships but on an average of 51.5 ships per day, it can next tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes passed for the canal in 2020.
- ★ The canal acts as a major source of income for Egypt's economy, African country earning about 5.61 billion U.S. dol-

lars in revenues from it last year.

- ★ In 2015, he just announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal with the aim of reducing the waiting time and doubling the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.
- ★ 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.

### ***History of the Canal***

- ★ The Suez Canal was the first canal that directly linked the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.
- ★ It was constructed by the Suez Canal company between 1859 and 1869.
- ★ It was opened for the purpose of navigation in November 1969 as a vital shortcut for military and commercial shipping.
- ★ The 150-year-old canal was initially controlled by the British and the French interests but was nationalized by Egypt in 1956.
- ★ The canal has been closed five times; the last time being the most serious one, it lasted for eight years.
- ★ It was reopened for navigation in June 1975.
- ★ The Suez crisis, International Crisis in the Middle East precipitated in 1956 when the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal while it was owned by the Suez Canal company that was controlled by the French and the British interests.

### ***SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CANAL***

- ★ It separates Egypt from the Sinai Peninsula and Africa from Asia.
- ★ Before the construction of the canal, ships traversing from Asia to Europe and vice versa had to circumnavigate all around the Cape of Good Hope in the southern tip of Africa to reach the other continent. instruction of the canal reduced this journey by about 8900 kilometers.
- ★ It enabled a direct connection to the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean trade routes easily available, and allowed goods to be shipped between Europe and Asia more directly.
- ★ It is often referred to as the life-line of Egypt's economy, as the country has huge earnings through the trade that takes place through the canal.
- ★ The canal provides the shortest maritime route that is possible between Europe and the lands that lie around the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean.
- ★ The canal forms one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes as it carries over 12% of the World Trade by volume and provides a crucial link for the shipping of oil, natural gas and cargo from the East to the West.
- ★ Without the Suez Canal, a supertanker carrying Mideast crude oil to Europe would have to travel an extra 6,000 miles around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, adding some \$300,000 in fuel costs. Because it has no locks, it can even handle aircraft carriers.

- ★ Among other goods, 54.1 million tons of cereal passed through the canal, 53.5 million tons of ores and metals, and 35.4 million tons of coal and coke in 2019.

### ***What was the recent Crisis at Suez Canal about?***

- ★ On March 23 a 400 meter long ever given container ship ran aground as it traveled North from the Red Sea towards the Mediterranean twisting diagonally across the width of the canal.
- ★ The principal causes for this were the high winds and sandstorm that had reduced the visibility and rendered the ship unable to keep a straight course through the channel.
- ★ The container ship blocked the southernmost stretch of the canal that has a single Lane implying that no other ships can pass through it.

## ***India-South Korea Relations***

Recently, Indian Defence Minister and his South Korean counterpart inaugurated the India-Korea Friendship Park in a ceremony at the Delhi Cantonment.

- ★ Later on both the ministers concluded a bilateral meeting and explored different areas of cooperation.
- ★ Earlier in February 2019, the Prime Minister of India visited South Korea (Republic of Korea).

### ***Key Points***

#### ***About:***

- Spread across a green area of six acres, the park includes an entrance gate

made in Korean style, a jogging track, well landscaped garden and an amphitheatre.

- ❑ Has an imposing handshake artifact standing tall at the entrance bearing flags of India and South Korea.
- ❑ Has statue of General KS Thimayya, a celebrated soldier who led the Indian contingent in the Korean War as Chairman of Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) in Korea headed by India.
- ★ Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission:
- ★ One of the follow-up actions to the Armistice Agreement in the Korean War was the establishment of a NNRC which was to decide on the fate of over 20,000 prisoners of war from both sides.
- ★ India was chosen as the Chair of the NNRC, with Poland and Czechoslovakia representing the Communist bloc and Sweden and Switzerland representing the Western world.
- ❑ The five pillars raised in the backdrop of General Thimayya's statue are embossed with details of operations carried out by 60 Parachute Field Ambulance (deployed by India) during the Korean war where they had treated about 1,95,000 cases, and performed about 2,300 field surgeries.
- ★ One pillar also 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.

### **Developed By:**

- ❑ The park has been developed in joint consultation with the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, Indian Army, Delhi Cantonment Board, Embassy of Korea and Korean War Veterans Association of India.

### **Significance:**

- ❑ The park's significance is not only because of it being a symbol of strong India-South Korea friendly relations, but also as a monument to India's contributions as part of 21 countries which participated in Korean war 1950-53, under the aegis of the United Nations.

### **Issues Discussed at the Meet:**

- ❑ Discussed maritime cooperation as part of the Indo-Pacific strategy and also cooperation in the defense industry and future technologies.
- ★ The two countries have a logistics agreement helping the Indian navy while operating in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Political:**

- ❑ During the Korean War (1950-53), India played a major role in a cease-fire agreement signed between both the warring sides (North Korea and South Korea) and the ceasefire was declared on 27th July 1953.
- ❑ In May 2015, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to 'special strategic partnership'.
- ❑ India has a major role to play in South Korea's Southern Policy under which Korea is looking at expanding relations beyond its immediate region.
- ❑ Similarly, South Korea is a major player in India's Act East

Policy under which India aims to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific.

### **Economic:**

- ❑ The current bilateral trade between India and South Korea is at USD 21 billion and the target that has been set is USD 50 billion by the year 2030.
- ❑ India and South Korea have signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), 2010 which has facilitated the growth of trade relations.
- ❑ To facilitate investment from Korea, India has launched a "Korea Plus"-facilitation cell under 'Invest India' to guide, assist and handhold investors.
- ❑ India's share in Korea's global trade was 1.72% in 2020 and India's contribution in Korea's global imports increased from 0.78% in 2001 to 1.05% in 2020.

### **Cultural:**

- ❑ Korean Buddhist Monk Hyecho or Hong Jiao visited India from 723 to 729 AD and wrote the travelogue "Pilgrimage to the five kingdoms of India" which gives a vivid account of Indian culture, politics & society.
- ❑ Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore had composed a short but evocative poem 'Lamp of the East' - in 1929 about Korea's glorious past and its promising bright future.



- ❑ To further enhance cultural exchanges between India and Korea, Indian Cultural Centres (ICC) were established in Seoul in April 2011 and in Busan in December 2013.

### **Multilateral Platforms Shared by Both the Countries:**

- ❑ United Nations.
- ❑ World Trade Organization.
- ❑ ASEAN Plus.
- ❑ East Asia Summit (EAS).
- ❑ G-20.

### **Way Forward**

- ★ India and South Korea relations have made great strides in recent years and have become truly multidimensional, spurred by a significant convergence of interests, mutual goodwill and high level exchanges.
- ★ However, there is massive scope to expand ties between India and South Korea and make it a unique relationship in Asia. What is needed is political will and new imagination in diverse areas such as cultural relations, building on people-to-people contacts, harnessing democracy and liberal values, and cementing civilisational connections.

### **PM's Visit to Bangladesh**

The Prime Minister of India paid a State Visit to Bangladesh to join the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the Independence of Bangladesh, the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh.



### **Key Points**

#### **Joint Celebrations of Historical Links:**

- ❑ Bangladesh thanked India for conferring Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2020 on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- ❑ Jointly inaugurated the Bangabandhu - Bapu Digital Exhibition in Dhaka.
- ❑ To mark the 50th anniversary of India-Bangladesh friendship:
- ★ Both sides released respective commemorative postage stamps.
- ★ Decided to commemorate 6th December as Maitri Diwas, the day when India recognized Bangladesh in the year 1971.
- ★ India announced the establishment of the Bangabandhu Chair at the University of Delhi.
- ❑ Bangladesh thanked India for naming the historic road from Mujib Nagar to Nadia on the Bangladesh-India

border as "Shadhinota Shorok" commemorating the historic significance of the road during Bangladesh's Liberation War.

#### **Water Resources Cooperation:**

- ❑ Bangladesh reiterated its long-pending request for concluding the interim agreement on the sharing of the waters of the Teesta river.
- ★ The draft agreement has already been agreed upon by both Governments in January 2011.
- ❑ India also requested for early finalization of the draft of the interim agreement for sharing of water of Feni River, pending with the Bangladesh side which had been agreed upon by both sides in 2011.
- ★ Also, requested working towards an early conclusion of the Framework of Interim

Agreement on sharing of waters of six common rivers, namely, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar.

- ❑ Directed the Joint Technical Committee to expeditiously commence the feasibility study of the Ganges-Padma barrage for optimum utilization of the Ganges waters received by Bangladesh as per the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, 1996.

### ***Trade for Growth:***

- ❑ Stressed the need for predictability of trade policies, regulations and procedures and the need for removal of non-tariff barriers.
- ❑ Stressed the urgent need for up-gradation of infrastructure and facilities of the Land Customs Stations (LCSs)/Land Ports in a coordinated manner to facilitate trade between the two countries.
- ❑ Reiterated the importance of harmonization of standards and mutual recognition of agreements and certificates for enhancing bilateral trade.
- ★ Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) would collaborate for the capacity building and development of testing and Lab facilities.
- ❑ India congratulated Bangladesh on its upcoming graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status.
- ❑ Emphasized on expeditious conclusion of the ongoing

joint study on the prospects of entering into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

- ❑ Bangladesh invited Indian investment in the jute mills of Bangladesh to revitalize and modernize the jute sector.
- ❑ India requested early finalization of modalities for implementation of the Katihar “Parbotipur” Bornagar cross border electricity interconnection.
- ❑ Took stock of progress in the implementation of the India Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline and unit-1 of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Project.

### ***Connectivity for Prosperity:***

- ❑ India expressed gratitude for Bangladesh’s initiative of revitalizing the pre-1965 rail connectivity.
- ❑ Bangladesh reiterated its eagerness to partner in the ongoing initiative of the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project.
- ❑ Also agreed to an early operationalization of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement through expeditious signing of the Enabling MoU for Bangladesh, India, and Nepal to commence the movement of goods and passengers, with provision for Bhutan to join at a later date.
- ❑ India urged for early operationalization of the trans-shipment Agreement on the use of Chattogram and Mongla Ports for the

Movement of Goods to and from India (Kolkata to Agartala via Chattogram).

- ★ India also requested for trans-shipment arrangement in Munshiganj and Pangaon as part of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade.
- ★ Recently, Maitree Setu (between India and Bangladesh) over River Feni in South Tripura has been inaugurated.
- ❑ Bangladesh offered the use of Chattogram and Sylhet International Airport, by the people of North East India, especially of Tripura.

### ***Cooperation in Public Health:***

- ❑ Bangladesh thanked the Government of India for giving 3.2 million doses of Oxford Astra Zeneca Covishield vaccine made in India.

### ***Border Management and Security Cooperation:***

- ❑ Bangladesh reiterated the request for 1.3 km Innocent Passage through river route along with River Padma, on humanitarian grounds.
- ★ India requested for completion of border fencing at all pending sectors at the international border at the earliest, beginning from the Tripura (India) - Bangladesh sector.
- ❑ Defence Cooperation: Emphasized on the frequent exchange of programs and enhancing cooperation in training and capacity building.
- ★ India has offered a USD 500 million line of credit for defence imports from India into Bangladesh and thus

requested for early operationalization of this defense Line of Credit.

- ❑ Welcomed the signing of an MoU on Disaster Management, Resilience and Mitigation.

#### ***New Areas of Cooperation:***

- ❑ Acknowledged the potential of new and emerging areas of cooperation in cutting edge areas of science, artificial intelligence, peaceful uses of nuclear technology, big data and technology enabled services in health and education.
- ❑ 50 young entrepreneurs from Bangladesh were invited to visit India and present their ideas to venture capitalists.

#### ***Partners in the Region and the World:***

- ❑ Agreed to continue working together for common objectives in the United Nations and other multilateral fora.

- ❑ Emphasized that the regional organizations, such as SAARC and BIMSTEC have an important role to play, particularly in the post-Covid-19 situation.
- ❑ Bangladesh thanked India for convening the SAARC leaders Video Conference in March 2020 and for proposing creation of the SAARC Emergency Response Fund to counter effects of the global pandemic in the South Asian region.
- ❑ Bangladesh highlighted that the country would assume chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for the first time in October 2021 and requested the support of India for working towards greater maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean region.
- ❑ India welcomed the decision of Bangladesh to join the New Development Bank (NDB).

#### ***The two Prime Ministers also announced/ unveiled the following:***

- ❑ Foundation stone laying ceremony for a memorial in the honour of the Martyrs of the Indian Armed Forces who sacrificed their lives during Liberation War of 1971 at Ashuganj, Brahmanbaria.
- ❑ Foundation stone for five packages out of total eight packages of Rooppur Power Evacuation Project.
- ❑ Inauguration of 3 border haats, Nalikata (India) - Saydabad (Bangladesh), Ryngku (India) - Bagan Bari (Bangladesh) and Bholagunj (India) Bholagunj (Bangladesh).
- ★ Border Haats aim at promoting the wellbeing of the people dwelling in remote areas across the borders of two countries, by establishing a traditional system of marketing the local produce through local markets
- ★ Inauguration of 'Mitali Express' - passenger train connecting Dhaka on Bangladesh side and New Jalpaiguri on the Indian..


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<b>AIR 56</b> Pankaj	<b>AIR 91</b> Narwade Vishal Tej Rao	<b>AIR 109</b> Chavan Rahul Laxman	<b>AIR 103</b> M V Satya Sai Karthik	<b>AIR 167</b> Keerthana H S	<b>AIR 190</b> Shailaja Das



# ECONOMY

## India Emerged Out of Technical Recession

The Indian economy has emerged out of technical recession as it grew at 0.4% in the third (October-December) quarter of 2020-21 with improvement in manufacturing, construction and agriculture.

- ★ The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had contracted by 24.4% and 7.3% in the April-June and July-September quarters, respectively, marking a technical recession in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ★ A technical recession is when a country faces a continuous decline for two consecutive quarters in the GDP.

### Key Points

#### Growth Projections:

- ❑ For the full fiscal year (2020-21), the National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected a contraction of 8%, higher than the forecasts of the Economic Survey (7.7%) and the Reserve Bank of India (7.5%).

- ❑ The real GDP growth estimate for the third quarter (2020-21) is at 0.4%. In the corresponding quarter last year, the economy had grown 3.3%.
- ❑ For the April-June quarter (Q1) and July-September (Q2), the contraction numbers were revised from 23.9% to 24.4% and 7.5% to 7.3%, respectively.

#### Growth Across Major Sectors:

##### Industries and Services Sector:

- ★ With improved performance of manufacturing, electricity and construction, industry recorded a growth rate of 2.6% in the third quarter against the contraction in the first two.
- ★ However, services, with the largest share in GDP at 57%, still remained in the contraction zone with a 0.9% fall year-on-year.
- ★ Financial, real estate and professional services grew 6.6% as against 9.5% contraction in the previous quarter and 5.5% growth in the corresponding period last year.

- ★ Mining, trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting services and public administration services continued to stay in the negative territory in the third quarter registering a contraction of 5.9 %, 7.7%, and 1.5%, respectively.

#### Cores Sector Output:

- ★ India's eight core sectors recorded a meagre 0.1% rise in output in January 2021, propped up by a 5.1% rise in electricity, 2.7% growth in fertilizers and 2.6% growth in steel production, even as the other five sectors contracted.
- ★ Coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, and cement recorded negative growth in January.
- ★ The eight core industries constitute 40.27% of the Index of Industrial Production.

#### Agriculture:

- ★ Growth in agriculture jumped 3.9% in October-December compared with 3% growth in July-September and 3.4% growth during the corresponding quarter last year.



## **Reasons:**

### **New Investment:**

- ★ The positive momentum seen in investment demand (Gross Fixed Capital Formation - GFCF) as it grew by 2.6% in the third quarter after being in doldrums for several quarters now.
- ★ GFCF: It is essentially net investment. It is a component of the Expenditure method of calculating GDP.
- ★ This is the result of unrelenting efforts of the government to go all-out to revive investments under the ambit of the various measures which formed a part of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package.
- ★ Going forward, the growth stimuli available from the Union Budget 2021-22 and the additional measures including the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) will lead to a strong growth path over the recovery horizon.

### **Increase in Centre's Capital Expenditure:**

- ★ The resurgence of Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE) in Q3 and Centre's capital expenditure increased year-on-year by 129% in October, 249% in November and 62% in December.
- ★ GFCE is an aggregate transaction amount on a country's national income accounts representing government expenditure on goods and services that are used for the direct satisfaction of individual needs (individual consumption) or collective needs of members of the community.

### **V-shaped recovery:**

- ★ The Q3 GDP numbers showed the success of the government's initial policy of "lives over livelihood". The sharp V-shaped recovery has been driven by rebounds in both Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) and Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) as a combination of astute handling of the lockdown and a calibrated fiscal stimulus.
- ★ PFCE: It is defined as the expenditure incurred by the resident households and non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH) on final consumption of goods and services, whether made within or outside the economic territory.

### **Other Economic Indicators:**

- ❑ Domestic Consumption: Disaggregated data show that domestic consumption continued to contract, at 58.6% of GDP in Q3, as against 60.2% during the corresponding period of last fiscal.
- ❑ Government Spending: Government spending, as reflected by the GFCE, dipped a tad to 9.8% of GDP in Q3 from 10% during Q2.
- ❑ GVA Estimates: The growth rate in terms of gross value added (GVA) which is GDP minus net product taxes, and reflects growth in supply is seen contracting 6.5% in 2020-21 as against earlier estimates of 7.2% and 3.9% in the previous year.
- ❑ GDP in Nominal Terms: It factors in inflation, and is estimated at (-)3.8% in 2020-21.

## **Revising National Food Security Act, 2013**

NITI Aayog, through a discussion paper, has recommended reducing the rural and urban coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, to 60% and 40%, respectively.

- ★ It has also proposed a revision of beneficiaries as per the latest population which is currently being done through Census- 2011.

### **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**

- ★ Notified on: 10th September, 2013.
- ★ Objective: To provide for food and nutritional security in the human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantities of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.
- ★ Coverage: 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

**Overall, NFSA caters to 67% of the total population.**

### **Eligibility:**

- ❑ Priority Households to be covered under TPDS, according to guidelines by the State government.
- ❑ Households covered under existing Antyodaya Anna Yojana.

### **Provisions:**

- ❑ 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains.

- ❑ The existing AAY household will continue to receive 35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month.
- ❑ Meal and maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000 to pregnant women and lactating mothers during pregnancy and six months after the child birth.
- ❑ Meals for children upto 14 years of age.
- ❑ Food security allowance to beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals.
- ❑ Setting up of grievance redressal mechanisms at the district and state level.

### Key Points

#### Number of Beneficiaries at Present:

- ❑ Approximately 2.37 crore households or 9.01 crore persons, as in February 2021 under Antyodaya Anna Yojana.
- ❑ While approximately 70.35 crore persons are under the priority households.

#### Significance of the NITI

#### Aayog's Recommendations:

- ❑ If the rural-urban coverage ratio remains the same (67% of all population), then the total number of people covered will increase from the existing 81.35 crore to 89.52 crore - an increase of 8.17 crore (based on the projected 2020 population).
- ★ This will result in an additional subsidy requirement of Rs. 14,800 crore.
- ❑ If the national coverage ratio is revised downward, the Centre can save up to Rs. 47,229 crore.

- ❑ This amount of savings can be utilised by the Government in other important areas of concern such as health and education.

#### Challenges of the Move:

- ❑ In the times of Covid-19 pandemic, it will be a double burden (Unemployment and Food insecurity issues) on the poor section of the society.
- ❑ The move may be opposed by some of the states.

#### Other Recommendations:

- ❑ HLC (High Level Committee) under Shanta Kumar had recommended reducing the coverage ratio from 67% of the population to 40%.
- ★ According to it, 67% coverage of the population is on the much higher side, and should be brought down to around 40%, which will comfortably cover BPL families and some even above that.
- ❑ The Economic Survey- 2020-21 had recommended a revision of the Central Issue Prices (CIP) of foodgrains released from the central pool, which have remained unchanged for the past several years.

## Maritime India Summit 2021

'Maritime India Summit 2021' is being organised by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

### Key Points

#### Focus Area:

- ❑ To further the port-led development along the 7,516-km long coastline.

- ❑ India will invest USD 82 billion in port projects by 2035 (under Sagarmala Programme), raise the share of clean renewable energy sources in the maritime sector, develop waterways and boost tourism around light-houses.
- ❑ India aims to operationalise 23 waterways by 2030.
- ❑ Through the focus areas of upgradation of infrastructure, India aims to strengthen the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

#### Current Status of Indian Ports:

- ❑ India has 12 major ports and several minor ports along its West and East coast.
- ❑ Capacity of major ports have increased from 870 million tonnes in 2014 to 1550 million tonnes in 2021.
- ❑ Indian ports have measures such as: Direct port Delivery, Direct Port Entry and an upgraded Port Community System (PCS) for easy data flow that has helped in reduced waiting time for inbound and outbound cargo.

#### Significance:

- ❑ It will help in growth of the maritime sector and promote India as a leading Blue Economy of the world.
- ❑ Further the Maritime India Vision 2030.

#### Other Initiatives for Port Development:

- ❑ The Sagar-Manthan: Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre has also been launched.

- ★ It is an information system for enhancing maritime safety, search and rescue capabilities, security and marine environment protection.

- ❑ Ship repair clusters will be developed along both coasts by 2022.
- ❑ Domestic ship recycling industry will also be promoted to create 'Wealth from Waste'.

- ★ India has enacted Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 and agreed to the Hong Kong International Convention.

- ❑ India aims to increase usage of renewable energy to more than 60% of total energy by 2030 across Indian ports.

### **Sagarmala Programme**

- ★ The Sagarmala Programme was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2015 which aims at holistic port infrastructure development along the 7,516-km long coastline through modernisation, mechanisation and computerisation.
- ★ Under this port-led development framework, the government hopes to increase its cargo traffic three-fold.
- ★ It also includes the establishment of rail/road linkages with the port terminals, thus providing last-mile connectivity to ports; development of linkages with new regions, enhanced multi-modal connectivity including rail, inland water, coastal and road services.

## **Merchant Digitization Summit 2021**

Recently, the Government of India, Federation of Indian

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and UN-based Better Than Cash Alliance hosted Merchant Digitization Summit 2021: Towards Atma Nirbhar (Self Reliance) Bharat.

- ★ The Summit brought together leaders from the public and private sectors to accelerate responsible digitization of merchants in India's North-Eastern and Himalayan regions, and Aspirational districts.

### **Key Points**

#### **Highlights of the Summit:**

- ❑ Empowering women merchants who play critical roles in their communities is one of the priorities to help achieve the mission of Digital India.
- ❑ The National Language Translation Mission can be used to disseminate digital payments information, privacy clauses and consent in local languages for trust and empowerment.
- ❑ Identified opportunities to address the challenges of connectivity, access to smartphones, and digital literacy for merchants at the last mile.
- ❑ Along with the increased focus on 'Make in India' through Atmanirbhar Bharat Scheme, responsible digitization must more strongly include rural networks such as Self Help Groups and community enablers.

- ★ This will lead to creation of the local digital ecosystems to help millions of merchants join the formal economy, access credit, and grow their business.

- ❑ From an average of 2-3 billion digital transactions monthly, India has set an ambitious target for 1 billion digital transactions per day.

- ★ Person to Merchant (P2M) digital payment transactions will scale to 10-12 billion transactions every month to contribute to India's digital economy.

#### **Related Recent initiatives:**

- ❑ Digital Payments Index.
- ❑ Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) scheme.
- ❑ Relaxations in Merchant Discount Rate.

#### **Better Than Cash Alliance (BTCA):**

- ❑ About: BTCA is a partnership of governments, companies, and international organizations that accelerates the transition from cash to responsible digital payments to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❑ Foundation: It was launched by the 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.
- ★ It is based at the United Nations.
- ★ It was created in 2012.
- ❑ Members: The Alliance has 75 members which are committed to digitizing payments in order to boost efficiency, transparency,

women's economic participation and financial inclusion, helping build economies that are digital and inclusive.

- ★ Members do not want to abolish physical cash but rather want to provide responsible digital payment options that are "better than cash".
- ★ India became a member of the Better Than Cash Alliance in 2015 to digitize payments to achieve financial inclusion and to share success stories from Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, the world's largest financial inclusion program.

### ***Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI):***

- ❑ FICCI is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation established in 1927.
- ❑ It is the largest and oldest apex business organisation in India whose history is closely interwoven with India's struggle for independence, its industrialization, and its emergence as one of the most rapidly growing global economies.

## ***Pre-Pack Insolvency Resolution Process***

Recently, a sub-committee of the Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) has recommended a pre-pack framework within the basic structure of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016.

- ★ The Government had constituted a sub-committee of Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) in June, 2020 under the chairmanship of Dr. M. S. Sahoo, Chairperson, Insolvency

and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) to make recommendation on Pre-Pack Insolvency Resolution Process (PPIRP).

### ***Key Points***

#### ***Pre-Packs:***

- ❑ A pre-pack is an agreement for the resolution of the debt of a distressed company through an agreement between secured creditors and investors instead of a public bidding process.
- ★ This system of insolvency proceedings has become an increasingly popular mechanism for insolvency resolution in the UK and Europe over the past decade.
- ❑ In India's case, such a system would likely require that financial creditors agree on terms with potential investors and seek approval of the resolution plan from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

#### ***Need for Pre-Packs:***

- ❑ Slow progress in the resolution of distressed companies has been one of the key issues raised by creditors regarding the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) under the IBC.
- ★ CIRP is the process of resolving the corporate insolvency of a corporate debtor in accordance with the provisions of the Code.
- ★ Under the IBC, stakeholders are required to complete the CIRP within 330 days of the initiation of insolvency proceedings.

### ***Key Features of Pre-Packs:***

- ❑ Pre-Pack usually requires services of an insolvency practitioner to assist the stakeholders in the conduct of the process.
- ★ The extent of authority of the practitioner varies across jurisdictions.
- ❑ Pre-pack envisages a consensual process - prior understanding among or approval by stakeholders about the course of action to address stress of a Corporate Debtor (CD), before invoking the formal part of the process.
- ❑ No requirement of Court Approval: It does not always require approval of a court. Wherever it requires approval, the courts often get guided by commercial wisdom of the parties.
- ★ Outcome of the pre-pack process, where approved by the court, is binding on all stakeholders.

### ***Advantages of Pre-pack Offer:***

- ❑ Quick Resolution: Pre-pack, which enables a faster resolution, preserves and maximises value (of a company in a stressful state) and increases the possibility of resolution.
- ❑ Minimises Disruptions to the Business: Since the CD continues with the existing management during pre-pack, it avoids the cost of disruption of business as it does not shift management to Interim Resolution Professional (i.e. unlike that in the CIRP process) and continues to retain employees, suppliers, customers, and investors.



- ❑ **Group Resolution:** Given that resolution of a group of companies can be value-adding as compared to a separate insolvency proceeding for each company in distress, many jurisdictions are contemplating to make available an enabling framework for the same.
- ★ In the absence of any mechanism to effectively deal with insolvency of a group of companies in most jurisdictions, pre-packs have proved to be very helpful.
- ❑ **Lighter on Courts:** The courts usually have limited infrastructural capacity and can perform its obligations within its limits.
- ★ A pre-pack has the potential to reduce litigation, due to its informal and consensual nature. It does not require involvement of the court during the informal part of the process and requires a minimum role of courts during formal process.
- ★ It is necessary to have a functional out of court restructuring process, so that the vast majority of cases are restructured out of bankruptcy, with the NCLT acting as a court of last resort if no agreement is possible.

### ***Drawbacks of Pre-Packs:***

#### ***Lack Transparency:***

- ★ The key drawback of a pre-packaged insolvency resolution is the reduced transparency compared to the CIRP as financial creditors would reach an agreement with a potential investor privately and not through an open bidding process.

- ★ This could lead to stakeholders such as operational creditors raising issues of fair treatment when financial creditors reach agreements to reduce the liabilities of the distressed company.
- ❑ **Insufficient Marketing:** The research shows that where no marketing is carried out pre-packs return less money to creditors.
- ❑ No consideration is given to the future viability of the new company: The insolvency practitioner has no legal requirement to look at the future viability of the new business emerging from a pre-pack sale.
- ★ His/her only legal responsibility is to the creditors of the old business.

### ***Way Forward***

- ★ Under the present regime of the IBC, insolvency professionals are still evolving the necessary expertise required over time. Like the law under the UK regime has evolved over time rather than simply promulgated, application of pre-pack insolvency in India will require a much higher degree of expertise of insolvency professionals, as under such resolution methods, they have a much higher degree of control.
- ★ However, with the increase in the trend of out of court settlements, pre-pack insolvency could very well be the next alternative to regular CIRP proceedings.

## ***MSME Credit Health Index***

The latest MSME Credit Health Index indicates that MSME credit

growth has accelerated in the quarter ending September 2020 as compared to the quarter ending in June 2020.

- ★ The Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECGLS) has helped in the credit growth for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector.

### ***Key Points***

- ★ About the MSME Credit Health Index:
  - ❑ **Launch:** The TransUnion CIBIL in partnership with the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has launched MSME Credit Health Index.
- ★ The Index is published quarterly.
  - ❑ **Aim:** To provide a measure of the growth and strength of the MSME sector in India.
- ★ The Index will provide government, policy makers, lenders and MSME market participants, a numeric indicator for benchmarking the health of the MSME sector.
  - ❑ **Measurement:** The Index measures the credit health of India's MSME industry on two parameters i.e, growth and strength. Both the growth and strength indices follow the principle of higher the better.
- ★ Growth is measured by plotting increase in exposure value (outstanding balances) over time.
- ★ An increasing Growth Index indicates improvement in credit growth.
- ★ Strength is measured by decrease/increase in credit risk in terms of non-performing assets (NPA).

★ An increasing Strength Index implies better asset quality and therefore denotes an improvement in the structural strength of the sector.

□ Significance: This measurement model will facilitate better MSME credit risk management, formulation of strategies and policies to support the revival and resurgence of the MSME sector and the economy.

#### **Latest Data:**

- The overall growth index inched up to 114 points, which is a three-point increase from 111 in June, 2020.
- The overall Strength Index also improved to 89 from 83 over the same period.

#### **About the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme:**

- The scheme was launched as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package announced in May 2020 to mitigate the distress caused by coronavirus-induced lockdown, by providing credit to different sectors, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- The ECLGS provides for the Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility.
- ★ The GECL is a loan for which 100% guarantee is provided by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC) to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) - banks, financial institutions and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
- ★ The loans are extended in the form of additional working capital term loan facility in case of

banks and additional term loan facility in case of NBFCs to eligible Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)/business enterprises and interested Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) borrowers.

### **PLI Scheme for Telecom Sector**

The Union Cabinet has approved the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the telecom sector with an outlay of Rs. 12,195 crores over five years.

#### **Key Points**

#### **About the PLI Scheme:**

- In order to boost domestic manufacturing and cut down on import bills, the central government in March 2020 introduced a scheme that aims to give companies incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units.
- Apart from inviting foreign companies to set shop in India, the scheme also aims to encourage local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units.

□ The Scheme has been approved for many sectors including electronic products, IT hardware, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and components, etc.

#### **PLI Scheme for Telecom Sector :**

#### **About:**

- ★ This Scheme is for domestic manufacturing of telecom and networking products such as switches, routers, 4G/5G radio access network, wireless equipment and other internet of things (IoT) access devices.
- ★ It will be operational from 1st April, 2021.

#### **Eligibility for the Scheme:**

- ★ It is subject to achieving a minimum threshold of cumulative incremental investment and incremental sales of manufactured goods.
- ★ The cumulative investment can be made at one go, subject to annual cumulative threshold as prescribed for four years being met.
- ★ 2019-20 will be treated as the base year for computation of cumulative incremental sales of manufactured goods net of taxes.

**Going Local**

Phased manufacturing programme (PMP) sets a time-bound policy to make India a mobile & component manufacturing hub

The first phase of PMP was started in 2015 by making local assembly of mobiles cheaper than imports

The policy was then extended to chargers, batteries & headsets last year

PMP aims to create **5.6m** jobs

This industry has the ability to reach a turnover of \$500b, and meet 40% of the global demand through PMP

**ARUNA SUNDARARAJAN**, IT secy

### ***Incentives:***

- ★ An investor who qualifies for the scheme will be incentivised up to 20 times the minimum investment threshold, enabling them to utilise their unused capacity.

### ***Higher Incentives for MSMEs:***

- ★ For Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the minimum investment threshold has been kept at Rs. 10 crore, while for others it is Rs. 100 crore.
- ★ For MSMEs, a 1% higher incentive is also proposed in the first three years.

### ***Significance :***

- The scheme is expected to lead to an incremental production of about Rs. 2.4 lakh crore, with exports of about Rs. 2 lakh crore over five years and bring in investments of more than Rs. 3,000 crore.
- Scheme is also likely to generate 40,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities and generate tax revenue of Rs. 17,000 crore from telecom equipment manufacturing.
- Through this scheme, India will move towards self-reliance. Currently, India imports over 80% of its telecom and wireless network equipment.

## ***Sub-Mission on Agroforestry Scheme***

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Central Silk Board on a convergence model for the implementation of Agroforestry in the silk sector. It is a part of the ongoing Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme.

- ★ Earlier, the Government of India allocated Rs. 2161.68 crores for three years i.e. 2017-2020 to its Central Sector Scheme 'Silk Samagra' for the development of sericulture in the country.

### ***Key Points***

#### ***Convergence Model:***

##### ***Aim:***

- ★ To incentivize the farmers to take up sericulture based Agroforestry models thereby contributing to the Make in India and Make for the World vision of the Prime Minister.

##### ***About:***

- ★ This linkage will add another dimension to agroforestry for faster returns to the growers as well as support the production of the range of silks that India is famous for.
- ★ The Central Silk Board (CSB - under the Ministry of Textiles) will act as a catalyst to promote Agroforestry in the silk sector.
- ★ CSB is a statutory body established in the year 1948 by an Act of Parliament.
- ★ The initiative of formalizing the collaboration in the sericulture sector is especially targeted for augmentation of sericulture host plants e.g. Mulberry, Asan, Arjuna, Som, Soalu, Kesseru, BadaKesseru, Phanat, etc. to be cultivated both as block plantations and border or peripheral plantations on farmlands.

##### ***Significance:***

- ★ Planting sericulture based tree species on the farm bunds and rearing silkworms will help in creating additional income

opportunities for farmers besides their regular source of income from agriculture activities.

- ★ It will contribute to the Prime Minister's vision of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

### ***Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme:***

##### ***About:***

- ★ The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC & FW) has been implementing the SMAF since 2016-17 as part of the recommendation of the National Agroforestry Policy 2014.
- ★ India was the first country to have such a comprehensive policy which was launched at the World Agroforestry Congress held in Delhi in February 2014.
- ★ The scheme is implemented only in the states having liberalized transit regulations for the transport of timber and will be extended to other states as and when such relaxations are notified by them.
- ★ At present, the scheme is being implemented in 20 States and 2 UTs.
- ★ The scheme promotes endemic species or tree species that come with medicinal value.
- ★ Exotic species are not promoted by the scheme.

##### ***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, as well as enhanced feedstock to inter alia wood-based and herbal industry.

### **Funding:**

- ★ It is operational under the funding pattern 60:40 (Central government: State government) basis for all states except for 8 states of North East Region, the hilly states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand where it would be 90:10 fund sharing. For Union Territories (UTs), the assistance will be 100% from the Central government.

### **Beneficiaries:**

- ★ Farmers would be supported financially to the extent of 50% of the actual cost of the interventions (limited to 50% of the estimated cost as indicated in the Cost norms) for the respective interventions.
- ★ Farmers groups/Cooperatives and Farmer Producers Organization (FPO) can also avail the benefit of the programme but the assistance can be accessed as per norms and provisions applicable to the individual farmers.
- ★ At least 50% of the allocation is to be utilized for small, marginal farmers of which at least 30% should be women beneficiaries/farmers. Further 16% & 8% of the total allocation or in proportion of SC/ST population in the district will be utilized for Special Component Plan (SCP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) respectively.
- ★ Farmers must have a soil health card to get the benefit under the programme.

### **Agroforestry**

- ★ Agroforestry is defined as a land use system which integrates trees and shrubs on farmlands and rural landscapes

to enhance productivity, profitability, diversity and ecosystem sustainability.

- ★ It is a dynamic, ecologically based, natural resource management system that, through integration of woody perennials on farms and in the agricultural landscape, diversifies and sustains production and builds social institutions.

### **Sericulture**

#### **About:**

- It is an agro-based industry.
- It involves rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk, which is the yarn obtained out of cocoons spun by certain species of insects.
- The major activities of sericulture consist of food-plant cultivation to feed the silkworms which spin silk cocoons and reeling the cocoons for unwinding the silk filament for value-added benefits such as processing and weaving.
- Domesticated silkworms (*Bombyx mori*) are raised for the purpose of sericulture.

#### **Silk Production in India:**

- There are five major types of silk of commercial importance, obtained from different species of silkworms.
- ★ These are Mulberry, Oak Tasar & Tropical Tasar, Muga and Eri.
- Except for mulberry, other non-mulberry varieties of silks are wild silks, known as vanya silks.
- India has the unique distinction of producing all these commercial varieties of silk.

- South India is the leading silk producing area of the country and is also known for its famous silk weaving enclaves like Kancheepuram, Dharmavaram, Arni, etc.

## **New Umbrella Entity for Payment Systems**

The private companies have shown interest in setting up New Umbrella Entities (NUEs) for payment systems - an idea floated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- ★ The aim is to create an alternate mechanism to the existing National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

### **Key Points**

#### **New Umbrella Entities (NUEs):**

- About: NUEs 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.

#### **Functions Envisaged:**

- ★ NUEs will develop new payment methods, standards and technologies.
- ★ These will operate clearing and settlement systems, identify and manage relevant risks such as settlement, credit, liquidity and operation and preserve the integrity of the system.
- ★ These will monitor retail payment system developments and related issues in the country and internationally to avoid shocks, frauds and contagions that may adversely affect the system and the economy in general.



### ***Need for NUEs:***

- ❑ Limitations of NPCI: 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.
  - ❑ To Increase Competitiveness: RBI's plan to allow other organisations to set up umbrella entities for payments systems aims to expand the competitive landscape in this area.
- ★ Players planning to establish these NUE aim to get an even bigger share in the digital payments sector.

### ***Framework Related to NUEs:***

- ❑ Owned and Controlled by Residents: The promoter or the promoter group for the NUE should be 'owned and controlled by residents' with 3 years' experience in the payments ecosystem.
- ★ The shareholding pattern should be diversified. Any entity holding more than 25% of the paid-up capital of the NUE will be deemed to be a promoter.
  - ❑ Capital: The umbrella entity shall have a minimum paid-up capital of Rs. 500 crore.
- ★ No single promoter or promoter group should have more than 40% investment in the capital of the entity.

- ★ A minimum net worth of Rs. 300 crore should be maintained at all times.
  - ❑ Governance Structure: The NUE should conform to the norms of corporate governance along with 'fit and proper' criteria for persons to be appointed on its board.
- ★ The RBI retains the right to approve the appointment of directors as also to nominate a member on the board of the NUE.
  - ❑ Foreign Investment: Allowed in NUEs as long as they comply with the existing guidelines.

## ***Cabinet okays DFI for infrastructure***

The Union cabinet on Wednesday approved the setting up of a development finance institution (DFI) to fund infrastructure projects. This was announced as a part of the Union Budget 2021-22

- ★ The DFI will be fully owned by the government initially, but the shareholding will gradually be pared to 26%.
- ★ The government had allocated ₹20,000 crore in the FY22 budget to capitalize the institution and expects it to create a lending portfolio of at least ₹15 trillion in about three years.
- ★ The finance ministry will soon table a draft law in Parliament to set up the new institution.
- ★ The DFI is expected to leverage its equity to raise as much as, ₹3 trillion in the next few years.
- ★ Tax incentives for the first 10 years and government backing will help the institution keep a lid on fund costs.

- ★ The DFI will have a professional board, with directors drawing market-linked remuneration.
- ★ The board will have powers to hire and fire whole-time directors.
- ★ At least half of the board will be non-official directors, including persons of eminence.
- ★ The idea behind this is to attract the best talent for the institution, which will meet the requirements of the 21st century.

### ***Development Finance Institution (DFI)***

- ★ A development finance institution or development finance company is an organisation that is owned by the government or charitable Institutions to finance the Low cost projects or the projects in which the borrowers are not able to meet their finance requirements From the commercial lenders in the market.
- ★ Such institutions provide finance both for short term that is less than five years and long term that is more than five years.
- ★ The source of capital of these institutions is national or international development funds.
- ★ This ensures their creditworthiness and their ability to provide project finance at a very competitive rate.

### ***Characteristics of a Development Finance Institution (DFI)***

- ★ The sole objective of establishing a DFI is to promote the economic growth of the country.
- ★ These are banks that provide

financial as well as the technical support to various sectors in the economy.

- ★ They do not accept deposits from people.
- ★ They raise funds by borrowing from governments and by selling their bonds to the general public.
- ★ They also provide a guarantee to banks on behalf of the companies and subscriptions on shares, debentures, etc.
- ★ They also provide technical assistance like Project Report, Viability study, and consultancy services.
- ★ They are different from commercial banks as it strikes a balance between commercial operational norms as followed by commercial banks on one hand, and developmental responsibilities on the other.
- ★ This implies that they are not just plain lenders like commercial banks but companions in the development process of an economy.

#### ***Why India needs a DFI to finance its infrastructure requirements***

- ★ To boost the economic growth in the country that will also lead to an increase in the capital flows and energise the capital markets.
- ★ To improve the situation of long term finances.
- ★ To provide a credit enhancement for infrastructure and housing projects who have been stalled due to credit crunch.
- ★ As India does not have a development bank, a DFI can fulfil the need for India to have an institutional mechanism for

funding capital requirements.

- ★ Debt flow towards the infrastructure projects would be improved.
- ★ In 2017, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also specified that a specialised bank can help in catering to the wholesale and long term financing needs of the growing economy and it will also aid in filling the current gap in long term financing.
- ★ Such institutions can also help in easing the burden on the public sector banks in India and improve their efficiency.
- ★ It will mobilise the ₹111 lakh crore that is required for funding of the ambitious national infrastructure pipeline (NIP).
- ★ It will also help in enhancing the credit rating of projects.
- ★ It will help in funding the projects where others are not willing to enter because of the risks involved.

#### ***Evolution of DFIs in India***

- ★ The first DFI in India was the IFC or the Industrial Finance Corporation that was established in 1948.
- ★ Other major DFIs in India are UTI, NABARD, IDBI, EXIM BANK, SIDBI, NHB, IIFCL, etc.
- ★ Some of these were later converted into banks like the ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank, etc.

#### ***Classification of Development Finance Institutions***

##### ***There are two types of DFIs:-***

1. Sector Specific DFIs- these DFIs focus on a particular sector to provide project finance. Ex: the NHB that is solely related to financing of the Housing projects, the

EXIM (Export Import) bank which is oriented towards import export operations.

2. Investment Institutions:- These institutions are specialized in providing services designed to facilitate business operations in the economy, like the capital expenditure financing and equity offerings, including initial public offerings (IPOs). Ex: LIC, GIC and UTI.

#### ***National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)***

The National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) for FY 2019-25 is a first-of-its-kind, whole-of-government exercise to provide world-class infrastructure to citizens and improve their quality of life. It is a group of social and economic infrastructure projects in India over a period of five years.

##### ***Significance of the NIP:***

1. It will enable a forward outlook on infrastructure projects which will create jobs, improve ease of living, and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.
2. It will help in stepping-up annual infrastructure investment to achieve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$5 trillion by 2024-25.
3. It will boost the agrarian economy by strengthening agricultural and rural infrastructure.
4. It will lead to an increase in the connectivity across India, especially in rural areas, through the expansion of roads and railways.

5. Well-developed infrastructure enhances the level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving the revenue base of the government, and ensures the quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.
6. It will boost the manufacturing capacity as it will help reduce the leakages due to insufficient infrastructure which slows down the manufacturing. It will also encourage new players to enter the market in manufacturing business.

### Way Forward

- ★ Formulation of a comprehensive policy for establishment of a DFI that addresses all the concerns related to it.
- ★ Collaboration with foreign countries to increase the credit capacity of the institution.

## Bank Employees Strike

As employees of various public sector banks prepare to go on strike on March 15 and 16 over the Centre's decision to privatise two state-owned lenders, banking services are likely to be hit across the country.

- ★ Services such as deposits and withdrawal at branches, cheque clearance and loan approvals would be affected due to the strike. However, ATMs are likely to remain functional.
- ★ The strike is called by the United Forum of Banks Union (UFBU) which is an umbrella body of none bank unions.

### Privatisation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs)

- i. The privatisation of two PSBs (apart from IDBI Bank) was announced by the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2021-22.
- ii. The move is a part of the government's process of disinvestment to generate ₹1.75 lakh crore.
- iii. The move has come after 51 years of nationalisation of 14 largest private sector banks in 1969.
- iv. It will give the private sector a key role in the banking sector.
- v. Presently, India has 12 public sector banks, 22 private banks and 10 small finance banks.
- vi. The current decisions by the government to privatise PSBs and also to set up a Bad Bank to manage bad loans of a PSB underline an approach of finding market led solutions to challenges in the financial sector like the rise in NPAs.
- vii. It was previously recommended by several committees set up like the Narasimham Committee that proposed to cut down the government's stake in the PSBs to 33% and the Nayak Committee that suggested to keep it below 50%.
- viii. Privatisation of two public sector banks will set the ball rolling for a long term project that envisages only a handful of state owned banks, with the rest either consolidated with strong banks or privatised.

### Advantages of privatisation of PSBs

- i. It will relieve the government i.e. the majority owner of the PSBs from continuing to provide equity support to the banks year after year.
- ii. The private banks are better than the PSBs with regard to net interest margin i.e. 3.4% vs 2.4% and lower costs as the wage bill in private banks is 8.7% of the income and that in PSBs is 13.8% of the income.
- iii. Considering the economic crisis created by the Covid 19 pandemic, the situation of the PSBs can further deteriorate when the pandemic-related moratorium and other shock absorbers are taken away.
- iv. The PSBs are already overburdened by the rising Non Performing Assets. Currently, in the Indian banking sector, about ₹10.3 trillion have been classified as NPAs which amounts to about 11 percent of the total loans given. And the situation of the PSBs is even worse which account for 86% of these NPAs.
- v. Due to lack of autonomy, the PSBs cannot change their cost and revenue structures or find the capital needed to reverse the relative growth strength when compared to private sector banks.
- vi. PSBs currently face dual regulation i.e. one by the government under the Banking Regulation Act, 1934 and the other by the RBI under the RBI Act, 1949. This results in RBI having lesser

powers to regulate the PSBs as per their performance, while this is not the case with private banks.

- vii. Public sector banks still at the board level are not professionalised as the government has a say in the board appointments.
- viii. Competition heated up in the banking sector after the RBI allowed more private banks since the 1990s. They have expanded the market share through new products, technology, and better services, and also attracted better valuations in stock markets. HDFC Bank (set up in 1994) currently has a market capitalisation of ₹8.80 lakh crore while SBI, the largest PSB commands just ₹3.50 lakh crore.
- ix. Many countries have privatized their nationalized banks, including some from the erstwhile Eastern bloc countries. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, etc.
- x. Privatisation of few loss making PSBs will act as a lesson for the others in the sector and have a deterrent effect on the staff and management of the banks.
- xi. It will be another step towards reducing the fiscal deficit that has already increased to exorbitant levels and financing the revenue expenditure through revenue receipts in the long term.

### **Concerns related to privatisation of PSBs**

- i. The private sector banks work with the motive of

profit. This can have an impact on banking services like loans for the common man.

- ii. The private sector banks in India cannot be considered as flawless especially when we look at the recent cases of Yes Bank and Lakshmi Vilas Bank.
- iii. The governance structure of the private banks are prone to malpractices in the wake of serving the interest of its promoters.
- iv. It will have an impact on the social welfare schemes of the government as private banks would not want to be a part of it.
- v. Restructuring schemes like the strategic debt restructuring, corporate debt restructuring and schemes for sustainable structuring of stressed assets (initiated by RBI) are the major reasons for the delay in the recognition of bad loans, and these are irrespective of ownership of the banks—whether public or private.
- vi. It might just increase the rural urban financial divide as private banks would operate in the urban areas where scope for profit and growth are high.
- vii. The very purpose of nationalisation of banks in India i.e. serving the unbanked and under-banked, is yet to be achieved and financial inclusion cannot afford the luxury of complete privatisation.

### **Way Forward**

- i. Rather than complete privatisation of PSBs, the gov-

ernment can go for a safer option i.e. increasing the autonomy of the PSBs—much more like corporatisation like the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC).

- ii. Instead of privatisation, the government should look for other mechanisms to reduce the burden of NPAs on the banks which reduces their credit activities.
- iii. Implementation of the recommendations of the PJ Nayak Committee on reforms in the governance structure of the PSBs.

## **Arms Imports by India falls: SIPRI**

India's import of arms decreased by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20 and Russia was the most affected supplier, according to a report released by Swedish defence think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

- ★ It said that the drop in Indian arms imports seemed to have been the result of the country's convoluted procurement processes combined with an attempt to reduce its dependence on Russian arms.
- ★ Over the last few years, India has taken a series of measures to boost domestic defence industry with an aim to reduce dependence on imported military platforms and hardware.
- ★ Russia was the most affected supplier, although the imports of US to India also fell, by 46%.
- ★ India is planning large-scale arms imports in the coming years from several suppliers.



- ★ The government of India has been majorly focusing on boosting the domestic defence production in India and has set a target of ₹1.75 trillion turnover in defence manufacturing by 2025.
- ★ According to the report, the exports by China also decreased by 7.8 percent between 2011-12 to 2015-16.

### **India's arms imports**

- ★ According to a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India was the second largest arms importer during the period 2015 to 2019.
- ★ It is also among the top three spenders on defence after the US and China.
- ★ India's military expenditure over the 30-year period (1990-2019) grew by about 259% and by about 37% over the decade (2010-19). It amounted for about 2.4% of GDP in 2019.
- ★ A large part of this allocated amount goes into imports of defence equipment from countries like Russia, US, etc. and due to this despite having one of the largest defence budgets in the world India procures 60% of its weapon systems from foreign markets.
- ★ Hence, the government has started to implement policies to achieve self-reliance and indigenization in the defence technology as a part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

### **Self Reliance in Defence Manufacturing**

1. Need and Significance
- ★ Economic- Indigenization of defence equipment will help in

reducing the huge defence import bill. India was the largest importer in the past decade accounting for about 12% of global arms imports. It would also reduce the overall fiscal deficit of the government. The government can use the remaining amount for financing the welfare initiatives for the people.

- ★ Security Imperative- Domestic production reduces the vulnerabilities that arise during crises by reducing dependence on imported spares, ammunition and weapons. India being surrounded by porous borders and hostile neighbours needs to be self-sufficient and self-reliant in defence production to meet any unforeseen situations or emergencies.
- ★ Technological- It keeps intact the technological expertise in the country and encourages spin-off technologies and innovation that often stem from it.
- ★ Promote Exports- production of high quality and efficient defence equipment within the country can facilitate its exports to other countries, thus being an economic gain for India.
- ★ Employment Generation- new industries dedicated to defence manufacturing will lead to the creation of employment opportunities for a lot of people in various sectors like designing, manufacturing, innovation, etc.
- ★ Strategic- self-sufficiency in defence production is one of the fundamental steps in realizing the goal of being a global power, especially when a country is surrounded by hostile neighbours.

### **Initiatives taken by the Government**

1. Revision of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Limit- the government has raised the FDI limit in defence manufacturing through the automatic route from 49 percent to 74 percent.
2. Project Management Unit (PMU) - the government is expected to set up a Project Management Unit for contract management purposes to begin time bound defence procurement and faster decision making.
3. Reduction in Defence Import Bill- the government is set to notify a list of defence equipment that cannot be imported from any country and hence have to be produced in the country. Also there is a separate budget provision for domestic capital procurement.
4. Corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)- It will include public listing of some units of the board ensuring more efficient interface of the manufacturers with the designers and the end-users.
5. Encouraging Private Manufacturers- the government has taken initiatives to encourage the private sector to engage in defence manufacturing, thus reducing the government's expenditure on defence manufacturing.
6. A Defence export strategy has been formulated with a view to facilitate the Defence Public Sector Enterprises (DPSUs) and private defence

players in exploring business opportunities abroad. The total value of production for OFB & DPSUS together accounts for \$8.0 bn.

### **Challenges Ahead**

- ★ lack of adequate resources- india lacks both financial as well as human resources required for an efficient defence manufacturing industry.
- ★ not so developed technology- India is behind many of the countries when it comes to technological innovations due to lack of sufficient research and development in the country.
- ★ Lack of an institutional capacity and capability- there are issues related to stringent labour laws, compliance and burden and lack of skills. This is the reason for India not being able to attract FDI in the defence sector.
- ★ limited private sector involvement- the private sector is least involved in the defence industry due to low profits and high investments.
- ★ lack of dispute resolution mechanism in case of disputes
- ★ land acquisition issues for setting up of big factories and industries.
- ★ Lack of Coordination- there is an Overlapping jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Industrial Promotion. This impairs India's capability of defence manufacturing.
- ★ Long Gestation Period- The creation of a manufacturing base is capital and technology-inten-

sive and has a long gestation period.

### **Way Forward**

1. Strengthening the institutional capacity and capability.
2. Permanent Arbitration Cell can be set up to deal with all the objections and disputes during defence manufacturing
3. Encouraging the private sector to invest in defence manufacturing. It can infuse efficient and effective technology and human capital required for modernization of indigenous defence industry.
4. A level playing field should be provided for the private as well as the public players participating in the defence sector.
5. Development of technological innovations like Artificial Intelligence and their integration with the defence equipment.
6. Robust supply chain is critical for a defence manufacturer looking to optimize costs. Indian SMEs are playing a key role in the global supply chain of OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturer).

### **National Non-ferrous Metal Scrap Recycling Framework**

The Ministry of Mines has issued a National non-ferrous metal scrap recycling framework, 2020 in a bid to cut down the scrap imports.

- ★ It also seeks to use a life cycle management approach for better efficiency in the mineral value chain process.

### **Key Points**

- ★ Objectives of the Recycling Framework:
  - ❑ To work towards economic wealth creation, job creation and increased contribution to GDP through metal recycling.
  - ❑ To promote a formal and well organized recycling ecosystem by adopting energy efficient processes.
  - ❑ To minimize the effect of end of life products on landfills and environmental pollution by promoting an environmentally sound recycling system.
  - ❑ To evolve a responsive ecosystem by involving all stakeholders.

### **Implementation Guidelines:**

- ❑ The framework envisages setting up of a central Metal Recycling Authority to facilitate recycling of metals.
- ❑ The government will work towards establishing standards for Quality of scrap used for recycling.
- ❑ A mechanism for registration of segregators, dismantlers, recyclers, collection centers etc. will be developed to promote recycling to an organized sector
- ❑ It is proposed to set up Urban Mines, envisaged as a location to collect and hold large quantities of similar materials.
- ❑ An Online market platform/ exchange platform for recy-

cled/secondary metal will be developed.

- ★ Recyclers may explore the possibility of entering into collection contracts with industrial and commercial establishments.

### ***Roles/ Responsibilities of Stakeholders:***

- ❑ Responsibility of Manufacturer: To ensure that any Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guidelines/Regulations be strictly adhered to.
- ★ Designing products that are easier to recycle and reuse in an efficient and environmentally sound manner.
- ❑ Role of Public: Public should responsibly dispose of scrap at designated scrap collection centers for their effective and environmentally sound processing.
- ❑ Role of Government: MoEF&CC to streamline the regulatory requirements, eliminating multiple clearances wherever feasible, for the recycling units.
- ❑ Role of Recycling Authority: Developing technical, safety and environmental norms and SOPs for handling and processing of scraps in consultation with MoEFCC, CPCB, BIS, etc.
- ★ Challenges Faced By the Non-ferrous Metals Recycle Industry:
  - ❑ A major challenge is its heavy dependence on import of metal scrap.
  - ❑ Lack of an organized / systematic scrap recovery mechanism.
  - ❑ Lack of sustained imple-

mentation of existing regulations on waste collection and recycling.

- ❑ Lack of standardization of recycled products adversely affecting market adoption.
- ❑ Lack of specific skill sets on responsible methods and technologies.

### ***Government Initiatives For Recycling***

- ❑ The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) is in the process of formulating National Resource Efficiency Policy (NREP) which aims to mainstream resource efficiency across all sectors, wherein Aluminium sector has been considered as a priority sector.
- ❑ The Ministry of Steel has brought out a Steel Scrap Recycling Policy which envisages a framework to facilitate and promote establishment of metal scrap recycling centers.
- ❑ NITI Aayog is proposing a comprehensive "National Material Recycling Policy"-to drive concerned and coordinated national and state level programs, plans and actions towards ramping up material recycling in India in a formal and organized manner.

### ***Growth in Bank Credit & Deposits: RBI***

Recent data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed that Bank credit and deposits grew and were higher in February 2021 than January 2021.

- ★ The credit and deposits for February 2021 were even higher than the pre-pandemic data of February 2020.

### ***Key Points***

- ★ Bank Related Data by RBI:
  - ❑ At the end of February 2021:
- ★ Bank credit grew by 6.63% to Rs.107.75 lakh crore which in February 2020 stood at Rs.101.05 lakh crore.
- ★ Bank deposits grew by 12.06% to Rs.149.34 lakh crore which in February 2020 stood at Rs.133.26 lakh crore.

### ***Reason for Credit Growth:***

- ❑ The growth in bank credit is driven by an increase in retail loans.
- ★ Retail loans include a vast range of different loans. Personal loans such as car loans, mortgages, signature loans and credit cards all fall into the category of retail loans, but business loans can also fall into the category of retail loans.
- ❑ The overall retail credit growth, which is currently at 9% is expected to accelerate further, led by mortgages (contributing 51% of retail loans) and back-end support by unsecured (cards/personal loans) and vehicle loans.

### ***Bank Credit:***

- ❑ Banks and financial institutions make money from the funds they lend out to their clients.
- ★ These funds come from the money clients deposit in their accounts or invest in certain investment vehicles such as certificates of deposit (CDs).

- ★ A CD is a product offered by banks and credit unions that provides an interest rate premium in exchange for the customer agreeing to leave a lump-sum deposit untouched for a predetermined period of time.

❑ Bank credit consists of the total amount of combined funds that financial institutions advance to individuals or businesses. It is an agreement between banks and borrowers where banks make loans to borrowers.

### **Bank Credit In India:**

- ❑ The Bank credit in India refers to credit lending by various scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) to various sectors of the economy.
- ❑ The bank credit is categorized into food credit and non-food credit.
- ★ The food credit indicates the lending made by banks to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) mainly for procuring food-grains. It is a small share of the total bank credit.
- ★ The major portion of the bank credit is the non-food credit which comprises credit to various sectors of the economy (Agriculture, Industry, and Services) and also in the form of personal loans.
- ★ The data on bank credit is collected on a monthly basis by the RBI.

### **Bank Deposits:**

❑ Bank deposits consist of money placed into banking institutions for safekeeping. These deposits are made to deposit accounts such as savings accounts, current accounts, and money market accounts.

- ★ The account holder has the right to withdraw deposited funds, as set forth in the terms and conditions governing the account agreement.
- ★ Bank Deposits in India: In India there are four major types of Bank Deposits

### **Current Account:**

- ★ A current account is a special type of account that has lower restrictions than a savings account when it comes to withdrawals and transactions.
- ★ It is also known as a demand deposit account and it is meant for businessmen to conduct their business transactions smoothly.
- ★ Banks also offer overdraft facilities on these, i.e., they let account-holders withdraw more money than there is in the account.

### **Savings Accounts:**

- ★ It offers high liquidity and is very popular among the masses. It does, however, have cash withdrawal and transaction limits to promote digital payments.
- ★ Banks provide an interest rate which is only slightly higher than inflation, so it is not very optimal for investment.

### **Recurring Deposits:**

- ★ It is a special type of term deposit where you do not need to deposit a lump sum savings rather a person has to deposit a fixed sum of money every month.
- ★ There are no premature withdrawals allowed in the account, but for a penalty, you can close the account before the maturity date of the deposit.

### **Fixed Deposits:**

- ★ It is an investment avenue offered by banks, financial institutes and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) that offers guaranteed returns.
- ★ It gives a higher interest than a regular savings account and offers a wide range of tenures ranging from 7 days to 10 years.

## **The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

The Lok Sabha on March 22 passed The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to raise the limit for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in insurance companies from 49% to 74%. The Bill had earlier been cleared by the Rajya Sabha and now requires Presidential assent to become law.

- ★ The finance minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman, who piloted the bill in both the houses of the parliament claimed that the move was aimed at solving some of the long term capital availability issues in the insurance sector that was a capital intensive industry.
- ★ she added that the stakeholders in this sector had been consulted by the insurance regulator, insurance regulatory and development authority of India before going ahead with the move.
- ★ apprehensions over the gradual taking over of public sector insurance companies in India were ill founded as the banking and the insurance industries have been designated as strategic sectors and that a cap of 74% is just a limit post on the FDI.



- ★ She also pointed out the high solvency fund ratio in the insurance sector has led to the liquidity stress in the sector under a proposed bill aimed to address that stress.
- ★ Regarding the issue of loss of jobs to the public sector employees, she asserted that the public sector employees will be protected, and the measure will also give a boost to the private employees.
- ★ There are about 2.6-7,00,000 employees in the private sector in the insurance and about 1.5-4,00,000 in the public sector. around 15,00,000 insurance agents in the public sector and 21,00,000 in the private sector.
- ★ In India there are 7 public sector companies in the insurance sector while 61 of them exist in the private sector.

#### **INSURANCE AMENDMENT BILL, 2021**

- ★ The bill intends to amend the Insurance Act of 1938 and increase the maximum foreign investment allowed in an Indian insurance company.
- ★ It increases the limit on the foreign investment in Indian insurance companies from existing 49% to 74% and also removes the restrictions on ownership and control in these companies.
- ★ While the control will go to the foreign companies, the majority of the directors and the key management persons in the insurance company will be Indian residents who will be covered by the law of the land.
- ★ The FDI policy has been brought in only to supplement domestic capital. This will only

supplement what is available in the country because what is now available is not sufficient for the development of the sector.

#### **Safeguards provided in the Bill**

- ★ Under the new structure, the majority of directors on the board and key management persons would have to be resident Indians, which will make them accountable under the Indian law.
- ★ At least half of directors are to be independent directors which also ensures accountability.

#### **Concerns associated with the Bill**

- ★ The ownership of these insurance companies should remain with Indian companies.
- ★ Bankruptcy- If a foreign entity is given ownership and it later declares the company as bankrupt, the Indian investors will not be able to recover their money.

#### **Significance of the bill**

- ★ The insurance companies in India have been constantly facing liquidity pressure and the increased FDI limit will help meet the growing capital requirement of these companies.
- ★ The move taken by the government will help in attracting greater foreign investment and strengthening the insurance sector in India.
- ★ The additional infusion of capital in the insurance sector will help enable growth and help insurance reach the last mile at the grassroots level.
- ★ It will also help in creation of more jobs for the youth which

is currently the most crucial requirement in India.

- ★ it will also provide an impetus to the insurance industry and help in scaling up and building more digital infrastructure capabilities in the post pandemic era.

#### **Insurance sector in India**

- ★ Insurance acts as the main element in the operation of national economies throughout the world.
- ★ It helps in protecting the health and assets of the people and stimulates the business activities to operate in a cost effective manner.
- ★ India's insurance sector has been growing dynamically in recent years, with total insurance premiums increasing rapidly, as compared to global counterparts.
- ★ The insurance penetration i.e. the ratio of total premium to GDP (gross domestic product) and insurance density i.e. the ratio of total premium to population stood at 3.69% for FY18, which is low in comparison with global levels.

#### **History**

- ★ Foreign investment in the Indian insurance sector was first permitted in the year 2000 that was up to 26%.
- ★ Later through an amendment act of 2015, this cap of 26% was raised to 49% of the paid up equity capital of such companies which are Indian owned and controlled.
- ★ The Government of India had earlier allowed 100 per cent foreign direct investment in insurance intermediaries.

- ★ These services include insurance brokers, reinsurance brokers, insurance consultants, corporate agents, third party administrators, surveyors and loss assessors.

### **Challenges in the insurance sector**

- ★ Rural- Urban divide- Rural participation of insurers in India remains deficient, and the life insurers, especially the private ones, gravitate towards the urban population, that causes a detriment of the rural population.
- ★ Lack of Capital- Insurers in India lack sufficient capital, and their financial health, particularly that of the public-sector insurers, is in a precarious state.
- ★ Dominance of the public sector- though the monopoly of the government in the insurance sector has ended, the public-sector insurers to a large extent hold a larger share of the insurance market even though there are fewer in number.
- ★ Nascent stage of Non- Life insurance- Life insurance dominates the sector with a huge share of 74.7%, with non-life insurance accounting for the remaining share of just 25.3%. Moreover, products catering to specialty risks such as catastrophes and cyber security are at a nascent stage of development in India.

### **Way Forward**

- ★ The players in the insurance sector must adopt a rural-centric approach to increase the penetration of insurance in rural areas. This will also need

products that cater to the specific needs in rural areas.

- ★ There is a need for complementary thrust to spread awareness and improve financial literacy among the people, particularly about the concept of insurance, and its importance.
- ★ Integration of the role of technology in the insurance industry to design special products to cater to the special needs of the people.
- ★ Enhancing the role of the insurance regulator- the IRDAI must ensure the reach of insurance products to those who need it the most, facilitate easy availability of insurance both online and offline, etc.

### **NaBFID Bill**

The union cabinet had approved a budget proposal of setting up a development finance institution which will have tax benefits to enable fund raising from investors.

- ★ The finance minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman on March 22nd introduced the National Bank for financing infrastructure and development bill, 2021 in the Lok Sabha.
- ★ The bill paves the way for setting up a government owned development finance institution to fund infrastructure projects.
- ★ The National Bank for financing infrastructure and development will be set up with a corpus of Rs. 20,000 crores and the government will give an initial grant of rupees 5000 crores.
- ★ The government expects the development finance institu-

tion to leverage this fund to raise up to rupees 3 lakh crore in the next few years in the economy.

### **What are Development Finance Institutions?**

- ★ A development finance institution or a development finance company is an organisation which is owned by the government or charitable institutions in the country. It is established to finance the low-cost projects or the projects in which the borrowers are not able to meet the finance requirements of the project from the commercial lenders in the market.
- ★ The development finance institutions provide finance both for short term as well as for the long term. The short term finances are for less than 5 years while the long term finances are for more than 5 years.
- ★ The source of capital for these institutions is national or International Development funds.
- ★ The development finance institutions ensure their creditworthiness and their ability to provide project finance at a very competitive rate.
- ★ Such institutions do not accept deposits from the people and only function as funding institutions.
- ★ They are different from the commercial banks from the point of view that this drive to strike a balance between commercial operational norms that are followed by the commercial banks on one hand and the developmental responsibilities on the other.

- ★ This implies that they do not just have a role as plain lenders like the commercial banks but are companions in the development process of an economy whose sole objective is to promote the economic growth in the country.

#### ***National Bank For Financing Infrastructure And Development (NaBFID)***

- ★ Ownership- at the initial stage, the 100% stake in the NaBFID will be of the Government of India. gradually the government will bring down its stake in the institution to 26% in the coming years.
- ★ Purpose - the purpose of setting up the institution will be to provide finance for social and economic infrastructure projects that have been identified under the national infrastructure pipeline (NIP).
- ★ Management - a professional board will be set up that will have at least 50% of the members as non-official directors.
- ★ Capital infusion - the capital infusion by the Government of India will be of rupees 20,000 crores. The initial grant to the institution constitutes rupees 5000 crores. The institution is then expected to raise around rupees 3,00,000 crores in the next few years by the market funds.
- ★ Tax exemption - the Government of India will provide a 10 year tax exemption 2 funds that will be invested in the DFI. This will help attract long term players such as insurance and pension funds.

#### ***Advantages Of Setting Up A Development Finance Institution To Fund The Infrastructure Projects***

- i. It will help to boost the economic growth in the country

and will also lead to an increase in the capital flows and energize the capital markets of the economy.

- ii. It will help in improving the situation of the long term finances in the economy.
- iii. It will be a mechanism to provide a credit enhancement for infrastructure and housing projects that have been stalled till now due to the credit crunch.
- iv. As India does not have a Development Bank, such an institution can help fulfil the need for India to have an institutional mechanism that is solely designed for funding capital requirements.
- v. It will help improve the debt flow towards the infrastructure projects.
- vi. The Reserve Bank of India in 2017 clearly specified that a specialised bank can help in catering to the wholesale and the long term financing needs of the growing Indian economy and it will also aid in filling the current gap in the long term financing.
- vii. The development finance institution can also help in easing the burden on the public sector banks and improve their efficiency as they are highly caught in the vicious cycle of increasing non-performing assets.
- viii. It will mobilize the rupees 111 lakh crores that is required for the funding of the ambitious national infrastructure pipeline (NIP).
- ix. It will also help in enhancing the credit rating of projects in India.

- x. It will help in funding the projects where others specially the private sector is not willing to enter because of the risks involved in them.

#### ***National Infrastructure Pipeline***

- ★ The national infrastructure pipeline announced by the Government of India is the first of its kind, whole of the government exercise to provide world class infrastructure to the citizens of India and improve their quality of their lives.
- ★ It is a group of social and economic infrastructure projects in India that is to be completed in the period of 5 years from 2019 to 2025.
- ★ It will help enable forward outlook on the intra structure projects and also lead to the creation of jobs, improve the ease of living and provide equitable access to infrastructure to all. This will make the growth in the economy more inclusive.
- ★ It will help in stepping up the annual infrastructure investment and help in the achievement of the goal of being a 5 trillion dollars economy by 2024 -25.
- ★ It will give a boost to the agrarian economy by strengthening the agricultural and rural infrastructure.
- ★ It will lead to an increase in the connectivity across India, especially in the rural areas through the expansion of roads and railways across the country.
- ★ It will improve India's rank on the ease of doing business index as well developed infrastructure helps enhance the

level of economic activity in the country.

- ★ It will create an additional fiscal space by improving the revenue base of the government and ensure the quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.
- ★ It will provide an impetus to the manufacturing capacity with reduction in the leakages due to insufficient infrastructure that has slowed down the manufacturing processes.
- ★ It will also encourage new players - both national and international - to enter the market in the manufacturing business.

#### WAY FORWARD

- ★ The earlier generation of DFIs in India ran into a problem of financing because the retail deposit access was cornered by the banks and available for long-term financing without government guarantees was limited. India must ensure that such mistakes are not repeated again.
- ★ The government must formulate a comprehensive policy that addresses all the concerns related to NaBFID/ DFI.
- ★ Government can think of collaborating with foreign countries for setting up such an institution.

### *Sops under RODTEP to see delay*

The notification of benefit rates payable to exporters under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RODTEP) scheme, is expected to take more time as it is facing 'teething issues'.

The Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RODTEP) scheme

- ★ It was announced by Government of India (GOI) in 2019 to boost exports by allowing reimbursement of taxes and duties, which are not exempted or refunded under any other scheme in accordance with World Trade Organization (WTO) norms.
- ★ RODTEP is a combination of the current Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) and Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL).
- ★ At present, embedded duties and taxes, which are not refunded under any other scheme, range from 1-3%.
- ★ Under the scheme, rebate of these taxes will be given in the form of duty credit/electronic scrip.

Need for the RODTEP Scheme

- ★ The current Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) scheme provided additional benefits of 2% to 7% on the FOB value of eligible exports.
- ★ Objective of the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) is to promote the manufacture and export of notified goods/ products.
- ★ A complaint was filed against India at the WTO (World Trade Organization) by the USA stating that the benefits given to Indian exporters under the MEIS scheme give undue benefits that are against the WTO norms.
- ★ As per the WTO norms, a country can't give export subsidies like MEIS if Per capita income is above 1000 US \$ and India's Per

Capita Income crossed above 1000 US \$ in 2017.

- ★ India subsequently lost the case at WTO and had to come up with a new WTO compliant scheme to help Indian exporters.
- ★ This led to the birth of the RODTEP Scheme, so as to ensure that India stays WTO-compliant.

### *Bad Bank*

For a banking sector-dependent economy like India, the good health of the banks is very important to ensure accessible financial services and flow of credit to support the growing economy. However, for many years, Indian banks have been dealing with the NPA crisis that has created problems for them and the entire economy.

Further, the economic fallout due to the coronavirus crisis has increased the banking sector's stress. Therefore, to restore banks' health, the Budget 2021 has proposed one such measure i.e. the idea of setting up a National bad bank. However, the idea of a bad bank is itself much debatable.

What is a Bad Bank

- ★ A bad bank is an entity that acts as an aggregator of bad loans or non-performing assets (NPA's) and purchases them from across the banking sector at a discounted price and then works towards their recovery and resolution.
- ★ These loans are classified as non-performing and are at the verge of or already in the state of default. These bad loans negatively impact a bank's balance sheet.



- ★ The bad bank is similar to an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), where they absorb these loans from the banks and then manage them to recover as much amount as possible.

### ***Proposed Model for Bad Bank***

- ★ The budget 2021 proposed an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)-Asset Management Company (AMC) structure, wherein the ARC will aggregate the debt, while the AMC will act as a resolution manager.
- ★ The proposed structure envisages the setting up of a National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARC) to acquire stressed assets in an aggregated manner from lenders, which will be resolved by the National Asset Management Company (NAMC).
- ★ A skilled and professional set-up dedicated to Stressed Asset Resolution will be ably supported by attracting institutional funding in stressed assets through strategic investors, AIFs, special situation funds, stressed asset funds, etc for participation in the resolution process.
- ★ Further, transferring these stressed assets to bad banks will entail recovery of 15% in cash and 85% in sovereign guaranteed security receipts. This government guarantees but will carry a zero-risk weight, for a specified period of time.
- ★ The net effect of this approach would be to build an open architecture and a vibrant market for stressed assets.

### ***Arguments for Bad Banks***

- ★ Providing Lending Leverage to Banks: The benefits of bad bank include the recovered value, and significant lending leverage because of three factors:
  - ❑ Capital being freed up from less than fully provisioned bad assets.
  - ❑ Capital freed up from security receipts because of a sovereign guarantee.
  - ❑ Cash receipts that come back to the banks and can be leveraged for lending, also freeing up provisions from the balance sheet.
- ★ International Precedent: There are several international success stories of a bad bank accomplishing its mission and there is no reason to believe why India cannot accomplish its objective.
  - ❑ The US implemented the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) after the 2008 financial crisis, which helped the US economy after the subprime crisis.
  - ❑ It was modeled around the idea of a bad bank.
- ★ Revival of Credit Flow Post-Covid: Some experts believe that a bad bank can help free capital of over, ₹ 5 lakh crore that is locked in by banks as provisions against the bad loans.

### ***Arguments against a Bad Bank***

- ★ Not a Panacea: It is argued that creating a bad bank is just shifting the problem from one place to another.
  - ❑ Without fundamental reforms to solve the NPA problem, the bad bank is likely to become a warehouse for bad loans without any recovery taking place.

- ★ Tight Fiscal Position: Furthermore, an important concern is regarding mobilizing capital for the bad bank. In an economy hit by the pandemic, it is hard to find buyers for distressed assets and the Government is also in a tight fiscal position.

- ★ No Clear Procedure: Also, there is no clear procedure to determine at what price and which loans should be transferred to the bad bank. This may create political challenges for the Government.

- ★ Moral Hazard: Former Governor of the reserve bank, Raghuram Rajan believes that setting a bad bank may also create moral hazard problems among the banks that would enable them to continue with their reckless lending practices, further exacerbating the NPA problem.

### ***Conclusion***

- ★ So long as Public sector banks managements remain beholden to politicians and bureaucrats, their deficit in professionalism will remain and subsequently, prudential norms in lending will continue to suffer.
- ★ Therefore, a bad bank is a good idea, but the main challenge lies with tackling the underlying structural problems in the banking system and making reforms to improve the public sector banks.

## ***World Development Report 2021***

Recently, the World Bank has published the World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives.

- ★ The World Development Report 2021 provides a blueprint on

how to harness the power of data for development, to ensure no one is left behind.

### **Key Points**

- ★ The Social Contract For Data: To get more value out of data while protecting people against harm and ensuring access and representation. Different data-creating and data-using parties need to safely collaborate.
  - ❑ The three elements of a social contract for data: Value, Equity and Trust
- ★ Data As a Force For Public Good:
  - ❑ Public intent data - data collected with the intent of serving the public good by informing the design, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of public programs and policies - are a prerequisite for many government functions.
  - ❑ Public intent data can bring value to development through several pathways, such as
- ★ holding governments accountable and empowering individuals,
- ★ improving service delivery, and
- ★ prioritizing scarce resources.

### **Infinite Possibilities:**

- ❑ Repurposing and integrating public- and private-intent data can help provide real-time and finer-scale insights, fill data gaps, and overcome limitations associated with each data type.
- ★ Connecting The World: Data Infrastructure is a key part of ensuring equitable access to data for poor people and poor countries.

- ★ Crossing Borders: Data is a tradable asset, but sending them across borders requires adequate data protection.
- ★ Governing Data: The role of data governance is two fold:
  - ❑ First, to control risks by ensuring the security, integrity, and protection of data and systems; and
  - ❑ Second, to capture value by establishing rules and technical standards to enable data to be more effectively transferred, combined, and exchanged.
- ★ Improving Data Systems: Fully harnessing the value of data requires building an Integrated National Data System (INDS).
  - ❑ INDS is a way of countries realizing the potential of data for development, using the principles of the social contract as a blueprint.
  - ❑ The INDS framework allows a country to share data between national participants safely while maximizing the benefit equitably.

### **Issues Flagged by the Report:**

- ❑ Not A Leveling Playing Field: An explosion of data platform businesses is raising concern about competition and posing new challenges for regulation.
- ★ Data Platform: It is an integrated technology solution that allows data located in databases to be governed, accessed, and delivered to users, data applications, or other technologies for strategic business purposes.
  - ❑ Lack of Open Data: Only 11% low-income countries make their data open (Not

Accessible To General Public or research institution), the report flagged.

- ★ The comparable rate for lower-middle-income countries was 19%, for upper-middle-income countries 22% and high-income countries 44%.
  - ❑ Underinvestment In Public Intent Data Systems: Only half the countries had a national statistical plan that was fully funded as of 2019. While 93% of high-income countries had a fully funded national statistical plan, not a single low-income country had one.
  - ❑ Issue Related To Lower-income Countries: Unable to harness the potential of data due to a lack of institutions, decision-making autonomy, and financial resources, all of which hold back their effective implementation and effectiveness of data systems and governance frameworks.
  - ❑ Gaps In Data On Women And Girls are particularly severe: Only 10 of the 54 gender-specific indicators (19%) in the United Nations-mandated sustainable development goals (SDGs) were widely available.
  - ❑ Misuse of Data: Making data accessible to more users and creating systems that facilitate their reuse also opens the door for data to be misused in ways that can harm individuals or development objectives.
- ★ The report also flagged concerns over protection of personal data; misinformation; and attacks on software, networks and data systems.

- ❑ **Data Infrastructural Gaps:** There are major gaps evident between rich and poor people on broadband connectivity, and a substantial divide emerging between rich and poor countries when it comes to the availability of data infrastructure.

#### **Data Gaps In India:**

- ❑ Echoed concerns on assessment of global poverty by the World Bank, which has been skewed due to absence of data on poverty from India.
- ❑ India monitors 54 out of the 130 SDG indicators. While the overall number of monitored indicators has gone up, the country has dropped four indicators from its tracking list.

- ❑ The report called for strategic repurposing of existing data.

- ❑ Some steps taken by India:

- ★ **National Data Sharing & Accessibility Policy (NDSAP):**
- ★ The National Policy is expected to increase the accessibility and easier sharing of non-sensitive data amongst the registered users and their availability for scientific, economic and social developmental purposes.
- ★ **Open Government Data (OGD) Platform:**
- ★ To provision an enabling Platform to provide proactive and open access to the data generated.
- ★ To increase Transparency, Accountability, Citizen Engagement, Collaboration, Better Governance, Decision making & Innovation.

- ★ **Paradigm Shift in Governance** Direct Delivery of Services to Citizens, Setting up a Platform for Collaboration, Innovation in delivery of Services to Citizens.

#### **Way Forward**

- ★ **Participation of the Poor:** Data offers tremendous potential to create value by improving programs and policies, driving economies, and empowering citizens. The perspective of poor people has largely been absent from the global debate on data governance and urgently needs to be heard.
- ★ **International cooperation:** The Report called for International cooperation to harmonise regulations and coordinate policies so that the value of data can be harnessed to benefit all, and to inform efforts toward a green, resilient and inclusive recovery.


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# GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

## **Right to Repair: European Union**

Companies that sell refrigerators, washers, hair dryers or televisions in the European Union (EU) will need to ensure that those appliances can be repaired for up to 10 years.

- ★ The “Right to Repair,” as it is sometimes called, came into force across the 27-nation from March 2021.

### **Key Points**

#### **About:**

- ❑ The Right to Repair electronics refers to government legislation that is intended to allow consumers the ability to repair and modify their own consumer electronic devices, where otherwise the manufacturer of such devices require the consumer to use only their offered services.
- ❑ Idea of Right to Repair originally originated from the USA where the Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act 2012, required

the manufacturers to provide the necessary documents and information to allow anyone to repair their vehicles.

#### **New Rules:**

- ❑ Under the new EU rules, manufacturers will have to ensure parts are available for up to a decade, though some will only be provided to professional repair companies to ensure they are installed correctly.
- ❑ New devices will also have to come with repair manuals and be made in such a way that they can be dismantled using conventional tools when they really can't be fixed anymore, to improve recycling.
- ★ E-Waste Generation in Europe:
  - ❑ As per the Global E-Waste Monitor 2020, Europeans produce more than 16 kilograms (kg) of electrical waste per person every year.
- ★ Asia and Africa were much lower: 5.6 and 2.5 kg respectively.

- ★ Global E-Waste Monitor: It is a collaboration of the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership (GESp), formed by United Nations University (UNU), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), in close collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

- ❑ About half of that junk is due to broken household appliances, and the EU recycles only about 40% of it, leaving behind huge amounts of potentially hazardous material.

#### **Significance:**

- ❑ It will help reduce the vast mountain of electrical waste (e-waste) that piles up each year on the continent.
- ❑ It will save consumers money.
- ❑ It will contribute to circular economy objectives by improving the life span, maintenance, re-use, upgrade, recyclability and waste handling of appliances.



❑ It would tackle two manufacturing trends:

- ★ Cavalier attitude towards planned obsolescence.
- ★ Tendency on the part of manufacturers to control the repair and maintenance network.
- ★ Problem with Repair of Modern Appliances:

### ***Need Special Tools:***

- ★ Modern appliances are often glued or riveted together, if you need specialist tools or have to break open the device, then you can't repair it.

### ***Lack of Spare Parts:***

- ★ Lack of spare parts is another problem, campaigners say. Sometimes a single broken tooth on a tiny plastic sprocket can be challenging work.

### ***Concerns For Manufacturers:***

- ❑ Manufacturers have pushed back against a broader "right to repair"- as that would hurt their ability to sell new products more frequently, and would push them to become a service provider rather than a product maker.
- ❑ They also say allowing the consumer to repair high-technology products is a risk, think of lithium-ion batteries in cars.

### ***E-waste in India***

#### ***Official Data:***

- ❑ According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India generated more than 10 lakh tonnes of e-waste in 2019-20, an increase from 7 lakh tonnes in 2017-18.

### ***Indian Initiatives:***

- ❑ E-Waste Management Rules, 2016:
- ★ The rules aim to enable the recovery and/or reuse of useful material from e-waste, thereby reducing the hazardous wastes destined for disposal and to ensure the environmentally sound management of all types of waste of electrical and electronic equipment.

### ***E-Waste Clinic:***

- ★ Aimed at segregating, processing and disposal of waste.

### ***Way Forward***

Such regulations could be especially valuable in a country like India, where service networks are often spotty and authorised workshops are few and far between in the hinterland. India's informal repair sector does a good job with jugaad. But the quality of repair and maintenance services could improve substantially if such legislation was adopted

## ***NDC Synthesis Report: UNFCCC***

The UNFCCC, in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Synthesis Report, has called for more ambitious climate action plans by the countries in order to achieve the Paris Agreement target of containing global temperature rise to 2°C (ideally 1.5°C) by the end of the century.

- \* The report was sought ahead of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UNFCCC which is scheduled to take place from 1st-12th November 2021, in Glasgow, UK.

- ★ NDCs are at the heart of the Paris Agreement and embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Each NDC reflects the country's ambition, taking into account its domestic circumstances and capabilities.

### ***Key Points***

#### ***About:***

- ❑ The NDC Synthesis Report covers submissions up to 31st December 2020 and includes new or updated NDCs by 75 Parties, which represent approximately 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

#### ***Findings:***

- ❑ Good Performers:
- ★ The United Kingdom and the European Union are the only regions among 18 of the world's biggest emitters that have significantly increased their greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.
- ❑ Under Performers:
- ★ Sixteen of the world's biggest emitters have not increased their emission reduction targets substantially or at all.
- ❑ Adaptation Action and Economic Diversification:
- ★ More countries reported on mitigation co-benefits of adaptation action and economic diversification plans.
- ★ Adaptation actions and economic diversification plans with mitigation co-benefits include climate-smart agriculture, adapting coastal ecosystems, increasing the share of renewable sources in energy generation, carbon dioxide cap-

ture and storage, fuel switch and fuel price reforms in the transport sector, and moving to a circular economy for better waste management.

❑ Need for the Update:

- ★ The current levels of climate ambition are very far from putting us on a pathway that will meet our Paris Agreement goals.
- ★ While a majority of countries increased their individual levels of ambition to reduce emissions, their combined impact will help achieve only a 1% reduction by 2030 compared to 2010 levels.
- ★ Global emissions, however, need to reduce by 45% in order to meet the 1.5°C goal, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

### Way Forward

- ★ Participating nations will get more time to review and update their NDCs. This will be compiled in the final synthesis report to be brought out ahead of COP 26.
- ★ Climate action must be enabled and facilitated through the provision of adequate support where needed. This is critical and must be addressed also with high propriety and urgency without adequate resources and access to greener technologies the deep transformation we need will not happen.

## Purple Revolution under Aroma Mission

Around 500 farmers across villages in Doda district in Jammu had their incomes quadrupled

after shifting from maize to lavender cultivation which is being called purple revolution. It was possible due to initiatives taken under Aroma Mission.

### Key Points

- ★ Purple Revolution (Under Aroma Mission):
  - ❑ About:
- ★ First-time farmers were given free lavender saplings and those who have cultivated lavender before were charged Rs. 5-6 per sapling.

### Aim:

- ★ To support domestic aromatic crop based agro economy by moving from imported aromatic oils to homegrown varieties.

### Products:

- ★ Main product is Lavender oil which sells for at least Rs. 10,000 per litre
- ★ Lavender water, which separates from lavender oil, is used to make incense sticks.
- ★ Hydrosol, which is formed after distillation from the flowers, is used to make soaps and room fresheners.

### Main Agencies Involved:

- ★ Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, Jammu (IIIM Jammu), the two bodies are mainly responsible for making purple revolution under the Aroma Mission a success.

### Significance:

- ★ Apart from being in sync with government policy of doubling farm incomes by 2022, lavender cultivation also provided employment to the district's

women farmers thus gave impetus to inclusive growth.

### Aroma Mission:

- ❑ Objectives: The CSIR Aroma Mission is envisaged to bring transformative change in the aroma sector through desired interventions in the areas of agriculture, processing and product development for fuelling the growth of aroma industry and rural employment.
- ★ The mission will promote the cultivation of aromatic crops for essential oils that are in great demand by the aroma industry.
- ★ It is expected to enable Indian farmers and aroma industry to become global leaders in the production and export of some other essential oils on the pattern of menthol mint.
- ★ It aims to provide substantial benefits to the farmers in achieving higher profits, utilization of waste lands and protection of their crops from wild and grazing animals.

### Nodal Agencies:

- ★ The nodal laboratory is CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CSIR-CIMAP), Lucknow. The participating laboratories are CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT), Palampur; CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM), Jammu etc.

### Coverage:

- ★ The scientific interventions made under the mission project would provide assured benefits to the growers of Vidar-

bha, Bundelkhand, Gujarat, Marathwada, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and other states where farmers are exposed to frequent episodes of weather extremes and account for maximum suicides.

- ★ Aromatic Plants include lavender, damask rose, mushk bala, etc.

#### **Intended Outcomes:**

- ★ Bring about 5500 ha of additional area under captive cultivation aromatic cash crops particularly targeting rain-fed /degraded land across the country.
- ★ Provide technical and infra-structural support for distillation and values-addition to farmers/growers all over the country.
- ★ Enabling effective buy-back mechanisms to assure remunerative prices to the farmers/growers.
- ★ Value-addition to essential oils and aroma ingredients for their integration in global trade and economy.

## **WWF Conservation Drive on World Wildlife Day**

Recently, on the occasion of World Wildlife Day (3rd March), the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) called on multiple stakeholders, including the European Union (EU), to save Europe's last old-growth forests.

- ★ WWF was established in 1961 and is headquartered at Gland, Switzerland. Its mission is to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.

### **Key Points**

#### **About:**

- ❑ Europe's Old-Growth Forests (OGF) are primitive forests that are dominated by natural processes. They include virgin, near-virgin, long-untouched forests by humans, eg: BiaÅ,owieÅ¼a Forest in Poland.
- ❑ To date, 3,50,000 hectares (ha) of old-growth and virgin forests had been identified in Central and Southeastern Europe. Of these, only 2,80,000 ha were legally protected.

#### **Location:**

- ❑ The largest areas of surviving OGF and forest habitats in Europe (outside of Russia) were found primarily in Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

#### **Ecological Importance:**

- ❑ They were home to Europe's largest surviving large carnivore populations, as well as thousands of other species of flora and fauna.
- ❑ These forests rendered important ecosystem services such as filtering and storing freshwater to regulating the climate and were thus essential to people and to the economy.

#### **Threats:**

- ❑ Increasing pressure on forests from both unsustainable legal and illegal logging, as well as the impacts of climate change.
- ❑ The fragmentation and destruction of forest habitats meant that both ani-

mals and disease vectors were inadvertently coming into more frequent contact and conflict with humans.

#### **Steps that can be Taken:**

- ❑ Developing and promoting sustainable compensation mechanisms.
- ❑ Developing forest-based local green business and investment schemes to support sustainable development of such forests.

## **Black-Browed Babbler Rediscovered**

Recently, a Black-Browed Babbler (*Malacocincla perspicillata*) was rediscovered in southeastern Kalimantan, the part of Borneo that is administered by Indonesia.

### **Key Points**

#### **History:**

- ❑ In the 1840s, a mystery bird was caught on an expedition to the East Indies. It was named as black-browed babbler.
- ❑ The species was never seen in the wild again, and a stuffed specimen featuring a bright yellow glass eye was the only proof of its existence.
- ★ No Asian bird has been missing for as long as Indonesia's Black-browed Babbler. It has been missing for the last 170 years.
- ★ This bird is often called 'the biggest enigma in Indonesian ornithology'.

#### **About:**

- ❑ It has a strong bill, chocolate colouring and distinc-

tive black eye-stripe, its iris is of striking maroon colour.

- ❑ It has brown wings and a black stripe across its brow.

### **Significance:**

- ★ Discoveries like this give hope that it's possible to find other species that have been lost to science for decades or longer.
- ★ More than 150 species of birds around the world are considered "lost" with no confirmed sightings in the past decade.

## **CSIR Floriculture Mission**

Recently, CSIR Floriculture Mission has been approved for implementation in 21 States and Union Territories of India.

- ★ CSIR's Societal Portal has also been launched along with the Android App.

### **Key Points**

#### **About the Mission:**

- ❑ Floriculture is a branch of horticulture that deals with the cultivation, processing and marketing of ornamental plants vis-à-vis landscaping of small or large areas, and maintenance of gardens so that the surroundings may appear aesthetically pleasant.
- ❑ The mission will focus on commercial floral crops, seasonal/annual crops, wild ornaments and cultivation of flower crops for honey bee rearing.
- ★ Some of the popular crops include Gladiolus, Canna, Carnation, Chrysanthemum, Gerbera, Lilium, Marigold, Rose, Tuberose etc.

- ❑ In the mission, available knowledge base in Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Institutes will be utilized and leveraged to help Indian farmers and industry.

- ★ The Indian floriculture market was worth Rs. 15,700 crore in 2018. The market is projected to reach Rs. 47,200 crore by 2024 during 2019-24.

- ★ Along with CSIR, other implementing agencies involved are:

- ❑ Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR),
- ❑ Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC),
- ❑ APEDA and TRIFED,
- ❑ Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC), Kannauj, and
- ❑ Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).

#### **Significance of the Mission:**

- ❑ Raising Income: Floriculture has the potential to provide employment to a large number of people through nursery raising, floriculture farming, entrepreneurship development for nursery trade, value addition and export.
- ❑ Agro Climatic diversity: India has diverse agro-climatic and edaphic conditions (physical, chemical, and biological properties of soil), and rich plant diversity, still it shares only 0.6% of the global floriculture market.
- ❑ Import Substitution: At least 1200 million USD worth of floriculture products are

being imported by India every year from different countries.

- ❑ The convergence of Floriculture with Apiculture (beekeeping) as envisaged in the mission will yield even greater benefits.

- ★ Other Related Initiative (Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture):

- ❑ Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo.

- ★ About CSIR's Societal Portal:

- ❑ This Portal has been developed by CSIR Team with the help of MyGov Team.
- ❑ The Portal is to facilitate the public to submit the societal problems that can be resolved using S&T interventions.
- ❑ This is the first step in terms of seeking inputs on challenges and problems being faced by different stakeholders in society.

## **Food Waste Index Report 2021**

Recently, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the Food Waste Index Report 2021.

- ★ It has revealed that 17% of all food available at consumer level (11% in households, 5% in food service and 2% in retail) was wasted in 2019 and around



690 million people had to go hungry.

### Key Points

#### About the Report:

- ❑ It presents the most comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis and modelling to date, generating a new estimate of global food waste.
- ❑ It also publishes a methodology for countries to measure food waste, at household, food service and retail level, to track national progress towards 2030.
- ❑ In contrast to the Food Loss Index, the Food Waste Index measures total food waste (rather than loss or waste associated with specific commodities).

#### Findings:

##### Food Wastage:

- ★ This report estimates that around 931 million tonnes of food waste was generated in 2019.
- ★ 61% of which came from households, 26% from food service and 13% from retail.
  - ❑ Wastages Across All Income Groups:
- ★ Food waste generation is found to be equally relevant across all income countries such as high, upper middle and lower middle income countries.
- ★ Developed Countries like Austria produce very low amounts of waste at 39 kg/capita/year. On the other hand, countries like Nigeria are producing waste at 189 kg/capita/year. For India, the waste in kg/capita/year was 50.

- ★ This diverges from earlier narratives concentrating consumer food waste in developed countries, and food production, storage and transportation losses in developing countries.

##### Lack of Data Availability:

- ★ Global food waste data availability is currently low, and measurement approaches have been highly variable.

##### Significance of Reduction of Food Waste:

- ❑ Reduce Hunger: Reducing food waste can slow the destruction of nature through land conversion and pollution, enhance the availability of food and thus reduce hunger and save money at a time of global recession.
- ❑ Aligned with SDGs: This Food Waste Index Report aims to advance progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 12.3), i.e. "By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses".
- ❑ Tackle GHG Emissions: About 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with food that is not consumed. Thus, tackling food wastage issues can further achieve Paris Agreement targets.

##### Suggestions by the Report:

- ❑ Enhancing NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) for Food Systems: To raise ambition in national climate

strategies by integrating food loss and waste, and strengthen food security.

- ❑ Co-create and adopt game-changing solutions to food waste through the UN Food Systems Summit.
- ❑ Regional Food Waste Working Group: These Working Groups will provide capacity building and training to participating Member States in measuring food waste, developing a national baseline and designing national strategies for food waste prevention.

## Ease of Living & Municipal Performance Index 2020

Recently, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs released the final rankings of Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020 and the Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020.

### Key Points

#### Municipal Performance Index:

##### About:

- ★ It has been launched as an accompaniment to the Ease of Living Index.
- ★ It seeks to examine local government practices in municipalities across areas of services, finance, policy, technology and governance.
- ★ It also seeks to simplify and evaluate the complexities in local governance practice and promote the ethos of transparency and accountability.

### Coverage:

- ★ The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC, and the three Municipal Corporations).

### Parameters Used:

- ★ The five verticals under MPI are Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance. These five verticals comprise 20 sectors and 100 indicators in all totality.

### Categories:

- ★ The assessment framework under MPI 2020 has classified municipalities based on their population:
- ★ Million+ (municipalities having over a million population) and
- ★ Less than a Million Population.
- ★ MPI 2020 Performance

### Million+ category:

- ★ Indore has emerged as the highest ranked municipality, followed by Surat and Bhopal.

### Less than Million category:

- ★ New Delhi Municipal Council topped, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.
- ★ Ease of Living Index

### About:

- ★ It is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.
- ★ It provides a comprehensive understanding of participating cities across India based on quality of life, economic-ability of a city, and its sustainability and resilience.

### Aim:

- ★ It aims to enable cities to systematically assess themselves against global and national

## India's best cities



Ease of Living Index evaluated 49 cities with over one million residents and 62 with less than a million people

### Top big cities

Rank	City	Index score
1	Bengaluru	66.7
2	Pune	66.27
3	Ahmedabad	64.87
4	Chennai	62.61
5	Surat	61.73
6	Navi Mumbai	61.6
7	Coimbatore	59.72
8	Vadodara	59.24
9	Indore	58.58
10	Gr Mumbai	58.23
13	Delhi	57.56

### Top small cities

Rank	City	Index score
1	Shimla	60.9
2	Bhubaneswar	59.85
3	Silvassa	58.43
4	Kakinada	56.84
5	Salem	56.4
6	Vellore	56.38
7	Gandhinagar	56.25
8	Gurugram	56
9	Davanagere	55.25
10	Tiruchirappalli	55.24



benchmarks and encourage them to shift towards an 'outcome-based' approach to urban planning and management.

- ★ Bhubaneswar had the highest CPS score, followed by Silvassa, Davangere, Kakinada, Bilaspur and Bhagalpur.

### Parameters:

- ★ Citizen Perception:
- ★ The EoLI 2020 strengthens its scope by consolidating the framework with the addition of a Citizen Perception Survey in the index, holding a weightage of 30%.

### Citizen Perception Survey:

- ★ It was undertaken to help validate citizens' experience of their city in terms of service delivery.

### Existing Living Conditions:

- ★ It also examines the outcomes that lead to existing living conditions.
- ★ Across 13 categories such as Education, Health, Housing and Shelter, Buildings, Energy Consumption, and City Resilience, that account for 70% of the overall outcome.

### EoLI Performance 2020

- Million+ Category:
- ★ Top Performers:

- ★ Bengaluru followed by Pune and Ahmedabad.
- ★ Worst Performers:
- ★ Amritsar, Guwahati, Bareilly, Dhanbad and Srinagar.
- ❑ Less than Million Category:

#### **Top Performers:**

- ★ Shimla followed by Bhubaneswar and Silvassa.
- ★ Worst Performers:
- ★ Aligarh, Rampur, Namchi, Satna and Muzaffarpur.

#### **Significance:**

- ❑ Provide Holistic Assessment:
- ★ These indices provide a holistic assessment of cities based on their efforts to cultivate better quality of life, create infrastructure, and address challenges of urbanization.

#### **Help In Overcoming Deficiencies:**

- ★ Learnings gathered from these indices can help the government identify gaps, tap into potential opportunities, and increase efficiency in local governance to improve the lives of citizens and fulfil broader development outcomes.

#### **Complement SDG Goals:**

- ★ These indicators are also linked with the majority of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specially to the SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities And Communities).

## **Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary**

The Supreme Court-mandated Ridge Management Board has decided to constitute an expert committee to look into the propos-

al of dumping inert (non-reactive) waste in the mines of Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (Delhi).

### **Key Points**

#### **Inert Waste:**

- ❑ Inert waste is waste which is neither biologically nor chemically reactive and is waste which will not decompose or decompose very slowly.
- ❑ Inert waste includes, but is not limited to: construction and demolition material such as metal, wood, bricks, masonry and cement concrete; asphalt concrete; metal; tree branches; bottom ash from coal fired boilers; and waste coal fines from air pollution control equipment.
- ❑ These wastes usually don't pose a threat to the environment, or the health of animals or other people and will not endanger the quality of watercourses.
- ❑ However, when there is a large amount of this type of waste, it can become an issue as it begins to take up a lot of space.

#### **Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary:**

- ❑ Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary covering 32.71 sq km area lies on the Southern Delhi Ridge of Aravalli hill range, one of the oldest mountain systems of the world, on Delhi-Haryana border.
- ❑ An area of 1km around the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Gurugram and

Faridabad is an Eco-sensitive zone.

- ★ Activities such as commercial mining, setting up of industries, and establishment of major hydro-electric projects are prohibited.
- ❑ The Asola wildlife sanctuary has both floral and faunal diversity in form of
- ★ Wide variety of trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses.
- ★ Large numbers of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies.
- ❑ Sanctuary comprises around 200 species of resident and migratory birds.
- ❑ Wildlife habitats inside the sanctuary act as a water recharge zone for Delhi, Faridabad and Gurugram.

#### **Ridge Management Board:**

- ❑ Background: The Supreme Court mandated the Delhi Government to constitute a Ridge Management Board for protection of the Delhi Ridge through their orders in the M.C. Mehta case 1987.
- ★ The Delhi Ridge is the northern extension of the Aravalli Range covering a distance of about 35km.
- ★ The Delhi Ridge acts as the green lungs of the capital and, through various government orders over the years, all construction has been banned in the Ridge in an effort to preserve it.
- ❑ Date of Establishment: 6th October 1995.
- ❑ Members: The Chairman of the board is Chief Secretary of Delhi and Head of the Forest Department of Delhi



Government is its Member Secretary.

- ★ The Board also has members from the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs).

## *Delhi remains the most polluted capital*

Recently a report was released by 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. According to the report, Delhi remained the most polluted capital city in the world.

- ★ Though the situation of Delhi was worse, India on the whole had improved its average annual PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels in 2020 than in 2019.
- ★ Delhi's PM2.5 concentration level, based primarily on data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), was 84.1 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2020, a 15 percent improvement from the 98.6 µg/m<sup>3</sup> recorded in 2019 when the city was ranked the world's most polluted capital for the second straight year.
- ★ Average pollution levels were 51.9 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2020, compared with 58.1 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2019. This makes India the third most polluted country in 2020, unlike in 2019, when its air was the fifth most noxious.
- ★ The report ranked a total of 106 countries of the world.
- ★ Bangladesh and Pakistan were the worst countries in pollution with average PM2.5 levels higher than that of India, said the report. China ranked 11th in the latest report, a deterioration from the 14th position in 2019.

★ In 2020, 84% of all monitored countries observed air quality improvements. Other improvements in major cities over 2019 included a 11% drop in Beijing, a 13% drop in Chicago, a 17% drop in Paris and a 16% drop in London and Seoul.

★ However, only 24 out of the 106 monitored countries have the World Health Organisation (WHO) annual guidelines for PM2.5.

★ In the ranking for the cities, Hotan in China was the most polluted (average concentration 110.2 µg/m<sup>3</sup>), followed by Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh (106).

★ Of the 15 most polluted cities in the world, 13 were in India.

★ Above all, 2020 proved to be a particularly severe year in stubble burning with farm fires in Punjab increasing 46.5% over that in 2019. This was the situation in spite of the pandemic.

### *Air Pollution in India*

Air pollution is defined as the introduction of chemicals, particulates, or biological materials into the atmosphere that cause discomfort, disease, or death to humans, damage other living organisms, damage natural and built environments. It is now the third largest cause of death in India.

### *Impact of Air Pollution*

#### *On Human Health*

1. It acts as a significant risk factor for various health conditions like respiratory problems, heart diseases and even lung cancers.
2. According to the Greenpeace Southeast Asia analysis, air pollution has claimed approximately

54,000 lives only in Delhi.

### *On Environment*

1. When smoke from the ground mixes with the water molecules in the atmosphere it leads to the formation of acid rain. This has several negative impacts like acidification of water bodies, damage to crops, changing soil profile, damaging monuments and buildings, etc.
2. The harmful nitrogen emission leads to permanently raised level of nutrient enrichment subsequently causing eutrophication.
3. Air pollutants accumulating on the crops and waterbodies subsequently enter the food chain and harm human beings.
4. It leads to the depletion of the ozone layer increase is the level of global warming.

### *On plants and animals*

1. It causes respiratory problems in the animals too. Also when animals consume plants that have pollutants accumulated on them it leads to harmful impacts on them.
2. Air pollutants have a negative impact on plant growth, primarily through interfering with resource accumulation.

### *On Economy*

1. According to a study by the World Bank in 2016 air pollution cost India approximately 8% of its GDP or \$560 billion in 2013, as a result of lost productivity due to premature mortality and morbidity.



2. Also, air pollution leads to lower yields in agricultural crops and commercial forests.

### *Initiatives taken by the Government*

#### **1. National Clean Air Programme**

- ❑ It is a long-term, time-bound, national-level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
- ❑ The total estimated cost of the programme is ₹ 637 crores.
- ❑ The objective of the programme is a comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution, in addition to augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country.
- ❑ It focuses on a participatory and consolidating approach that involves all sources of pollution and coordination between relevant central ministries, state governments, local bodies and other stakeholders.
- ❑ Under the programme, there will be an intensive awareness, training and capacity-building drive; a credible, transparent and accountable data collection and monitoring system; increase in the number of air quality monitoring systems, data dissemination, public participation on planning and implementation; and establishment of an information centre for data analysis, resource apportionment studies, national inventory

and rural monitoring stations, besides guidelines for indoor air pollution.

#### **2. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**

- ❑ It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) that was established in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of pollution) Act, 1974. It also has been given powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
- ❑ It provides technical services to MoEFCC, coordinates the activities of State PCB and also resolves disputes among them.

#### **3. LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging)**

- ❑ It is used to vertically monitor the air quality in the Delhi-NCR.
- ❑ It tracks the evolution of the pollutant, detects leakages of organic pollutants, observes the structure and height of mixing layers, measures the transport and diffusion of plumes or clouds of particulates and remotely determines smoke-plume opacity.

#### **4. Climate and Clean Air Coalition**

- ❑ It unites the government, civil society and private sector committed to improving air quality and protecting the climate in next few decades by reducing short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP) across sectors.

- ❑ The initial focus of the programme is Methane, black carbon and HFCs.

#### **5. Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)**

- ❑ Its objective is to provide a real-time air quality index on 24\*7 basis with colour coding along with 72-hour advance weather forecast. It also issues health advisory to prepare citizens well in advance.

#### **6. GreenCo Rating System**

- ❑ It has been acknowledged in India's intended NDC document.
- ❑ It is used as a proactive voluntary action of the Indian industry or the private sector towards combating climate change.

### *Measures that should be taken*

1. WHO 4- Pillar Strategy- the WHO gave an enhanced four pillar strategy for a global response to address the adverse health effects of air pollution. These include:
  - a. Expanding the knowledge base
  - b. Monitoring and reporting
  - c. Global leadership and coordination
  - d. Institutional capacity strengthening
2. Innovation- India should invest in research and development to develop new and innovative methods to tackle the air pollution.
3. Stubble burning- the government should keep a vigil on the farming practices and provide equipment like

Turbo Happy Seeder to limit the stubble burning.

4. The government should ensure development of efficient public transport to minimise the use of personal vehicles thus reducing vehicular emissions.
5. Build institutional capacity for implementation and enforcement of effective municipal planning and have the necessary legal back-up for compliance and strong deterrence.
6. Public Awareness- measures should be taken to make the public aware of their actions and the impact they have on increasing the air pollution and also steps to bring a behavioural change.

## SC steps in to protect Great Indian Bustard

The Supreme Court intervened on behalf of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustards which are falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

- ★ It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- ★ Less than 200 birds are left now, of which about 100 are in Rajasthan.
- ★ Conservationists have been demanding to secure this population, warning that the bird might get extinct in the coming decades, in which case it would become the first mega species to disappear from India after Cheetah in recent times.

### Key points:

- ★ Replacing overhead cables: It will examine whether overhead power cables can be replaced with underground ones to save one of the heaviest flying birds on the planet.
  - ❑ The Power Ministry said that only low voltage lines can go underground but not the high voltage ones.
- ★ Flight diverters: An alternative mechanism -" to install flight bird divertors -" to guide the birds away from the power lines would be expensive.
  - ❑ Firefly bird diverters are flaps installed on power lines. They work as reflectors for bird species like the GIB. Birds can spot them from a distance of about 50 meters and change their path of flight to avoid collision with power lines.
  - ❑ The selected stretch of their installment is opposite the Pokhran Field Firing Range, which offers a safe habitat to a breeding population of GIBs outside the Desert National Park Sanctuary in Jaisalmer.
- ★ Middle path: Wherever there is high voltage power lines, they can use flight bird divertors even if the recurring costs are high. Wherever there are overhead low voltage lines, these lines can be placed underground.

### Great Indian Bustard

- ★ GIB is one of the most critically threatened species in India, with less than 150 birds left in the wild.

- ★ It is a large bird with a horizontal body and long bare legs, giving it an ostrich-like appearance, this bird is among the heaviest of the flying birds.
- ★ Their population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- ★ The bird also happens to be the state bird of Rajasthan.
- ★ Bustards generally favour flat open landscapes with minimal visual obstruction and disturbance, therefore adapt well in grasslands.
- ★ It Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- ★ They face threats of hunting, and collision with power-lines during their migration to neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan and Nepal
- ★ Threats: Collision with live high-tension wires is the prime reason for mortality among great Indian bustards, with as many as 15% of their deaths attributed to the cause, according to a report submitted to the National Green Tribunal by the wildlife division of the ministry of environment, forests and climate change.
  - ❑ Since great Indian bustards are heavy birds with limited frontal vision, they find it difficult to change their course of flight swiftly even if they spot a live wire
- ★ Conservation efforts: As the population of Great Indian bustards dwindles, the WCSI has partnered with the Rural India Support Trust (RIST), the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, and the

Rajasthan Forest Department for this initiative.

- ❑ This is a part of its great Indian bustard conservation project.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) prepared a species recovery programme for the Great Indian Bustard, the Lesser Florican and the Bengal Florican, three of the four bustard species found in India, in January last year.
- ★ All the three birds have been endemic to the grasslands of India and are on the brink of extinction. The fourth one, Houbara, is a migratory species.

## **Sangay Volcano: Ecuador**

Recently, Ecuador's Sangay volcano erupted.

### **Key Points**

#### **About Sangay Volcano:**

- ❑ Sangay volcano is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world and one of Ecuador's most active ones.
- ❑ Sangay is the southernmost stratovolcano (a volcano built up of alternate layers of lava and ash) in the northern volcanic zone of the Andes. It is 5230 m high.
- ★ The Andes is the longest above water mountain range in the world and boasts some of the highest peaks.
- ★ Sangay National Park is located in the central part of Ecuador on the Andes mountains' eastern side. It is a world heritage site.

#### **Eruptions:**

- ❑ The earliest report of a historical eruption was in 1628. More or less continuous eruptions were reported from 1728 until 1916, and again from 1934 to the present. Sangay has had frequent eruptions in historic times, mostly of strombolian type.

#### **Other Major Volcanoes of Ecuador:**

- ❑ Ecuador, part of the Pacific Rim's "Ring of Fire"- region, has eight volcanoes such as Cotopaxi (5,897m), Cayambe (5,790m), Pichincha (4,784m) etc. in its territory.

#### **Volcanic Eruptions**

##### **About:**

- ❑ Volcanic eruptions happen when lava and gas are discharged from a volcanic vent.
- ❑ The most common consequences of this are population movements as large numbers of people are often forced to flee the moving lava flow.
- ★ Types: Volcanic activity and volcanic areas are commonly divided into six major types:

##### **Icelandic:**

- ★ It is characterized by effusions of molten basaltic lava that flow from long, parallel fissures. Such outpourings often build lava plateaus.

##### **Hawaiian:**

- ★ It is similar to the Icelandic variety. In this case, however, fluid lava flows from a volcano's summit and radial fissures to form shield volcanoes, which are quite large and have gentle slopes.

##### **Strombolian:**

- ★ These involve moderate bursts of expanding gases that eject clots of incandescent lava in cyclical or nearly continuous small eruptions.
- ★ Because of such small frequent outbursts, Stromboli volcano, located on Stromboli Island off the northeast coast of Italy, has been called the "lighthouse of the Mediterranean."

##### **Vulcanian:**

- ★ It is named for Vulcano Island near Stromboli, generally involving moderate explosions of gas laden with volcanic ash. This mixture forms dark, turbulent eruption clouds that rapidly ascend and expand in convoluted shapes.

##### **Pelean:**

- ★ It is associated with explosive outbursts that generate pyroclastic flows, dense mixtures of hot volcanic fragments and gas.
- ★ The fluidized slurries produced by these eruptions are heavier than air but are of low viscosity and pour down valleys and slopes at great velocities. As a result, they are extremely destructive.

##### **Plinian:**

- ★ This type is an intensely violent kind of volcanic eruption. In this type of eruption, gases boiling out of gas-rich magma generate enormous and nearly continuous jetting blasts that core out the magma conduit and rip it apart.
- ★ The uprushing gases and volcanic fragments resemble a gigantic rocket blast directed vertically upward. Plinian eruption clouds can rise into the

stratosphere and are sometimes continuously produced for several hours.

- ★ Lightning strikes caused by a buildup of static electricity are common close to Plinian ash clouds, adding one more element of terror to the eruption.

## Seabuckthorn Plantation in the Cold Desert

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

### Key Points

#### About Seabuckthorn:

- ❑ It's 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 and grows in the wild in Lahaul and Spiti and parts of Kinnaur.
- ❑ A major part is covered by this plant in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- ★ The Seabuckthorn Plantation has many Ecological, Medicinal and Economical benefits.

#### Ecological Benefits:

- ★ Seabuckthorn is a soil-binding plant which prevents soil-erosion, checks siltation in rivers and helps preserve floral biodiversity.
- ★ In the Lahaul valley, where willow trees are dying in large

numbers due to pest attack, this hardy shrub is a good alternative for protecting the local ecology.

- ★ Grows well in dry regions and becomes much more important especially in the light of reduced water flow from Himalayan glaciers.

#### Medicinal Benefits:

- ★ As a folk medicine, seabuckthorn has been widely used for treating stomach, heart and skin problems.
- ★ Its fruit and leaves are rich in vitamins, carotenoids and omega fatty acids and it can help troops in acclimatising to high-altitude.
- ★ In the last few decades, scientific research worldwide has backed many of its traditional uses.

#### Economical Benefits:

- ★ Seabuckthorn also has commercial value, as it is used in making juices, jams, nutritional capsules etc.
- ★ It is an important source of fuelwood and fodder.
- ★ However, wild Seabuckthorn cannot sustainably supply raw material to the industry, and the plant needs to be cultivated on a large scale as is being done in China.

## Project RE-HAB

A pilot project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees) has been launched in Karnataka which entails installing bee boxes along the periphery of the forest and the villages to mitigate human-elephant conflict.

- ★ These spots are located on the periphery of Nagarhole National Park and Tiger Reserve, which is a known conflict zone.

### Key Point

#### About:

- ❑ It is intended to create "bee fences"- to thwart elephant attacks in human habitations using honeybees.

#### Advantages:

- ❑ The bee boxes will dissuade elephants without causing any harm to them.
- ❑ Extremely cost-effective as compared to various other measures such as digging trenches or erecting fences.
- ❑ The initiative will increase honey production and farmers' income.

#### Implementing Agency:

- ❑ Project is an initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).
- ❑ It is a sub-mission of KVIC's National Honey Mission.

#### Honey Mission:

- ❑ The KVIC has launched the Honey Mission to provide awareness, training and 'Bee Boxes' along with Bee Colonies to the farmers.
- ❑ The mission was launched in August 2017 in line with the 'Sweet Revolution'.
- ★ The 'Sweet Revolution' was launched in 2016 to promote beekeeping and associated activities.

### Nagarhole National Park

#### About:

- ❑ It is also known as Rajiv Gandhi National Park.
- ❑ It was established as a



wildlife sanctuary in 1955 and was upgraded into a national park in 1988. It was declared as the 37th Tiger reserve under Project Tiger in 1999.

❑ There are 51 Tiger reserves in India.

- ★ The latest addition in this list is Srivilliputhur Meghamalai Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu, which got approval in 2021.

#### **Location:**

❑ The Park lies in the Western Ghats and is a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

#### **Rivers:**

❑ The Nagarahole River flows through the park, which joins the Kabini River which also is a boundary between Nagarahole and Bandipur National Park.

#### **Flora:**

❑ The vegetation consists mainly of moist deciduous forests with predominating trees of teak and rosewood.

#### **Fauna:**

❑ Asian elephants, chital (spotted deer), Indian mouse deer, gaur, stripe-necked and ruddy mongooses, grey langur, bonnet macaque, Asian wild dog, leopard, tiger, sloth bear among others.

## **70 years after big cat's extinction**

The Supreme Court in 2020 lifted its seven year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis. The court allowed the re-introduction

of cheetahs into the Palpur Kuno Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh on an experimental basis.

★ Nearly 70 years after the cheetah was officially declared locally extinct or extirpated, India will receive its first batch of the large cats from Africa by the end of this year.

★ Within a week's time two expert teams one from Namibia and the other from South Africa, both the countries having the highest populations of cheetah in the world, will arrive to train Indian forest officers and wildlife experts on handling, breeding, rehabilitation, medical treatment and conservation of the animals.

★ This is the first time in the world that a large carnivore will be relocated from one continent to the other.

★ The animal is believed to have disappeared from India when Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya, Chhattisgarh hunted and shot the last three recorded Asiatic cheetahs in India in 1947.

★ The cheetah was officially declared extinct by the Government of India in 1952.

★ While the current relocation attempt of cheetahs began in 2009, it is only last year that the Supreme Court of India gave the green signal to the centre to do so.

★ An expert committee set up by the ministry of environment forests and climate change under the chairmanship of Wildlife Trust of India member and former Director Wildlife of the Indian Government, Dr. M K Ranjitsinh, along with members of the Wildlife Institute of

India, WWF, NTCA And officials from the centre and the states have completed an assessment on the sites for relocation.

### **Cheetahs in India**

★ The cheetah or the *Acinonyx jubatus*, is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.

★ The cheetahs are also the world's fastest land mammal, an icon of nature.

★ Until the 20th century, the Asiatic cheetah was quite common and round all the way from Israel, the Arabian Peninsula to Iran, Afghanistan and India. In India it ranged as far South as the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. The Asiatic cheetah also known as the hunting leopard in India was kept by Kings and Princes to hunt gazelle; the Mughal emperor Akbar kept them for hunting gazelle and black-bucks.

★ Trapping of large numbers of adult Indian cheetahs, who had already learned hunting skills for wild mothers, for assisting in Royal hunts is said to be one of the major causes for the rapid decline of the species in India.

### **CAUSES OF EXTINCTION OF THE INDIAN/ ASIATIC CHEETAH FROM INDIA**

★ Cheetahs were very easy to tame: they were often trained to race down and hunt animals, almost like a hound -" a 'sport' called coursing -" and so t were caught in large numbers for use in such hunts.

- ★ For cheetahs it was nearly impossible to breed in captivity.
- ★ Deforestation
- ★ Excess hunting

### **ATTEMPTS FOR REINTRODUCTION**

- ★ During the 1970s, the Department of Environment of India formally wrote to the Iranian government to ask for Asiatic cheetahs; he also received a positive response. However, the talks were stalled after the Shah of Iran was deposed and the negotiations never progressed.
- ★ In August 2009 the then environment minister again rekindled the talks with Iran for sharing a few of their cheetahs. However, Iran was hesitant to commit to the idea due to the low numbers of the animal there.
- ★ During the 1980s the Canadian government offered to send cheetahs to India. In 2009 the report by the Wildlife Institute of India recommended sourcing cheetahs from Africa.
- ★ During the early 2000s, Indian scientists from the Center for cellular and molecular biology, Hyderabad had proposed a plan to clone the asiatic cheetahs obtained from Iran. later this proposal was rejected due to the complicated procedure involved in this.
- ★ Finally, in 2009, the ministry of environment and forests approved the recommendation for a detailed survey for potential reintroduction sites in the Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.

### **POSSIBLE SITES OF RE INTRODUCTION**

The wildlife experts have currently shortlisted 3 regions which have the potential to support the cheetah populations. these include:

- i. The Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh
- ii. The Kuno Palpur wildlife sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh
- iii. The Shahgarh bulge landscape, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

### **PROTECTION STATUS OF CHEETAH**

- ★ AFRICAN CHEETAH
- ★ IUCN STATUS- Vulnerable
- ★ CITES Status- Appendix I i.e. migratory species that have been assessed as being in danger of extinction throughout the world or a significant portion of their range.
- ★ Habitat- Around 6,500-7,000 African cheetahs present in the wild. 40-50 found only in Iran.
- ★ Physical Characteristics- Bigger in size as compared to Asiatic Cheetah.

### **ASIATIC CHEETAH**

- ★ IUCN STATUS- critically endangered
- ★ CITERs status- Appendix I of the list
- ★ Habitat- 40- 50 found only in Iran
- ★ Physical Characteristics- Smaller and paler than the African cheetah. Has more fur, a smaller head and a longer neck. Usually have red eyes and they have a more cat-like appearance.

### **Cheetah reintroduction programme in India**

The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ,1260-crore cheetah reintroduction project six years ago. It was estimated that an amount of ,125 crore to ,130 crore would be needed to build an enclosure in an area of 150 sq km for the cheetahs in Nauradehi. The proposal was to put the felines in the enclosure with huge boundary walls before being released in the wild, he said.

Nauradehi Sanctuary was found to be the most suitable area for the reintroduction of the cheetahs as its forests are not very dense and can restrict the fast movement of the spotted cat. Besides, the prey base for cheetahs is also available in abundance at the sanctuary.

According to the earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa. The Namibia Cheetah Conservation Fund had then shown its willingness to donate the felines to India. However, the State was not ready to finance the plan contending that it was the Centre's project.

### **International Day of Forest**

Every year the United Nations observes March 21 as the International Day of Forests to commemorate the green cover around the world and reiterate its importance in the world.

- ★ The theme of this year's International Day of Forests celebration is "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being".
- ★ The decision to mark March 21 as International Day of Forests was taken in 2012 to commemorate and raise awareness

about the significance of all types of forests.

- ★ This day reminds us about the importance of forests in the lives of the living creatures.

### ***Significance of International Day of Forests***

- ★ It provides an opportunity for the countries to look at the condition of their forests and amount of green cover in the country and take required actions in this context.
- ★ It is an opportunity to realise that the sustainable development of forests along with judicious use of their resources is the primary way to combat climate change and contribute to the prosperity and well-being of present and future generations.
- ★ Forests have an important role to play in the eradication of poverty in the countries and can help in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- ★ Though the forests provide us with unmeasured ecological, economic, social, and health benefits, still global deforestation and several other threats to them continue at an alarming rate.

### ***How is the International Day of Forests celebrated?***

- ★ According to the official website of the UN, the Day celebrates and raises awareness regarding the importance of all types of forests.
- ★ On this day, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees,

such as tree-planting campaigns.

- ★ It is celebrated by the UN Forum on Forests and the Food and Agricultural Organisation, in collaboration with the governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other relevant organisations in this area.

### ***International Day of Forests: Theme***

- ★ Every year, the Collaborative Partnership on Forest (which is an arm of the United Nations Forum on Forests) decides on a theme for the forest day. The International Day of Forests 2021 theme has been declared as “Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being”-.
- ★ According to the official video promo of the day, “when we take a step to restore forests, we take a part in something much bigger.”
- ★ This year’s theme encourages replanting and recreating lost forests to return lost habitats to millions of plants and animals.

### ***Forests in India***

- ★ As per the India State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2019, the total forest and tree cover in India is 24.56% of the total geographical area.
- ★ When compared to the ISFR, 2017 there has been an increase of
- ★ 0.65% of forest and tree cover put together at the national level.
- ★ 0.56% of forest cover
- ★ 1.29% of tree cover.

Forest Cover (Area-wise) -  
Madhya Pradesh> Arunachal

Pradesh> Chhattisgarh> Odisha> Maharashtra.

Forest Cover (Percentage wise)-  
Mizoram (85.4%)> Arunachal Pradesh (79.63%)> Meghalaya (76.33%).

There has been a decrease in the forest cover of 0.45% in the North eastern region of India. Except Assam and Tripura all the other states in the North eastern region have shown decrease in the forest cover.

The total forest cover in the tribal districts of India is 422351 square kilometers, which is 37.54% of the geographical area of these districts.

Maharashtra has had the highest increase in tree cover and this is mostly due to the horticulture in the state.

### ***SIGNIFICANCE OF FORESTS***

- ★ Forests help to maintain the water cycle on earth. The plants absorb water from the soil through their roots and they release the excess water into the atmosphere in the form of water vapour. This process is known as transpiration. The process in which water vapour from oceans rises and condenses to form clouds is known as condensation and the process of moving clouds to land due to sea breeze is known as precipitation and this eventually leads to rainfall. All these processes together form the water cycle and hence forests play a crucial role in continuing the water cycle.
- ★ Forests help to maintain the temperature and oxygen level of the atmosphere. Plants release oxygen during photosynthesis and consume carbon

dioxide. Forests being a huge reserve of plants and trees, they play a significant role in balancing oxygen level in the atmosphere.

- ★ Forests help to prevent global warming across the world. The increased amount of carbon dioxide i.e. a greenhouse gas in the atmosphere results in the greenhouse effect and thus causes global warming.
- ★ Forests help to prevent soil erosion. Trees present in the forests hold the soil particles strongly with their roots and prevent them from erosion.
- ★ They play an integral role in maintaining the ecosystem balance around the earth.
- ★ They act as a habitat for different species of wildlife, birds and several other creatures. About 90% of all earth's species live in forests. Animals such as lizards, snakes, turtles, crocodiles, alligators, insects, birds, butterflies and monkeys among other wild animals such as lions and leopards all live in the forests or within the rivers and streams in forest areas.
- ★ They act as a source of livelihood for those who depend on forest produce. Eg- the tribal communities or those who live in remote villages and rely on traditional occupations.
- ★ Forests play a role in acting as watershed regions since approximately all the water comes from forest derived water tables, and from within the rivers, lakes, and streams in forest areas. Streams and rivers running through forests are protected from sun's radiation and drying by the forest cover.

- ★ They help in recycling the soil Nutrients through the shedding of leaves and small branches. The plant and tree roots also break the soils in finer particles and encourage water infiltration into the soil.
- ★ They are highly linked to medicinal research and pharmaceutical breakthroughs because of their extensive plant life and animal life forms. A large percentage of the drugs used for diverse medical treatments are extracted from the plants and animals that live in the forests. Eg- cinchona tree, which is used to make quinine, a drug to treat malaria.

### Greater One-Horned Rhino

The claims by different political parties over significant reduction in poaching of Greater One-Horned Rhino has become an issue in Assam Assembly Elections.

- ★ According to the Assam Forest Department, poaching has reduced by 86% in the last three years.

### Key Points

#### About:

- The Greater One-Horned Rhino is one among the five different species of Rhino. The other four are:
- ★ Black Rhino: Smaller of the two African species.
- ★ White Rhino: Recently, researchers have created an embryo of the northern white rhino by using In vitro Fertilization (IVF) process.
- ★ Javan Rhino: Critically endangered in IUCN Red List.
- ★ Sumatran Rhino: Recently gone extinct in Malaysia.

- There are three species of rhino in Asia””Greater one-horned (Rhinoceros unicornis), Javan and Sumatran.
- Only the Great One-Horned Rhino is found in India.
- Also known as Indian rhino, it is the largest of the rhino species.
- It is identified by a single black horn and a grey-brown hide with skin folds.
- They primarily graze, with a diet consisting almost entirely of grasses as well as leaves, branches of shrubs and trees, fruit, and aquatic plants.

#### Habitat:

- The species is restricted to small habitats in Indo-Nepal terai and northern West Bengal and Assam.
- In India, rhinos are mainly found in Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.
- Assam has an estimated 2,640 rhinos in four protected areas, i.e. Pabitora Wildlife Reserve, Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park, Kaziranga National Park, and Manas National Park.
- ★ About 2,400 of them are in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR)

#### Protection Status:

- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable.
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix I (Threatened with extinction and CITES prohibits international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is



not commercial, for instance for scientific research).

- ❑ Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I.

### **Threats :**

- ❑ Poaching for the horns
- ❑ Habitat loss
- ❑ Population density
- ❑ Decreasing Genetic diversity

### **★ Conservation Efforts by India:**

- ❑ The five rhino range nations (India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia) have signed a declaration 'The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019' for the conservation and protection of the species.
- ❑ Recently, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has begun a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country.
- ❑ National Rhino Conservation Strategy: It was launched in 2019 to conserve the greater one-horned rhinoceros.
- ❑ Indian Rhino Vision 2020: Launched in 2005, it is an ambitious effort to attain a wild population of at least 3,000 greater one-horned rhinos spread over seven protected areas in the Indian state of Assam by the year 2020.

## **Global Water Crisis: UNICEF**

According to a new report released by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), one in five children worldwide reside in areas of high or extremely high water vulnerability.

★ The Report was released ahead of World Water Day (22nd March).

### **Key Points**

#### **★ About the Report :**

- ❑ The new report is part of UNICEF's 'Water security for all' initiative that identifies areas where physical water scarcity risks overlap with poor water service levels.
- ❑ The initiative aims to mobilise resources, partnerships, innovation and global response to identified hot spots.
- ❑ UNICEF identified 37 hot-spot countries where children faced especially distressing circumstances in terms of absolute numbers, where global resources, support and urgent action had to be mobilised.
- ❑ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tanzania and Yemen were especially vulnerable.

#### **Findings:**

- ❑ Children in more than 80 countries live in areas with high or extremely high water vulnerability.
- ❑ Eastern and Southern Africa has the highest proportion of children living in such areas, with more than half of children - " 58% - " facing difficulty accessing sufficient water every day.
- ❑ It is followed by West and Central Africa (31%), South Asia (25%), and the Middle East (23%).

- ❑ More than 155 million children in South Asia lived in areas with high or even extremely high water vulnerability.

### **Water Crisis in India:**

- ❑ India has 4% of the world's freshwater which has to cater to 17% of the world's population.
- ❑ As per NITI Aayog report released in June 2018, India is facing the worst-ever water crisis in history. Approximately 600 million people or roughly around 45% of the population in India is facing high to severe water stress.
- ❑ The report says that nearly 40% of the population will have absolutely no access to drinking water by 2030 and 6% of India's GDP will be lost by 2050 due to the water crisis.

### **Causes of Water Crisis in India:**

- ❑ The Central Groundwater Board's estimates show that the groundwater table in most parts of the country has been declining every year because of over-exploitation.
- ★ If the groundwater continues to decline unabated, meeting the country's agricultural and drinking water requirements will become a big challenge.
- ★ 85% of rural water supply, 45% of urban water supply and over 64% of irrigation now rely on groundwater.
- ❑ Due to accumulation of sediments in the water storage area of major and medium irrigation dams that are currently in use, the total stor-

age capacity has fallen significantly.

- ★ This is clearly underlined in the report 'Compendium of Silting of Reservoirs in India', released by the Central Water Commission in 2020.
  - ❑ Climate change is causing major changes in rainfall levels.
- ★ Measures Taken by the Central Government:
  - ❑ "Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain"- Campaign:
- ★ The campaign will be implemented during the period 22nd March, 2021 to 30th November, 2021 - the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country.
- ★ The campaign is intended to nudge the State and all stakeholders to create Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suitable to the climatic conditions and subsoil strata to ensure storage of rainwater.
- ★ Rains falling in the four/five months of monsoon are the only source of water for most parts of the country.
- ★ Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM):
- ★ In the Budget 2021-22, Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) has been announced under the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all statutory towns in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal- 6.
- ★ It complements the Jal Jeevan Mission (Rural) which envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.

## Modernizing Agriculture Sector

The Prime minister was addressing the 75th episode of his monthly Mann ki Baat radio programme, where he said, "Modernization is essential in all fields of life, otherwise it becomes a burden at times. In India's agriculture sector, modernization is the need of the hour. It's very late, we have already lost a lot of time."

- ★ According to the Prime Minister, modernizing the agriculture sector is the need of the hour and the country has already lost a lot of time in doing this.
- ★ He said, "To generate new employment opportunities in the agriculture sector, increase the income of the farmers, it is equally important to adopt new alternatives innovations along with traditional agricultural practices."
- ★ As for the Prime Minister, bee farming is becoming the foundation of the honey revolution or sweet revolution in the country and farmers in large numbers are associating with it and innovating.
- ★ He cited the example of the Gurdum village in Darjeeling, West Bengal, in which despite geographical challenges, people of the village have started honey bee farming and the honey produced here is in great demand. it has also led to an increased income for the farmers.
- ★ He stated that bee farming does not lead to income solely from honey, but Bee wax is also a very big source of income.
- ★ The Prime Minister also spoke

about the 'Amrit Mahotsav' being celebrated to mark the 75th anniversary of Independence.

### India's Agriculture sector

- ★ Agriculture and allied activities are the primary source of income for about 58% of the total population of India. This makes it the largest employing sector of the Indian economy.
- ★ It holds a key importance in reducing India's malnutrition problem and directly affecting public health and worker productivity.
- ★ It has the potential to spoil India's overall gross domestic product growth as economic transformation in developing countries is propelled by an increase in the agricultural income that underpins industrial growth. An example of this is China's economic growth.
- ★ However, this sector contributes merely about 16.5% to India's gross value added (GVA).

### Issues in Indian Agricultural Sector

- i. Rainfed agriculture- a large portion of India's agriculture is still dependent on monsoon for the purpose of irrigation and lacks modern equipment, even after so many years of independence.
- ii. Lack of modernization- Indian agricultural sector is deprived of modern tools that are used for ploughing, harvesting as well as irrigation.
- iii. Land size- the number of operational Holdings of

land has been rising with an increase from 138.3 million to about 146 million due to the increasing population. This has led to the average landholding size of farmers being reduced from 1.2 hectares to about 1.08 hectares. In addition to this, the area under agriculture in India has consistently reduced due to the increasing urbanization.

- iv. Lack of credit- most of the farmers in India are small and marginal farmers and they depend on the revenue that is generated in one cropping season and use this to get inputs for the next cropping season. This leaves very little with them as profit. Moreover, there are still a large number of farmers who rely on informal means of credit that is the moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest on the loans they give pushing the farmers into a debt trap.
- v. Lack of adequate infrastructure- what access to reliable and timely market information for the farmers, absence of demand and supply forecast, will be structured and inefficient supply chains, inadequate cold storage facilities and shortage of proper food processing units, large intermediation between the farmers and the consumers are some of the major causes that lead to losses for the farmers.
- vi. Low Yield- The farm yields in India is 30 to 50% lower than that in the developed

countries. average farm size, we're infrastructure, no use of technologies in farms and lack of best farming techniques, degrees of soil fertility due to over fertilization and sustained pesticide use are the leading causes that have led to low agricultural productivity.

- vii. Low investment- gross capital formation in the agriculture sector as a person of the total gross capital formation in the economy has fallen from 8.5% in financial year 2011-12 to 6.5% in the financial year 2018-19. This is due to the shrinking share of private investment in this sector. but the public investment has gone up, because it is not sufficient to check the slide or keep the gross capital formation at FY12 level.
- viii. Subsidy and other related issues- According to the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (ICRIER-OECD) report, despite the plethora of schemes run to support and subsidize Indian farmers, due to the regressive policies on the marketing side (both domestic and international trade policies) and the deficit of basic infrastructure for storage, transportation etc., they have suffered net losses and thus have emerged to be net taxed despite receiving subsidies.
- ix. Minimum Support Price (MSP) and related issues- though the government declares MSP for 23 crops,

only wheat and Paddy are procured in large quantities as they are required to meet the requirement of the public distribution system (PDS). Moreover, the government's declaration of these prices do not increase at par with the increase in the costs of production.

### ***Measures to reform the Indian agricultural sector***

- ★ Redesigning the public procurement and distribution system to broaden the range of crops, including more high-value-added and less water-intensive crops.
- ★ Providing adequate formal credit mechanisms to farmers to elevate their social and economic status.
- ★ Development of modern irrigation techniques to reduce the dependence on monsoon.
- ★ Using sustainable techniques in agriculture like crop rotation, mixed cropping, etc.
- ★ Promotion of collective farming to pooling of resources to invest in modern farming techniques and machinery.
- ★ Providing other means of employment to reduce the dependence on the agriculture sector.
- ★ Building modern infrastructure to mitigate the supply chain challenges.
- ★ The central government, in association with the state governments, should free up land lease markets, which can help provide farmers with a steady income, while maintaining asset security.
- ★ Adequate emphasis on the allied sectors of agriculture like

the bee farming, fisheries segment, horticulture, creative cultivation and domesticated animals and sericulture.

- ★ If India has to move away from procurement-based support, at present restricted to certain crops only, a more attractive income support scheme has to be conceived coupled with much higher investment, both public and private, in agri-infrastructure.

## *Proposing a new climate agenda for India*

The year 2021 is an important year for global climate change negotiations, as Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will release its report this year, updated national pledges on emission limits are expected at a climate Conference of Parties in the United Kingdom (UK), and Joe Biden-led United States (US) has promised to rejoin Paris climate deal.

Also, India has been considering to achieve the target of net-zero emissions by 2050. This pledge will earn India diplomatic credit by assuming climate leadership. However, these diplomatic gains could come at the cost of domestic developmental objectives.

This is because without dramatic changes in policy and technology, India, at least, needs the option of increasing emissions to develop. Therefore, the trick for India is to focus on squeezing more development out of less carbon.

### *Challenges For India At Global Climate Politics*

- ★ More Likely To Miss Target: Analysis by the International

Energy Agency illustrates the scale of change -" an immediate and dramatic shift is required to shift Indian emissions from stated policies to sustainable development.

- ❑ Further, this dramatic shift would still only get us to net-zero by 2065; 2050 would be even harder.
- ❑ Also, net-zero emissions targets may not be able to meet, because they rely on future promises rather than current action, and on uncertain technologies to remove greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere.

- ★ Silo-Based Climate Decisions: India's climate governance structure is designed for silo-based decisions, whereas the climate crisis requires cross-sectoral collaboration.

- ❑ For example, electricity decisions may be tied to decisions on urban policy, transport systems, and building design. However, cross-sectional collaboration is still lacking in India's policymaking.

- ★ Fossil-Fuels Needed for Development: If India wants to achieve the net-zero target, its emissions would have to decline to start now, and never again reach levels achieved in 2019.

- ❑ However, India's greenhouse gas emissions are growing, and, because complex energy and economic systems take time to turn around, will grow for some time.
- ❑ Further, limiting emissions from industry is a longer-

term prospect because technologies are nascent, and will require international collaboration for new technology and approaches.

### *Way Forward*

- ★ Sectoral Transition Plans: Rather than a broad ambitious target, there is a need to identify and build a future pledge around sectoral transition plans for key areas of the economy.

- ❑ Attention to sectoral transitions likely sends a clearer and more direct signal to the private sector on the need to shift investment patterns than does a broad and diffuse economy-wide net-zero target.

- ❑ For example, to accelerate the electricity sector transition requires fixing distribution companies, transitioning from coal while protecting coal communities, and enhancing investment in renewable energy investments.

- ★ Strengthening Climate Governance: India needs to build and strengthen its domestic institutions for climate governance. This will require identifying linkages between development needs and low carbon opportunities. In this context, a climate law can be useful.

- ★ Reaffirming CBDR: In this upcoming climate change negotiations, India needs to reaffirm the long-standing principle of "common but differentiated responsibility"- (CBDR) that requires richer countries to lead and argue against any pledge that risks prematurely



limiting Indian energy use for development.

### Conclusion

- ★ The Indian road to leadership should be based on specific near-term actions, institutional strengthening, and a combination of mid-and long-term targets. Longer-term targets, including net-zero, can, and should, be clarified and strengthened as we learn by doing overtime, as part of our transition to a low carbon future.

## Earth Hour

The Earth Hour is being observed on 27th March 2021.

### Key Points

#### About:

- ❑ Earth Hour is the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)'s annual initiative that began in 2007.
- ❑ It is held every year on the last Saturday of March.
- ❑ It encourages people from more than 180 countries to switch off the lights from 8.30 pm to 9.30 pm as per their local time.
- ❑ The idea is to refrain from the use of non-essential lighting to save energy in a symbolic call for environmental protection.

#### Impact:

- ❑ Earth Hour has become a catalyst for positive environmental impact, driving major legislative changes by harnessing the power of the people and collective action.
- ❑ Examples: It helped
- ★ Create a 3.5 million hectare

marine-protected area in Argentina.

- ★ Ban all plastics in the Galapagos in 2014.
- ★ Plant 17 million trees in Kazakhstan.
- ★ Light up homes with solar power in India and the Philippines.
- ★ Push new legislation for the protection of seas and forests in Russia.

## New Red Algal Seaweed Species

Recently, two new red algal seaweed species have been discovered along India's coastline.

- ★ India has a vast coastline of over 7,500 kms.

### Key Points

#### About:

- ❑ 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.
- ★ There are 61 species of which 10 were reported in India. With two new species, the total number of species now would be 63.

#### Location:

- ❑ *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.

### Significance:

- ❑ *Hypnea* variants of seaweeds can fetch good monetary value if commercial-scale cultivation is taken up. *Hypnea* contains Carrageenan, a biomolecule commonly used in the food industry.

### Seaweeds

#### About:

- ❑ They are the primitive, marine non-flowering marine algae without root, stem and leaves, play a major role in marine ecosystems.
- ❑ Large seaweeds form dense underwater forests known as kelp forests, which act as underwater nurseries for fish, snails and sea urchins.
- ❑ Some species of seaweeds viz. *Gelidiella acerosa*, *Gracilaria edulis*, *Gracilaria crassa*, *Gracilaria verrucosa*, *Sargassum* spp. and *Turbinaria* spp.

#### Location:

- ❑ Seaweeds, found mostly in the intertidal region, in shallow and deep waters of the sea and also in estuaries and backwaters.
- ❑ The southern Gulf of Mannar's rocky intertidal and lower intertidal regions have rich populations of several seaweed species.

### Ecological Importance:

#### Bioindicator:

- ★ When waste from agriculture, industries, aquaculture and households are let into the ocean, it causes nutrient imbalance.

ance leading to algal blooming, the sign of marine chemical damage. Seaweeds absorb the excess nutrients and balance out the ecosystem.

#### ***Iron Sequestrator:***

- ★ These aquatic organisms heavily rely on iron for photosynthesis. When the quantity of this mineral exceeds healthy levels and becomes dangerous to marine life, seaweeds trap it and prevent damage. Similarly, most heavy metals found in marine ecosystems are trapped and removed by seaweeds.

#### ***Oxygen and Nutrient Supplier:***

- ★ On their part, the seaweeds derive nutrition through photosynthesis of sunlight and nutrients present in seawater. They release oxygen through every part of their bodies. They also supply organic nutrients to other marine life forms.

#### ***Role in Climate Mitigation:***

- ❑ Seaweed has a significant role in mitigating climate change. By afforesting 9% of the ocean with seaweed, it is possible to sequester 53 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually. Hence, there is a proposal termed as 'ocean afforestation' for farming seaweed to remove carbon.

#### ***Other Utilities:***

- ❑ They can be used as fertilizers and to increase aquaculture production.
- ❑ When livestock is fed with seaweed, methane emission from cattle may be reduced substantially.
- ❑ They can be buried in beach dunes to combat beach erosion.

- ❑ It is used as an ingredient in preparing toothpaste, cosmetics and paints.

## ***Millet Cultivation***



An International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supported initiative to revive Kodo and Kutki Millets cultivation, started in the year 2013-14 in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, has given new life to the forgotten crops.

- ★ IFAD is a specialized agency of the United Nations and was one of the major outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference.
- ★ Founded in 1977, IFAD focuses on rural poverty reduction, working with poor rural populations in developing countries to eliminate poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.

#### ***Key Points***

#### ***About the Project:***

#### ***Beginning:***

- ★ The project was started with 1,497 women-farmers from 40 villages "mostly from the Gonda and Baiga tribes" growing these two minor millets (Kodo and Kutki) on 749 acres.
  - ❑ Seed and Training:
- ★ The identified farmers were supplied good-quality seeds and trained by scientists from

the Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University in Jabalpur and the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra -" on field preparation, line-sowing (as opposed to conventional broadcasting by hand) and application of compost, zinc, bavistin fungicide and other specific plant protection chemicals.

#### ***Self Help Groups:***

- ★ A federation of the farmers' self-help groups undertook procurement of the produce and also its mechanical dehulling (the traditional manual pounding process to remove husk from the grain was time-consuming).

#### ***Impact:***

- ❑ Helped in increasing the number of farmers growing kodo-kutki in the project area to 14,301 in 2019-20.
- ❑ Helped in increasing the acreage to 14,876 acres.
- ❑ Helped in meeting nutritional goals (fighting malnourishment among children).
- ❑ Helped in reviving millet cultivation (crop yields are 1.5-2 times higher than before).

#### ***Millets***

#### ***About:***

- ❑ Millets are often referred to as Superfood and its production can be seen as an approach for sustainable agriculture and a healthy world.

#### ***Millets in India:***

- ❑ The three major millet crops currently grown in India are jowar (sorghum),

bajra (pearl millet) and ragi (finger millet).

- ★ Along with that, India grows a rich array of bio-genetically diverse and indigenous varieties of “small millets”- like kodo, kutki, chenna and sanwa.

- Major producers include Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana.

- ★ Need for Reviving Millet Cultivation:

#### ***Nutritional Security:***

- ★ Millets are less expensive and nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their high protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals like iron content.
- ★ Millets are also rich in calcium and magnesium.
- ★ For example, Ragi is known to have the highest calcium content among all the food grains.
- ★ Its high iron content can fight high prevalence of anaemia in Indian women of reproductive age and infants.

#### ***Climate Resilient:***

- ★ They are also harder and drought-resistant crops, which has to do with their short growing season (70-100 days, as against 120-150 days for paddy/wheat) and lower water requirement (350-500 mm versus 600-1,200 mm).

#### ***Economic Security:***

- ★ As low investment is needed for production of millets, these can prove to be a sustainable income source for farmers.

#### ***Can Tackle Health Issues:***

- ★ Millets can help tackle lifestyle problems and health challenges

such as obesity and diabetes as they are gluten-free and have a low glycemic index (a relative ranking of carbohydrates in foods according to how they affect blood glucose levels).

- ★ Millets are rich in antioxidants.

#### ***Challenges:***

- Preference for Wheat:

- ★ Wheat has gluten proteins that swell and form networks on adding water to the flour, making the dough more cohesive and elastic.

- ★ The resultant chapattis come out soft, which isn't possible with millets that are gluten-free.

#### ***Increased Demand for Processed Food:***

- ★ India has seen a jump in consumer demand for ultra-processed and ready-to-eat products, which are high in sodium, sugar, trans-fats and even some carcinogens.
- ★ With the intense marketing of processed foods, even the rural population started perceiving mill-processed rice and wheat as more aspirational.

#### ***National Food Security Act Promoting Other Grains:***

- ★ In rural India, the National Food Security Act of 2013 entitles three-fourths of all households to 5 kg of wheat or rice per person per month at Rs 2 and Rs 3 per kg, respectively, thus reducing the demand for millets.

#### ***Indian Initiatives:***

##### ***Promoting Millets:***

- ★ The Union Agriculture Ministry, in April 2018, declared millets

as “Nutri-Cereals”-, considering their “high nutritive value”- and also “anti-diabetic properties”-.

- ★ 2018 was also observed as ‘National Year of Millets’-.

#### ***Increase in MSP:***

- ★ The government has hiked the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Millets, which came as a big price incentive for farmers.
- ★ Further, to provide a steady market for the produce, the government has included millets in the public distribution system.

#### ***Input Support:***

- ★ The government has introduced provision of seed kits and inputs to farmers, building value chains through Farmer Producer Organisations and supporting the marketability of millets.

#### ***International Initiative:***

- ★ The United Nation General Assembly adopted an India-sponsored resolution to mark 2023 as the International Year of Millets.

#### ***Way Forward***

- ★ Farming of millets deserves encouragement especially in view of their climate resilience, short cropping duration and ability to grow on poor soils, hilly terrains and with little rain.
- ★ Because of their accessibility to the poor, they can play an essential role in providing nourishment to people across all income categories and supporting climate adaptation of rainfed farming systems.



# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## 53rd PSLV Flight

Recently, the 53rd flight of PSLV-C51 marked the first dedicated mission for New Space India Ltd (NSIL), the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

- ★ In this flight, ISRO successfully launched Brazil's optical earth observation satellite, Amazonia-1, and 18 co-passenger satellites from India (5) and the USA (13) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SHAR) at Sriharikota.
- ★ SHAR, Sriharikota is the Spaceport of India. It is responsible for providing Launch Base Infrastructure for the Indian Space Programme.

### Key Points

- ★ Brazilian Satellite Amazonia 1:
  - About:
- ★ Weighing 637 kg, belonging to the Brazilian National Institute for Space Research (INPE), was injected into its precise orbit of 758 km in a sun-synchronous polar orbit successfully.

- ★ Objective:
  - ★ To strengthen the existing structure by providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and for analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.
- ★ 5 Indian Satellites:
  - UNITYsat (three satellites):
    - ★ They have been deployed to provide Radio relay services.
  - ★ UNITYsat was designed and built as a joint development by Jeppiaar Institute of Technology, Sriperumpudur (JITsat), G. H. Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur (GHRCEsat) and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore (Sri Shakthi Sat).
- ★ SDSAT:
  - ★ Satish Dhawan Satellite (SDSAT) is a nano satellite intended to study the radiation levels/space weather and demonstrate long range communication technologies.
  - ★ It was built by Chennai-based Space Kidz (an organization

dedicated to designing innovative concepts for students in the field of education).

- ★ SDSDAT also has an engraving of the Indian Prime Minister on the top panel of the satellite to show solidarity and gratitude for the Atmanirbhar initiative and space privatisation.
- ★ A Bhagavad Gita was also sent on-board in an SD card to give the scripture, which teaches oneness as the highest form of humanity, the highest honour.
- ★ SindhuNetra:
  - ★ It was developed by students of Bengaluru-based PES University, which was awarded the Rs. 2.2 crore contract by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- ★ This project will help in identifying suspicious ships through satellite imaging.
- ★ USA Satellites:
  - 13 satellites were from the USA, one was a technology demonstration satellite (SAI-1 Nano Connect 2) and the remaining for 2-way



communications and data relay (SpaceBEEs).

★ Significance:

- ❑ Provided Impetus to Indo-Brazil Relationship:

★ Since the early 2000s, India and Brazil have signed cooperative instruments for exploration and peaceful uses of outer space, both at the government level (2004) and space agency level (between ISRO and Brazilian Space Agency AEB in 2002).

★ The new satellite (Amazonia-1) would open the door for multiple business, trade and governmental opportunities. Brazil has also requested India's support in procurement of material and systems for its launch vehicle programme.

★ Five Indian satellites were built under the new space reforms announced by the Government of India.

★ The approved reforms will boost the private sector participation in the entire range of space activities.

★ Four of the co-passenger satellites were signed for launch by IN-SPACe, ISRO's small satellites facilitation agency, and 14 were signed up through NSIL for commercial launch.

★ IN-SPACe: It is an independent nodal agency under the Department of Space (DOS) for allowing space activities and

usage of DOS owned facilities by Non-Government private Entities (NGPEs) as well as to prioritise the launch manifest.

★ NSIL: It is the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the primary responsibility of enabling Indian industries to take up high technology space related activities. It is also responsible for promotion and commercial exploitation of the products and services emanating from the Indian space.

- ❑ Demonstrated Applications

## Blazing a trail

ISRO's first launch of 2021 in numbers

**19** satellites, including Brazil's earth observation satellite Amazonia-1, were carried by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, PSLV-C51

**13** satellites were from the U.S.

**5** satellites, including the Satish Dhawan Satellite from the Chennai-based Space Kidz India, were built by students

**78**th mission from Sriharikota

**53**rd flight of India's workhorse launch vehicle PSLV

■ It was the first dedicated launch by the NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a PSU set up under the Department of Space in 2019

■ ISRO has till date launched 342 foreign satellites from 34 countries

■ Amazonia-1, with a mission life of four years, will monitor deforestation in the Amazon region

■ The SDSAT has an engraving of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the top panel to show solidarity and gratitude for the *aatmanirbhar* initiative and space privatisation

of Space Technology:

★ Projects such as this demonstrate the extension of applications of Space Technology to different sectors and areas which brought 'ease of living', 'ease of environment' and 'ease of humanity' for common man.

### Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle

#### About:

- ❑ Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) is the third generation launch vehicle of India.
- ❑ It is a four-staged launch vehicle with first and third stages using solid rocket motors and second and fourth stages using liquid rocket engines.
- ❑ It is the first Indian launch vehicle to be equipped with liquid stages.

#### Capacity:

- ❑ Initially, PSLV had a carrying capacity of 850 kg but has been enhanced to 1.9 tonnes.

#### Accomplishments:

- ❑ The PSLV has helped take payloads into almost all the orbits in space including Geo-Stationary Transfer Orbit (GTO), the Moon, Mars and would soon be launching a mission to the Sun.
- ❑ Between 1994 and 2019, the PSLV launched 50 Indian satellites and 222 foreign satellites for over 70 international customers from 20 countries.
- ❑ It has a history of successful launches of payloads that include Chandrayaan-1, Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM)

and the space recovery mission, etc.

- ❑ The PSLV has failed only twice in its history -" the maiden flight of the PSLV D1 in 1993 and the PSLV C-39 in 2017.

## National Science Day 2021

National Science Day (NSD) is celebrated every year on 28th February to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930. The first NSD was celebrated in 1987.

### Key Points

- ★ Basic Objective: To propagate the message of the importance of science and its application among the people.
- ★ 2021 Theme: 'Future of STI (Science, Technology and Innovations): Impacts on Education, Skills, and Work'.
- ★ Nodal Agency to Support Celebration: National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC) of Ministry of Science and Technology.
- ★ Awards Conferred:
  - ❑ National S&T Communication Awards, Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research (AWSAR) awards, and SERB Women Excellence Awards and Rajendra Prabhu Memorial Appreciation Shield for outstanding work in science media and journalism.
  - ❑ The first-ever National S&T Databases on S&T Awards in

India and Indian origin Academicians abroad, was released.

### Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research (AWSAR):

- ❑ AWSAR is an initiative that aims to disseminate Indian research stories among the masses in an easy to understand and interesting format.

### Objectives:

- ★ To encourage youth pursuing higher studies to submit at least one story/article based on their research work.
- ★ Foster, strengthen and create scientific temper through popular science writing and creating a culture of science communication/popularisation among the scholars.
- ★ Recognize the initiative and output of researchers on the specific aspects of natural, physical, mathematical and information sciences, applied science, technology, engineering, and multi-disciplinary science.
- ★ Conduct training Workshops for Early Career Researchers (PhD Scholars and PDFs) in popular science writing.

### Some Recent Developments:

- ❑ National Research Foundation (NRF): It is to be set-up as an autonomous body envisaged under the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- ★ It will look after funding, mentoring, and building 'quality of research' in India. The NRF aims to fund researchers working across streams in India.

- ❑ Draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020).

## Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship

The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India under its "Waste to Wealth"- Mission launched the "Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship"-.

### Key Points

### About the Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship:

- ❑ Objectives: 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.
- ❑ Three Categories of Awards under the Fellowships:
  - ★ 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 requirements/descriptions.

### Waste to Wealth Mission:

- ❑ This mission will identify, develop, and deploy technologies to treat waste to generate energy, recycle materials, and extract worth.

- ❑ 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 mission will assist and augment the Swachh Bharat and Smart Cities projects to create circular economic models that are financially viable for waste management to streamline waste handling in the country.

### ***E-waste to Wealth: New Technology (IIT Delhi)***

- ★ Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi has developed a zero-emission technology to manage and recycle e-waste to wealth.
- ★ The new methodology uses e-waste as an "Urban Mine"- for metal recovery and energy production.
- ❑ The e-waste is shredded and pyrolyzed to yield liquid and gaseous fuels, leaving behind a metal-rich solid fraction.
- ❑ On further separation, the leftover solid residue yields a 90-95% pure metal mixture and some carbonaceous materials.
- ❑ The carbonaceous material is further converted to aerogel for oil spillage cleaning, dye removal, carbon dioxide capture, and use in supercapacitors.
- ★ This technology will cater to the needs of "Smart Cities," "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan," and "Atmanirbhar Bharat"- initiatives.

## ***Quasar P172+18***

Recently, an international team of astronomers has discovered the most distant 'Radio-Loud' Quasar with the help of European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope (ESO's VLT).

### ***Key Points***

#### ***Quasars:***

- ❑ Quasars are very luminous objects in faraway galaxies that emit jets at radio frequencies.
- ❑ The word quasar is short for "quasi-stellar radio source".
- ★ The name, which means star-like emitters of radio waves, was given in the 1960s when quasars were first detected.
- ★ The name is retained today, even though astronomers now know most quasars are faint radio emitters. In addition to radio waves and visible light, quasars also emit ultraviolet rays, infrared waves, X-rays, and gamma-rays.
- ❑ Most quasars are larger than our solar system. A quasar is approximately 1 kiloparsec in width.
- ❑ They are only found in galaxies that have supermassive black holes which power these bright discs.
- ★ Black hole refers to a point in space where matter is so compressed as to create a gravity field from which even light cannot escape.
- ❑ Most active galaxies have a supermassive black hole at the centre which sucks in sur-

rounding objects.

- ❑ Quasars are formed by the energy emitted by materials swirling around a blackhole right before being sucked into it.
- ❑ They are further categorised into the "radio-loud" and the "radio-quiet" classes.

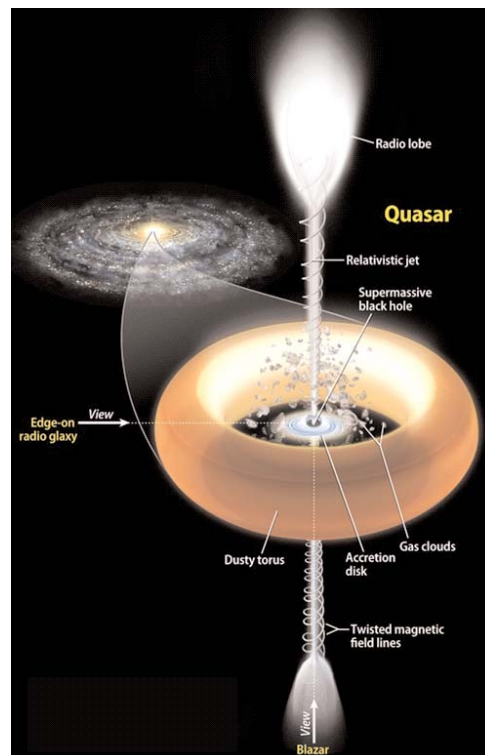
#### ***Radio-loud:***

- ★ They are with powerful jets that are strong sources of radio-wavelength emission.
- ★ These make up about 10% of the overall quasar population.

#### ***Radio-quiet :***

- ★ They are those quasars lacking powerful jets, with relatively weaker radio emission than the radio-loud population.
- ★ The majority of quasars (about 90%) are radio-quiet.

### ***Recently Discovered Quasar/P172+18:***



- ❑ Named P172+18, the quasar emitted wavelengths which had a redshift of 6.8.
- ★ It took 13 billion years for the quasar's light to reach earth.
- ❑ This particular quasar appears to the scientists as it was when the universe was just around 780 million years old.
- ❑ The glowing disc around a blackhole is 300 million times more massive than our Sun.
- ❑ It is also one of the fastest accreting quasars, which means it is accumulating objects from the galaxy at an enormous speed.
- ❑ Only three other 'radio-loud' sources with redshift greater than six have been discovered so far and the most distant one had a redshift of 6.18.
- ★ The higher the redshift of the radio wavelength, the farther away is the source.

### ***Inference:***

- ❑ The blackhole at its centre is consuming from its galaxy at a stunning rate.

### ***Significance:***

- ❑ A detailed study of these 'radio-loud' super bright objects can lead astronomers to understanding how the supermassive blackholes in their core grew to be as big so rapidly since the Big Bang.
- ❑ It also holds clues about the ancient star systems and astronomical bodies.

### ***About the ESO's VLT:***

- ❑ The Very Large Telescope used to observe the

P172+18 is located at Paranal Observatory in the Atacama Desert.

- ★ The four Unit Telescopes boast 8.2-meter (27 feet) mirrors.
- ★ Just one of these instruments can spot objects that are 4 billion times fainter than what can be seen with the unaided eye.
- ★ According to the European Southern Observatory, the Very Large Telescope is the world's most advanced optical telescope.

## ***Technology & Innovation Report 2021***

India was the biggest 'overperformer' in frontier technologies than the country's per capita Gross Domestic Products (GDP) would suggest, according to a recent country-readiness index of the Technology And Innovation Report 2021.

- ★ The report was released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

### ***Key Point***

- ★ About the Report:
  - ❑ The report examines the likelihood of frontier technologies widening existing inequalities and creating new ones.
  - ❑ It also addresses the national and international policies, instruments and institutional reforms that are needed to create a more equal world of opportunity for all, leaving no one behind.

### ***Key Takeaway:***

- ❑ Frontier Tech Market: The report shows that frontier technologies already repre-

sent a USD 350 billion market, which could grow to USD 3.2 trillion by 2025.

- ❑ International Cooperation: It calls for strengthened international cooperation to build innovation capacities in developing countries, facilitate technology transfer.
- ❑ Inclusive: Envisages increase women's participation in digital sectors, conduct technological assessments and promote an inclusive debate on the impact of frontier technologies on sustainable development.
- ❑ Humans and Machines At Work: Technological change affects inequalities through its impact on jobs, wages and profits in following ways:
  - ★ Automation taking jobs
  - ★ Job displacement can also be accompanied by job polarization, which refers to an expansion in high- and low-wage jobs combined with a contraction in middle-wage jobs.
  - ★ Frontier technologies are being used to provide services via digital platforms that have spurred the creation of a 'gig economy'.
  - ★ India Specific Findings:
    - ❑ India's actual index ranking is 43, while the estimated one based on per capita income is 108.
    - ❑ This meant that India overperformed other countries by 65 ranking positions. India was followed by the Philippines, which overperformed by 57 ranking positions.



- ❑ India performed well in research and development.
- ★ This is reflected in its abundant supplies of qualified and highly skilled human resources available at a comparatively low cost.
- ❑ However countries such as the United States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom were “best prepared”- for frontier technologies.
- ★ Challenges for Developing Countries:
  - ❑ Demographic Changes: Low-income- and lower-middle-income countries have expanding and younger populations which will increase the supply of labour and depress wages, reducing the incentives for automation.
  - ❑ Lower Technological and Innovation Capabilities: Low-income countries have fewer skilled people and depend to a large extent on agriculture which tends to be slower to take advantage of new technologies.
  - ❑ Slow Diversification: Developing countries typically innovate by emulating industrialized countries, diversifying their economies, and absorbing and adapting new technologies for local use, but this process is slowest in the poorest countries.
  - ❑ Weak Financing Mechanisms: Most developing countries have increased their R&D expenditures, but these are still relatively low. There is very little private funding of industrial tech-

nologies for productive applications.

- ❑ Intellectual Property Rights and Technology Transfer: Stringent intellectual property protection will restrict the use of frontier technologies that could be valuable in SDGs related areas such as agriculture, health and energy.

### ***Suggestions:***

- ❑ The Report argues that frontier technologies are essential for sustainable development, but they also could accentuate initial inequalities.
- ★ It is up to policies to reduce this risk and make frontier technologies contribute to increasing equality.
- ❑ A balanced approach building a robust industrial base and promoting frontier technologies is a must for success in the twenty-first century.

## ***Equine Herpes Virus***

Recently, there has been an outbreak of Equine Herpes Virus (EHV-1) among horses in Europe.

- ★ So far seven countries have confirmed EHV-1 cases: Spain, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Qatar.

### ***Key Points***

- ★ About Equine Herpes Virus (EHV):
  - ❑ Equine Herpes Virus is a common DNA virus that occurs in horse populations worldwide.
  - ❑ EHV is a family of viruses which are named by numbers such as EHV 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

- ★ There are more viruses in this family, but EHV 1, 3, and 4 pose the most serious health risks for domestic horses.

### ***Health Risks:***

- ★ EHV1 can cause manifestations of disease in horses, including respiratory disease, abortion and neonatal death.
- ★ This strain can also cause neurological problems, leading to paralysis and in some cases, death. Horses that contract this virus can develop a lack of coordination, weakness, loss of appetite and are unable to stand.
- ★ Spread of EHV-1 Virus:
  - ❑ It is contagious and spread by direct horse-to-horse contact via the respiratory tract through nasal secretions.
  - ❑ This virus can also be spread indirectly through contact with physical objects that are contaminated with the virus.

- ★ Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy (EHM) is another name for the neurologic disease associated with Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) infections.

### ***Precautions and Treatment:***

- ❑ As the infection has a high transmission rate, keeping a diseased horse in isolation is required.
- ❑ Treatments may include anti-inflammatory drugs.

## ***Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet Technology***

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully conducted the

test of the Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology, which is crucial for the indigenous development of long range air-to-air missiles.

### Key Points

- ★ Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) Technology:
  - ❑ SFDR technology is a missile propulsion system based on the concept of Ramjet Engine principle.
  - ❑ The system utilises a solid fuelled air-breathing ramjet engine.
- ★ Unlike solid-propellant rockets, the Ramjet takes up oxygen from the atmosphere during flight. Thus, it is light in weight and can carry more fuel.
  - ❑ DRDO began developing SFDR first in 2017 and had conducted successful tests in 2018 and 2019 as well.

### Significance:

- ❑ Successful demonstration of SFDR technology will enable DRDO to develop indigenous long range air-to-air missiles.
- ❑ At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world.
- ❑ Air-to-air missiles which use SFDR technology can achieve longer ranges as they do not require oxidisers (take oxygen from the atmosphere).
- ❑ The missile based on SFDR fly at supersonic speeds and high manoeuvrability ensures the target aircraft cannot get away.
- ★ Defence Research and Development Organisation:

- ❑ Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India.
- ❑ It is working to establish a world class science and technology base for India and provides Defence Services decisive edge by equipping them with internationally competitive systems and solutions.
- ❑ It was established in 1958 after combining Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).
- ❑ It is responsible for carrying out Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).

### Ramjet

- ★ A ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.
- ★ Ramjets work most efficiently at supersonic speeds but they are not efficient at hypersonic speeds.

### Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme

- ★ IGMDP was the brainchild of renowned scientist Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.
- ★ It was intended to attain self-sufficiency in the field of missile technology.
- ★ After keeping in mind the requirements of various types

of missiles by the defense forces, the program recognized the need to develop five missile systems.

- ★ The IGMDP formally got the approval of Indian government on 26th July, 1983.
- ★ The missiles developed under IGMDP are:
  - ❑ Short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile -“ Prithvi
  - ❑ Intermediate-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile -“ Agni
  - ❑ Short-range low-level surface-to-air missile -“ Trishul
  - ❑ Medium-range surface-to-air missile -“ Akash
  - ❑ Third generation anti-tank missile -“ Nag

## India Science Research Fellowship 2021

Forty scholars from six countries have been recommended for award of Indian Science Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021.

- ★ This fellowship is a platform to establish research cooperation with neighbouring countries of India, which is one of the mandates of DST's (Department of Science and Technology) International Science and Technology Cooperation.

### Key Points

- ★ About India Science Research Fellowship (ISRF):
  - ❑ As part of India's initiatives to engage with neighbouring countries to develop S&T partnerships, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has launched ISRF Programme.

- ❑ This fellowship is for scholars from the neighbouring countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.
- ❑ ISRF programme has provided an opportunity to the young researchers from neighbouring countries to get access to the state of art facilities available in the Indian institutes/universities.
- ❑ ISRF has been implemented since 2015.
- ★ Significance of the Fellowship:
  - ❑ Science Diplomacy: Enlarging India's pursuit of influence in global arena/platforms and mainstreaming Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) into international diplomacy and foreign relations.
  - ❑ Technological Advancement in the South Asia region.

## Genome Mapping in Indian Ocean

A 30-member team of scientists and researchers from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in Panaji and another 30 crew members onboard its research vessel Sindhu Sadhana will spend the next three months traversing the course of over 10,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean on a research project to reveal the internal working of the body of the ocean at a cellular level.

- ★ It is a first of its kind research in the country.
- ★ It is aimed at understanding the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to cli-

mate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.

- ★ This research project that has been conceptualized for the last two to three years is being undertaken at a cost of ₹125 crores.
- ★ The duration of the project would be 3 years.

### What is a Genome?

- ★ The genetic code of any organism is contained in its Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid or the DNA, which act as the building blocks of life. It has a structure of a double helix.
- ★ A genome in simple terms is all the genetic matter in any organism. It is defined as an organism's complete set of DNA, including all of its genes. Each genome consists of all of the information that is needed to build and maintain that organism.
- ★ In humans, a copy of the entire genome - "more than 3 billion DNA base pairs -" is contained in all cells that have a nucleus.

### Genome Mapping

- ★ Genome mapping basically means figuring out the location of a specific gene in a particular region of a chromosome and also determining the location of and relative distances between other genes on that chromosome.
- ★ It enables the scientists to gather evidence about any disease transmitted from parents to the child that is linked to one or more genes.

### History of mapping of human genome

- ★ The Human Genome Project (HGP) was an international programme that led to the decod-

ing of the entire human genome.

- ★ It has been described as one of the great feats of exploration in history. Rather than an outward exploration of the planet or cosmos, the HGP was an inward voyage of discovery.
- ★ It was led by an international team of researchers who were looking to sequence and map all of the genes - "together known as the genome -" of members of our species.
- ★ HGP went on from 1 October 1990 to April 2003.
- ★ Only a small fraction of the species in the deep sea and polar oceans have so far been identified as species in the oceans are much more difficult to record and evaluate than on land.

### Genome Mapping of Indian Ocean

1. It has been launched by the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO).
2. It aims to understand the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.
3. A team of scientists and researchers from the NIO on board its research vessel Sindhu Sadhana will spend 90 days traversing the course of over 10,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean on the research project to reveal the internal working of the body of the ocean at a cellular level.
4. They will course across the east coast of India, Australia, Port Louis in Mauritius and the border of

Pakistan, off India's west coast.

5. The samples will be collected across different stretches of the ocean at an average depth of about 5 km.
6. Just like gene mapping in humans that is carried out on blood, the scientists are going to map these in the bacteria and other microorganisms found in the Indian Ocean.
7. The mapping of the Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid (DNA) and the Ribonucleic Acid (RNA) will tell us about the nutrients present in them, and also those lacking in different parts of the ocean.
8. It is expected to generate new information about trace metals from underexplored regions of the Indian Ocean. These metals eg. copper, cadmium, etc are supplied in the oceans through the continental run offs, atmospheric deposition, hypothermal activities and continental shelf interactions. These are essential for maintaining productivity in the ocean.
9. Proteins act as catalysts for the biogeochemical reaction the organisms undergoing in the ocean. By studying proteomics, we can identify the biogeochemistry of the organisms under varying ocean conditions.
10. Such studies will allow us to understand cellular biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress, and increasing pollution.

### ***Benefits of Genome mapping of Indian Ocean***

- ★ It will help in the development of an understanding about the ecosystem of the Indian Ocean.
- ★ It will give a holistic and comprehensive understanding about the nutrient cycling and productivity of the oceans.
- ★ It will enable the identification of factors that are responsible for changing the DNA, RNA of the oceans and various stressors that impact them.
- ★ It will help in understanding the adaptation of microbes in the ocean to various micro and macro nutrients and also the trace metals.
- ★ It will help in identifying the parts of the ocean that have a greater concentration of a particular mineral or element.
- ★ Scientists will then use these as tracers to tackle the causative factors for excess or lack of a certain mineral or element and suggest possible solutions for their mitigation.
- ★ The large pool of the DNA and RNA can be used in the future for purposes beneficial to human beings.
- ★ It can act as an enabler in different biotechnology applications that focus on the treatment of certain incurable diseases like cancer to cosmetics and industrial enzymes, to antiviral molecules.
- ★ Exploration of the Indian ocean at a genetic level will result in new insights into the taxonomy and adaptive capacity of the Ocean. This can further help in optimizing conservation efforts in the Ocean.

- ★ Isotopic forms of trace metals can be utilized to track the movement of water masses responsible for ocean circulation and as tools to study the biological, geochemical and ecosystem processes and food web analyses.

### ***INS Karanj***

Recently, the Indian Navy inducted its third Scorpene-class conventional diesel electric submarine - INS Karanj, into service.

- ★ The first submarine of the class - INS Kalvari, was commissioned in 2017 and the second - INS Khanderi, in 2019.
- ★ A fourth submarine - Vela, was launched into the water in 2019 and the fifth - Vagir, in 2020, and both are undergoing sea trials. The sixth is in an advanced stage of outfitting.

### ***Karanj - Background:***

- ★ The earlier version of the submarine (Foxtrot class), was first commissioned in 1969 in the erstwhile USSR.
- ★ In 1964, the Soviet government agreed for transfer by purchase for four Foxtrot-class submarines, of which INS Karanj was a part.
- ★ All the four (8th Submarine Squadron), played a key role during the 1970-71 Indo-Pak war.
- ★ The INS Karanj went on to serve the nation for 34 years till 2003.

### ***Project 75I***

- ❑ Under this project of the Indian Navy, six latest-generation (Karanj, one among them) attack submarines are being built and are expected to be completed by 2022.



- ❑ The project is taking shape at Mazagon Dock in Mumbai.

### **About the Scorpene-class submarines:**

- ★ Designed by: One of the most advanced conventional electric submarines in the world, the Scorpene class of submarines were designed by French naval shipbuilding firm DCNS in partnership with Spanish shipbuilding firm Navantia.
- ★ Features: The submarine has superior stealth features, such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels and ability to attack with precision-guided weapons on board.
  - ❑ The attack submarines can travel at a maximum submerged speed of approximately 20 knots.
  - ❑ It has the ability to remain submerged for 21 days, with a diving depth of more than 350m.
- ★ Use: The Indian Navy intends to use the submarines for missions such as area surveillance, intelligence gathering, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare and minelaying operations.
- ★ Special about INS Karanj: It is the first truly indigenous submarine, encapsulating the spirit of 'Make in India'.

### **Moving Black Hole**

Scientists have discovered the first moving supermassive black hole whose mass is about three million times that of our Sun.

- ★ The black hole was travelling within its own galaxy (J0437+2456) which is around

228 million light years away from Earth.

### **Key Points**

- ★ Study Conducted by the Scientists:
  - ❑ Scientists studied 10 far-away galaxies with supermassive black holes in the centre, expecting them to have the same velocity as that of the galaxies they reside in.
  - ❑ Focus of their study was the water in the accretion disk (the spiralling mass around a supermassive black hole made of matter that is eventually ingested by the black hole).
- ★ As the water circles around the black hole before falling into it like liquid in a sink, it produces a laser-like beam of radio light known as a maser. These masers can tell the velocity of black holes very accurately.
- ★ About the Moving Supermassive Black Hole:
  - ❑ Of the 10 black holes they studied, only the one at the center of J0437+2456 was unusual. It was not moving at the same velocity as its home galaxy.
- ★ Besides the empirical evidence, the enormous size of these black holes had led people to imagine them to be stationary objects planted in the middle of galaxies as opposed to objects floating around in space.
  - ❑ It is moving with a speed of about 1,10,000 miles per hour inside its galaxy.
  - ❑ Possible Causes for the Motion:

- ★ Two Supermassive Black Holes Merging: Scientists might have spotted the resulting black hole moving in a rearward motion after the merger before settling down in a position.
- ★ One in a Binary System of Black Holes, where not one but two supermassive black holes might exist within the host galaxy held together by a shared centre of gravity, which they might be orbiting.
- ★ The twin of the newly-discovered wandering black hole might not be emitting masers, keeping it from being detected by the radio antenna network.

### **Black Hole**

- ★ It refers to a point in space where the matter is so compressed as to create a gravity field from which even light cannot escape.
- ★ The concept was theorized by Albert Einstein in 1915 and the term 'black hole' was coined in the mid-1960s by American physicist John Archibald Wheeler.
- ★ Usually, the black holes belong to two categories:
  - ❑ One category ranges between a few solar masses and tens of solar masses. These are thought to form when massive stars die.
  - ❑ The other category is of supermassive black holes. These range from hundreds of thousands to billions of times that of the sun from the Solar system to which Earth belongs.
- ★ In April 2019, the scientists at the Event Horizon Telescope Project released the first-ever image of a Black Hole (more precisely, of its shadow).

- ❑ The Event Horizon Telescope is a group of 8 radio telescopes (used to detect radio waves from space) located in different parts of the world.

- ★ Gravitational waves are created when two black holes orbit each other and merge.

## New Technique for Monitoring of Power Transmission Cables

Recently, researchers at IIT Madras have demonstrated that power transmission cable can be monitored by using Raman thermometry on the fibre optic cable.

- ★ They achieved this by using the optical fibres that are already embedded in the power cables for establishing optical communication.

### Key Points

#### Raman Thermometry:

- ❑ It is a thermal characterization technique which makes use of Raman scattering phenomena to determine the local temperature in microelectronics systems.
- ❑ When light is scattered off an object, say a molecule, two bands are observed, with higher and lower frequency than the original light, called the Stokes and anti-Stokes bands, respectively.
- ❑ By studying the relative intensity of the two bands, it is possible to estimate the temperature of the object which scatters the light.
- ★ The anti-Stokes component of Raman scattering is strongly

dependent on the temperature that the material is subjected to. Thus, by measuring the intensity of the anti-Stokes scattered light we can estimate the temperature.

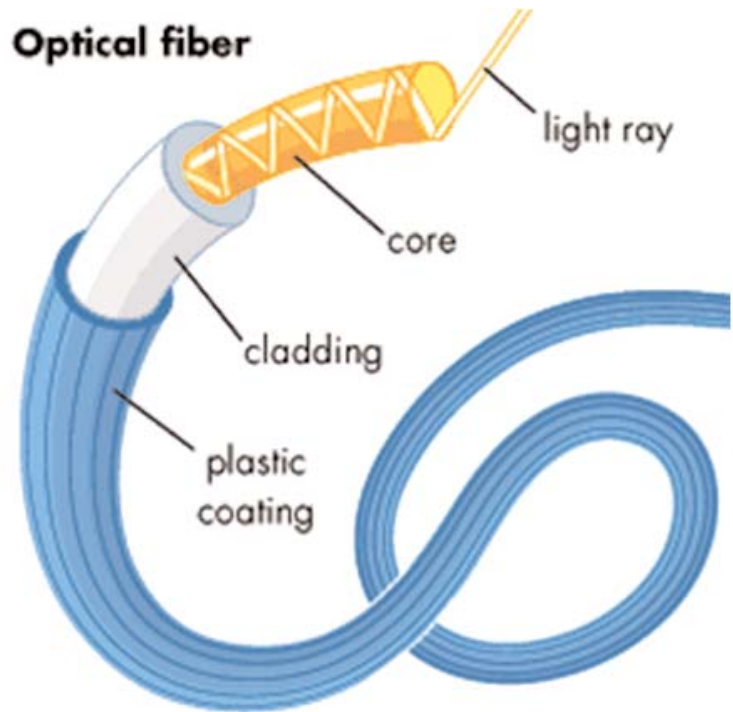
- ❑ Any current flowing through a conductor would cause a temperature rise due to the Joule heating effect. Hence the flow of current through the power cables results in heating of the power cables.
- ★ Joule heating (also referred to as resistive or ohmic heating) describes the process where the energy of an electric current is converted into heat as it flows through a resistance.

#### Optical Fibre Technique:

- ❑ The temperature measurement of wires is performed in not just one location, but in a distributed manner using an optical fibre. To achieve this, a pulse of light is launched into the optical

fibre and the backscattered radiation is observed.

- ★ Optical fibres are fabricated with high quality composite glass/quartz fibres.
- ★ Each fibre consists of a core (denser) and cladding (rarer).
- ★ When a signal in the form of light is directed at one end of the fibre at a suitable angle, it undergoes repeated total internal reflections along the length of the fibre and finally comes out at the other end.
- ★ Total internal reflection is complete reflection of a ray of light within a medium such as water or glass from the surrounding surfaces back into the medium.
- ★ Since light undergoes total internal reflection at each stage, there is no appreciable loss in the intensity of the light signal.
- ❑ The time of flight of the backscattered radiation provides an estimate of the distance from which the light is backscattered.



- ★ Backscattering (or backscatter) is the reflection of waves, particles, or signals back to the direction they came from.
- ★ This constitutes a distributed measurement as the pulse propagates all along the length of fibre.
- ★ This can go up to tens of kilometers.

### **Significance:**

### **Actual Temperature Measurements:**

- ★ The use of Raman thermometry technique allows the operators to get the results for actual temperature measurements over tens of kilometres.

### **Economic and Real-Time:**

- ★ Alternative methods of measuring the temperature of power cables include using a thermal camera which is cumbersome. The present method devised by the team is both economical and provides real-time information.
- ★ Thermal cameras detect temperature by recognizing and capturing different levels of infrared light.

## **India, Japan space agencies review cooperation**

A bilateral meeting took place between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) held virtually.

- ★ Indian and Japanese 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 programme”-.

- ★ Both agencies signed an Implementing Arrangement for collaborative activities on rice crop area and air quality monitoring using satellite data.

### **India's space collaborations**

- ★ India and Japan are working on a joint lunar polar exploration (LUPEX) mission that aims to send a lander and rover to the Moon's south pole around 2024.
- ★ India and Australia signed an amendment to the MoU which will build on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Both countries are also in discussions for Australia to host vital tracking infrastructure to support the Gaganyaan manned space flight mission.
- ★ India and Italy decided to explore opportunities in earth observation, space science and robotic and human exploration.

## **OTT Case: SC stays all pleas in HCs**

The Supreme Court recently stayed the proceedings in High Courts in cases seeking regulation of content shown on over-the-top (OTT) platforms.

- ★ The hearing was based on a plea by the Centre to transfer the cases in the High Courts to the Supreme Court.
- ★ The Bench was informed by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that despite the apex court's earlier order issuing notice on the transfer plea filed by the Centre to club all such petitions

filed in various High Courts, the Punjab and Haryana High Court is still proceeding in the matter pending there.

- ★ A counter affidavit filed by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry in another case said Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules of 2021 provides a “comprehensive”- mechanism to check content on OTT platforms.
- ★ The Ministry said the Rules were based on a globally recognised model and keep a fine balance, considering the major audience these OTT platforms had while at the same time providing a healthy classification of content based on age groups.
- ★ Recently, another Supreme Court Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan had criticised the 2021 Rules as lacking teeth to punish violators or to screen offensive content.
- ★ In that case the Centre had agreed to consider drafting new regulations or even legislation to address the concern raised by the court about OTT platforms.
- ★ According to the Supreme Court the new rules that were notified by the Center are more in the nature of guidelines and there was no effective mechanism for screening or to take appropriate action against the violators of the rules.

Information technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

- ★ These are the new rules that are notified by the Center to broad-

ly deal with the social media and over the top platforms.

- ★ They have been framed in exercise of the power under section 87 (2) of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 and in supersession of the earlier IT (intermediary guidelines) rules 2011.
- ★ These rules have been formed in the in the background of the Supreme Court order in 2018 which directed the Government of India to frame necessary guidelines to eliminate child pornography, rape and gangrape imageries, videos and sites in content hosting platforms and other applications.
- ★ In 2020, an ad hoc committee of the Rajya Sabha was formed that laid its report after studying the alarming issue of pornography on social media and the effect it has on children and society as a whole. It recommended for enabling identification of the first originator of such contents.

### **PROVISIONS FOR OTT PLATFORMS UNDER THE NEW RULES**

- ★ According to the new rules, the OTT platforms are publishers of online curated content.
- ★ Search platforms need to self classify their content into 5 categories which are based on age. these are:
  - ★ U for universal
  - ★ U/A for 7+
  - ★ U/A for 13+
  - ★ U/A for 16+ and
  - ★ A for adult

The OTT platforms are now required to provide parental lock systems for content that is

classified U/A 13+ or higher and also have an age verification mechanism for the content that are classified as adult.

The rating for the content on these platforms should be prominently displayed by the publishers of online curated content to the users before the program starts so that it can make informed decisions based on suitability, prior to watching the programme.

Along with the rating, the content description should be provided with a viewer discretion message if applicable.

A three level grievance redressal mechanism has to be established under the new rules with different levels of self regulation

- ★ Level 1 -self regulation by the publishers
- ★ Level 2 -self regulation by the self regulating bodies of the publishers
- ★ Level 3 -oversight mechanism.

The Oversight Mechanism will be formulated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that shall publish a charter for self regulating bodies, including codes of practises. it should also establish an interdepartmental committee for the hearing of the grievances.

### **NEED FOR REGULATION OF OTT PLATFORMS IN INDIA**

- ★ These regulations will help to keep out the obnoxious online content that promotes violence and vulgarity among the people.
- ★ It will help in undermining the effects that such content has on society especially among the younger generation.

★ It will help to protect the Internet users and deal formally with the platforms that have content that promotes violence, terrorist material, child abuse, cyber bullying, cyber harassment, etc.

★ These regulations came to bring the online platforms of news and entertainment at par with the print media as well as the cinema.

★ The new rules emphasise the need for the social media intermediaries and the online content providers whether for entertainment or for informative purposes, tops of strict compliance with the constitution and the domestic laws in India.

★ They envisage to bring uniform application of the existing laws to combat unlawful content.

★ It envisages to check the proliferation of fake news and hate speech.

### **Concerns associated with the new rules**

- ★ The 3 tier grievance redressal mechanism that has been mandated by the new rules distorts the idea of self regulation for the digital publishers of news and current affairs as well as the video streaming services. This is because with an Inter ministerial committee of government officials that will become an appellate authority over the self regulatory exercise. This implies that self regulation by the media organization and the industry will be at the government's pleasure.
- ★ The sheer process of such a grievance handling mechanism can impede the operations of relatively smaller digital ven-



tures in news and current affairs space.

- ★ This seems to bring government control over the digital news platforms and over the top platforms rather than just regulation.
- ★ It poses a challenge to the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression under article 19 (1)(a) of the constitution.
- ★ The grievance redressal mechanism that has the provision to be used by anyone and everyone is an open ended provision and has a potential to be misused.

### *Way forward*

- ★ It now depends upon the judiciary for a clear and fair judgement on the validity of the newly notified rules.
- ★ Meanwhile the government needs to deliberate with all the stakeholders involved in these rules with the publication of a white paper.
- ★ The government needs to clearly outline the harms that are sought to be addressed through these rules.
- ★ After the consultation with the stakeholders, if the regulations are deemed to be necessary then it must be implemented through legislation that is debated inside the parliament. Meanwhile the government also has to expedite the process of formulation of a data protection law he got the citizens against excesses committed by any party

## *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

In just the last decade, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has

evolved at an unprecedented pace. It has already helped increase crop yields, raised business productivity, improved access to credit and made disease detection faster and more precise.

- ★ More importantly, the more we use AI, the more data we generate, the smarter it gets. And as these systems become more capable, our world becomes more efficient and consequently richer.
- ★ It could contribute more than \$15 trillion to the world economy by 2030, adding 14% to global GDP. 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.
- ★ However, just as AI has the potential to improve billions of lives, it can also replicate and exacerbate existing problems, and create new ones.

### *Ethical Challenges Associated with AI*

- ★ Risk of Unemployment: The hierarchy of labour is concerned primarily with automation. 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.;
- Moreover, the day is not far when many desk jobs will also be edged out by AI, such as accountants, financial traders, and middle managers.
- ★ Exacerbating Inequalities: Using artificial intelligence, a

company can drastically cut down on relying on the human workforce, and this means that revenues will go to fewer people.

- Consequently, individuals who have ownership in AI-driven companies will make all the money. Also, AI could compound digital exclusion.
- Further, investment is likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established, widening gaps among and within countries.
- Therefore, without clear policies on reskilling workers, the promise of new opportunities will in fact create serious new inequalities.
- ★ Tech Addiction: Technological addiction is the new frontier of human dependency. AI has already become effective at directing human attention and triggering certain actions.
- When used right, this could evolve into an opportunity to nudge society towards more beneficial behavior.
- However, in the wrong hands, it could prove detrimental.
- ★ Discriminating Robots: We shouldn't forget that AI systems are created by humans, who can be biased and judgemental.
- It can lead AI facial recognition and surveillance technology to discriminate against people of color and minorities.
- ★ Data Privacy Concerns: AI also presents serious data privacy concerns. The algorithm's never-ending quest for data has

led to our digital footprints being harvested and sold without our knowledge or informed consent.

- ❑ The case of Cambridge Analytica, in which such algorithms and big data were used to alter voting decisions, should serve as a potent warning of the individual and societal concerns resulting from current AI business models.
- ★ AI Turning Against Humans: What if artificial intelligence itself turned against humans?
- ❑ Imagine an AI system that is asked to eradicate cancer in the world. After a lot of computing, it spits out a formula that does, in fact, bring about the end of cancer -“ by killing everyone on the planet.

### Way Forward

- ★ Whole of Society Approach: Many countries, including India, are cognizant of the opportunities and the risks, and are striving to strike the right balance between AI promotion and AI governance -“ both for the greater public good.
- ❑ NITI Aayog’s Responsible AI for All strategy, the culmination of a year-long consultative process, is a case in point.
- ❑ It recognizes that our digital future cannot be optimized for good without multi-stakeholder governance structures that ensure the dividends are fair, inclusive, and just.
- ❑ In this scenario, a “whole of society”- approach to AI governance will enable us to develop broad-based ethical

principles, cultures, and codes of conduct.

- ❑ So that societal trust can be developed for AI to flourish and bring about the extraordinary breakthroughs it promises.
- ★ Whole of World Approach: Given the global reach of AI, such a “whole of society”- approach must rest on a “whole of world”- approach.
- ❑ The UN Secretary-General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation is a good starting point. It lays out the 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”-.
- ❑ Similarly, UNESCO has developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to the Member States for deliberation and adoption.

### Conclusion

Just as electricity allowed us to tame time, enabling us to radically alter virtually every aspect of existence, 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.

However, without ethical guard rails, AI will widen social and economic schisms, amplifying any innate biases at an irreversible scale and rate and lead to discriminatory outcomes.

## Double Mutant Coronavirus Variant

A unique “double mutant”- coronavirus variant with a combination of mutations, not seen anywhere else in the world, has been found in India.

- ★ Mutation is an alteration in the genetic material (the genome) of a cell of a living organism or of a virus that is more or less permanent and that can be transmitted to the cell’s or the virus’s descendants.
- ★ The genomes of organisms are all composed of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA), whereas viral genomes can be of DNA or Ribo Nucleic Acid (RNA).

### Double Mutant:

- ❑ Genome sequencing of a section of virus samples by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), revealed the presence of two mutations, E484Q and L452R together, in virus samples from states such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat.
- ❑ The INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID) and, if it merits, classify it as a Variant of Concern (VOC).
- ★ So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage.

### Challenges of Double Mutant:

- ❑ The double mutation in key areas of the virus’ spike pro-

tein may increase the risks and allow the virus to escape the immune system.

- ★ The spike protein is the part of the virus that it uses to penetrate human cells.
- ❑ Presence of a VOC or suspected VOC does not automatically mean that they are causing the outbreak, but rather suggests challenges to public health measures for containment.
- ❑ While the double mutants have been associated with a reduction in vaccine efficacy as well as infectivity, their combined effect and biological implication has not yet been understood.

#### **Other Variant:**

- ❑ Also genome variation studies from Kerala have revealed the presence of other mutations.
- ★ It is associated with the ability to help the coronavirus evade antibodies.
- ❑ The N440K mutation that is associated with immune escape has also been reported from 16 other countries, including the UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia.

#### **Solution:**

- ❑ It would require the same epidemiological and public health response of increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases & contacts as well as treatment as per “National Treatment Protocol” by the States/UTs.
- ★ Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG):

- ★ INSACOG is a multi-laboratory, multi-agency, pan-India network to monitor genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2.
- ★ It helps in the understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves.
- ★ Genomic surveillance can generate a rich source of information for tracking pathogen transmission and evolution on both national and international levels.

## **Drone Operations**

Recently, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has granted permits to "No-Permission-No-Takeoff" (NPNT) compliant drone operations at 34 additional green zones to facilitate, smoothen, and promote drone operations in the country.

### **Key Points**

#### **About:**

- ❑ NPNT is a software program that enables every Remotely Piloted Aircraft (except Nano) to obtain a valid permission through DigitalSky platform before operating in India.
- ★ Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) is defined as an Unmanned Aircraft (UA), which is piloted from a remote pilot station. Drone is a layman terminology for UA.
- ★ DigitalSky is a Ministry of Civil Aviation initiative, a highly secure and scalable platform which supports technology frameworks such as NPNT designed for enabling flight permission digitally and managing Unmanned Aircraft operations and traffic efficiently.

- ❑ If a NPNT compliant drone tries to breach geo-fencing (to go beyond the permissible boundary in the air-space), the in-built software will compel the drone to return-to-home (RTH).
- ❑ Drone flights in the green zone sites shall be compliant with the applicable conditions of Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021.
- ❑ Flying in the ‘green-zones’ require only intimation of the time and location of the flights.
- ★ Permissions are required for flying in ‘yellow zones’ and flights are not allowed in the ‘red zones’.
- ★ Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021:
  - ❑ UAS categorised as airplane, rotorcraft and hybrid with further categorisation as remotely piloted aircraft, model remotely piloted aircraft and autonomous unmanned aircraft system.
  - ❑ UA is classified as nano, micro, small, medium and large unmanned aircraft based on the maximum all up weight.
  - ❑ Mandatory for individuals and companies to obtain approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to import, manufacture, trade, own or operate drones.
  - ❑ No Permission- No Take-off (NPNT) policy adopted for all UAS except for those in the nano category.
  - ❑ Micro and small UAS are not permitted from flying above 60m and 120m, respectively.

- ❑ UAS prohibited from flying in strategic and sensitive locations, including near airports, defence airports, border areas, military installations/facilities and areas earmarked as strategic locations/vital installations by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- ❑ Research and development (R&D) organisations, including start-ups, authorised UAS manufacturers, any accredited recognised institution of higher education located in India, are permitted to carry out R&D of UAS only after obtaining authorisation from the DGCA.
- ❑ Penalties ranging between rupees ten thousand and one lakh for individuals, and for organisations, a 200, 300 and 400% of the amount specified for individuals, based on the size of the organisation.

## Asteroid Apophis

Recently, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has ruled out the possibility of the dreaded asteroid Apophis causing any damage to the Earth for the next 100 years.

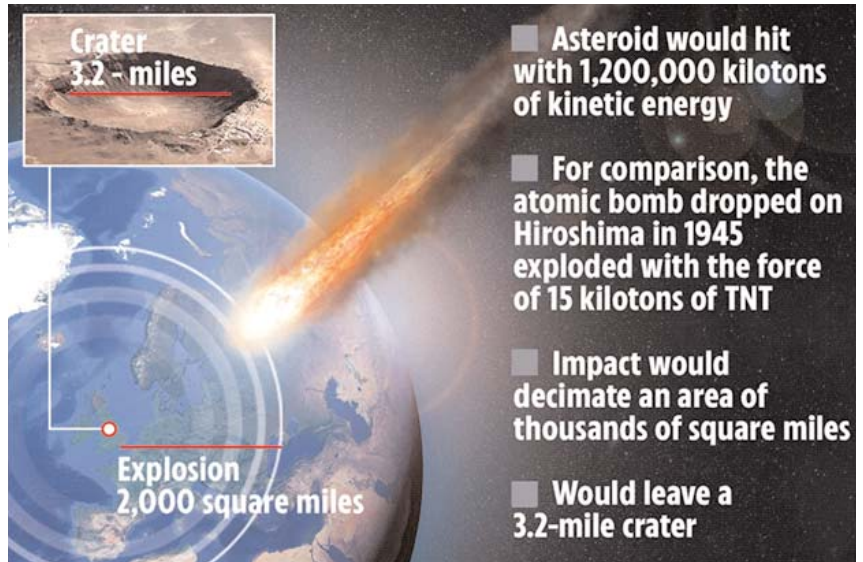
### Key Points

#### Size:

- ❑ Apophis is a near-Earth asteroid with a relatively large size (about 335 meters wide).

#### Name & Discovery:

- ❑ Named after the ancient Egyptian god of chaos and darkness, it was discovered in 2004, after which NASA had



said that it was one of the asteroids that posed the greatest threat to Earth.

- ★ Apophis was predicted to come threateningly close to us in the years 2029 and 2036, but NASA later ruled these events out.
- ★ However, there were still fears about a possible collision in 2068.

### Near Earth Flight:

- ❑ Recently, the asteroid flew past Earth on 5th March 2021, coming within 17 million km of our planet. During this approach, scientists used radar observations to study in detail the asteroid's orbit around the sun.

- ★ Impact if it Hits Earth:

### Asteroids

#### About:

- ❑ Asteroids are rocky objects that orbit the Sun, much smaller than planets.
- ★ They are also called minor planets.
- ❑ According to NASA, 9,94,383 is the count of

■ Asteroid would hit with 1,200,000 kilotons of kinetic energy

■ For comparison, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 exploded with the force of 15 kilotons of TNT

■ Impact would decimate an area of thousands of square miles

■ Would leave a 3.2-mile crater

known asteroids, the remnants from the formation of the solar system over 4.6 billion years ago.

**Categorization: Asteroids are divided into three classes:**

#### First Group:

- ★ Those found in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, which is estimated to contain somewhere between 1.1-1.9 million asteroids.

#### Second Group:

- ★ It is that of trojans, which are asteroids that share an orbit with a larger planet. NASA reports the presence of Jupiter, Neptune and Mars trojans. In 2011, they reported an Earth trojan as well.

#### Third Group:

- ★ It is Near-Earth Asteroids (NEA), which have orbits that pass close by the Earth. Those that cross the Earth's orbit are called Earth-crossers. More than 10,000 such asteroids are known, out of which over 1,400 are classified as Potentially Hazardous Asteroids (PHAs).



- ★ NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object Study (CNEOS) determines the times and distances of these objects, when their approach to the Earth is close, through the Asteroid Watch Widget.

### **Potentially Hazardous Asteroids**

- ★ It means that an asteroid has the potential to make threatening close approaches to the Earth.
- ★ Specifically, all asteroids with a Minimum Orbit Intersection Distance (MOID) of 0.05 AU (which is about 7,480,000 Km) or less and an Absolute Magnitude (H) of 22.0 (about 150 mt in diameter) or less are considered PHAs.
  - ❑ Minimum Orbit Intersection Distance is a method for calculating the minimum distance between two almost overlapping elliptical orbits.
  - ❑ The Astronomical Unit (AU) is the distance between the Earth and the Sun and is roughly 150 million km.
  - ❑ The absolute magnitude is a measure of the star's luminosity i.e. the total amount of energy radiated by the star every second.

## **NISAR**

NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing an SUV-sized satellite called NISAR, which will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.

- ★ The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh) into a near-polar orbit.

### **Key Points**

- ★ The Name 'NISAR': 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.
  - ❑ It 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.
- ★ Function: It will scan the globe every 12 days over the course of its three-year mission of imaging the Earth's land, ice sheets and sea ice to give an unprecedented view of the planet.

### **Role of NASA:**

- ❑ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA - space agency of the USA) will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.
- ❑ NISAR will be equipped with the largest reflector antenna ever launched by NASA.

### **Role of ISRO:**

- ❑ Indian Space and Research Organisation (ISRO) will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.

### **Primary Goals:**

- ❑ Tracking subtle changes in the Earth's surface,

- ❑ Spotting warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions,
- ❑ Helping to monitor groundwater supplies, and
- ❑ Tracking the rate at which ice sheets are melting.

### **Expected Benefits:**

- ❑ NISAR's data can help people worldwide better manage natural resources and hazards, as well as providing information for scientists to better understand the effects and pace of climate change.
- ★ The images will be detailed enough to show local changes and broad enough to measure regional trends.
  - ❑ As the mission continues for years, the data will allow for better understanding of the causes and consequences of land surface changes.
  - ❑ It will also add to our understanding of our planet's hard outer layer, called its crust.

### **What is S-Band Radar?**

- ★ S band radars operate on a wavelength of 8-15 cm and a frequency of 2-4 GHz.
- ★ Because of the wavelength and frequency, S-band radars are not easily attenuated. This makes them useful for near and far range weather observation.
- ★ The drawback to this band of radar is that it requires a large antenna dish and a large motor to power it. It is not uncommon for a S-band dish to exceed 25 feet in size.

# MISCELLANEOUS

## *Exercise Desert Flag-VI*

For the first time, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is participating in the Exercise Desert Flag-VI, hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Air Force.

### **Key Points**

- ★ About: Ex Desert Flag is an annual multinational large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the UAE Air Force.
- ★ Aim: To provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.
- ★ Exercise Desert Flag-VI:
  - ❑ Duration: It is about a three week long exercise scheduled from 3rd - 27th March 2021 at Al-Dhafra air base, UAE.
  - ❑ Participants: The air forces of the UAE, India, United States of America, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Bahrain.
  - ❑ India's Participation: The IAF is participating with six Su-30 MKI, two C-17 Globemasters and one IL-78 tanker aircraft.

### **Joint Military Exercises with the UAE:**

- ❑ With the UAE, India has In-UAE BILAT (bilateral naval exercise) as well as Desert Eagle-II (bilateral air force exercise).

### **Recent Engagements:**

- ❑ India participated in the NAVDEX 21 (Naval Defence Exhibition) and IDEX 21 (International Defence Exhibition).
- ★ The exhibitions showcase the latest technologies and innovation in the global defence sector, support the growth of UAE's defence industry, and forge new relationships between major international companies.
- ★ Examples of Other Multinational Exercises:
  - ❑ Pitch Black: Biennial, multilateral air combat training exercise of Australia.
  - ❑ Red Flag: Multilateral air exercise of USA.

## *Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2021*

The third and final leg of 11th edition of the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2021 took place at Murshidabad, West Bengal.

- ★ Various colourful performances were given by the local artists, including 'Baul Gaan', 'Alkupa Gaan', 'Leto gaan', 'Jhumuriya' and Ranpa folk dances.

### **Key Points**

- ★ Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is the flagship festival of the Ministry of Culture.
- ★ It has been organized since 2015 with the active participation of Seven Zonal Culture Centres.

- ★ It was started with an intention to exhibit the rich cultural heritage of the country in all its rich and varied dimensions namely, Handicrafts, Cuisine, Painting, Sculpture and Performing Arts- Folk, Tribal, Classical and Contemporary- all at one place.

### ★ Significance:

- ❑ It has been playing a pivotal role to take the vibrant culture of India out to the masses instead of confining it to auditoria and galleries.
- ❑ It has been instrumental in showcasing folk and tribal art, dance, music, cuisines & culture of one state in other states reinforcing the cherished goal of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat".
- ❑ It also provides an effective platform to the artists and artisans to support their livelihood.
- ❑ It reconnects the people (especially the youth) with their indigenous culture, its multifaceted nature, magnificence, and historical importance in the context of 'India as a Nation' over the millennia.
- ★ Till date, Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsavs have been held at various places such as Delhi, Varanasi, Bengaluru, Tawang, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tehri and Madhya Pradesh.

### **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**

- ★ It was launched in 2015 to promote engagement amongst the people of different States/UTs

so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

- ★ It is an initiative of the Ministry of Education.
- ★ The broad objectives of the initiative are as follows:
  - ❑ To CELEBRATE the Unity in Diversity of our nation and to maintain and strengthen the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people,
  - ❑ To PROMOTE the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all Indian states and Union Territories through a year-long planned engagement between states,
  - ❑ To SHOWCASE the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of different states for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity,
  - ❑ To ESTABLISH long-term engagements, and
  - ❑ To CREATE an environment which promotes learning between states by sharing best practices and experiences.
- ★ Every State and UT in the country would be paired with another State/UT for a time period, during which they would carry out a structured engagement with one another in the spheres of language, literature, cuisine, festivals, cultural events, tourism etc

### **Zonal Cultural Centres**

- ★ The centres aim to strengthen the ancient roots of Indian Culture and evolve and enrich composite National Culture.
- ★ There are seven Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCC) in India.
  - ❑ Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre Kolkata, North Central Zone Cultural Centre Allahabad, North east Zone Cultural centre Dimapur, North Zone Cultural centre Patiala, South Central Zone Cultural Centre Nagpur, South Zone Cultural Centre Thanjavur, West Zone Cultural Centre Udaipur
- ★ These ZCCs organize various cultural activities and programmes all over the country on a regular basis.
- ★ Other schemes of ZCCs - Award to Young Talented Artists, Guru Shishya Parampara, Theatre Rejuvenation, Shilpgram, Octave and National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP).

### **Biju Patnaik**

The birth anniversary of Biju Patnaik was celebrated (5th March). He is remembered as a freedom fighter, an Indian politician, an aviator and a businessman.

#### **Key Points**

##### **Brief Profile:**

- ❑ Bijayananda Patnaik was born on 5th March 1916, he is popularly known as Biju Patnaik.
- ❑ He was an ace pilot and joined the Royal Indian Air Force in 1936.

- ❑ He was the two times Chief Minister of Odisha.

##### **Role in Freedom Struggle:**

- ❑ Biju Patnaik started his career as a freedom fighter in 1942. He joined the Quit India Movement under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi to make India free.
- ★ He became a prominent leader of Congress and was engaged in the Quit India Movement with Jay Prakash Narayan and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.
- ★ In 1943, he underwent imprisonment for about two years for his participation in the Quit India Movement.
- ❑ He fearlessly undertook covert missions, ferrying freedom fighters to secret meetings with their supporters, and even air-dropped leaflets in support of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.
- ❑ He played a major role in World War II and the Kashmir War of 1948 as a pilot in the Indian Air Force.

##### **Role in Kashmir Integration:**

- ❑ Biju Patnaik had fearlessly flown a DC-3 transport aircraft to Srinagar on 27th October 1947, ferrying soldiers of the Sikh regiment after the tribal invasion from Pakistan in Kashmir.

##### **Role in Indonesian Freedom Struggle:**

- ❑ On the request of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Biju Patnaik flew to Java and brought Sultan Sjahrir out of Dutch controlled territory in Indonesia for a meeting in Delhi.

- ★ For this act of bravery, he was given honorary citizenship in Indonesia and awarded the 'Bhoomi Putra', the highest Indonesian award, rarely granted to a foreigner.
- ★ In 1996, the Biju Patnaik was awarded the highest Indonesian national award, the 'Bintang Jasa Utama'.

## Hardit Singh Malik

Recently, England has approved the design for a sculpture of an early 20th century Sikh fighter pilot "Hardit Singh Malik" for a new memorial to be erected in the port city of Southampton.

- ★ The memorial is built in memory of all Indians who fought in the World Wars.
- ★ The memorial will be created by English sculptor Luke Perry.

### Key Points

#### About Hardit Singh Malik:

##### Birth:

- ★ He was born into a Sikh family on 23rd November 1894 in Rawalpindi in West Punjab, pre-partitioned India.

##### Career:

- ★ Hardit Singh Malik first arrived in the UK in 1908 as a 14-year-old to Balliol College at the University of Oxford.
- ★ He became a member of the Royal Flying Corps during World War I (1914-1918).
- ★ As the first Indian and turbaned pilot with a specialised helmet, he became famous as the "Flying Sikh".
- ★ Malik also played cricket for Sussex and was also the Indian Ambassador to France after a

long and distinguished career in the Indian Civil Service.

##### Death:

- ★ He died in New Delhi on 31st October 1985.

#### India's Contribution to World War I:

##### About:

- ★ World War I (WW I), also known as the Great War, lasted from July 1914 to November 1918.
- ★ WW I was fought between the Allied Powers and the Central Powers.
- ★ Allied Powers: France, Russia, and Britain. The United States also fought on the side of the Allies after 1917.
- ★ Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.
- ★ India made a huge contribution to Britain's war effort.
- ★ As high as 100 million British Pounds was given by India to Britain to fund their war anticipating dominion status and home rule in return.
- ★ The British raised men and money from India, as well as large supplies of food, cash, and ammunition, collected by British taxation policies.
- ★ In return, the British promised to award self-rule to India at the end of the war which eventually was not delivered.

##### Troops:

- ★ It sent staggering numbers of volunteers to fight and die on behalf of the allied forces.
- ★ Almost 1.5 million Muslim, Sikh and Hindu men from regions such as the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra,

Tamil Nadu and Bihar volunteered in the Indian Expeditionary Force, which fought on the Western Front, in East Africa, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Gallipoli.

- ★ However, of these men, around 50,000 died, 65,000 were wounded, and 10,000 were reported missing, while 98 Indian army nurses were killed.

##### Other Supplies:

- ★ The country also supplied 1,70,000 animals and 3.7 million tonnes of supplies, jute for sandbags to the British government.

#### India's Contribution to World War II:

##### About:

- ★ World War II, also called Second World War, was a conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939-45.
- ★ The principal belligerents were:
- ★ Axis powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- ★ Allies: France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China.
- ★ India sacrificed too much for the war. In the end the promised independence was also not granted. Indian contribution was hence largely neglected by the allied powers.

##### Troops:

- ★ Approximately 2.5 million Indian soldiers served in World War 2.
- ★ Over 36,000 Indian soldiers lost their lives, 34,000 were wounded and 67,000 were taken prisoners of war.
- ★ Their exploits were seen in East



and North Africa, Italy, Burma, and as far out as Singapore, Malay Peninsula, Guam, and Indo China.

- ★ The roles played by Air Force pilots from India are legendary and well documented.
- ★ In the East, the Indian soldiers, as part of the British Indian Army, fought against the Japanese and were responsible for ultimately securing South East Asia that included Singapore, the Malay Peninsula and Burma.

### **Other Supplies:**

- ★ Indian doctors and nurses were also involved on the British soil and other countries.
- ★ India supplied over 1.7 million food packets to soldiers and Asian prisoners of war, besides putting together warm clothes and other supplies.

## **Janaushadhi Diwas**

The Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) celebrated the 3rd Janaushadhi Diwas (7th March 2021) to spread awareness about quality generic medicines, available at low prices.

- ★ Theme of Janaushadhi Diwas was “Seva Bhi -“ Rozgar bhi”-. The Janaushadhi week was celebrated across the country from 1st-7th March 2021.
- ★ As a part of celebrations, the Prime Minister inaugurated the 7,500th Janaushadhi Kendra at NEIGRIHMS, Shillong.

### **Key Points**

#### **Janaushadhi Kendra:**

- Bureau of Pharma PSUs in India (BPPI) supports Janaushadhi Kendras as a part of Pradhan Mantri

Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana.

- These are the centres from where quality generic medicines are made available to all.
- The number of stores has grown to more than 7400 and all 734 districts of the country have Janaushadhi Kendras.
- Government grants of up to Rs. 2.5 lakhs are provided for setting up of Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Kendras, which can be set up by doctors, pharmacists, entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs), NGOs, charitable societies, etc. at any suitable place or outside the hospital premises.
- ★ Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):
  - PMBJP is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in 2008 under the name Jan Aushadhi Campaign.
- ★ The campaign was revamped as PMBJP in 2015-16.
  - Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) is the implementation agency for PMBJP.
- ★ The Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India works under the Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers.
- ★ BPPI has also developed the Janaushadhi Sugam Application.
  - PMBJP stores have been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
  - It also intends to extend the

coverage of quality generic medicines so as to reduce the out of pocket expenditure on medicines and thereby redefine the unit cost of treatment per person.

- ★ A medicine under PMBJP is priced on the principle of a maximum of 50% of the average price of top three branded medicines. Therefore, the price of Janaushadhi Medicines is cheaper at least by 50% and in some cases, by 90% of the market price of branded medicines.

### **Performance Analysis:**

- In the current financial year 2020-21, PMBJP has already achieved sales of Rs. 593.84 crores. This has led to savings of approximately Rs. 3600 crores of the common citizens of the country.
- This scheme is also providing a good source of self-employment with sustainable and regular earnings.

## **Bamiyan Buddhas**

Recently, the Bamiyan Buddhas - monumental statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley, have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called - A Night With Buddha.

- ★ In March 2001, the Taliban blew up two monumental Buddha statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley.
- ★ Once among the tallest statues in the world, the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas were lost to the world forever.
- ★ Following the fall of the Bamiyan Buddhas, UNESCO included the remains in its list

of world heritage sites in 2003.

### ***The legacy of the Bamiyan Buddhas:***

- ★ Belongs to the 5th century AD: These were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.
  - ❑ Salsal and Shamama (called by the locals), rose to heights of 55 and 38 metres respectively and were said to be male and female.
- ★ Salsal means light shines through the universe and Shamama is Queen Mother.
- ★ Location: Bamiyan is situated in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan.
  - ❑ Part of the Silk Road: The valley (along the Bamiyan River), was once integral to the early days of the Silk Roads - providing passage for culture, religion and language.
- ★ Confluence of different cultures: The Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
  - ❑ The Roman draperies and two different mudras is the proper depiction of this confluence.
  - ❑ During Buddhist Kushan Empire: Bamiyan became a major trade, cultural and religious centre, as China, India and Rome sought passage through Bamiyan.

### ***The significance of Bamiyan:***

- ★ With the rapid spread of Buddhism (1st to 5th centuries AD), Bamiyan's landscape reflected the faith, especially its monastic qualities.
- ★ Part of several other structures:

Such as stupas, smaller seated and standing Buddhas, and wall paintings in caves, spread in and around surrounding valleys.

## ***Statue of Unity***

Recently, the 'Statue of Unity' at Kevadia in Gujarat's Narmada district has crossed the mark of 50 lakh visitors since its inauguration in 2018.

- ★ India's first seaplane service in Gujarat started from 31st October, 2020. It connects Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad to the Statue of Unity in Kevadia.

### ***Key Points***

#### ***About:***

- ❑ The Statue of Unity is built in honour of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Sardar Patel is credited with uniting 560 princely states in pre-independent India hence the name of the statue is christened as 'Statue of Unity'.
- ❑ It was inaugurated on 31st October, 2018 to mark the 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel.
- ❑ The Statue of Unity is the tallest statue in the world. At 182 metres, it is 23 metres taller than China's Spring Temple Buddha statue and almost double the height of the Statue of Liberty (93 metres tall) in the US.
- ❑ In January 2020, it was added in the 'Eight Wonders' of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

### ***Location:***

- ❑ It is located on the Sadhu Bet island on the Narmada river, which flows between the Satpura and the Vindhya mountain ranges.

### ***Designed:***

- ❑ The Statue of Unity was designed by Padma Bhushan recipient sculptor Ram V Sutar and intricate bronze cladding work was done by a Chinese foundry, the Jiangxi Toqine Company (JTO).

### ***Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel***

***Born: 31st October 1875 in Nadiad, Gujarat.***

#### ***Achievements:***

- ❑ First Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India.
- ❑ Headed various Committees of the Constituent Assembly of India, namely:
  - ★ Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights.
  - ★ Committee on Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas.
  - ★ Provincial Constitution Committee.
- ❑ Integrated the farmer's cause in Kheda Satyagraha (1918) and Bardoli Satyagraha (1928) with the national freedom movement.
- ❑ Women of Bardoli bestowed the title 'Sardar' on Vallabhbhai Patel, which means 'a Chief or a Leader'.
- ❑ Known as the "Iron Man of India"- for playing an important role in unification and integration of Indian princely states into

the Indian federation and for convincing princely states to align with the Indian Union.

- ❑ Requested the people of India to live together by uniting (Ek Bharat) in order to create a foremost India (Shresth Bharat).
- ❑ This ideology still reflects in the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative which seeks to make India self-reliant.
- ❑ Remembered as the 'Patron Saint of India's Civil Servants' as he established the modern all-India services system.

**Death:** 15th December 1950 in Bombay.

## **Sahitya Akademi Award**

Recently, Marathi writer Nanda Khare refused to accept the Sahitya Akademi award for his novel "Udya", published in 2014.

### **Key Points**

#### **About Sahitya Akademi Award:**

- ❑ Sahitya Akademi award established in 1954, is a literary honour that is conferred annually by Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of letters.
- ❑ Akademi gives 24 awards annually to literary works in the languages it has recognized and an equal number of awards to literary translations from and into the languages of India.
- ★ Besides the 22 languages enumerated in the Constitution of India, the Sahitya Akademi has recognised English and Rajasthani as languages in which its programme may be

implemented.

- ❑ The Sahitya Akademi award is the second-highest literary honour by the Government of India, after the Jnanpith award.

#### **Criteria for Choosing Awardee:**

- ❑ The author must be of Indian Nationality.
- ❑ Book/work eligible for the award must be an outstanding contribution to the language and literature to which it belongs.
- ❑ When equal merit for books of two or more are found, certain criteria like total literary contribution and standing of authors shall be taken into consideration for declaring award.
- ★ About the Marathi Novel 'Udya':
  - ❑ It is a futuristic account of the possible scenarios emerging as consequences of the current capitalistic and machine-driven human life.
  - ❑ It nuances how humans have been enslaved by machines, particularly by the ones that are susceptible to surveillance of one's personal life.

## **Shaheed Diwas**

Prime Minister of India paid tributes to Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru on Shaheed Diwas (23rd March).

- ★ The Day is also known as Martyrs' Day or Sarvodaya Day.
- ★ This Day should not be confused with the Martyrs' Day observed on 30th January, the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.

### **Key Points**

#### **About:**

- ❑ Every year on 23rd March, Shaheed Diwas is observed.
- ❑ It was on this day that Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed by the British government in 1931.
- ★ They were hanged to death for assassinating John Saunders, a British police officer in 1928. They had mistook him for British police superintendent James Scott.
- ★ It was Scott who had ordered lathi charge, which eventually led to the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.
- ★ While Singh, who had publicly announced avenging Rai's death, went into hiding for many months after this shootout, he resurfaced along with an associate Batukeshwar Dutt, and the two, in April 1929, set off two explosive devices inside the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi.
- ★ Allowed themselves to be arrested, while shouting the famous slogan: "Inquilab Zindabad", or "Long live the revolution".
- ❑ Their lives inspired countless youth and in their death, they set an example. They carved out their own path for independence, where individual heroism and their aggressive need to do something for the nation stood out, departing from the path followed by the Congress leaders then.

#### **Bhagat Singh:**

- ❑ Born as Bhaganwala on the 26th September, 1907,

Bhagat Singh grew up in a petty-bourgeois family of Sandhu Jats settled in the Jullundur Doab district of the Punjab.

★ He belonged to a generation that was to intervene between two decisive phases of the Indian national movement - the phase of the 'Extremism' of Lal-Bal-Pal and the Gandhian phase of nonviolent mass action.

❑ In 1923, Bhagat Singh joined the National College, Lahore which was founded and managed by Lala Lajpat Rai and Bhai Parmanand.

★ The College was set up as an alternative to the institutions run by the Government, bringing to the field of education the idea of Swadeshi.

❑ In 1924 in Kanpur, he became a member of the Hindustan Republican Association, started by Sachindranath Sanyal a year earlier. The main organiser of the Association was Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh became very close to him.

★ It was as a member of the HRA that Bhagat Singh began to take seriously the philosophy of the Bomb.

★ Armed revolution was understood to be the only weapon with which to fight British imperialism.

❑ In 1925, Bhagat Singh returned to Lahore and within the next year he and his colleagues started a militant youth organisation called the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

❑ In April 1926, Bhagat Singh established contact with

Sohan Singh Josh and through him the 'Workers and Peasants Party' which brought out the monthly magazine Kirti in Punjabi.

★ For the next year Bhagat Singh worked with Josh and joined the editorial board of Kirti.

❑ In 1927, he was first arrested on charges of association with the Kakori Case, accused for an article written under the pseudonym Vidrohi (Rebel). He was also accused of being responsible for a bomb explosion at Lahore during the Dussehra fair.

❑ In 1928, Bhagat Singh changed the name of Hindustan Republican Association to Hindustan Socialist Republic Association (HSRA). In 1930, when Azad was shot, the HSRA collapsed.

★ Naujawan Bharat Sabha replaced HSRA in Punjab.

❑ His time in the prison was spent protesting, seeking better living conditions for inmates. During this time, he gained the sympathy of the public, especially when he joined fellow defendant Jatin Das in a hunger strike.

★ The strike ended with Das' death from starvation in September 1929. Two years later, Singh was convicted and hanged at the age of 23.

## Shigmotsav

The Goa government has limited the Shigmotsav (Shigmo festivities) parades to three locations only (Panaji, Ponda and Mapusa), owing to rising cases of Covid-19 in the state.

## Key Points

### About:

❑ Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa.

❑ Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.

### Two Variants of the Festival:

❑ Dhakto Shigmo: It is celebrated by the rural population, farmers and the labour class.

❑ Vhadlo Shigmo: It is of greater importance and is celebrated by everyone.

### Celebrations:

#### Time:

★ Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

### Invocation of Deities:

★ The festival begins with 'Naman' that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village 'maand' or the village stage to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk.

★ It is called the 'romta mell' that moves from one village to another.

### Dances:

★ Folk dances like Ghode Modni (a dance of equestrian warriors), Gopha and Phugadi.



### ***Shigmo Street Parade:***

- ★ Shigmo street parade floats as the highlight. It is held as an annual affair in the state capital, Panjim and other major cities like Margao, Mapusa, Vasco, and Ponda.
- ★ These colour-parties usually see people dressed in vibrant clothing performing traditional folk dances to depict the historical legacy of the Maratha War that backs this festival.
- ★ The float parades have, over the years, been a draw for tourists both domestic and international.
- ★ Other Names: Shigmo is celebrated all over India but in different names:
- ★ North India - Holi.
- ★ Assam and Bengal - Dolyatra.
- ★ South India - Kamadahan.
- ★ Maharashtra - Shimga.

### ***Haridwar Kumbh Mela***

The Centre has written to the Uttarakhand government about the need for stringent measures to control the spread of Covid-19 during the ongoing Kumbh Mela in the state (at Haridwar).

#### ***Key Points***

- ★ Kumbh Mela comes under UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- Kumbh Mela is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, during which participants bathe or take a dip in a sacred river.
- ★ It takes place on the banks of the Godavari river in Nashik, the Shipra river in Ujjain, the

Ganges in Haridwar, and the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati river in Prayag. The confluence is referred to as the 'Sangam'.

- As it is held in four different cities in India, it involves different social and cultural activities, making this a culturally diverse festival.
- ★ While technically, it is to be held in each of the aforementioned locations once every 12 years, sometimes, the mela can happen only a year apart at the sites.
- ★ It should also be known that in between, around the sixth year, the Ardh Kumbh Mela (also known as the half mela) is held. In addition to that, in Allahabad, every year the Maagh Mela is celebrated in the month of Maagh (mid-January to February, as per the Hindu calendar) at the Sangam.
- This Maagh Mela is also referred to as the Ardh Kumbh Mela and Kumbh Mela when it happens in the sixth and twelfth years, respectively.
- ★ Kumbh Mela in Haridwar is being held after 11 years -" not the usual 12 -" because of specific auspicious dates. In fact, this is the first time in 80 years that such a phenomenon has happened.
- ★ The event encapsulates the science of astronomy, astrology, spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and social and cultural customs and practices, making it extremely rich in knowledge.
- ★ The teacher-student relationship of the sadhus in the ashrams and akhadas remains

the most important method of imparting and safeguarding knowledge and skills relating to Kumbh Mela.

### ***Gandhi Peace Prize***

The father of the nation of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the late Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said Al Said are to be awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 and 2019 respectively.

#### ***Key Points***

##### ***About the Gandhi Peace Prize:***

- Institution of Award: The annual award was instituted by the Government of India in 1995 during the commemoration of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi for those involved in social, economic and political transformation through non-violence.
- Rewards: The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a Citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.
- Conferred Upon: The prize can be given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations.
- ★ It can be divided between two persons/institutions who are considered by the Jury to be equally deserving of recognition in a given year.
- ★ It is open to all persons regardless of nationality, creed, race or sex.
- Selection Committee: The jury chaired by the Prime Minister and other members are the Chief Justice of

India, the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha Speaker and founder of Sulabh International.

### **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman:**

- ❑ He was known as Bangabandhu. Also regarded as "Jatir Janak" or "Jatir Pita" (both meaning "Father of the Nation") of Bangladesh.
- ❑ He was born on 17th March 1920 in Tungipara, India (now in Bangladesh) and passed away on 15th August 1975 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- ★ Year 2020 marked the birth centenary of Bangabandhu.
- ❑ He was a Bengali leader who became the first prime minister of Bangladesh (1972–75) and later became the president of the same in 1975.
- ❑ He began his formal political career in 1949 as a co-founder of the Awami League.
- ❑ He played a crucial role in advocating political autonomy for East Pakistan, the detached eastern part of Pakistan (now Bangladesh).
- ❑ He was chosen for Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 in recognition of his outstanding contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods.
- ❑ He was a champion of human rights and freedom, and is a hero to Indians as well.
- ★ The legacy and inspiration of

Bangabandhu has made the heritage of both countries more comprehensive and deep-rooted, and that the path shown by Bangabandhu has laid a strong foundation for the partnership, progress and prosperity of both countries over the last decade.

### **Qaboos bin Said Al Said:**

- ❑ He has been the Arab world's longest-serving ruler. He ruled Oman for almost half a century.
- ★ In 1970, with the help of British, Qaboos overthrew his father in a bloodless coup, emerging as the Sultan at age 29.
- ❑ He was a visionary leader whose twin policy of moderation and mediation in addressing international issues won him praise and respect across the globe.
- ❑ He was also the architect of the special ties between India and Oman.
- ★ He had studied in India and always maintained a special relationship with India.
- ❑ The Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 recognises his leadership in strengthening the ties between India and Oman and his efforts to promote peace in the Gulf region.

## **VAJRA PRAHAR**

Recently, Special Forces of India and the USA conducted the joint military exercise 'VAJRA PRAHAR 2021' in Himachal Pradesh.

- ★ Earlier, India and the USA navy had carried out a two-day Passage Exercise (PASSEX) in the eastern Indian Ocean Region.

## **Key Points**

### **About the Exercise:**

- ❑ The joint exercise by the Special Forces of both the countries is conducted alternatively between India and the United States.
- ★ Special Forces are the units of a country's armed forces that undertake covert, counterterrorist, and other specialized operations.
- ❑ This is the 11th edition of the exercise conducted at Special Forces Training School located at Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh.
- ★ The 10th edition of VAJRA PRAHAR was held in 2019 at Seattle, USA.

### **Aim:**

- ❑ To share the best practices and experiences in areas such as joint mission planning and operational tactics as also to improve interoperability between the Special Forces of both nations.
- ★ Other Exercises of India with the USA:
  - ❑ Exercise Yudh Abhyas (Army).
  - ❑ Cope India (Air Force).
  - ❑ Red Flag (USA's multilateral air exercise).
  - ❑ Malabar Exercise (trilateral naval exercise of India, USA and Japan).

## **Maharaja Chhatrasal**

- ★ The Maharaja Chhatrasal Convention Centre has been inaugurated at Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ The Convention Centre, named after the legendary

Bundelkhand King Maharaja Chhatrasal, was built under the Swadesh Darshan scheme of the Ministry of Tourism.

### **Khajuraho**

- ★ It is one of the nineteen identified iconic destinations in the country.
- ❑ 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.
- ★ The Khajuraho Group of Monuments is listed as a UNESCO world heritage site.
- ❑ The temples are famous for their nagara-style architectural symbolism and their erotic sculptures.
- ❑ Most Khajuraho temples were built between 885 AD and 1050 AD by the Chandela dynasty.

### **Key Points**

#### **Brief Profile:**

- ❑ Birth : Born on 4th May 1649, to Champat Rai and Lal Kunwar, into the Bundela Rajput clan.
- ❑ Medieval Indian warrior, fought against the Mughal Empire, and established his own kingdom in Bundelkhand.
- ❑ Descendant of Rudra Pratap Singh of Orchha.
- ❑ Ancestors were vassals of the Mughal emperor.
- ❑ Death: 20th December, 1731.

#### **Power Struggle Against the Mughal:**

- ❑ He started his struggle in 1671, and first captured

Naugaon region of Chhatarpur district.

- ❑ He fought for 50 years against Mughals and captured a large part of Bundelkhand with his seat of power at Panna.

#### **Relation with Baji Rao I:**

- ❑ Baji Rao I helped Chhatrasal against the Mughals. He sent military aid against the Mughal force led by Muhammad Khan Bangash in 1728.
- ❑ The Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao I's second wife Mastani was Chhatrasal's daughter.
- ❑ Before his death, Chhatrasal transferred Mahoba and the surrounding area to Baji Rao I in return for his assistance against the Mughals.

#### **Patron of Literature :**

- ❑ His court housed several noted poets. His eulogies written by Kavi Bhushan, Lal Kavi, Bakhshi Hansaraj and other court poets helped him gain lasting fame.

#### **Religious View:**

- ❑ Disciple of Mahamati Prannathji.
- ❑ Swami Prannathji also guided him in political, social, and economic matters.
- ❑ Swami Prannathji told Chhatrasal regarding Diamond mines of Panna and thus helped him in strengthening his financial position.

#### **Legacy:**

- ❑ The Chhatarpur town and its district in Madhya Pradesh are named after Chhatrasal.

- ❑ Maharaja Chhatrasal Museum in Madhya Pradesh and the Chhatrasal Stadium in Delhi are also named after the Maharaja Chhatrasal.

#### **About Swadesh Darshan Scheme**

- ★ Swadesh Darshan, a Central Sector Scheme, was launched in 2014-15 for integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country.
- ❑ Currently, there are 15 theme based circuits - Buddhist, Coastal, Desert, Eco, Heritage, Himalayan, Krishna, North-east, Ramayana, Rural, Spiritual, Sufi, Tirthankara, Tribal and Wildlife.
- ❑ Theme-based tourist circuits are developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner to enrich tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities.
- ★ Under the scheme, the Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to State Governments/Union Territory Administrations for infrastructure development of circuits.
- ★ This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India etc. with the idea of positioning the tourism sector as a major engine for job creation, driving force for economic growth and building synergy with various sectors to enable tourism to realise its potential.



## Students Corner

# RIGHT TO LEGAL AID – A LEVELER IN INDIAN COURTS

Legal aid is free legal assistance to the poor and weaker sections of the society with the object to enable them to exercise the rights given to them by law. *Justice P.N.Bhagwati* has rightly said that “the poor and the illiterate should be able to approach the Courts and their ignorance and poverty should not be an impediment in the way of their obtaining Justice from the Courts.”

As political philosopher; *Charles de Montesquieu* said that; “In the state of nature...all men are born equal, but they cannot continue in this equality. Society makes them lose it and they recover it only by the protection of the law.” The protection of law to poor, illiterate and weak is important to ensure equal justice. Legal aid is one of the means to ensure that the opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any person by reason of poverty, illiteracy, etc.

The Constitution of India articulates the significance of broadly accessible legal aid. Under Article 39A of the Constitution of India Part V (the Directive Principles of State Policy) inserted by the

Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, the State is committed to securing that “the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equality” and providing free legal aid “to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disability.”

In furtherance of the Constitutional mandate enshrined in Article 39A, The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 was enacted which allowed any person to seek legal aid under the Act to defend or file a case and if belonging to any of the specified category, viz., member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe; or poor (with an annual income of not more than Rs.50,000/- for cases in the Supreme Court and Rs.25,000/- in other courts); or a victim of human trafficking or a beggar; or a woman or child; or if the individual suffers from any disability; or a victim of mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste atrocity, flood, drought, earthquake, industrial disaster; or an industrial workman; or in custody, including protective custody;



Name : S. Sai Krishna  
Id No : 11800561  
Batch : September  
Branch : Ashoknagar,  
Hyderabad

or facing a charge which might result in imprisonment. In addition, legal aid may also be granted in cases of public importance and special cases considered deserving of legal aid/ services.

The 1987 Act envisaged legal service schemes with respect to paralegals; legal clinics; programmes for unorganised workers, etc. It also made an attempt towards reducing the workload on the courts by providing for setting up of Lok Adalats (under the aegis of National Legal Services Authority) in the court premises to



serve as an alternate dispute resolution system. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, as amended by the Act of 1994 (which came into force on 9th November 1995) established a nation-wide network of Legal Services Authorities at the national, state and district levels. The Legal Services Authorities (Amendment) Act of 2002 led to the setting up of Legal Service Committees at the Supreme Court (SC) and High Courts.

### **Right to Legal Aid – A Constitutional Commitment**

- ★ The Constitution of India gives much emphasis on the constitutionalism and rule of law. In India the rule of law is regarded as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution and also of natural justice. The rule of natural justice says that individuals should not be penalized by decisions affecting their rights or legitimate expectations unless they have been given prior notice of the cases against them, a fair opportunity to answer them, and the opportunity to present their own cases.
- ★ The preamble of the Constitution of India secures to its citizen, social, economic and political justice. Article 14 of the Constitution makes it clear that the State shall not deny to any person equality before law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. The aim of Article 14 is to ensure equal justice. The guarantee of equal justice is meaningless if the poor or illiterate or weak persons cannot enforce their rights because of

their poverty or illiteracy or weakness.

- ★ Articles 38 and 39, of the Constitution of India lay down clear mandate in this regard. According to Article 38 (1), the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic or political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life.
- ★ Article 39-A directs the State to ensure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.
- ★ Right to free legal aid or free legal service is an essential fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India. It forms the basis of reasonable, fair and just liberty under Article 21, which says, “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law”.
- ★ In *State of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Vashi*, the Supreme Court has made it quite clear that it is now well established that the failure to provide free legal aid to an accused at the cost of the State unless refused by the accused, would vitiate the trial. In *M.H*

*Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra*, Justice Krishnaiyer observed that providing free legal aid is the State's duty and not government's charity.

- ★ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also under Article 14 (3) (d) guarantees to everyone: “*Right to be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it*”.

## **Various Dimensions of Free Legal Aid**

### **Duty of the Welfare State**

Being a welfare state, India is taking its long strides towards social justice. In order to mitigate economic inequalities and social disabilities, incorporation of social justice becomes necessary in the administration of justice.

### **Factor for the Survival of Healthy Democracy**

Denial of justice because of poverty amounts to negation of social justice and violation of the principle of our democracy. In order to transform political democracy into social democracy, provision of legal aid is urgently required.

### **Necessary to Implement Rule of Law**

Equal access to justice for the rich and the poor alike, must be

seen as an essential part of maintenance of the rule of law. There could be no rule of law unless the machinery of law is readily accessible to all.

### ***A True Spirit of Equality***

The concept of legal aid is the very spirit of equality and its movement is dedicated to the principle of equal justice to the poor. Equal justice requires a systematic approach in removing the prevailing inequalities and injustices in our society. Legal aid is a vital limb of our Constitution and becomes for this reason, an interpretative doctrine reflecting the desired fulfilment of the basic objectives of equality. Denial of justice to needy person is nothing but a negation of equality.

### ***An Integral Part of Natural Justice***

One of the principles of natural justice namely, *Audi Alteram Partem* (let the other side be heard as well) may become a mere formality in the absence of legal aid.

## ***Challenges***

- ★ Access to legal services continues to be a challenge for a substantial segment of the Indian population due to geographical, resource and infrastructure constraints. Since legal representation is costly and out of reach for the disadvantaged, the need for legal aid arises.
- ★ The problem has been compounded by the failure to mainstream legal-aid services, particularly for the marginalized sections at the panchayat levels. Marginalised communities, especially rural and tribal pop-

ulation; senior citizens; persons with low income; persons with disabilities; victims of drug abuse, human trafficking; prison inmates- the rightful recipients of legal aid- are unable to avail it.

- ★ India has an expansive history of legal aid, backed by decades of legislation, jurisprudential interpretation and numerous state-funded programs. But the absence of a structured and economically viable format has hindered lawyers in actively offering legal assistance to those in need of it.
- ★ The 'pro bono' (Latin, For the public good) culture is still a work in progress. While legal aid is provided and organized by non-governmental organizations, law schools, bar associations and also individual advocates, the demand for legal aid clearly exceeds the supply.
- ★ India's tremendous diversity; population; socio-cultural barriers; liberal laws and jurisprudence in relation to legal aid; and economic growth coupled with the expectations that come with growth have made it a unique and challenging environment for meeting the demand for legal assistance.
- ★ It has been widely acknowledged by legal aid experts that legal education can play a larger role in the country's legal aid movement and that exclusion of law schools from legal aid programs would be self-defeating not just for the cause of legal aid, but also the legal profession.

★ The service-mindedness acquired by law students from performing legal aid work is a useful tool in influencing the social sensitivity of the Bar in the long run. Ironically, the rationale of involving law students in the delivery of legal services, particularly to poor and weaker sections, neither occurred nor found favour with our legal educational reformers for a long time.

★ Even the legal aid authorities, failed to recognize the potential of using legal educational institutions and law students to participate in the budding legal aid movement in the country. It was only in 1997 that the Bar Council of India (BCI) made legal aid a compulsory practical paper to be taught in law colleges all over the country, thereby granting a fresh lease of life to the cause of legal aid.

★ In this context, it is relevant to take note of the Access to Justice Project of UNDP India titled "Study of the Law School based Legal Service Clinics" undertaken in the year 2011 in the 7 states of India. The purpose of the study was to understand the functioning of legal aid cells established by law colleges in these states and suggest ways to improve their functioning to be effective instruments of access to justice.

★ In an alarming finding, despite 82% of the colleges having designated faculty to conduct legal aid activity, only a miniscule of them were providing academic credit to the faculty for the

workload/lecture hours; and to the students in terms of grades or marks. This naturally reduced the enthusiasm and motivation needed to conduct legal aid activities making them burdensome or additional work for teachers and students of law.

- ★ Although majority of the colleges had a good track record in conducting legal literacy programmes, the methods for the same were not entirely useful, being limited to 'public talk' by lawyers with limited or no follow up service.
- ★ Of late legal aid clinics/camps have emerged as an important component of legal education with many reputed law schools/ colleges actively organizing the same, yet many law schools tend to have an ad hoc approach towards legal aid activities. In the other words, the success of these efforts is largely dependent on the

enthusiasm of the faculty and the students.

### Way Forward

- ★ In a democracy, where rule of law is supreme; it is essential to ensure that even the weakest amongst the weak, poorest among the poor, in the country does not suffer injustice arising out of any abrasive action on the part of State or private person.
- ★ As a way forward there is need to ensure capacity building for legal aid movement. This requires strengthening the skills of stakeholders of legal aid; law teachers, lawyers, law students, volunteers such as aaganwadi workers, members of local panchayat, etc. to act as intermediates between rural people and legal service institutions.
- ★ In state of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Pragaji vashi, the Supreme Court has

highlighted the necessity for capacity building and held that in order to provide the "free legal aid" it is necessary to have welltrained lawyers in the country. This is only possible if there are adequate number of law colleges with necessary infrastructure, good teachers and staff.

- ★ The major drawback of legal aid movement in India is the lack of legal awareness. People are not aware of rights and protection available under the law. It needs to be realized that the promotion of awareness regarding legal aid is not the exclusive duty of the legal fraternity. It is equally the concern and responsibility of the society at large.
- ★ Constitutional commitment for legal aid can only be cherished if society comes forward to care for its vulnerable population.



## Abhyasa Program Structure



	Multiple Choice Questions (PRELIMS)	Descriptive Questions (MAINS)	Total Marks
Daily Test	10 (10*1 = 10 marks)	1 (1*10= 10 Marks)	20
Weekly Test	20 (20*1 = 20 marks)	2 (2*10= 20 Marks)	40
Fortnightly Test	30 (30*1 = 30 marks)	3 (3*10= 30 Marks)	60
Monthly Test	50 (50*1 = 50 marks)	5 (5*10= 50 Marks)	100
3 Months Test	100 (100*1 = 100 marks)	10 (10*10= 100 Marks)	200
Total Questions	4250+	500+	



## Daily Intensive Test Practice Program (Along with Classroom Program)



**ANALOG**  
IAS ACADEMY

	Multiple Choice Questions (PRILMS)	Descriptive Questions (MAINS)	Total Marks
Daily Test	10 (10*1 = 10 marks)	1 (10*1 = 10 marks)	20
Weekly Test	20 (20*1 = 20 marks)	2 (20*1 = 20 marks)	40
Frotnightly Test	30 (30*1 = 30 marks)	3 (30*1 = 30 marks)	60
Monthly Test	50 (50*1 = 50 marks)	5 (50*1 = 50 marks)	100
3 Months Test	100 (100*1 = 100 marks)	10 (100*1 = 100 marks)	200
Total Questions	4250+	500+	

**SCIENTIFIC APPROACH FOR LONG TERM MEMORY**

Efficiency curve of forgetting

1 hour - 80% left  
1 day - 67% left  
1 week - 50% left  
1 month - 30% left

The forgetting curve

Long Term Memory Enhancement - Revision Technique

20 - 30 minutes  
After 1 day  
After 2-3 weeks  
After 2-3 months

**Approach of Abhyasa**

Reinforcement technique

5 minutes  
20-30 minutes  
After 1 day  
After 2-3 weeks  
After 2-3 months

Important technique technique

Return to Memory after day  
Classroom by students own  
Daily Revision  
Daily Revision  
Daily Revision  
Monthly Test on 4 weeks revision  
Class Revision Session 1 month



## Intensive revision program (After the classroom program)

- Dedicated Mentors
- Doubt Clearing session with Faculty
- Answer Writing Practice
- Weekly Current Magazine
- Daily and Weekly Test
- 24x7 Library & Reading Room Access





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Humble Contribution to  
Nation Building

**ANALOG IAS ACADEMY IS PROUD TO CONTRIBUTE**

**61 RANK HOLDERS IN UPSC CSE 2019-20**  
towards serving the nation

**OUR TOPPERS**



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**SHRESTHA ANUPAM**  
DELHI



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**PEDDITI DHATRI REDDY**  
HYDERABAD



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**MANOJ MADHAV S**  
BENGALURU



**Pankaj**  
**AIR 56**



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**M V Satya Sai Karthik**  
**AIR 103**



**Keerthana H S**  
**AIR 167**



**Shailaja Das**  
**AIR 190**

**OUR BRANCHES**



Hyderabad : Indira Park  
1-2-288/32, 2nd Floor,  
Indira Park 'X' Road, Domalguda,  
Hyderabad - 500029.

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analog@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analog@gmail.com)



Hyderabad : Madhapur  
101, Ayyappa Central,  
100 Ft Road, Ayyappa Society,  
Madhapur, Hyderabad,  
Telangana 500081

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analog@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analog@gmail.com)



New Delhi  
2nd Floor, building number 5,  
Pusa Road, Karolbagh,  
New Delhi, 110060

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analog.delhi@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analog.delhi@gmail.com)



Vizag  
Office-3, 3rd Floor,  
GK Towers,  
Beside ANR shopping Mall,  
Dwaraka Nagar, Visakhapatnam,  
Andhra Pradesh - 16.

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analogvizag@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analogvizag@gmail.com)



Guntur  
2nd Floor, Eluri Mansion,  
2/1, Arundalpet,  
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh - 522002.

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analog.guntur@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analog.guntur@gmail.com)



Bengaluru  
Adj to Attiguppe Metro Station,  
Near Sharavathi Nursing Home,  
Vijaynagar, Bengaluru - 40.

Ph: 8494990066  
Email: [ias.analog.blr@gmail.com](mailto:ias.analog.blr@gmail.com)