

NOVEMBER 2020

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

A financial model for higher education

A world in Chaos & Threats to Democracy

Inter-State River Water Disputes(Amendment)

Vaccine race and key steps for India

Shifting trajectory of India's foreign policy

Under Biden, the future of US-India ties

17th ASEAN-India Summit

India-Luxembourg Summit

Operation Greens: Top to Total Schemes



PREFACE

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

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

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

This is the 66th edition of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **NOVEMBER 2020** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

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

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

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

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HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

Mansar Lake Development Plan inaugurated

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

In news

- In a move to increase tourism, the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, inaugurated the Mansar Lake Development Plan in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The project is eyed to attract almost 20 lakh tourists every year.
- It shall increase employment opportunities also.

Important value additions

- Mansar Lake is situated 62 km from Jammu.
- It is a lake having a natural border of forest-covered hills.
- Surinsar-Mansar Lakes were designated as Ramsar Convention in November 2005.
- Mansar is of immense importance from Pilgrimage as well Heritage point of view

Traces of Dairy Production found in Indus Valley Civilisation

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Ancient history

In news

- Recently, a study by Indian and Canadian archaeologists has found that dairy products were being produced by the Harappans as far back as 2500 BCE.

Key takeaways

- The finding reveals the earliest evidence of dairy production.
- The results are based on molecular chemical analysis of residue of pottery found at KotadaBhadli, in Gujarat.
- The researchers were able to identify that cattle were used for dairy through a process called stable isotope analysis.

Important value additions

Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)

- It is also known as Harappan Civilization.
- It marks the beginning of Indian history.
- It flourished around 2,500 BC, in the western part of South Asia, in contemporary Pakistan and Western India.
- In the 1920s, the Archaeological Department of India carried out excavations in the Indus valley wherein the ruins of the two old cities, viz. Mohenjodaro and Harappa were unearthed.
- In 1924, John Marshall, Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery of a new civilisation in the Indus valley to the world.

‘International ‘Satavadhanam’ program launched virtually

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I - Culture

In news

- The ‘International ‘Satavadhanam’ program, launched virtually by the Vice President recently.

- He observed that 'avadhanam' as a literary feat has greatly contributed to the Telugu language's glorious tradition.
- The program was organized by Dr. Medasani Mohan under the auspices of Sri Krishnadevaraya Satsang in Tirupati.

Important value additions

- Avadhānam is a literary performance popular from the very ancient days in India.
- It originated as a Sanskrit literary process.
- It was revived by poets in Telugu and Kannada in modern times.
- It involves the partial improvisation of poems using specific themes, metres, forms, or words.

Religion in news: Sarna Religion

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture

In news

- The Jharkhand government has passed a resolution to send the Centre a letter to recognise Sarna religion and include it as a separate code in the Census of 2021.



Important value additions

Sarna religion

- The followers of Sarna faith believe in praying to nature.
- The motto of the faith is "Jal, Jungle, Zameen".
- Its followers pray to the trees and hills while believing in protecting the forest areas.

Do you know?

- It is believed that 50 lakhs tribals in the entire country put their religion as 'Sarna' in the 2011 census, although it was not a code.
- Jharkhand has 32 tribal groups of which 8 are from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.

Place in news: Peru

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Geography

In news

- Peru's fifth president in five years, Manuel Merino, was forced out of power, just five days after taking office, as massive protests swept Peru over alleged bribery - charges on the President.



Important value additions

Peru

- It is a country in western South America.
- It is bordered in the north by Ecuador and Colombia, in the east by Brazil, in the southeast by Bolivia, in the south by Chile, and in the south and west by the Pacific Ocean.
- Peru is a megadiverse country with habitats ranging from the peaks of the Andes mountains vertically extending from the north to the southeast of the country to the tropical Amazon Basin rainforest in the east with the Amazon river.
- The country forms part of The Pacific Pumas, a political and economic grouping of countries along Latin America's Pacific coast that share common trends of positive growth, stable macroeconomic foundations, improved governance and an openness to global integration.
- Its Capital is Lima.

Place in news: Puerto Rico

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

In news

- For the third time in ten years, the United States territory of Puerto Rico has voted in favour of statehood, and thus be treated at par with the current 50 states of the country.



Important value additions

Puerto Rico

- It is an unincorporated territory of the United States.
- Puerto Ricans have been citizens of the United States since 1917, and can move freely between the island and the mainland.
- As it is not a state, Puerto Rico does not have a vote in the U.S. Congress, which governs the unincorporated territory with jurisdiction under the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950.
- It is located in the northeast Caribbean Sea.
- It includes the eponymous main island and several smaller islands, such as Mona, Culebra, and Vieques.
- The capital and most populous city is San Juan.

Do you know?

- Originally populated by the indigenous Taíno people, Puerto Rico was colonized by Spain following the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493.
- In 1898, following the Spanish–American War, the United States acquired Puerto Rico, which remains an unincorporated territorial possession, making it the world's oldest colony.

Subdued Northeast Monsoon

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Climatology

In news

- Rainfall over the southern peninsular region of India has been deficient so far which indicates that the northeast monsoon has remained dull this year.

Key takeaways

Reasons for deficient rainfall this Northeast monsoon

- **Prevailing La Niña conditions in the Pacific Ocean:** La Niña conditions enhance the rainfall associated with the Southwest monsoon, but has a negative impact on rainfall associated with the Northeast monsoon.
- **Inter Tropical Convective Zone (ITCZ):** The current position of the ITCZ has also contributed to the poor rainfall during the ongoing monsoon season. Currently, the ITCZ is located to the north of its normal position.

Important value addition

Northeast monsoon

The Northeast monsoon occurs during October to December.

It is confined to the Southern peninsula.

It is also called the winter monsoon.


- Northeast monsoon is important for Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal, Yanam, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, north interior Karnataka, Mahe and Lakshadweep.
- Tamil Nadu records about 48% of its annual rainfall during these months, making it the key factor for undertaking agricultural activities.
- Some South Asian countries such as Maldives, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, too, record rainfall during October to December.

La Niña

- La Niña (Spanish for 'little girl') refers to the large-scale cooling of the ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, along with changes in the tropical atmospheric circulation.
- It usually has the opposite impacts on weather and climate as El Niño, which is the warm phase of the so-called El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

ITCZ

- The ITCZ is a low-pressure belt, whose northward and southward movements along the equator determine the precipitation in the tropics.




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Starting from 15th November



By **M. TARIQUE SIR**
THE BEST HISTORY FACULTY IN INDIA

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Discrepancies pointed out in Central Vista Redevelopment Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Parliament

In news

Central Vista Redevelopment project was in news recently when a Senior Advocate argued about the discrepancies in its process in a Supreme Court hearing.



Important value additions

- The Central Vista
- It is a 3 km stretch in the heart of New Delhi that runs from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.
- It is flanked by large green spaces and significant structures such as Parliament, the Secretariat buildings and the National Archives.
- The Central government is redeveloping the three-km-long Central Vista and Parliament.
- A common Central secretariat will be constructed for all ministries that are currently spread over many buildings across Delhi.
- The new Parliament has to be ready by March 2022.
- The revamped Central Vista, complete with public amenities and parking, has to be ready by November 2021 and the new common Central secretariat by March 2024.
- The Parliament House and North and South Blocks will not be demolished, but their usage may change.
- The rest of the buildings that came up post-1947, including Shastri Bhavan and Krishi Bhavan, are likely to be demolished.

Single Male Parent eligible for child care leave

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

In news

- Male Government employees who are single parents will now be eligible for child care leave.

Key takeaways

- Single male parents, includes unmarried employees, widowers and divorcees, who may be expected to take up the responsibility of caring for a child single-handedly.
- Child care leave can be granted at 100% of leave salary for the first 365 days and 80% of leave salary for the next 365 days.
- In case of a disabled child, the condition of availing child care leave up to the age of 22 years of the child has been removed.
- Now, child care leave can be availed by a government servant for a disabled child of any age.

Do you know?

- Child Care Leave is treated as earned leave.
- It is generally granted to women employees.
- Women employees having minor children (children upto 18 years of age) may be granted child care leave for a maximum period of two years (i.e. 730 days) during their entire service for taking care of upto two minor children
- The child care leave is granted either for rearing children or to look after any of the needs of children like examination, sickness etc.

The road to economic recovery

Context: The return of economic activity and declining active Covid-19 cases in India have raised hopes of recovery

Is the global resurgence of Covid-19 a threat to the stock market recovery?

- The stock market has responded enthusiastically with large cap indices trading a little below their pre-Covid highs.
- Investment Flows and improving fundamentals have pulled the market to current levels. Undoubtedly, we are not out of the woods.
- Factors like the ongoing second wave in the US and Europe, the US election results etc will impact our markets, albeit on a temporary basis.

What factors will determine the recovery path for firms?

- India's economic recovery will be a function of top-down factors like fiscal and monetary stimulus as well as bottom-up entrepreneurial efforts.
- Firms with less leverage, good governance, and the ability to raise capital, cut costs with the precision of a surgeon's knife, and innovate to adapt in the current situation will not only survive but also prosper.

When the pandemic continues, what factors raise hopes of recovery?

- Active cases are coming down despite normalisation of economic activities.
- A **vaccine breakthrough** seems to be on the horizon.

- **Macroeconomic Stability:** Lower oil, gold and Chinese goods imports have made India current account-surplus. Foreign exchange reserves are about to exceed foreign exchange debt.
- **Foreign Investment:** Global firms are opening up their purses for direct as well as portfolio investment.
- **Agriculture reforms** will materially benefit a large rural population.
- **Labour reforms** and postal life insurance schemes are steps in the right direction for India becoming a manufacturing hub.

Way Ahead: Areas where Policy focus is needed

- **Credit Transmission:** The monetary policy is accommodative but credit transmission needs to improve further.
- **Borrowing Costs:** Policy rates are at lifetime low levels but the cost of borrowing needs to be lowered for below-AA rated borrowers.
- **Sector Specific Stimulus:** Fiscal stimulus has supported growth at the bottom of the pyramid but sectors like travel, tourism, hotel, retailing, aviation, infrastructure etc require more support.
- **Non-Tax resources:** The path of fiscal prudence is important but it needs to be achieved by raising non-tax resources like proceeds from strategic divestment and monetisation of assets, unlocking capital stuck in gold deposits etc.
- **Rule of Law:** Ease of doing business has improved but rule of law needs to be improved. Our laws are being made for the lowest common denominator as crooks escape without adequate punishment. This increases the cost of compliance for the rest. Investment cannot pick up sustainably unless rule of law is experienced by investors.
- **Inequality:** Big has become bigger in these challenging times, but eventually small and medium firms need to become competitive and prosper.

Initiatives for Good and Vigilant Governance launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Governance

In news

- Recently, the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) has come up with new initiatives for good and vigilant governance on the last day of the Vigilance Awareness Week 2020.

Key takeaways

- "Ideas Box on Good Governance Practices in a Pandemic" has been launched and operationalised both on the DARPG as well as on the MyGov platform.
- Social media tweets on the "Best Practices in e-governance" have been launched.
- Round table discussion on "Satark Bharat, Samridh Bharat" (Vigilant India, Prosperous India) was held.

Important value additions

Vigilance Awareness Week

- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) observes the Week every year during the week of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birthday (31st October).
- **Objective:** (1) To affirm India's commitment to the promotion of integrity and probity in public life through citizen participation; (2) To reiterate Government's resolve to continue the crusade against corruption.

- **Theme for 2020:** Satark Bharat, Samriddh Bharat

Central Vigilance Commission

- It is an independent statutory body.
- It is only responsible to the Parliament.
- It is the apex vigilance institution monitoring all vigilance activity under the Central Government.
- It advises various authorities in Central Government organisations in planning, executing, reviewing and reforming their vigilance work.
- It was recommended by K Santhanam Committee
- The Parliament enacted the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.
- It is composed of a Central Vigilance Commissioner (Chairperson) and not more than 2 Vigilance Commissioners (members).
- They are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs and the Leader of the Opposition in the House of the People.
- Tenure: 4 years from the date on which they enter their office or till they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

A financial model for higher education

Context: National Education Policy 2020 that aims to achieve gross enrolment ratio of 50% in Higher Education by 2035.

Do You Know?

- Presently, India's gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education is 28%. It lags behind the global average of 38% and behind China's 51%.
- 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) will admit as many as 15,000 undergraduates this year, while just one state university in the United States (US), Arizona State University, admits 13,500 undergraduates each year.

Financial Concerns with Higher Education

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Achieving the targets in NEP 2020 calls for the scaling up of existing institutions as well as the creation of new premier ones.
- **Need for Money:** While the scaling-up of existing institutions and the creation of new institutions require additional budgetary allocations, running them well calls for money on a recurring basis.
- **Outdated Financing Model:** NEP is trying to address this issue of funding by allocating a fixed percentage of GDP for higher education and providing granting administrative autonomy to these institutes. Currently, these institutions receive upwards of 80% of funds from the government.

What is needed is a structural overhaul and creation of a diversified financial model for our institutions. Some of the financial models that can be adopted are:

1. Restructuring of Tuition Fees – Use of Income Contingency Loans

- Tuition fees contribute up to a quarter of the income for the most universities in the US, Australia and Asia.
- In the IITs, Tuition fees contributes to only 6-7%, since only a fraction (approximately one-third) of students pay the upper limit of tuition fees. Others pay a much lower amount, based on their social category and economic status.

- This contribution can be increased not only by increasing the highly subsidised tuition fees, but also by bringing all students into the fee-paying category.
- This can be achieved by decoupling students and their families from the upfront financial barriers by offering them collateral-free and interest-free **Income Contingency Loans (ICLs) through a centralised financial structure.**
- Australia's Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) is a widely-praised ICL model that is managed by the Australian taxation office. The repayments are linked to the debtor's income level and are collected directly by the Australian tax authorities.
- ICLs are different from the education loans offered in the US that have caused massive student debt problems.

2. Research grants/equity investments in startups/technology transfer fees

- A third of the income could come from the research activities. Though research is primarily government-sponsored, universities in US and France raise up to a third of their research funds from non-government sources
- HEI like IITs could tap funds from the private sector, invest in and incubate research start-ups, and strengthen technology transfer and intellectual property licensing mechanisms.
- Mechanisms such as Foundation of Innovative Technology Transfer (FITT) at IIT Delhi and Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) at IIT Bombay may facilitate institutional equity investment in deep-tech start-ups.
- The recent launch of the world's most affordable Covid-19 testing kit by IIT Delhi and the supply of over 4.5 million export-quality personal protective equipment by IIT Delhi start-ups are small demonstrations of the potential such investments by HEIs can generate.

3. Endowment donations

- Harvard, Stanford and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have pioneered the concept of endowments, now adopted by public universities across the world.
- An endowment is an **aggregation of assets invested by a college or university** to support its educational mission in perpetuity.
- An institution's endowment actually comprises hundreds or thousands of individual endowments.
- An endowment allows donors to transfer their private dollars to public purposes with the assurance that their gifts will serve these purposes for as long as the institution continues to exist. An endowment represents a compact between a donor and an institution.
- Endowments are raised not only from the alumni but also from industry, philanthropists and governments.
- Last year, IIT Delhi launched an endowment fund with a target of raising \$1 billion, that will provide a conservative investment income of ₹700 crore every year.
- A successful endowment model will require the creation of fund-raising teams and investment policy changes to overcome bureaucratic hurdles.

Conclusion

Tuition fees, research grants, and endowment funds should contribute a third each to income of Higher Educational Institutions so as to increase their autonomy and hence their global ranking

Connecting the dots

- Right to Education Act
- Operation Digital Board

[Lakhs of people benefit through Tele-Law](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Governance

In news

- Tele-Law was in the news recently.
- Almost 4 Lakh beneficiaries having received legal advice under this through CSCs (Common Service Centres).

Important value additions**Tele-Law programme**

- It was launched by Department of Justice in 2017 to address cases at pre-litigation stage.
- Under this programme, smart technology of video conferencing, telephone /instant calling facilities available at the vast network of Common Service Centres at the Panchayat level are used to connect the vulnerable communities with the Panel Lawyers for seeking timely and valuable legal advice.
- It is proactively outreached to groups and communities through a cadre of frontline volunteers provided by NALSA and CSC- e Gov.

Statements recorded by officers under the NDPS Act cannot be treated as confessions:SC

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Judiciary

In news

- The SC has given its ruling on whether statements recorded under Section 67 of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act can be admissible as confessional statements during criminal trials.

Key takeaways

- The majority judgment ruled that statements recorded by officers under the NDPS Act cannot be treated as confessions.
- The majority view held that if confessional statements made under the Act are held as the basis to convict a person, it would be a direct infringement of constitutional guarantees
- The court also held that when a reference is made to “police officers”, it does not only mean a police officer belonging to a state police force but includes officers who may belong to other departments.
- The ruling will impact evidence in several cases, including the alleged drugs case being investigated by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) where actor Rhea Chakraborty and 24 others have been named as accused.

Computation of maintenance to estranged wife will include child care: SC

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

In news

- The Supreme Court recently ruled that Computation of maintenance to estranged wife will include child care.

Key takeaways

- The Supreme Court said if an estranged wife gave up her job to take care of children and the elderly in the family, then this will have to be taken into consideration by the family court while quantifying monthly interim maintenance payable to her by the husband.

- The court also found that pleas for grant of interim maintenance were pending in courts for years even though the law stipulated a 60-day window, from the date of issuance of notice by the court to a husband on the estranged wife's application, for grant of maintenance.
- This is the first time that the highest court has considered the sacrifices made by career women in taking care of children.
- The SC ruled that this would be an added component for enhancing the grant of interim compensation to her, so that she could lead a life almost akin to what she was used to when all was well in the matrimonial home.
- Normally, the courts take into account the husband's income and assets while quantifying interim maintenance to an estranged wife.
- As of now, Neither the Hindu Marriage Act nor the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act specified the date from which interim maintenance was to be granted, leading to exercise of discretion by family courts.

The financial capacity of States is being weakened

Context: Through various means the Union government has substantially reduced the fiscal resource capacity of the States.

States need resources to deliver the developmental aspirations of its citizens but unfortunately, the financial capacity of the States is structurally being weakened. Some of the factors that has caused this weakness are:

1. Declining Actual devolution

- Finance Commissions recommend the share of States in the taxes raised by the Union government. Their recommendations are normally adhered to.
- The year 2014-15 commenced with a shock: actual devolution was 14% less than the Finance Commission's projection. Subsequent devolutions have been consistently less every year, ending the period 2019-20 with a whopping -37%
- Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, the States got ₹7,97,549crore less than what was projected by the Finance Commission.
- This is an undeniable and substantial reduction of the fiscal resource capacity of the States.

2. Shrinking the divisible pool

- Various cesses and surcharges levied by the Union government are retained fully by it. They do not go into the divisible pool. This allows the Centre to raise revenues, yet not share them with the States.
- CAG has also recently highlighted the misuse of Cess pool by Union Government. For details click [here](#)
- When taxes are replaced with cesses and surcharges, as has been done repeatedly by the government in the case of petrol and diesel, the consumer pays the same price. But the Union government keeps more of that revenue and reduces the size of the divisible pool. As a result, the States lose out on their share.
- Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, cesses and surcharges has increased from **9.3% to 15% of the gross tax revenue** of the Union government
- In 2019-20 alone, the **Union government expected ₹3,69,111crores from cesses and surcharges**. This will not be shared with the States.
- This government has exploited this route to reduce the size of the divisible pool.

3. GST Shortfall

- The ability of the States to expand revenue has been constrained since the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime was adopted.

- Under the GST (Compensation to States) Act, states are assured compensation for the gap between revenues at a compounded growth rate of 14 per cent over the base year revenue of 2015-16 and the actual revenues from GST for five years ending June 2022 through levy of cess on demerit and sin goods
- GST compensation to States will end with 2021-22. But cesses will continue.
- During 2019-20, the cess collected was ₹95,444 crore. With the abnormal exception of this year, the years ahead will generate similar or more cess revenue.
- Due to COVID-19 induced lockdown, it is expected that there will be nearly ₹3 lakh crore GST shortfall to the States and the Centre is saying that it will only compensate ₹1.8 lakh crores.
- On the other hand, states have been arguing that the Union government should borrow this year's GST shortfall in full and release it to the States. The entire loan borrowed can be repaid out of the assured cess revenue that will continue to accrue beyond 2022.

Consequences

- **Reduced Grants:** Apart from the streams discussed above, Central grants are also likely to drop significantly this year. For instance, ₹31,570 crore was allocated as annual grants to Karnataka. Actual grants may be down to ₹17,372 crore.
- **Revenue Shortfall:** Due to all these reasons, the States may experience a fall of 20%-25% in their revenues this year.
- **Increased borrowings by States:** To overcome such extreme blows to their finances and discharge their welfare and development responsibilities, the States are now forced to resort to colossal borrowings. Repayment burden will overwhelm State budgets for several years.
- **Social Impact:** After paying loans and interest, salaries and pensions, and establishment expenses, there will be little available for development and welfare. As a result, adverse consequences will be felt in per capita income, human resource development and poverty

Conclusion

States are at the forefront of development and generation of opportunities and growth. Strong States lead to a stronger India. The systematic weakening of States serves neither federalism nor national interest.

Arbitration And Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 promulgated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Polity and Governance

In news

- Indian President promulgated the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 to amend Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 further.

Key takeaways

- The Ordinance aims to ensure that all the stakeholders get an opportunity to seek unconditional stay of enforcement of arbitral awards where the underlying arbitration agreement or contract is induced by fraud or corruption.
- An addition has been made to Section 36 whereby if the Court is satisfied that a prima facie case is made out that the arbitration agreement or contract was induced or effected by fraud or corruption, it will stay the award unconditionally.
- The ordinance also does away with the 8th Schedule of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 which contained the necessary qualifications for accreditation of arbitrators.

Habeas Corpus

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Constitution

In news

- Bombay High Court heard Habeas Corpus plea of a senior journalist, who was arrested in a connection with abetment to suicide case by Police.

Important value additions

- The Indian Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to issue writs for enforcement of any of the fundamental rights conferred by Part III of Indian Constitution under Article 32.
- Thus the power to issue writs is primarily a provision made to make available the Right to Constitutional Remedies to every citizen.
- There are five types of Writs: Habeas Corpus, Mandamus, Prohibition, Certiorari and Quo warranto.
- **Mandamus:** A judicial writ issued as a command to an inferior court or ordering a person to perform a public or statutory duty.
- **Prohibition:** A writ of prohibition is a writ directing a subordinate to stop doing something the law prohibits. This writ is often issued by a superior court to the lower court directing it not to proceed with a case which does not fall under its jurisdiction.
- **Certiorari:** In law, certiorari is a court process to seek judicial review of a decision of a lower court or government agency.
- **Quo warranto:** Quo warranto is a prerogative writ requiring the person to whom it is directed to show what authority they have for exercising some right, power, or franchise they claim to hold.
- **Habeas Corpus:** It literally means "you may have the body." The writ is issued to produce a person who has been detained, whether in prison or in private custody, before a court and to release him if such detention is found illegal.

Do you know?

- In September, 2018, the Supreme Court reiterated that writ of habeas corpus can't be filed for a person in police custody ordered by a Magistrate.
- The Supreme Court bench said that as the custody is awarded by the Magistrate, it cannot be considered unlawful detention.

The End of Inspector Raj in India's IT Sector

Context: The Centre did away with the onerous Other Service Provider (OSP) regulations and issued new guidelines for the IT/ITeS industry. For an industry that employs close to 50 lakh people, this is a significant development.

What are Other Service Provider (OSP)?

- OSPs are entities providing applications, IT-enabled or any kind of outsourcing services using telecom resources. The term refers to BPOs, KPOs (knowledge process outsourcing), ITES, call centres, among others.
- In other words, OSPs are companies using telecom resources for its operations like tele-banking, tele-medicine, tele-trading, e-commerce, call-centre operations etc
- OSP regulations was introduced in the 1990s when business process outsourcing (BPO) started in India and the Indian telecom industry was going beyond BSNL.

- The government then introduced OSP terms and conditions to help the industry grow and ensure that they don't suffer due to lack of resources.

What was the earlier regulatory regime for OSPs?

- The conditions included registrations for OSP licence, frequent reporting obligation to track the BPO firms and bank guarantees.
- What started as a facilitator became a burden as the industry grew over years.
- For instance, a company applying for a licence should pay a bank guarantee of Rs 1 crore per office. So, if the company has 76 offices, it should pay Rs 76 crore as bank guarantee. While a large firm can afford this, it is a burden on smaller companies.
- For companies that were evaluating whether or not to use India as a base for new operations, these regulations imposed high level of constraints for their operations and thus discouraged them to establish their businesses in India.

New guidelines

- Requirements such as bank guarantees, frequent reporting obligations, penal provisions, the obligation to ensure that each additional site obtains a separate registration etc. **have been removed.**
- The registration requirement for OSPs has been done away with altogether.
- **Narrow definition:** The BPO industry engaged in data-related work have been taken out of the ambit of OSP regulations.
- Those few entities to whom OSP regulations now apply only need to comply with a few security obligations.
- In addition, restrictions such as the need for a network diagram and using static IP addresses for all agents working from home, have all been done away with.

Merits of the new regulations

- **End of Inspector Raj:** The regulatory regime for OSPs has now been liberalised thus effectively put an end to the inspector raj that these outdated regulations had perpetuated for so long.
- **Ease of doing business enhanced:** Doing away with frequent reporting obligations will tremendously reduce the compliance burden of the business process management (BPM) industry.
- **Prevents Corruption:** The previous broad definition was the reason for random acts of harassment by department of telecommunications (DoT) officials who were free to use the ambiguity inherent in the language of rules & regulations.
- **Makes India IT Sector Globally Competitive:** It is aimed at providing a strong impetus to the industry and positioning India as one of the most competitive IT jurisdictions in the world.
- **Flexibility to companies:** With the concept of remote working picking up and OSP relaxed, it gives a company a choice on how they want their delivery model to be.
- **Boost to Startups:** Smaller firms and startups, for whom the bank guarantee were an additional strain, are relaxed now. This makes it easier for entrepreneur to start his business operations in this field without much financial constraints
- **Adaptation of work models to new normal:** The new regulations will facilitate WFH or 'work from anywhere', which is likely to stay at the back of the pandemic. For instance, companies can have their employee in the North-East or in any remote corner in India and still take advantage of the remote working set up

- **Decongesting Urban Metropolis:** It is expected that close to 25-30 percent of the IT workforce could move to smaller cities and towns in the next five years, which will help reduce the Urban load and move towards regionally balanced development.
- **Attract Foreign Investment:** With OSP regulations no longer a constraint, and offshoring (moving talents to low-cost countries like India) picking up, global companies can expand their India operations quickly.
- **Boost to Women Employment:** One of the advantage is that companies can tap into a new talent pool such as the young female workforce in tier-2 & tier-3 cities who, due to social compulsions, find it suitable to work remotely from their native place.

Conclusion

- The cadres of bureaucrats whose business was to manage this obscure corner of the regulatory landscape will have to be disbanded and put to better use elsewhere
- These reforms combined with labour and agriculture reforms all point towards Liberalisation 2.0 of Indian Economy.

Connecting the dots

- Labour Reforms: Click [here](#)
- Agricultural Reforms: Click [here](#)

Various development projects to be inaugurated in Varanasi

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Ancient history & GS-II – Policies and interventions;

In news

- Indian Prime Minister will inaugurate various development projects in Varanasi including Sarnath Light and Sound show.

Important value additions

Sarnath

- Sarnath is a place located 10 km north-east of Varanasi city near the confluence of the Ganges and the Varuna rivers in Uttar Pradesh, India.
- **The Deer Park in Sarnath:** Gautama Buddha first taught the Dharma and Buddhist Sangha came into existence through the enlightenment of Kondanna.
- It is also referred to as Isipatana.
- This city is mentioned by the Buddha as one of the four places of pilgrimage which his devout followers should visit.
- It was also the site of the Buddha's DhammacakkappavattanaSutta, which was his first teaching after attaining enlightenment.
- Under this Sutta, he taught the four noble truths and the teachings associated with it.

Do you know?

- Singhpur, a village approximately 1km away from the site, was the birthplace of Shreyansanath, the Eleventh Tirthankara of Jainism.

Haryana State Employment Of Local Candidates Bill, 2020

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

In news

- On the lines of Andhra Pradesh government, Haryana too has announced that it wants 75% of private sector jobs in the state, till a certain salary slab, reserved for local candidates.

Key takeaways

- The state Assembly has passed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020 paving way for more employment opportunities for locals in private sector.
- All the companies, societies, trusts, limited liability partnership firms, partnership firms and any person employing 10 or more persons shall come under the ambit of this Act.
- It shall not include the central government or state government or any organisation owned by the central or state government.
- A candidate “who is domiciled in State of Haryana” is called a local candidate and shall be able to avail the benefit of this reservation while seeking employment in private sector.
- Every employer shall be required to employ 75% local candidates for the posts where the gross monthly salary or wages are not more than Rs. 50,000 or as notified by the government from time to time.
- An employer can claim exemption from this 75% recruitment restriction, but only after going through a long procedure and only if the government appointed officers believe that the employer’s request seeking exemption holds merit.
- The employer can be fined with a minimum Rs. 10,000 to a maximum Rs. 2 lakh once it is established that the employer has committed a violation of provisions of the Act.

Do you know?

Does this reservation Bill violate Article 16 of the Constitution of India?

- Concerns were raised in Haryana Vidhan Sabha that the Bill violates Article 16 of the Indian Constitution
- However, Haryana government claims that while Article 16 talks about the “public employment”, the Bill only pertains to “private sector employment”.

Tamil Nadu NEET Quota

Context: Tamil Nadu Governor gave his assent to a Bill that sought to reserve 7.5% seats in undergraduate medical admissions for government-school students who qualified NEET. The Tamil Nadu Assembly had passed a Bill on the quota in September this year.

What Is NEET?

- It is an entrance exam for medical courses like MBBS, BDS, and Post Graduation in both government and private medical colleges.
- NEET-UG replaced the All India Pre Medical Test (AIPMT) and all individual MBBS exams conducted by states or colleges themselves in 2013.
- The NTA – National Testing Agency, the regulatory body for NEET UG Exam, conducts it every year in various parts of India in multiple languages.
- The responsibility of the NTA is limited to the conduct of the entrance examination, declaration of result and for providing an “All India Rank Merit List” to the Directorate General Health Service, Government of India for the conduct of counselling for **15% All India Quota Seats** and for providing the result to States/other Counselling Authorities.
- NEET is based on a core curriculum approach, whereby the syllabi of all the school boards have been taken into consideration.

Criticism of NEET: Click [here](#)

Why was Tamil Nadu opposed to NEET?

- Among the States that were strident in their opposition to NEET (National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test) was Tamil Nadu.
- One of the primary arguments that were made was that NEET would push certain categories of students out of the race for MBBS degrees, and its **goal of providing equitable opportunities** for all would be frustrated.
- Students from government schools and rural areas would **not be able to afford the coaching** that would be essential for the competitive test, the State government argued.
- Since 2017, when NEET was implemented in Tamil Nadu, only 14 students from government schools have managed to get admitted to the MBBS course.

What did the State do?

- The inevitability of using NEET to select candidates for MBBS seats led critics to point to unique disadvantages for students from government schools, and seek redress on this front.
- The government ran free coaching centres for NEET to help students prepare for the examination.
- In 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, of the nearly 700 government-school students who cleared the NEET, nine entered government medical colleges, according to data provided by Tamil Nadu health authorities.
- A **Commission** was set by Tamil Nadu State government and headed by retired High Court judge **P. Kalaiyaran**, to set right the “de facto inequalities” between government-school students and private-school students.
- The Commission, in its report, made the observation that students from government schools are placed at a disadvantage, compared to their counterparts in private schools, *“due to a cognitive gap created by socio-economic factors such as caste, wealth, parental occupation, parental education, gender, etc., and these psychological and socio-economic barriers cannot be bridged by a few months of intensive coaching for NEET, even if provided for free”*.
- It recommended setting aside 10% seats for government students.
- As a result, the Assembly passed a Bill that sought to provide 7.5% horizontal reservation for government-school students in MBBS admissions.
- **Horizontal reservations** are applied irrespective of the community a student belongs to, just as in the case of quota for persons with disability or wards of ex-service personnel.
- The government also specified that if a government-school student has scored high marks, she or he could also opt to be allotted a seat based on their community reservation.

How many seats will students from government schools be eligible for this admission season?

- In the MBBS course in government medical colleges, 15% seats are set aside under the All India Quota, and the remaining 85% will be available for the State Quota, to be filled up according to the rule of reservation.
- A further percentage of seats (65% in private self-financing colleges, and 50% in private, self-financing minority colleges) will also be added to the government’s quota.
- This year, it adds up to a total of 4,058 seats, and 7.5% of that comes to 304 seats, according to State health authorities.
- State government has reiterated that the integrity of the 69% caste-based reservation for medical admissions would be preserved while admitting students to ensure that it is not violated in any manner

Conclusion

- Where 14 students were admitted in three years, 304 students from government schools will have the opportunity to take up medical education, provided they have cleared NEET.

Special Marriages Act (SMA)

Context: The Allahabad High Court in a recent ruling declared that the conversion for the sole purpose of marriage as "null and void".

What is Special Marriage Act?

- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA) was enacted to facilitate the marriage of couples professing different faiths and preferring a civil wedding.
- People from different castes or religions or states get married under SMA in which marriage is solemnized by way of registration.
- The prime purpose of the Act was to address Inter-religious marriages and to establish marriage as a secular institution bereft of all religious formalities, which requires registration alone.

What are the features of the SMA?

- **Basic age Criteria:** The marriage of any two persons may be solemnised under the SMA, subject to the man having completed 21 years of age and the woman 18.
- **Basic Conditions needs to be met:** Neither should have a spouse living; both should be capable of giving valid consent, should not suffer from any mental disorder of a kind that renders them unfit for marriage and procreation.
- **Restrictions related to Religious laws:** They should not be within the degrees of prohibited relationship — that is, they should not be related in such a way that their religion does not permit such marriages.
- **Notice Procedure:** Parties to an intended marriage should give notice to the 'marriage officer' of the district in which one of them had resided for at least 30 days. The notice will have to be entered in a 'Marriage Notice Book' and a copy of it displayed at a conspicuous place in the office.
- The marriage has to be solemnised within three months of the notice, and if it is not, a fresh notice will be needed.
- **Provision for objections to the marriage:** Any person can object to the marriage within **30 days of the publication of the notice** on the ground that it contravenes one of the conditions for a valid marriage. The marriage officer has to inquire into the objection and give a decision within 30 days. If he refuses permission for the marriage, an appeal can be made to the district court. The court's decision will be final.
- **Member of Undivided Family:** Also, the Act says that when a member of an undivided family who professes Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jaina religions, gets married under SMA, it results in his or her "severance" from the family.

What are the Criticisms of SMA i.e. the hurdles faced by inter-faith couples?

- **Practical Difficulties:** The provisions relating to notice, publication and objection have rendered it difficult for many people intending to solemnise inter-faith marriages.
- **Vulnerable to coercive tactics by family:** Publicity in the local registration office may mean that family members objecting to the union may seek to stop it by coercion.
- **Danger posed by fringe groups:** There have been reports of right-wing groups opposed to inter-faith marriages keeping a watch on the notice boards of marriage offices and taking down the details of the parties so that they can be dissuaded or coerced into abandoning the idea.
- **Intrusion of Privacy:** The law's features on prior public notice being given and objections being called from any quarter, places a question mark on the safety and privacy of those intending to marry across religions.

- **Violation of Right to Equality:** In the case of **Hindu and Muslim marriage laws**, there is no requirement of prior notice and, therefore, such a requirement in the SMA is considered as violation of the right to equality of those opting for marriage under SMA.
- **Pushes for religious conversion:** Due to complexities involved in SMA, the intending couple finds it easier to settle for marriage under the personal law of one of them, with the other opting for religious conversion. While conversion to Islam and Christianity has formal means, there is no prescribed ceremony for conversion to Hinduism.

Are there laws against conversion for the sake of marriage?

- The Himachal Pradesh **Freedom of Religion Act**, 2019, and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, both prohibit conversion by misrepresentation, force, fraud, undue influence, inducement, allurement and 'by marriage'.
- There is a separate section in both laws under which, not conversion for the purpose of marriage, but marriage done solely for the purpose of conversion, may be declared null and void by a family court based on a suit by either party.

Conclusion

Marriage being a personal matter has to be sparingly regulated, unless it leads to social evils. Freedom of choice should be given primacy in a liberal Democratic country like India.

Connecting the dots

Minimum [age of marriage for women](#)

All the Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) to be covered under the Energy Conservation (EC) Act, 2001

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Energy sector

In news

- The Union Ministry of Power, Government of India has issued a notification to cover all the Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) under the preview of the Energy Conservation (EC) Act, 2001.

Key takeaways

- The notification was formulated in consultation with Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- According to it, all entities having issued distribution license by State/Joint Electricity Regulatory Commission under the Electricity Act, 2003 (36 of 2003)" are notified as Designated Consumers (DCs).
- After this notification, all the DISCOMs will be governed under the various provisions of EC Act, such as Appointment of Energy Manager, Energy Accounting & Auditing etc. for each DISCOMs.
- Earlier, the DISCOMs whose annual energy losses were equal to or above 1000 MU were only covered as DCs.
- Now with this notification, the number of DISCOMs covered under the EC Act will increase from 44 to 102.

Important value additions

Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

- It assists in developing policies and strategies.
- **Objective:** Reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.

Media regulation that is quite over the top

Context: The government in its latest move has brought online news and current affairs portals along with “films and audio-visual programmes made available by online content providers” under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

In other words, the Union government has brought Over The Top (OTT) platforms, or video streaming service providers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and others, under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Do You Know?

- The Press Council of India regulates the print media,
- News Broadcasters Association (NBA) represents and regulates the news channels,
- Advertising Standards Council of India regulates advertising,
- Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) monitors films.
- However, there is no law or autonomous body governing digital content.

Brief Background to the issue

- From time to time, the government had indicated the necessity to monitor these platforms.
- In October 2019, the government had indicated that it will issue “negative” list of don’ts for the video streaming services like Netflix and Hotstar.
- Government also wanted the platforms to come up with a self-regulatory body on the lines of the News Broadcasting Standards Authority.
- Anticipating the government’s intervention, in January 2019, eight video streaming services had **signed a self-regulatory code** that laid down a set of guiding principles for content on these platforms

What was the self-regulatory Code adopted by OTT platforms?

The code adopted by the OTTs prohibited five types of content. This includes

1. Content that deliberately and maliciously disrespects the national emblem or national flag
2. Any visual or story line that promotes child pornography
3. Any content that “maliciously” intends to outrage religious sentiments
4. Any content that “deliberately and maliciously” promotes or encourages terrorism
5. Any content that has been banned for exhibition or distribution by law or court.

The government had refused to support this code.

Implication of the Bringing digital media under the I&B Ministry

- **No more unregulated:** This will give the government control over OTT platforms, which were unregulated till now
- **Treats to freedom of speech:** Such regulatory powers would arm the executive with control over the free press, thereby essentially making it unfree.

- **Matter is being heard in Supreme Court:** Passing such executive orders hijacks public interest litigation in the Supreme Court relating to content on “Over The Top” (OTT) platforms
- **It seeks to divide and rule the press** by creating an artificial distinction between the new-age digital media (the stand-alone news portals which are already struggling to stay afloat) — which is the media of the future, the media of the millennial generation — and the older print and TV news media.
- **Disincentives Innovation:** The fate of the digital media under the control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting leaves little scope for hope, and dooms the sector for both the media practitioner and the media entrepreneur and for the startups that have been the new vibrant face of contemporary journalism.
- **Not in Democratic Spirit:** The move is tantamount to nipping in the bud a promise of combative journalism. It makes our democracy the poorer for it.

Conclusion

Government should walk a tight rope to ensure that content on digital medium doesn't affect the Nation's & Society's interest but should also make sure that regulations don't stifle the freedom of speech & expression.

Connecting the dots

- Sudarshan TV Case: Click [here](#)
- Net Neutrality
- Shreya Singhal Case

Draft Rules notified Under the Code on Social Security, 2020

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

In news

- Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has notified the draft rules under the Code on Social Security, 2020.

Key takeaways

- The draft rules provide for Aadhaar based registration including self-registration by unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers, Building and Other Construction Workers on the portal of the Central Government.
- Provision has also been made in the rules regarding gratuity to an employee who is on fixed term employment.
- The rules also provide for single electronic registration of an establishment including cancellation of the registration in case of closure of business activities.
- Provision has also been made regarding manners and conditions for exiting an establishment from EPFO and ESIC coverage.
- The procedure for self-assessment and payment of Cess in respect of building and other construction workers has been elaborated in the rules.
- The rate of Interest for delayed payment of such cess has been reduced from 2% every month or part of a month to 1%.

Additional Judges appointed as Permanent Judges of Allahabad HC under Article 217

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Constitution

In news

- President of India recently appointed 28 Additional Judges as Permanent Judges of Allahabad High Court through Article 217(1) of the Indian Constitution.

Important value additions

Article 217 (1)

- Every Judge of a High Court shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with the Chief Justice of India, the Governor of the State, and, in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the chief Justice, the chief Justice of the High court.
- Every Judge of a High Court shall hold office, in the case of an additional or acting Judge, as provided in Article 224, and in any other case, until he attains the age of sixty two years
Provided that
 - a Judge may, by writing under his hand addressed to the President, resign his office;
 - a Judge may be removed from his office by the President in the manner provided in clause (4) of Article 124 for the removal of a Judge of the Supreme Court;

the office of a Judge shall be vacated by his being appointed by the President to be a Judge of the Supreme Court or by his being transferred by the President to any other High Court within the territory of India.

Supreme Court interpretation of Article 32 over the years

Context: Recently, Supreme Court Bench headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde observed that it is “trying to discourage” individuals from filing petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution.

The observation came during the hearing of a petition seeking the release of journalist Siddique Kappan, who was arrested with three others while on their way to Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, to report on an alleged gangrape and murder.

What is Article 32?

- It is one of the fundamental rights listed in the Constitution that each citizen is entitled.
- Article 32 deals with the ‘Right to Constitutional Remedies’, or affirms the right to move the Supreme Court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of the rights conferred in Part III of the Constitution.
- It states that the Supreme Court “shall have power to issue directions or orders or writs, including writs in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari, whichever may be appropriate, for the enforcement of any of the rights conferred by this Part”
- The Article cannot be suspended except during the period of Emergency.

Significance of Article 32

- The Article is **included in Part III of the Constitution** with other fundamental rights including to Equality, Freedom of Speech and Expression, Life and Personal Liberty, and Freedom of Religion.
- Only if any of these fundamental rights is violated can a person **can approach the Supreme Court directly** under Article 32.

- In the Constituent Assembly debates, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that without article 32 this Constitution would be a nullity. He further said that “It is the **very soul of the Constitution** and the very heart of it”
- Article 32 is one of the **greatest safeguards** that can be provided for the safety and security of the individual.
- Since Article 32 gives a person the right to approach the Supreme Court as a remedy if fundamental rights are violated, “it is a **right fundamental to all the fundamental rights**” guaranteed under the Constitution.

Can High Courts be approached in cases of violation of fundamental rights?

- Both the High Courts and the Supreme Court can be approached for violation or enactment of fundamental rights through five kinds of writs
- In civil or criminal matters, the first remedy available to an aggrieved person is that of trial courts, followed by an appeal in the High Court and then the Supreme Court.
- When it comes to violation of fundamental rights, an individual can **approach the High Court under Article 226** or the Supreme Court directly under Article 32. Article 226, however, is not a fundamental right like Article 32.

What have been the Supreme Court’s observations on Article 32?

- In **RomeshThapparvs State of Madras (1950)**, the Supreme Court observed that Article 32 provides a “guaranteed” (SC cannot refuse) remedy for the enforcement of fundamental rights.
- During the Emergency, in **Additional District Magistrate, Jabalpur vs S SShukla (1976)**, the Supreme Court had said that the citizen loses his right to approach the court under Article 32

Recent trends

- In the case of the **journalist SiddiqueKappan**, the court asked why the petitioners could not go to the High Court. It has sought responses from the Centre and the UP government, and will hear the case later this week.
- In another case invoking Article 32, filed by a **Nagpur-based man arrested in three cases for alleged defamatory content** against Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray and others, the same Bench directed him to approach the High Court first.
- In another matter, three-judge Bench of SC had issued a contempt notice to the Assistant Secretary of the Maharashtra Assembly who, in a letter to **Republic TV editor-in-chief ArnabGoswami**, had questioned him for approaching the top court against the breach-of-privilege notice. The court had then said that the right to approach the Supreme Court under Article 32 is itself a fundamental right
- *The above instances have been cited by Citizen Activists to criticize the working of Judiciary where access to Justice at apex level is liable to influence and power.*

Conclusion

Constitutional experts say that it is eventually at the discretion of the Supreme Court and each individual judge to decide whether an intervention is warranted in a case, which could also be heard by the High Court first.

Connecting the dots

- Judicial Reforms: Click [here](#) and [here](#)

Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge launched

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

In news

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge across 243 Cities to ensure that no life of any sewer or septic tank cleaner is ever lost again owing to the issue of 'hazardous cleaning'.



Key takeaways

- The Challenge was launched on the occasion of World Toilet Day.
- Aim:** Preventing 'hazardous cleaning' of sewers and septic tanks and promoting their mechanized cleaning.
- Representatives from 243 cities across the country took a pledge to mechanize all sewer and septic tank cleaning operations by 30th April 2021.
- The initiative is in line with the core of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U)
- The actual on-ground assessment of participating cities will be conducted in May 2021 by an independent agency and results of the same will be declared on 15 August 2021.
- Cities will be awarded in three sub-categories – with population of more than 10 lakhs, 3-10 lakhs and upto 3 lakhs, with a total prize money of ₹52 crores to be given to winning cities across all categories.

Do you know?

- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (2013) and various judgements of Supreme Court prohibit hazardous cleaning, i.e. manual entry into a septic tank or sewer without protective gear and observing operating procedures.

Meghalaya Integrated Transport Project (MITP) signed

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

In news

- The Government of India, the Government of Meghalaya and the World Bank signed a \$120 million project to improve and modernise the transport sector of state of Meghalaya.

Key takeaways

- The project will improve about 300 km of strategic road segments and stand-alone bridges by using innovative, climate resilient, and nature-based solutions.

- It will also support innovative solutions such as precast bridges to reduce both time and cost of construction.
- MITP will help Meghalaya develop reliable, climate resilient and safe roads which is crucial for the economic development of the state.
- About half of the 5,362 habitations in the state lack transport connectivity.
- This operation will also support state government's "Restart Meghalaya Mission" to revive and boost development activities affected due to COVID-19 pandemic.

A world in Chaos & Threats to Democracy

Context: The extent to which Mr. Trump has been willing to go in his attempt to negate the election (in which he lost), and the fact that a very sizeable segment of the U.S. population seems to be backing him reflects the threat to Democracy.

Threats to Democracy

- **Rise of Identity Politics:** Issues of identity, or threats to identity, are becoming an important issue in elections across democracies.
- **Misuse of Technology:** Manipulation of grievances by using psychometric techniques (a la Cambridge Analytica), and the use of 'deep fakes' made possible through Artificial Intelligence, further enhances the threat to current notions of democracy.
- **Social Unrest:** Protests in Thailand, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan
- **Threats to Secularism in Europe:** The recent wave of terrorist attacks, beginning with the beheading of a Paris schoolteacher by an Islamic State (IS) supporter, followed by IS violence in Nice, have been a major trigger, raising questions about long-held secular beliefs.
- **Terrorism** is resurfacing, and with renewed vigour. The al-Qaeda is again becoming prominent. The IS has returned with attacks in France — Paris and Nice — and in Austria (Vienna)
- **Informational autocracy:** Manipulation of information — and also events — to achieve certain desired ends, is becoming a norm in many democratic regimes. Many democratic nations today resort to manipulating data to support or prop up the government's version of events.

Challenges to Democracy in India

- High Polarization
- Rising terrorism threats in J&K aided by Pakistan which pushes for authoritarian tendencies.
- Borders issues with both China and Pakistan
- Protests against CAA and NRC
- Holding of Assembly elections in Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan
- India is being steadily marginalised in Afghanistan, where the control of the Taliban is increasing.

Amended liquidation regulations under IBC

Context: The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has amended the regulations for liquidation under the [Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code \(IBC\)](#).

What are the new regulations announced by the IBBI?

- **Speed up Liquidation Process:** In order to ensure quick liquidation of companies which are unable to find bidders under IBC, the liquidator can "assign or transfer a not readily realisable asset" to any person.

- **Consultation with Stakeholders:** The said transfer or assignment of the asset must be done in consultation with the stakeholders committee.
- **The definition of “a not readily realisable asset”** would include any assets of the corporate debtor, which could not be sold through the available options. Any or all assets of the company under liquidation, which is facing some dispute or is involved in some fraudulent transaction, can be sold by the liquidator.
- **Ease of Liquidation:** The liquidator for a company would not have to wait for the entire assets of the company to be sold in one go under liquidation, and can be disposed of to different bidders as and when they come.
- **Ease of Proving Default:** The IBBI has also said that financial creditors can, for the purpose of furnishing a record of default, submit their own book which establishes lapse of payment of debt by the corporate debtor.
- The financial creditors can also attach a copy of any court or tribunal’s order which has, through an order, established that the company had defaulted on debt payments.
- **Flexibility in IBC Process for Creditors:** The insolvency regulator has also amended the regulation to allow certain creditors, who do not want to wait for the liquidation process to be over, to exit the process by assigning or transferring the debt due to them, to other creditors of the company.
- **Helps Small Finance Creditors:** Suppose a small financial creditor does not see value in waiting for the liquidation of the company to get completed because they do not have that risk appetite. Now, they can choose to sell these assets to a bigger player and exit the process

What are the likely challenges for the new amended regulations?

- The new regulations will have to be tested in a court of law or an appropriate forum as its definition of “a not readily realisable asset” is contentious.
- The question is, can IBBI, under a delegated legislation, by way of amending a regulation, affect anybody’s substantive rights.
- Another amended regulation that is likely to be challenged is about the IBBI allowing the liquidator to distribute the un-disposed of assets among stakeholders, with the approval of the adjudicating authority.
- This will lead to creditors, be they financial or operational, challenging the distribution of the assets, and claiming that one or the other party has been favoured by the liquidator

Conclusion

In the wake of pandemic induced slowdown, easing the liquidation process helps is quick exit of bankrupt companies and putting back the capital assets back in circulation economy.

Promulgation of ordinance to ban online Games in TN

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

In news

- Tamil Nadu Governor promulgated an ordinance that banned online gaming in the state, with a fine up to Rs 5,000 and imprisonment of up to six months.

Key takeaways

- According to the Governor, due to online gaming, innocent people, mainly youngsters, are being cheated, and some people committed suicide.

- The decision to ban online gaming was taken to avoid such incidents of suicide and protect the innocent people.
- Any form of wagering or betting in cyberspace by using computers or any other communication device, common gaming houses, and any electronic transfer of funds to distribute winnings or prize money has also been banned.
- This effectively means that players in the state will not be able to purchase any add-on for the games they play, go to gaming arcades or participate in online gaming tournaments.

Do you know?

- In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, some forms of online games and gambling are banned.
- Karnataka has also been mulling a law to ban online games and gaming.

Inter-State River Water Disputes(Amendment) Bill

Context: The Interstate River Water Disputes Amendment Bill 2019 and the Dam Safety Bill 2019, passed by Lok Sabha and pending approval in Rajya Sabha.

The Inter-State River Water Disputes are one of the most contiguous issues in the Indian federalism today. In extreme cases, it may hamper the relationship between the different states.

Issues with the Inter State River Water Dispute Act, 1956

- **Multiple Tribunals:** Under this Act, a separate Tribunal has to be established for each dispute. There are eight inter-state water dispute tribunals, including the Ravi and Beas Waters Tribunal and Krishna River Water Dispute Tribunal.
- **Lacks Robust Governance Framework:** Currently there is no time limit for adjudication or publication of reports. There is lack of clarity in the institutional framework and guidelines that define these proceedings to ensure compliance.
- **Protracted Proceedings:** Only three of the eight tribunals have actually given awards accepted by the states. Tribunals like those on the Cauvery and Ravi Beas have been in existence for over 26 and 30 years respectively without any award.
- **Composition of the tribunals:** These are not multidisciplinary and it consists of persons only from the judiciary. There is no upper age limit for the chairman or the members.
- **Data Issue:** The absence of authoritative water data that is acceptable to all parties currently makes it difficult to even set up a baseline for adjudication.
- **Subversion of resolution mechanisms:** Though award is final and beyond the jurisdiction of Courts, either States can approach Supreme Court under Article 136(Special Leave Petition) under Article 32 linking issue with the violation of Article 21 (Right to Life).
- **Complicated process involving too much discretion:** India's colonial legacy, complicated federal polity and politicisation of water issue all leads to procedural complexities involving multiple stakeholders across governments and agencies.

Key Provisions of Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill

- **Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC):** The bill requires the central government to set up a DRC for resolving any inter-state water dispute amicably. The DRC will get a period of one year, extendable by six months, to submit its report to the central government.
- **Members of DRC:** Members of the DRC will be from relevant fields, as deemed fit by the central government.
- **Permanent Tribunal:** The Bill envisages to constitute a standalone Tribunal with permanent establishment and permanent office space and infrastructure. It can have multiple benches. All existing tribunals will be dissolved and the water disputes pending adjudication before such existing tribunals will be transferred to this newly formed tribunal.

- **Composition of the Tribunal:** The tribunal shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and not more than six nominated members (judges of the Supreme Court or of a High Court), nominated by the CJI. The central government may appoint two experts serving in the Central Water Engineering Service, not below the rank of Chief Engineer, as assessors to advise the bench in its proceedings.
- **Time allotted to Tribunal to take its decision:** Under the Bill, the proposed tribunal has to give its decision on a dispute within a period of two years. This period is extendable by a maximum of one year.
- **Decision of the Tribunal:** Earlier, the decision of the tribunal must be published by the central government in the official gazette. After publication, the decision has the same force as that of an order of the Supreme Court. Under the Bill, the requirement of publication in the official gazette has been removed.
- The Bill also adds that the decision of the bench of the tribunal will be final and binding on the parties involved in the dispute. This decision will have the same force as that of an order of the Supreme Court.
- **Maintenance of data bank and information:** The Bill also calls for the transparent data collection system at the national level for each river basin and a single agency to maintain data bank and information system.
- **Additional rule -making powers:** The Bill gives the central government powers to make rules in which water will be distributed during stress situations arising from shortage in the availability of water.

Key Issues and Analysis of the Bill

1. Issues with DRC

- Its role has been elevated from that of a perfunctory “techno-legal” body to an agency with a proactive role.
- An officer of secretary rank will head the DRC and the body will have senior officers from the states that are party to a river water dispute, as members.
- However, there are concerns of it being adequately empowered. There is challenge to make the DRC process neutral and ensure meaningful participation by states that are party to a river water dispute
- There is also lack of clarity whether the DRC function as part of the Permanent Tribunal or will it work separately.
- The Cauvery Supervisory Committee (CSC) which had a similar composition as that of DRC did not have much success
- The DRC aims at a politically negotiated settlement, for river water disputes are deeply political at their core. Its raison d’être is to avoid legal adjudication, not to supplement it. There are doubts whether this can be achieved

2. Conflict with Judiciary

- The court had in December 2016 said that it was within its jurisdiction to hear appeals against the 2007 Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal award after the centre and Puducherry opposed the appeals, saying that the Constitution of India expressly disallows the apex court from intervening in interstate river water disputes.
- This means that the party states can now appeal against the decisions of the tribunal.

- The Court followed it up with another order in February 2018 where it modified the allocations of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal Final award of 2007. The bill does not address the implications of these decisions.
- **The bill has to resolve this conundrum first.** In simple terms, the Supreme Court says it has jurisdiction over interstate river water disputes while the legislature says it doesn't.

3. Selection of Tribunal Judges

- One cannot miss the inclusion of a committee to select the tribunal judges.
- The committee comprises the prime minister or a nominee as the Chairperson, the Minister of Law and Justice, the Minister of Jal Shakti and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
- This composition will now risk states politicising not just the disputes, but their adjudication by the tribunal. This creates a situation where the dispute could escalate to the Supreme Court.

Paternity Leave

Context: Indian Cricket Team Captain Virat Kohli asked for, and was granted, paternity leave in the middle of a competitive Test series against Australia.

Unlike maternity leave, there is no law governing leave for fathers in India.

Do You Know?

- The time-use survey report released last month by the National Sample Survey Office shows that Indian women spend nearly four hours more on unpaid work than men, with grim consequences for women's participation in the workforce.
- India remains among the 90 out of the 187 countries in the world that do not have national policies to ensure that new fathers get adequate paid time off with their babies.
- The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 allows for pregnant women to take leave for a total of 26 weeks out of which up to 8 weeks can be claimed before delivery.
- The woman is also supposed to get paid a benefit at the rate of her daily wage for three months before she goes on maternity leave.

What are the merits of providing Paternity Leave?

- **To Promote Gender Equality:** Until men have equal opportunities to be caregivers, there will be an inevitable pressure on women to bear the bulk of responsibilities around the household.
- **To defeat Patriarchy:** There's a culture that perceives nurturing and parental duties as womanly. This toxic belief promotes the idea of women having to carry the sole responsibility of upbringing, while the men go out and chase their professional goals.
- **Parenting Skills:** Just like maternity leave, paternity leave allows new-dads to take time off work and spend time with and around the new baby and mother. As a result, father's attach to their babies in ways similar to mothers. This helps fathers to develop the parenting skills and sense of responsibility that then allows them to be active co-parents rather than helpers to their female partners.
- **Changed family Set Up:** In today's world with nuclear families working couples don't have the luxury of large joint family setups. Therefore, the husband/father needs to get time off from work to take care of his wife and newborn child.
- **Work-life balance and good for Women's Careers:** Paid Paternity leave helps find a balance between work and life for moms and dads, and in turn, help moms advance in their careers and achieve their own successes
- **Helps Control Population:** A study in Spain, which now gives 12 weeks of paternity leave, had found that it has lowered the fertility rate.

- **International Trend:** In Britain, Sweden and Norway, parents are granted about a year of paid parental leave to tend to their newborns during that particularly crucial and difficult period.
- **The post-COVID reality** makes it even more urgent for workplaces to incentivise men to take more responsibility at home, if more women are not to drop off the work grid.

Do Public Sector employees in India get Paternity Leave?

- Public sector employees get 15-day paternity leave.
- The government made provisions for paternity leave for all public sector employees in 1999 through the Central Civil Services (Leave) Rule 551 (A).
- This allows any male central government employee (including trainees and probationers) with less than two children to avail a 15-day paternity leave either 15 days before or within six months from the date of delivery of child.
- This also extends to cases where a child has been adopted.
- Many companies have adopted the same model.

How is Private Sector dealing with Paternity Leave?

- Paternity leave is a rather new concept in the Indian corporate setup and most companies have started offering it in the last few years
- The private sector in India is free not to offer paternity leave, but many large organizations are formulating their own policies.
- **Equality as well as higher productivity** resulting from the security and contentment of a better work-life balance may be their aim.
- Tech giants Facebook, Deloitte and Microsoft offer their employees 17, 16 and 12 weeks of paternity leave respectively.
- There is no set time duration for paternity leave in corporate India. Most companies offer paternity leave between 5-15 days.

Was there any effort made to pass law regarding Paternity Leave?

- A Paternity Benefit Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by MP Rajeev Satav in 2017.
- The bill, which emphasises upon equal parental benefits for both parents, proposes that all workers, including those in the unorganised and private sector, can avail paternity leave of 15 days, extendable up to three months.
- However, the bill has not yet been passed by the Parliament.

Judiciary on Paternity Leave

- A 2009 judgment in the matter of **Chander Mohan Jain v. N.K Bagrodia Public School**, where a private school teacher approached the Delhi High Court to challenge the rejection of his paternity leave application and deductions from his salary for availing paternity leaves.
- The Delhi High Court held that "all male employees of unaided recognized private schools were entitled to paternity leave".
- The court directed the school to refund the money that was deducted from the teacher's salary.
- While this judgment may not have pioneered the need to have a paternity benefit act in place, it does go to show that there has been some traction in India to give men the opportunity to bond with their new born.

What are the Challenges associated with Paternity leave?

- Even though several companies have progressive policies, the **people executing them are still rigid.**
- Employees are forced to take **work from home** and not a long leave.
- In our social set-up, where men are still considered the “breadwinner”, men may not be comfortable availing paternity leave.
- For many men, the worry that a six-month break may become a **career setback**, is quite real.
- The **absence of a law to support it**, unlike the maternity leave, contributes to the paternity leave needs not being taken seriously.
- The idea of legislating for paternity leave in the organised sector are viewed with suspicion as there are fears that Indian **men would turn it into a paid holiday.**

Conclusion

Paternity Leave is an important development in the context of gender discrimination at the workplace, but it will also have broader implications on the patriarchal mindset of Indian society.

UMANG app's international version launched

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

In news

- UMANG’s international version was recently launched to mark the occasion of its 3 years.
- It is launched in select countries that include USA, UK, Canada, Australia, UAE, Netherlands, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.
- **Primary Ministry:** Ministry of IT
- **Version launched in coordination with:** Ministry of External Affairs

Key takeaways

- It will help Indian international students, NRIs and Indian tourists abroad, to avail Government of India services, anytime.
- It will also help in taking India to the world through ‘Indian Culture’ services available on UMANG and create interest amongst foreign tourists to visit India.

Important value additions

- The UMANG mobile app (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) is a Government of India all-in-one single multi-lingual, multi-service Mobile App.
- It provides access to high impact services of various Government of India Departments and State Governments.
- **Aim:** To fast-track mobile governance in India.
- **Developed by:** National e-Governance Division (NeGD), Ministry of Electronics & IT.
- UMANG enables ‘Ease of Living’ for Citizens by providing easy access to a number of Indian government services such as Healthcare, Finance, Education, Housing, Energy, etc.
- **Key partners of UMANG:** Employee Provident Fund Organization, Direct Benefit Transfer scheme departments, Employee State Insurance Corporation, Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Staff Selection Commission (SSC).
- It is a ‘Digital India’ initiative.
- UMANG attained ‘Best m-Government service’ award at the 6th World Government Summit held at Dubai, UAE in February 2018.

Dam Safety Bill, 2019

The Bill aims to deal with the risks of India's ageing dams, with the help of a comprehensive federal institutional framework comprising committees and authorities for dam safety at national and state levels.

Do You Know?

- There are 5,344 large dams in India, of which around 293 are more than 100 years old and 1,041 are 50 to 100 years old.
- Nearly 92% of these dams are on inter-State rivers, and accidents at many of them have spurred concerns as to the frequency and efficiency of their maintenance.

Highlights of the Bill

- **Objective:** The Bill provides for the surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of all specified dams across the country. These are dams with height more than 15 metres, or height between 10 metres to 15 metres with certain design and structural conditions.
- **It constitutes two national bodies:** The National Committee on Dam Safety, whose functions include evolving policies and recommending regulations regarding dam safety standards; and the National Dam Safety Authority, whose functions include implementing policies of the National Committee, providing technical assistance to State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs), and resolving matters between SDSOs of states or between a SDSO and any dam owner in that state.
- **It also constitutes two state bodies:** State Committee on Dam Safety, and SDSO. These bodies will be responsible for the surveillance, inspection, and monitoring the operation and maintenance of dams within their jurisdiction.
- **Power of Union Government:** Functions of the national bodies and the State Committees on Dam Safety have been provided in Schedules to the Bill. These Schedules can be amended by a government notification.
- **Penal Provisions:** An offence under the Bill can lead to imprisonment of up to two years, or a fine, or both.

Key Issues and Analysis of Dam Safety Bill

1. Issue of Federalism:

- The Bill applies to all specified dams in the country. This includes dams built on both inter and intra state rivers.
- As per the Constitution, states can make laws on water including water storage and water power. However, Parliament may regulate and develop inter-state river valleys if it deems it necessary in public interest.
- The question is whether Parliament has the jurisdiction to regulate dams on rivers flowing entirely within a state.
- Since 'water' comes under the State list, the bill is criticised as being an unconstitutional move aimed at taking control of state's dams.
- State's see it as an attempt by the Centre to consolidate power in the guise of safety concerns

2. Opposition by Tamil Nadu

- The State which has four dams — the Mullaperiyar, Parambikulam, Thunakkadavu and Peruvuripallam — that are owned by it, but are situated in neighbouring Kerala.

- Currently, the rights on these dams are governed by pre-existing long-term agreements among the States.
- The provisions in the Bill implies that the dam-owning State would not have rights over the safety and maintenance of the dam located in another State.
- Thus, Tamil Nadu will lose the rights over the safety of above four dams which is violative of pre-existing agreement with Kerala State.

3. Due Process

- The functions of the National Committee on Dam Safety, the National Dam Safety Authority, and the State Committee on Dam Safety are listed in Schedules to the Bill.
- These Schedules can be amended by the government through a notification.
- The question is whether core functions of authorities should be amended through a notification or whether such amendments should be passed by Parliament.

Conclusion

In the absence of a proper legal framework, safety and maintenance of these large number of dams are a cause of concern. Hence, the bill has to be passed by taking on board the concerns of States.

Connecting the dots

- Inter State River Water Disputes

Mullaperiyar Dam Issue

[SahakarPragya launched](#)

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

In news

- ‘SahakarPragya’ was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** Ministry of Agriculture
- **Objective:** To impart training to primary cooperative societies in rural areas.

Key takeaways

- There will be 45 new training modules of SahakarPragya.
- **Training imparted by:** National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and Lakshmanraolnamdar National Cooperative Research and Development Academy (LINAC).
- SahakarPragyashall enhance NCDC’s training capacity by 18-fold through an elaborate network of 18 Regional Training Centres across the country by the dedicated LINAC set up and fully funded by NCDC

[Food processing projects approved under Creation Of Infrastructure For Agro-Processing Cluster](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Food processing

In news

- The government has approved seven proposals of Food Processing Projects worth over 234 crore rupees under the Scheme for Creation of Infrastructure for Agro-Processing Cluster.

- The scheme for Creation of Infrastructure for Agro-Processing Cluster was approved in 2017 under the PradhanMantriKisanSampadaYojana to incentivize the setting up of agro processing clusters in the country.
- This scheme aims at development of modern infrastructure to encourage entrepreneurs to set up food processing units based on cluster approach.

Important value additions

PradhanMantriKisan SAMPADA Yojana

- In 2016, MoFPI introduced an umbrella Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters(SAMPADA).
- It was proposed to be implemented with an allocation of ₹6,000 crores for the period of 2016-20.
- In 2017, SAMPADA was renamed as the PradhanMantriKisanSampadaYojana (PMKSY).
- It is a Central Sector Scheme.
- **Objectives:** (1) To supplement agriculture; (2) To create processing and preservation capacities; (3) To modernise and expand existing food processing units with a view to increasing the level of processing; (4) To add value leading to the reduction of wastage.
- **Seven component schemes under PMKSY:** (1) Mega Food Parks; (2) Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure; (3) Infrastructure for Agro-Processing Clusters; (4) Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages; (5) Creation/Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities; (6) Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure; (7) Human Resources and Institutions.
- Under PMKSY, capital subsidy in the form of grants-in-aid ranging from 35% to 75% of the eligible project cost subject to a maximum specified limit is provided to investors under the various schemes for undertaking infrastructure, logistic projects and setting up of food processing units in the country

Prohibition Of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020

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

In news

- The UP Cabinet recently cleared an ordinance to ban religious conversion for marriage.
- The new law will put the onus on the defendant to prove that conversion was not for marriage.

Key takeaways

- The Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020, recommends 1-5 years imprisonment if an accused fails to prove that the conversion of the woman was not for marriage or by use of force, allurement etc.
- The jail sentence for the offence would be 3-10 years if the woman is from the SC/ST community or is seen as part of mass conversion.
- The notice period to the district magistrate for the religious conversion has been doubled to two months from a month in an earlier draft.

Do you know?

- The ordinance comes days after the Allahabad high court said in a verdict that the right to choose a partner or live with a person of choice was part of a citizen's fundamental right to life and liberty.

- The verdict also said earlier court rulings that 'religious conversion for marriage was unacceptable' was not good in law.

Report on National Nutrition Mission: NITI Aayog

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

- Recently, the NITI Aayog has released "Accelerating Progress On Nutrition In India: What Will It Take".
- It is the third progress report on the National Nutrition Mission or the PoshanAbhiyaan.

Key takeaways

- The third progress report (October 2019-April 2020) takes into account the status on the ground and implementation challenges encountered at various levels through large scale datasets.
- These datasets are the NFHS-4 and Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS).
- According to the report, India's targets are conservative on stunting as compared to the global target defined by the World Health Assembly (WHA). It is a prevalence rate of 5% of stunting as opposed to India's goal of reducing stunting levels to 13.3% by 2022.
- The targets of reducing prevalence levels of anaemia among pregnant women from 50.3% (2016) to 34.4% (2022) and among adolescent girls from 52.9% (2016) to 39.66% are also considered to be conservative as compared to the WHA's target of halving prevalence levels.
- In the wake of the pandemic, experts warn that deepening poverty and hunger may delay achieving the goals defined under the Mission.

Suggestions by the NITI Aayog:

- **On Stunting:** (1) To improve complementary feeding using both behaviour change interventions and complimentary food supplements in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS); (2) To work towards investments in girls and women; (3) To improve water, sanitation, handwashing with soap and hygienic disposal of children's stools.
- **On Wasting:** (1) To include interventions that go beyond the treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and also address moderate wasting; (2) To scale-up to reach facility-based treatment of SAM; (3) To urgently release a full strategy for prevention and integrated management of wasting nationally.
- **On Anaemia:** To scale-up scenario that focuses only on health sector interventions which will achieve modest improvements in anaemia among women of reproductive age.

Important value additions

National Nutrition Mission

- **Launched in:** 2018
- It is Indian Government's flagship programme.
- **Objective:** To improve nutritional outcomes for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- It is backed by a National Nutrition Strategy prepared by the NITI Aayog with the goal of attaining "KuposhanMukt Bharat" or malnutrition-free India, by 2022.
- **Aims:** (1) To reduce stunting, undernutrition, anemia and low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively; (2) To address the problem of malnutrition in a mission-mode.

- 50% of the total budget comes from the World Bank or other multilateral development banks and the rest of the 50% is through Centre's budgetary support.
- The Centre's budgetary support is further divided into 60:40 between the Centre and the States, 90:10 for the north-eastern region and the Himalayan States and 100% for the Union Territories (UTs) without legislature.

Forest Rights Act in Jammu & Kashmir

Context: The J&K government has now decided to implement the Forest Rights Act.

Tribal politics in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir was focused on the twin issues of political reservation and enactment/extension of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006.

Brief Background of the Political Reservation Issue

- Lack of political reservation had been a major reason for the marginalization of Adivasis (Tribal people)
- The Adivasis have had to largely depend on non-tribal leadership to represent their issues and demands.
- Lack of political reservation meant that their issues were never adequately represented in the Legislative Assembly.
- The vote share of Adivasis is a major deciding factor in almost 21 Assembly constituencies, yet they remained politically marginalised.
- However, immediately **after the abrogation of Article 370** (August 2019) Adivasis were provided **political reservation**. It was considered as step in right direction.
- The actual impact of political reservation will be seen only after elections are conducted for the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of J&K.

Issues of FRA

- After the abrogation of J&K's special status, there was no delay in providing political reservation for the Adivasis. However, similar urgency wasn't shown in the extension of the FRA
- In fact, the FRA should have been in place in J&K long time ago — nothing in Article 370 prevented the Legislative Assembly from enacting a similar law.
- The FRA would have provided Adivasis in J&K access and ownership rights, forest-based livelihood rights, and minor forest produce rights.
- Due to lack of implementation of FRA, Adivasi lands had not been protected and Adivasis, especially nomads, had neither land rights nor rehabilitation rights.

Now that FRA is being implemented, will it resolve the issues of Adivasis?

- Many Adivasi families are unlikely to benefit from the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in J&K
- Implementing the FRA is a welcome step. However, instead of alleviating fears of displacement and disempowerment, the law has only increased those fears.
- This is primarily because this is happening against the backdrop of the J&K government's decision on October 31 to declare **Roshni Act null and void**. (details of Act at end of article).
- Roshni Act has been controversial due to the questionable transfer of ownership of state land to many influential people, including Ministers, legislators, bureaucrats, and police officers.
- Roshni Act also provided ownership rights to many poor and landless Adivasis but now the land will be retrieved from them (as the act will be null & void). In such a scenario, **the Adivasis will fail to prove their claims of ownership** under the FRA.

- Further, in the last few weeks, the **eviction and demolition drives** against nomads have intensified without any rehabilitation plans in place. The FRA, then, is unlikely to benefit such poor, landless Adivasis.

Conclusion

- Without a cut-off date, with land being retrieved after declaring the Roshni Act null and void, and with forceful evictions taking place, many tribal families are unlikely to benefit from the implementation of the FRA.

Jammu and Kashmir State Land (Vesting of Ownership to Occupants) Act -Roshni Act

- The Act regularised the unauthorised occupation of land.
- It granted legal ownership rights to those who had grabbed the government land in Jammu and Kashmir over several decades.
- The law provided for the collection of a fee for the legalising the illegal act of landgrab.
- The money thus raised was to be used for up-gradation of power generation in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The scheme in public view was to provide electricity, roshni in Hindi-Urdu.
- This is why this Act is called the Roshni Act and the scam Roshni scam.
- Anybody who had previously grabbed a piece of government land could approach the authorities, pay a fee and become the rightful owner of the land.
- What followed was that those who had not grabbed the land purchased such land from the poor who had erected some structure on the government and became the new legal owners of the land.
- The court held the Roshni Act as unconstitutional and directed the government to make the complete identities of influential persons who grabbed the land regularised under the law public.
- Jammu and Kashmir government issued an order to cancel all land transfers that took place under the Roshni Act.

National Portal For Transgender Persons Launched

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

In news

- ‘National Portal for Transgender Persons’ was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** Ministry for Social Justice & Empowerment

Key takeaways

- National Portal for Transgender Persons was developed after the Notification of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020 was released.
- This Portal would help a transgender person in applying for a Certificate and Identity card digitally from anywhere in the country.
- The most important benefit is that it helps the transgender person to get the I-Card without any physical interface and without having to visit any office.
- Through the Portal, they can monitor the status of their application that ensures transparency in the process.
- Getting Transgender Certificate and Identity Cards as per their self-perceived identity is an important provision of The [Transgender Persons \(Protection of Rights\) Act, 2019](#).

GarimaGreh: A Shelter Home for Transgender Persons' e-inaugurated

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

In news

- A 'GarimaGreh: A Shelter Home for Transgender Persons' was recently e-inaugurated in Vadodara, Gujarat.
- **Inaugurated by:** Ministry for Social Justice & Empowerment

Key takeaways

- Under the Scheme of 'Shelter Home for Transgender Persons', the ministry has decided to set up shelter homes for transgender persons who have been forced to leave their homes or abandoned by the family.
- This is first such home in Vadodara.
- By March 31st, 2021, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Patna, Kolkata, Jaipur, Raipur, Bhubaneswar and Manipur will also have such homes to be called "GarimaGreh" with a capacity for 25 persons.
- They will be run by transgender community-led organisations.
- These shelters will also provide skill training to connect the community members with livelihood opportunities.
- This is a pilot project.
- On its successful completion, similar schemes will be extended to other parts of the country.

Draft Merchant Shipping Bill, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has issued a draft of the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2020 for public consultation.
- It aims to repeal and replace the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 and the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838.

Key takeaways

- The Bill has provisions for repatriation of abandoned seafarers to improve their welfare on abandoned vessels.
- The Bill does away with requirement of general trading licence for Indian vessels to promote ease of doing business.
- It also enables electronic means of registration, and grants statutory recognition to electronic agreements, records, and log-books.
- The Bill has clauses to increase India's tonnage and to make the vessel a tradeable asset.
- It also seeks to introduce for the first-time statutory framework for regulating maritime emergency response against maritime incidents to promote India as a bankable shipping jurisdiction and avoid situations leading to wreck.
- To make India an active enforcement jurisdiction, the Bill incorporates powers of the Director-General to take action against vessels that are unsafe, and pose a threat to safety of life at sea and environment
- It also encourages active enforcement of pollution prevention standards.

Charting a reformed future for the police

Context: Director General of Police (DGP) conference scheduled for early December.

Conference through the years

- **Foundation of Conference:** Addressing the first in Independent India on January 12, 1950, Sardar Patel, the then deputy PM & home minister, expressed hope that the provincial police would handle law and order on their own, and not depend on the military as an aid to civil power. He also expected better results in criminal investigation with greater coordination between the states
- **Impact of Conferences:** The recommendations of the annual conference, in the early years, led to a great boost to police infrastructure, induction of human resources and technological upgradation.
- **Concern during 1950s to 1970s:** Communal violence, crimes against women, vehicle-theft and a range of other issues reflected the concerns of the prevailing times.
- **Concern during 1950s to 1970s:** Terrorism in Punjab and the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir became dominant themes in the 1980s and 90s.
- **Concerns of 21st Century:** Modernisation of Police, Cyber Crimes, Money laundering, [infodemics](#), mob lynching and hate crimes are new challenges that are being faced by Police of today's times.

However, important pronouncements by home ministers, during conferences in the past, have been largely ignored

1. Police Commissionerate System

- In 1962, LalBahadurShastri called for the introduction of the police commissioner system in cities with more than 500,000 people.
- He felt that to handle crimes and law and order, the police should have all powers, even if it meant withdrawing some from the deputy commissioner, revenue.
- Today, more than half of the one-million-plus towns are still without the police commissioner system.

2. Organisational Changes in Police System

- In 1964, the idea of an All India Police Commission was strongly mooted
- In 1981, home minister GianiZail Singh stressed on the need to post an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer as the home secretary or joint secretary in view of the specialised demands of the ministry. The home ministry shelved the proposal.
- Further, recommendations of Commissions under Dharamvira (1977), Ribeiro (1998), Padmanabhaiya (2000), Malimath (2000) lie buried as archival material.
- The home ministry does not brief police chiefs on their status and the public, too, is unaware.
- In 2005, Prime Minister (PM) Manmohan Singh announced a police mission and, in 2014, PM NarendraModi called for a SMART Police. Both are still works-in-progress

3. Key issues have escaped the attention of DGP conferences

- Police reforms, the police commissioner system, police autonomy, management of police cadre and the role of the home ministry are surprisingly never discussed
- The reason cited for not discussing these issues is that police is a state subject.

4. Ineffective Prosecution

- Ineffective prosecution is the bane of the criminal justice system.

- While prosecution-guided investigation exists in other countries, there is no coordination between the two in India.

Way Ahead

- **Postings at ground level:** If police stations are to deliver, then posting of SHOs has to be done by superintendents of police and not on secretarial files.
- **Autonomy to DGP:** The police should be declared a professional organisation where the CEO, here, the director-general of police (DGP), has unfettered right over transfers of his field commanders and is held accountable for his actions.
- **Transparency in Conference:** The public airing of DGPs' resolutions would enlighten citizens and exert moral pressure on chief ministers (CMs) to implement them.
- **Agenda of 2020 Conference:** Some critical events drawing nationwide attention to the role and functioning of the police must figure on the agenda of conference this year such as the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act agitations, Delhi riots, the VikasDubey encounter, the Hathras incident, the deaths in [Tuticorin police station](#) and the Sushant Singh Rajput case. DGPs must discuss and assess handling of agitations and riots this year, while suggesting a road map for the future.
- **Lack of critical forensic support** at police stations has to be taken up.
- **Sparing use of Discretionary Powers:** It is time for the DGPs to decide that sedition laws, defamation and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act or National Security Act, are resorted to only in exceptional cases
- **Avoid Politicization of Police:** Finally, police leaders should resolve not to cede space to the political leadership or bureaucracy on professional matters and cooperate with each other, adhering to the spirit of the law of land

Conclusion

In a democracy, the police is the cornerstone for good governance and should not be taken for granted.

Connecting the dots

- Long History of attempted Police reforms: Click [here](#)
- [Police reform and the crucial judicial](#) actor

[Protest Against Resettlement of Bru Tribals](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society & GS-II – Policies and Interventions

In news

- Recently, parts of north Tripura witnessed violent protests over the proposed resettlement of Bru tribals.

Key takeaways

- In January 2020, a quadrilateral agreement was signed by the Centre, the two state governments and Bru representatives to allow Brustos permanently settle in Tripura.
- The state has planned 12 resettlement spots across six districts with 300 families each in Tripura.
- The Centre has announced a special development project with funding of Rs. 600 crore.
- This agreement led to protests from Bengali and Mizo groups in Tripura.

- They claim that settling thousands of migrants permanently in North Tripura district of Kanchanpur would lead to demographic imbalance, exert pressure on local resources and potentially lead to law and order problems.
- It was also alleged that Bengali and Mizo families from Jampui Hill range, who fled due to atrocities by Brus, were yet to be resettled two decades on.

Important value addition

Bru

- Bru or Reang is a community indigenous to Northeast India.
- It lives mostly in Tripura, Mizoram and Assam.
- In Tripura, they are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group.
- In Mizoram, they have been targeted by groups that do not consider them indigenous to the state.
- In 1997, following ethnic clashes, nearly 37,000 Brus fled Mizoram and were accommodated in relief camps in Tripura.
- Since then, 5,000 have returned to Mizoram, while 32,000 still live in six relief camps in North Tripura.

PRAGATI Meeting held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Federalism; Governance

In news

- Recently, the Prime Minister (PM) has chaired the 33rd PRAGATI meeting.

Important value addition

PRAGATI

- PRAGATI is the multimodal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation involving central and state governments
- **Launched in:** 2015
- **Designed by:** Prime Minister's Office (PMO) team with the help of the National Informatics Center (NIC).
- It enables the PM to discuss the issues with the concerned central and state officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground-level situation.
- **It is a three-tier system:** PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States.
- **Objective:** (1) Grievance Redressal; (2) Programme Implementation; (3) Project Monitoring
- The PRAGATI platform uses latest technologies such as Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- **Significance:** (1) It promotes cooperative federalism; (2) It is a robust system for bringing e-transparency and e-accountability with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders; (3) It is an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.

SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Community in news: Miyas of Assam

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society

In news

- Recently, a proposed Miya museum reflecting the culture and heritage of the people living in char-chaporis has stirred up a controversy in Assam.

Important value additions

Miyas of Assam

- The 'Miya' community comprises descendants of Muslim migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam.
- They came to be referred to as 'Miyas', often in a derogatory manner.
- The community migrated in several waves — starting with the British annexation of Assam in 1826, and continuing into Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- Their Migration has resulted in changes in demographic composition of the region.
- Years of discontent among the indigenous people led to the six-year-long (1979-85) anti-foreigner Assam Agitation to weed out the "illegal immigrant", who was perceived as trying to take over jobs, language and culture of the indigenous population.

Char-chaporis

- Char-chaporis are shifting riverine islands of the Brahmaputra.
- These are primarily inhabited by the Muslims of Bengali-origin.
- A char is a floating island while chaporis are low-lying flood-prone riverbanks.
- While Bengali-origin Muslims primarily occupy these islands, other communities such as Misings, Deoris, Kocharis, Nepalis also live here.

PrasarBharati to Launch 51 Education TV Channels

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Education

In news

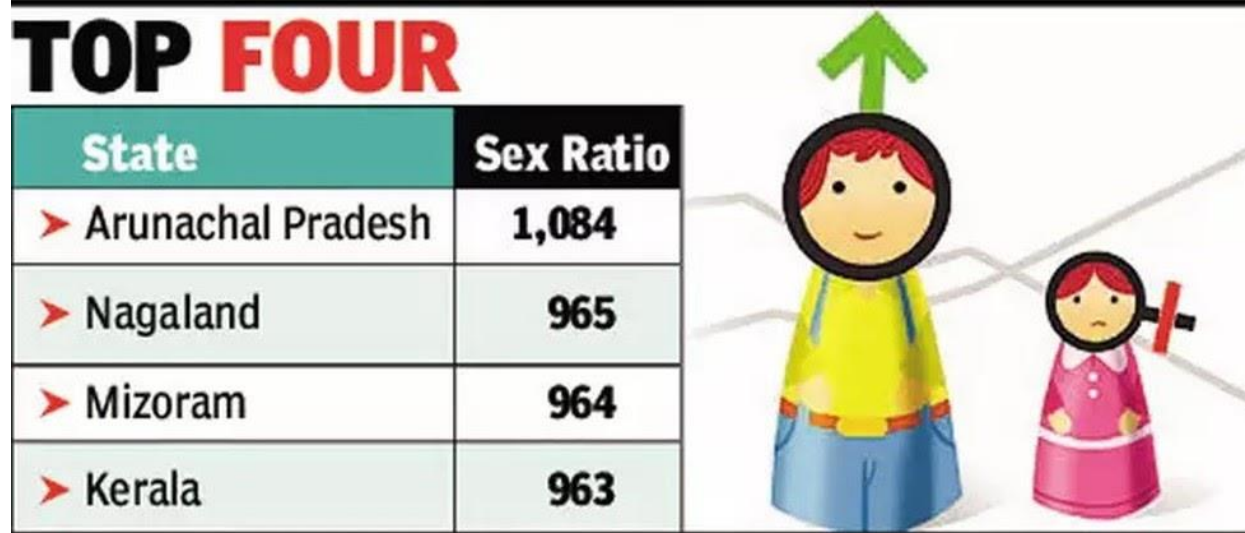
- In a landmark step, India's public broadcaster PrasarBharati entered into a MoU with Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-Informatics, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Under the MoU, 51 DTH education TV channels will be available as DD co-branded channels to all DD FreeDish viewers.
- This move aims to bring quality educational programmes to every household, including those in rural and remote areas.
- The services will be available free of cost for all the viewers, 24x7, in line with Government's commitment towards skill development and providing quality education to the last person in the country.

Arunachal Pradesh records the best sex ratio

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society

In news

- The three north-eastern states top the 2018 report on “Vital statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System (CRS)”.
- **Prepared by:** The Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India
- Arunachal Pradesh has recently recorded the best sex ratio in India with 1,084 females born per 1000 males.
- It is followed by Nagaland at 965 females and Mizoram at 964.



Key takeaways

- The sex ratio is the number of females per 1000 males.
- It is an important indicator to map the gender gap of a population.
- Lowest sex ratio has been reported by Manipur (757), Lakshadweep (839) and Daman & Diu (877), followed by Punjab (896).
- **Other North-Eastern states:** Assam- 904, Meghalaya - 942 and Tripura - 945.

Scheme For Creation And Expansion Of Food Processing And Preservation Capacities (CEFPPC)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Food Processing

In news

- The Ministry of Food Processing Industries has approved 28 Food Processing Projects worth over 320 crore rupees under the Scheme for Creation and Expansion of Food Processing and Preservation Capacities (CEFPPC).

Key takeaways

- **Objective:** (1) Creation of processing and preservation capacities; (2) Modernisation and expansion of existing food processing units with a view to increasing the level of processing, value addition leading to reduction of wastage.
- Scheme is implemented through organizations such as Central & State PSUs/ Joint Ventures/ Farmer Producers Organization (FPOs)/ NGOs, etc.

Atal Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education

In news

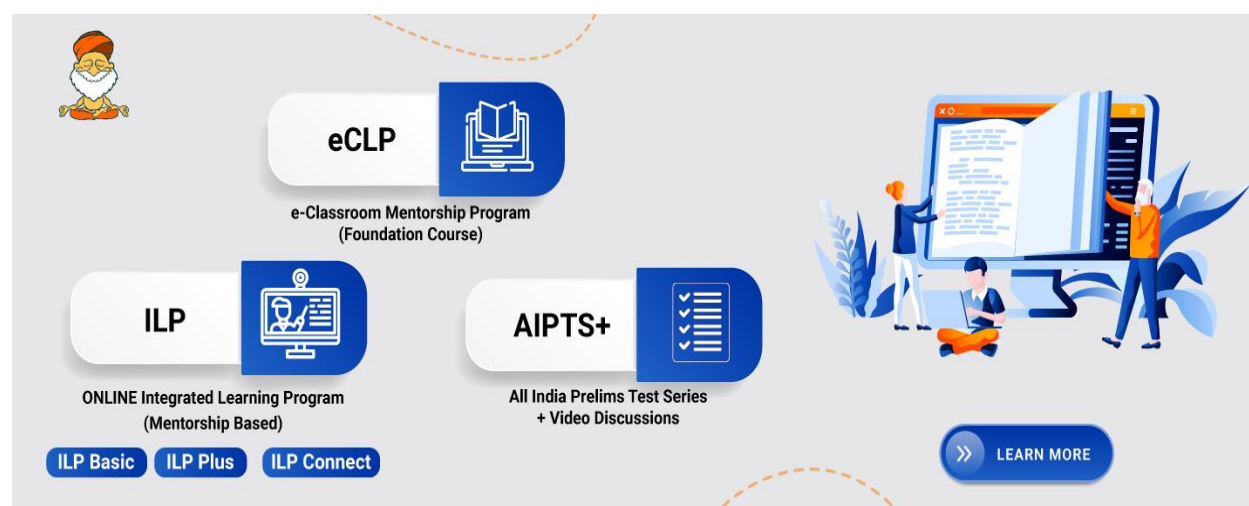
- Ministry of Education recently inaugurated 46 online AICTE Training and Learning (ATAL) Academy Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs) to train teachers of higher education institutions associated with All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) in emerging areas in technology.

Key takeaways

- The FDPs will be conducted in 22 Indian states according to the new National Education Policy (2020).
- Objective of ATAL Academy:** (1) To provide quality technical education in India; (2) To promote research and entrepreneurship through training in various emerging fields. IITs, IIITs, NITs CU and research labs are organizing these ATAL FDPs.

Do you know?

- The London-based organization, Book of World Records, has recognized the FDPs as a world record, under which 1,000 online FDPs in over 100 emerging areas will benefit one lakh faculty members across premier institutions like IITs, NITs, and IIITs.



WOMEN ISSUE

Alimony guidelines: On maintenance laws

Context: Women deserted by husbands are often left in dire straits and reduced to destitution, for lack of means to sustain themselves and their children.

Usually maintenance cases have to be settled in 60 days, but they take years in reality owing to legal loopholes.

Recent Supreme Court Judgement on alimony guidelines

1. Alimony entitled from the date of application:

- The Supreme Court on November 4 held that deserted wives and children are entitled to alimony/maintenance from the husbands from the date they apply for it in a court of law.
- This was based on the rationale that the primary object of maintenance laws is to protect a deserted wife and dependent children from destitution and vagrancy.

2. Educational Expenses of Children:

- The expenses of the children, including their education, basic needs and other vocational activities, should be factored in by courts while calculating the alimony. Education expenses of the children must be normally borne by the father.
- If the wife is working and earning sufficiently, the expenses may be shared proportionately between the parties

3. Permanent Alimony:

- The court opined it would not be equitable to order a husband to pay his wife permanent alimony for the rest of her life, considering the fact that in contemporary society marriages do not last for a reasonable length of time.
- The Court thus said that the duration of a marriage should be accounted for while determining the permanent alimony.

4. Moral Duty of Husband:

- The plea of the husband that he does not possess any source of income ipso facto does not absolve him of his moral duty to maintain his wife, if he is able-bodied and has educational qualifications.

5. Penal Provisions:

- To ensure that judicial orders for grant of maintenance are duly enforced by husbands, The court said a violation would lead to punishments such as civil detention and even attachment of the property of the latter.

5. Transparency: Both the applicant wife and the respondent husband have to disclose their assets and liabilities in a maintenance case.

6. Acknowledges Women's sufferings: The court said despite a plethora of maintenance laws, women were left empty-handed for years, struggling to make ends meet after a bad marriage.

7. Recognises long duration for resolution: If maintenance is not paid from the date of application, the party seeking maintenance would be deprived of sustenance, owing to the time taken for disposal of the application, which often runs into several years.

8. Equality for Live-in Couples: The judgment reiterated that Section 125 of the CrPC would include couples living together for years within its ambit. Strict proof of marriage should not be a pre-condition for grant of maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC.

9. Guidelines for other courts: SC has laid down uniform and comprehensive guidelines for family courts, magistrates and lower courts to follow while hearing the applications filed by women seeking maintenance from their estranged husbands.

10. Inequitable for husband to pay alimony under multiple Legislations

- The Court observed that women can make a claim for alimony under different laws, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Section 125 of the CrPC, or under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.
- Thus, the court said that it “would be inequitable to direct the husband to pay maintenance under each of the proceedings”, urging civil and family courts to take note of previous settlements.

Conclusion

- Given the large and growing percentage of matrimonial litigation, some clarity was necessary.

Connecting the dots

- Assisted Reproduction Technology Bill: [Provisions](#) and [Analysis](#)
- Surrogacy Regulation Bill

[Strengthening public health capacities in disasters](#)

Context: Much of Europe is witnessing a menacing second wave of COVID-19, which is seemingly worse than the first.

Second Wave and Challenges

- **Desensitised Public:** Living with the pandemic for months together has had a desensitising effect on the collective psyche.
- **Reduced Urgency:** Owing to such ‘desensitisation’, disasters that are not sudden and striking – like the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic- tend to be minimised.
- **Impacting Disaster Management Framework:** Unfortunately, the above two has characterised and thus weakened India’s disaster management framework in dealing with many pressing public health issues.

India’s Disaster Management Framework

- In 2005, India enacted the Disaster Management Act(DMA), which laid an institutional framework for managing disasters across the country
- What hitherto comprised largely of reactive, *ad hoc* measures applied in the event of a disaster, was to be replaced under the Act with a **systematic scheme** for prevention, mitigation, and responding to disasters of all kinds.
- Disaster management considerations were to be incorporated into every aspect of development and the activities of different sectors, including **health**.

- The Disaster Management Act is one of the few **laws invoked since the early days of COVID-19** to further a range of measures — from imposing lockdowns to price control of masks and medical services.
- **Concerns w.r.t Disaster Management Framework:** While some headway has indeed been achieved with the enactment of Act, the approach continues to be largely reactive, under-emphasizing of Public Health concern and presence of significant gaps in terms of medical preparedness for disasters.

Experience of using DMA during Pandemic and lessons learnt

1. Drawbacks in private sector

- Health services and their continuing development are oblivious to the possibility of disaster-imposed pressures.
- **Non-dependability of Private Sector during Crisis times:** Since the capping of treatment prices in private hospitals in May, many instances of overcharging by hospitals in India have surfaced, in some cases even leading to suspension of licences.
- **Private Sector Significance in future road map of Public Health Policy:** Dependability of private sector is important since the future development of hospital care services is being envisaged chiefly under publicly financed health insurance, which would very likely be private-sector led
- **Structural Weakness in Private Sector:** A large majority of private hospitals in the country are small enterprises which cannot meet the inclusion criteria for insurance. Many of these small hospitals are also unsuitable for meeting disaster-related care needs.
- **Incompatibility between Disaster Preparedness and Profit:** Disaster preparedness does not make a strong “business case” for hospitals, which prefer to invest in more profitable areas
- **Lesson Learnt:** Strong public sector capacities are therefore imperative for dealing with disasters. There is a strong case for introducing a legal mandate to strengthen public sector capacities via disaster legislation

2. Weakness in DMA

- **DMA fails to identify progressive events** (which nevertheless cause substantial damage, often more than sudden catastrophes) as disasters, thus neglecting pressing public health issues such as tuberculosis and recurrent dengue outbreaks
- Had they been identified as disasters, they would have attracted stronger action in terms of prevention, preparedness, and response
- **Inadequate Integration with primary care:** Primary care stands for things such as multisectoral action, community engagement, disease surveillance, and essential health-care provision, all of which are central to disaster management. This area of disaster management, especially relevant for low-income setting, has been overlooked.
- **Lesson Learnt:** Making primary health care central to disaster management can be a significant step towards building health system and community resilience to disasters. Also, synergies with the National Health Mission with the Disaster Management Act in 2005, could be worth exploring.

Conclusion

- While the novel coronavirus pandemic has waned both in objective severity and subjective seriousness, valuable messages and lessons lie scattered around. It is for us to not lose sight and pick them up.

The Scheme For Financial Support To PPPs in Infrastructure to be revamped and continued

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

In news

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved Continuation and Revamping of the Scheme for Financial Support to Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Infrastructure Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme till 2024-25 with a total outlay of Rs. 8,100 crore.

Key takeaways

- The Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance introduced "the Scheme for Financial Support to PPPs in Infrastructure" (Viability Gap Funding Scheme) in 2006.
- The revamped Scheme is mainly related to introduction of following two sub-schemes for mainstreaming private participation in social infrastructure:

Sub scheme–1

- This would cater to Social Sectors such as Waste Water Treatment, Water Supply, Solid Waste Management, Health and Education sectors etc.
- The projects eligible under this category should have at least 100% Operational Cost recovery.
- The Central Government will provide maximum of 30% of Total Project Cost (TPC) of the project as VGF and State Government/Sponsoring Central Ministry/Statutory Entity may provide additional support up to 30% of TPC.

Sub scheme–2

- This Sub scheme will support demonstration/pilot social sectors projects.
- The projects may be from Health and Education sectors where there is at least 50% Operational Cost recovery.
- In such projects, the Central Government and the State Governments together will provide up to 80% of capital expenditure and upto 50% of Operation & Maintenance (O&M) costs for the first five years.

Women Employment

Context: The year 2020 marks the anniversary of two major events concerning the status of women.

- First, it is nearly fifty years since the **Committee on the Status of Women in India** (CSWI) submitted the report 'Towards Equality' to the United Nations (UN), which focused on women-sensitive policymaking in India, providing a fresh perspective on gender equality.
- Second, it is the 25th anniversary of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, a benchmark for analysing the condition of women and State-led empowerment.

Issues of Women's Economic Participation

- **Economic Growth not translating into employment:** India's female employment trends do not resonate with its high economic growth, low fertility, and rise in female schooling.

- **Declining Female Labour Force Participation rate:** Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2018-19 shows that women faced a decline in labour participation rates (from 2011 to 2019) in rural areas from 35.8% to 26.4%, and stagnation in urban areas at around 20.4%.
- **Low Global Ranking:** Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranks India at 149 among 153 countries in terms of women's economic participation and opportunity.
- **Wage Gap:** The gender wage gap is the highest in Asia, with women 34% below men (for equal qualification and work), according to a 2019 Oxfam report. This stifles women's labour force participation, despite the guarantees of India's Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- **Feminisation of Agriculture:** Agriculture that is an almost completely informal sector employs nearly 60% of women, who form the bulk of landless labourers, with no credit access, subsidies, little equipment, and lack of social security measures.
- **Abysmal Land ownership:** Only about 13% of women tillers owned their land in 2019.
- **Low participation in Manufacturing Sector:** Manufacturing employs (almost completely informally) only around 14% of the female labour force.
- **Care work dominates Women's participation in Service Sector:** According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) 2005, over 60% of the 4.75 million domestic workers are women.
- **Unequal gender division of household work:** Women spend (an unpaid) three times (as per NSS) or even six times (as per OECD) more time than men in household work.
- **Overburdened Healthcare work:** According to WHO, 70% of the world's healthcare and social workers are women. In India, women are indispensable as frontline ASHA workers, but they are underpaid and overworked.
- **Disproportionate impact of Pandemic:** In India, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed that 39% of women lost their jobs in April and May compared to 29% of men, in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

Criticism of [recently passed three labour codes](#) w.r.t women issues

- The laws are expected to transform labour relations, but they only end up 'easing business'.
- The codes **acknowledge neither the gender wage gap** nor non-payment of wages and bonuses, and ignore informal (mostly women) workers in terms of social security, insurance, provident fund, maternity benefits, or gratuity.
- Though 'allowing' women to work night shifts, there is **little focus on accountability** and responsibility
- Even protection from **sexual harassment** at workplace is missing.
- Maternity benefits remain unchanged from the 2017 amendment, with an insensitively formulated adoption leave policy that grants leave to women who adopt infants under the age of three months, ignoring that most children are much older at the time of adoption.

Conclusion

- The recent labour codes disregard women's work conditions.
- Gender cannot be wished away, since every policy and code affects a giant proportion of India's workforce — both paid and unpaid, acknowledged and unacknowledged.

[Women Friendly Cities](#)

Context: Urban planning in India does not factor in gender perspectives. Cities need to be redesigned to address the concerns of women.

Issues

- Personal security, digital security and infrastructure security
- All these have a multiplier effect on the position of women — these can negatively affect their access to public spaces, jobs and even how much leisure time they can spend.
- Indifference to concerns of women results in a difficult commute and poor childcare facilities.
- The segregation of commercial and residential areas automatically increases the commute from work to home and creates entry barriers to mobility for women.
- Shared transport has been found to be generally unsafe. But in the absence of dedicated footpaths or cycle tracks, women commuters have little option.

Way Ahead

- To make cities women-friendly, urban planners must focus on two core issues — **greater safety from violence** and **adequate childcare support**.
- Mixed land-use, by encouraging office space and commercial areas in residential localities, makes for regular use of streets, better lighting and encourages women to use public spaces.
- Chandigarh Model - This city factored in local markets, commercial offices, schools, public parks, post offices, police posts and medical clinics into the design of each small locality or sector.
- Reliable childcare facilities, are necessary if we expect women to enter the job market, sustain jobs and also pursue leisure activities.
- Ensuring that enough creches are available throughout the city is important to set women free and support them in discharging their parental duties.
- For construction sites, mobile creches could be the answer.



HEALTH ISSUE

School Closures and Nutrition Fallout

Context: As many as 116 million children were impacted due to the indefinite school closure in India in the wake of COVID-19 induced lockdown which disrupted the largest school-feeding programme in the world –Mid Day Meal Scheme.

Do You Know?

- Almost 194.4 million people in India are undernourished, according to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 report by the FAO.
- A real-time monitoring tool estimated that as of April 2020, the peak of school closures, 369 million children globally were losing out on school meals, a bulk of whom were in India.

Pressing Issues

- **Tough to meet the ‘Zero Hunger’ goal by 2030:** The recent [Global Hunger Index](#) (GHI) report for 2020 ranks India at 94 out of 107 countries and in the category ‘serious’, behind our neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Danger of falling enrolment rate:** A report by the International Labour Organization and the UNICEF, on COVID-19 and child labour, cautions that unless school services and social security are universally strengthened, there is a risk that some children may not even return to schools when they reopen.

About Mid-Day Meal Scheme

- The scheme aims to improve nutritional levels among school children which also has a direct and positive impact on enrolment, retention and attendance in schools.
- A mid-day meal in India should provide 450 Kcal of energy, a minimum of 12 grams of proteins, including adequate quantities of micronutrients like iron, folic acid, Vitamin-A, etc. according to the mid-day meal scheme (MDMS) guidelines, 2006.
- This is approximately one-third of the nutritional requirement of the child, with all school-going children from classes I to VIII in government and government-aided schools being eligible.
- However, many research reports, and even the Joint Review Mission of MDMS, 2015-16 noted that many children reach school on an empty stomach, making the school’s mid-day meal a **major source of nutrition for children**, particularly those from **vulnerable communities**.

What happened to MDMS during COVID-19 Pandemic?

- In orders in March and April 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools, the Government of India announced that the usual hot-cooked mid-day meal or an equivalent food security allowance/dry ration would be provided to all eligible school-going children even during vacation.
- This was done to ensure that their immunity and nutrition is not compromised.
- Nearly three months into this decision, **States were still struggling to implement this.**
- According to the Food Corporation of India’s (FCI) food grain bulletin, the offtake of grains under MDMS from FCI during April and May, 2020 was 221.312 thousand tonnes, 22%, lower than the corresponding offtake during April and May, 2019 (281.932 thousand tonnes).
- There were 23 States and Union Territories that reported a decline in the grain offtake from FCI in April-May 2020, compared with corresponding months in 2019.

- The **State of Bihar**, for instance, which lifted 44.585 thousand tonnes in April and May 2019, **had no offtake during these two months in 2020**.
- Data and media reports indicate that dry ration distributions in lieu of school meals are irregular.
- The other worrying angle to the lack of school meals and functioning schools is the fact that there are reports of **children engaging in labour** to supplement the fall in family incomes in vulnerable households.

Innovative strategies to ensure functioning of MDMS during the pandemic period

1. Local Smallholder Farmer's involvement

- The COVID-19 crisis has also brought home the need for such decentralised models and local supply chains.
- Local smallholder farmers' involvement in school feeding can be at the helm of such nutrition initiatives.
- A livelihood model could be established that links local smallholder farmers with the mid-day meal system for the supply of cereals, vegetables, and eggs.
- This not only help in meeting protein and hidden hunger needs of children but could also diversify production and farming systems, transform rural livelihoods and the local economy, and fulfill the 'AtmanirbharPoshan' (nutritional self-sufficiency) agenda.

2. School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden

- School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden under MDMS can be another initiative to provide fresh vegetables for mid-day meals.
- Besides ensuring these are functional, what can be done, in addition, is provide hot meals can be provided to eligible children with a plan to prepare and distribute the meal in the school mid-day meal centre.
- This is similar to free urban canteens or community kitchens for the elderly and others in distress in States like Odisha.
- Also, adequate awareness about of the availability of the scheme is needed.

Conclusion

With continuing uncertainty regarding the reopening of schools, innovation is required to ensure that not just food, but nutrition is delivered regularly to millions of children. For many of them, that one hot-cooked meal was probably the best meal of the day.

[India ranks amongst the bottom in Body Mass Index \(BMI\) ranking](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health

In news

- According to a study in The Lancet, India ranks third and fifth from the bottom respectively among countries where 19-year-old girls and boys have a low Body Mass Index (BMI),

Key takeaways

- The study provides new estimates for height and BMI trends in 2019 across 200 countries after analysing data from 2,181 studies.
- The mean BMI of 19-year-old boys is 20.1 in India, compared to a high of 29.6 in the Cook Islands and a low of 19.2 in Ethiopia.

- For Indian girls, the mean BMI is again 20.1, compared to a high of 29.0 in Tonga and a low of 19.6 in Timor-Leste.
- The mean height of Indian 19-year-olds is 166.5 cm for boys and 155.2 cm for girls, well below the high of Netherlands boys (183.8 cm) and girls (170 cm).

Do you know?

- BMI is measured as the weight in kg divided by the square of the height in metres.
- WHO guidelines define a normal BMI range as 18.5 to 24.9, overweight as 25 or higher, and obesity as 30 or higher.

In vaccine race last lap, the key steps for India

Context: Nearly unparalleled efforts in science over the past few months have yielded at least two COVID-19 vaccines (from major pharma companies, Pfizer and Moderna) with promise (above 90% efficacy), in a historically short span of time.

Oxford University and its partner AstraZeneca are expecting the results of their phase-3 trials by December end, and have reportedly seen a good immune response in earlier trials among senior citizens

What should be the evaluation criteria for COVID-19 vaccine?

Evaluation of candidate vaccines for COVID-19 should be done on technical parameters and programmatic suitability. An ideal vaccine would provide all of these —

1. A vaccine that provides immunity of high degree (90% + protective especially against severe illness), broad scale (against different variants) and durable (at least five years if not lifelong)
2. A vaccine that is safe (little or no side-effects and definitely no serious adverse effects)
3. A vaccine that is cheap (similar to current childhood vaccines);
4. A vaccine that is programmatically suitable (single dose, can be kept at room temperature or at worst needs simple refrigeration between 2°C and 4°C, needle-free delivery.
5. A vaccine that is available in multidose vials, has long shelf life and is amenable to rapid production.

A difficult vaccine to develop

Historically, we have faced difficulties in the development of coronavirus vaccines.

- **No Reference Vaccines:** Although there were some attempts at development of vaccines against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), there are no licensed vaccines for any coronavirus yet.
- **Danger of Re-infection:** Previous coronavirus vaccines were found to be immunogenic (generate antibodies as in phase II) but did not effectively prevent acquisition of disease (phase III) fuelling a concern that re-infection may be possible
- **Inadequate Long term experience:** There are also safety concerns due to immunological consequences of the vaccine as these vaccines use newer techniques with which we do not have long term or large population experience.
- **Need of post-licensure surveillance system:** About the safety of vaccines, there are always possibilities of rare (one in million) or delayed (by months or years) serious adverse events which will come to light only after mass vaccination has started; this requires a good post-licensure surveillance system to be in place.

Given various candidate COVID-19 vaccines, what should the government strategy be while choosing a vaccine and for vaccination?

- **Ranking by risk category:** The first rule would be to not to put all your eggs in one basket. We already know that government has planned for vaccine supply from different sources

- **The second rule would be to prioritise:** WHO has issued guidelines for prioritisation for vaccine recipients. For this, we need to rank population sub-groups by risk category and by programmatic ease of vaccination. Vaccination should start with where these two criteria intersect — health-care workers followed by policemen
- **The third rule is use multiple channels** to immunise the population. Other important considerations would be of equity and cost.

Challenges Ahead

1. Vaccinating the general population

- Vaccinating the frontline workers like healthcare workers (& policemen) by utilizing the cold storage requirements at their own facility, including in private sector or district hospitals
- The problem arises in vaccinating general population especially the high-risk groups (the elderly and those with co-morbidity)
- It might be easier to vaccinate the institutionalised elderly as compared to community-dwelling ones.
- **Solution:** The only orderly option is to create some sort of a technological solution of a queuing system based on an earlier registration process for age and presence of co-morbidity and allotment of appointment in a nearest booth

2. Ensuring Equity in Vaccine Distribution

- The greatest challenge would be to immunise the poorest and the most vulnerable (slums/migrants/refugees/people with disabilities).
- **Solution:** Because of access issues, this must be by an outreach or camp approach (booths along with web-enabled appointments facilitated by civil society)
- **Leveraging Institutional Experience:** India has learnt major lessons through social mobilisation efforts during the Pulse Polio campaigns, Aadhaar card enrolment and elections, which will serve as good models
- **Strategic Usage:** It is expected that the pandemic would start receding once we protect about 60% of the population (in terms of coverage x effectiveness). However, we should ensure that this coverage is well-spread out, else focal outbreaks will keep occurring in areas with poor vaccine coverage.
- This also raises the possibility of using a ring immunisation strategy (immunising the population around reported cases), even earlier.

3. Issue of Market forces

- One major challenge would be that many people would be willing to pay for the vaccine and ask for expedited access.
- Obviously, till we cover a bulk of phase 1 beneficiaries, the government should not concern itself with other groups.
- However, government can and should allow the vaccine to be available in the private sector at a market-driven price for such people.
- It will be ethical as well as cost-saving for the government, if it does not divert vaccines from the government-driven programme.
- Let the decision to wait for a government-delivered vaccine or one from the private sector be made by individuals, and not the government. It will also free the government to focus more on “needy” people.

Conclusion

- Many countries have already published their prioritisation policy, therefore it is critical that the government has a fair, transparent and published policy in this regard even if it results in heartburn in some quarters.

Delirium: One of the symptoms for older Covid-19 patients

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

In news

- A new study supports evidence that delirium can predict coronavirus infection in older patients who show no other typical symptoms of Covid-19.

Important value additions

- Delirium is a serious disturbance in mental abilities that results in confused thinking and reduced awareness of the environment.
- The start of delirium is usually rapid — within hours or a few days.
- Delirium can often be traced to one or more contributing factors, such as a severe or chronic illness, changes in metabolic balance (such as low sodium), medication, infection, surgery, or alcohol or drug intoxication or withdrawal.

Do you know?

Delirium and dementia

- Dementia and delirium may be particularly difficult to distinguish, and a person may have both.
- Onset:** The onset of delirium occurs within a short time, while dementia usually begins with relatively minor symptoms that gradually worsen over time.
- Attention:** The ability to stay focused or maintain attention is significantly impaired with delirium. A person in the early stages of dementia remains generally alert.
- Fluctuation:** The appearance of delirium symptoms can fluctuate significantly and frequently throughout the day. While people with dementia have better and worse times of day, their memory and thinking skills stay at a fairly constant level during the course of a day.

Stepping out of the shadow of India's malnutrition

Context: Two recent reports — the annual report on “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020” by FAO and the 2020 Hunger report, “Better Nutrition, Better Tomorrow” by the Bread for the World Institute – document staggering facts about Indian food insecurity and malnutrition.

The Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)

- The PoU measures the percentage of people who are consuming insufficient calories than their required minimum dietary energy requirement.
- In India, **malnutrition has not declined as much as the decline** has occurred in terms of poverty.
- In terms of percentages, the PoU has declined 24.7% between 2001 and 2018 for India; whereas that for China (76.4%), Nepal (74%), Pakistan (42%), Afghanistan (37.4%) and Bangladesh (18.9%).
- It must be noted that the decline in China is way higher than that of India, even though it had started with lower levels of PoU in 2000.

- In contrast, Afghanistan (47.8%) that started with a higher base than India (18.6%) had experienced higher rates of decline.
- Of note is the fact that, economically, while Afghanistan is relatively much poorer and has gone through several prolonged conflicts in last two decades, it has been more successful in reducing malnutrition than India.
- Therefore, irrespective of the base level of PoU, most of these countries have done better than India on this dimension.

Prevalence of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI)

- These findings also get substantiated through Food Insecurity Experience Scale survey, which covers almost 90% of the world's population.
- Because it is not allowed to be conducted in India, direct estimates are not available.
- However, estimates indicate that between 2014-16, about 29.1% of the total population in India was **food insecure, which rose up to 32.9% in 2017-19.**
- In terms of absolute number, about 375 million of the total population was moderately or severely food insecure in 2014, which went to about 450 million in 2019.

Why National Food Security Act – 2013 failed to tackle malnutrition?

Despite the act ensuring every citizen “access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices”, two crucial elements that still got left out which were

- The non-inclusion of nutritious food items such as pulses
- Exclusion of potential beneficiaries.

Dangers in coming days

- The problem of malnutrition is likely to deepen in the coming years with rising unemployment and the deep economic slump.
- The current COVID-19 pandemic would make the situation worse in general, more so for vulnerable groups.

Way Ahead

- A major shift in policy has to encompass the immediate universalisation of the Public Distribution System which should definitely not be temporary in nature
- There has to be distribution of quality food items and innovative interventions such as the setting up of community kitchens among other things.
- The need of the hour remains the right utilisation and expansion of existing programmes to ensure that we arrest at least some part of this burgeoning malnutrition in the country.

Connecting the dots

- Global [Hunger Index \(GHI\)](#)
- [Nobel Peace Prize 2020](#)

Health Policy: Ayurveda doctors to practise general surgery

Context: On November 20, the Central Council of Indian Medicine, a statutory body set up under the AYUSH Ministry to regulate Indian systems of medicine, issued a gazette notification allowing postgraduate (PG) Ayurvedic practitioners to receive formal training for a variety of general surgery, ENT, ophthalmology and dental procedures.

The decision follows the amendment to the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016, to allow PG students of Ayurveda to practise general surgery.

Recent step by government to increase health service providers

- The passing of the National Medical Commission Act in 2019 allowed for the formalisation of proposals to induct mid-level care providers — Community Health Providers — in primary healthcare in India.
- They would serve at health and wellness centres across the country, and focus on primary healthcare provision, with a limited range of medicines allowed for them to use for treatment of patients.
- This move had also attracted strong opposition from modern medicine practitioners, who branded this as a form of quackery through half-baked doctors.
- Several countries have been using mid-level care providers, such as nurse practitioners, to enhance the access to healthcare, though with strict safeguards around training, certification, and standards.

Is allowing non-allopathic doctors to perform surgery legally and medically tenable?

- The current debate revolves around allowing postgraduates students in Ayurveda undergoing 'Shalya' (general surgery) and 'Shalakya' (dealing with eye, ear, nose, throat, head and neck, oro-dentistry) to perform 58 specified surgical procedures.
- This was immediately opposed by many allopathic professionals, with the Indian Medical Association (IMA) decrying it as a mode of allowing mixing of systems of medicine by using terms from allopathy.
- The AYUSH Ministry subsequently clarified that the 'Shalya' and 'Shalakya' postgraduates were already learning these procedures in their (surgical) departments in Ayurvedic medical colleges as per their training curriculum.

Can short-term training equip them to conduct surgeries and will this dilute the medicine standards in India?

- As such, the postgraduate Ayurvedic surgical training is not short-term but a formal three-year course.
- Whether the surgeries conducted in Ayurvedic medical colleges and hospitals have the same standards and outcomes as allopathic institutions requires explication and detailed formal enquiry, in the interest of patient safety.

Will non-allopathic doctors who have undergone training be restricted to practise in rural areas having poor doctor-patient ratios?

- As of now, no such restriction exists that limits non-allopathic doctors, including those doing Ayurvedic surgical postgraduation, to rural areas.
- They have the same rights as allopathic graduates and postgraduates to practise in any setting of their choice.

With allopathic surgeons often unwilling to practise in rural areas, how can this problem be solved?

- The shortage and unwillingness of allopathic doctors, including surgeons, to serve in rural areas is now a chronic issue.

- The government has tried to address this by mechanisms such as **rural bonds**, a quota for those who have served in rural service in postgraduate seats, as well as, more recently, a plan to work on increasing the number of medical colleges and postgraduate seats.
- However, there is still shortage of trained specialists in rural areas.
- Government needs to explore creative ways of addressing this gap by evidence-based approaches, such as **task-sharing**, supported by efficient and quality referral mechanisms.
- The advent of mid-level healthcare providers, such as Community Health Providers in many States, is also an opportunity to shift some elements of healthcare (preventive, promotive, and limited curative) to these providers, while ensuring clarity of role and career progression.

Is it sensible to allow Ayurvedic surgeons to only assist allopathic surgeons, rather than perform surgeries themselves?

- The AYUSH streams are **recognised systems of medicine**, and as such are allowed to independently practise medicine.
- They have medical colleges with both undergraduate and postgraduate training, which include surgical disciplines for some systems, such as Ayurveda.
- There is, however, a difference in approach in the systems of medicine, and hence models, which allow for cross-pathy.
- An apprenticeship model for Ayurvedic surgeons working with allopathic surgeons might fall into a regulatory grey zone. It might require re-training Ayurvedic practitioners in the science of surgical approaches in modern medicine.
- Even then, there might be a limit to what they are allowed to do.
- Any such experiment can put patient safety in peril, and hence, will need careful oversight and evaluation.

Can this lead to substandard care?

- Many patients prefer to receive treatment exclusively from AYUSH providers, while some approach this form of treatment as a complement to the existing allopathic treatment they are receiving.
- For invasive procedures, like surgery, the risk element can be high.
- Patients **have a right to know and understand who their surgeon would be**, what system of medicine they belong to, and their expertise and level of training.
- There should not be a difference in **quality of care between urban and rural patients** — everyone deserves a right to quality and evidence-based care from trained professionals.

Conclusion

The government has to take steps to improve healthcare service in rural areas however it should make sure that safety standards are upheld while inducting Ayurveda practitioners to perform surgery.

Connecting the dots

- Medical [Education: Over-centralisation is harsh](#)

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Funds meant for Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme siphoned off

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes

In news

- A recent investigation has found that the money meant for poor students under the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme in Jharkhand has been siphoned off and is not reaching the students.

Important value additions

Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme

- It is a centrally funded scholarship scheme for students in all states.
- It opens every year and has to be applied between August and November.
- **Aim:** To help students of minority communities - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Jains and Buddhists having annual income below Rs. 1 lakh.
- **Eligibility:** Students need to score at least 50% in their class exams.
- It is given in two tiers every year: (1) **Students in class 1 to 5:** Rs. 1,000 per year; (2) **Students of class 6 to 10:** Rs. 10,700 if a hosteller or Rs 5,700 if a day scholar.

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme extended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes & GS-III - Industries

In news

- The Union Government has extended the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) by one month till 30th November, 2020, or till such time that an amount of Rs. 3 lakh crore is sanctioned under the Scheme, whichever is earlier.

Important value additions

Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

- The scheme was launched as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package announced in May 2020.
- **Aim:** To mitigate the distress caused by coronavirus-induced lockdown, by providing credit to different sectors.
- **Objective:** To provide fully guaranteed and collateral free additional credit to MSMEs, business enterprises, MUDRA borrowers and individual loans for business purposes to the extent of 20% of their credit outstanding as on 29th February, 2020.
- **Eligibility:** Borrowers with credit outstanding up to Rs. 50 crore as on 29th February, 2020, and with an annual turnover of up to Rs. 250 crore.
- **Tenure:** Four years, including a moratorium of one year on principal repayment.

INTERNATIONAL

The shifting trajectory of India's foreign policy

Context: The Third India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue between the Foreign and Defence Ministers of India and the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defence took place in Delhi on October 26-27.

Key Outcome of the meeting

- The signing of the [Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement \(BECA\)](#) for Geo-Spatial Cooperation
- The two-day meeting also discussed steps to take existing bilateral cooperation, including 'military to military cooperation, secure communication systems and information sharing, defence trade and industrial issues', to a new level.
- With the signing of BECA, India is now a signatory to all U.S.-related foundational military agreements ([LEMOA signed in 2016](#) and [COMCASA signed in 2018](#))
- Welded together, the foundational military pacts effectively tie India to the wider U.S. strategic architecture in the region.

Critical Analysis of the military pacts

- **Apprehensions about India's Military Independence:** Previous attempts to sign these agreements were resisted on the ground that it would compromise India's security and independence in military matters.
- **Strategic Autonomy will henceforth sound hollow:** Built into the agreements are provisions for a two-way exchange of information that is not aligned with India's stance on maintaining strategic autonomy.
- **Pulled into wider Anti-China Coalition:** The U.S. makes little secret of the fact that the primary push for getting India to sign the foundational agreements was the threat posed by China, and by appending its signature India has signed on to becoming part of the wider anti-China 'coalition of the willing'.
- **Non-neutrality in Power Politics:** India has effectively jettisoned its previous policy of neutrality, and of maintaining its equi-distance from power blocs (US and China).
- **Impacts Indo-Russia Relationship:** The impact of India signing on to U.S.-related foundational military agreements, cannot but impact India-Russia relations, which has been a staple of India's foreign policy for more than half a century. A

Arguments in favour of signing these pacts and deepening India-US ties

- It is argued that there are enough India-specific safeguards built into the pacts, and there is no reason for concern.
- It may be argued that the new policy is essentially a pragmatic one, in keeping with the current state of global disorder.
- It could even be argued that an ideologically agnostic attitude is better suited to the prevailing circumstances of today.

Impact on China – Maintaining Peace a tougher challenge

- China-India relations have never been easy. Since 1988, India has pursued a policy which put a premium on an avoidance of conflicts with China.

- Even after Doklam in 2017, India saw virtue in the Wuhan and Mamallapuram discourses, to maintain better relations. This will now become increasingly problematic as India gravitates towards the U.S. sphere of influence.
- India's willingness to sign foundational military agreements with the U.S., to obtain high grade intelligence and other sensitive information, would suggest that India has made its choice, which can only **exacerbate already deteriorating China-India relations**.
- Several of India's neighbours (Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh), normally perceived to be within India's sphere of influence, currently seem to be out of step with India's approach on many issues.
- At the same time, both China and the U.S. separately, seem to be making inroads and enlarging their influence here.
- The **Maldives**, for instance, has chosen to enter into a **military pact with the U.S.** to counter Chinese expansionism in the Indian Ocean region.

Way Ahead

- **West Asia:** India needs to ensure, through deft diplomatic handling, that the latest [UAE-Israel linkage does not adversely impact India's interests](#) in the region. India also needs to devote greater attention to try and restore India-Iran ties which have definitely frayed in recent years.
- **Afghanistan:** India must decide how a shift in policy at this time would serve [India's objectives in Afghanistan](#), considering the tremendous investment it has made in recent decades to shore up democracy in that country.
- **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):** India, again, will need to try and square the circle when it comes to its [membership of the SCO](#), considering its new relationship with the U.S.
- **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):** Likewise, even though India currently has a detached outlook, vis-à-vis the NAM, and has increasingly distanced itself from the African and Latin American group in terms of policy prescriptions, matters could get aggravated, following India's new alliance patterns
- **Russia:** India can hardly hope to count on Russia as a strategic ally at a time, when Russia-China relations have vastly expanded and a strategic congruence exists between the two countries. India will need to handle with skill and dexterity its relationship with Russia.

Conclusion

New Delhi's diplomatic skills will be tested now that the country is effectively a part of the U.S.'s security architecture

Connecting the dots

- Future of SAARC and BIMSTEC
- India's Non-Alignment Policy in the times of increasing Polarisation in world

[The importance of Gilgit-Baltistan](#)

Context: On November 1, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that his government would give "provisional provincial status" to Gilgit-Baltistan region.



About GilgitBaltistan (G-B)

- The region is claimed by India as part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu & Kashmir as it existed in 1947 at its accession to India.
- However, post the 1947-48 war it is being administered by Pakistan.
- To G-B's west is Afghanistan, to its south is Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), and to the east J&K

A Brief History about GilgitBaltistan

- Gilgit had been leased to the British by Hari Singh in 1935 as GB was the frontiers of what was then the Soviet-British Great Game territory.
- The British returned G-B in August 1947 and Hari Singh sent his representative, Brigadier Ghansar Singh, as Governor, and Major William Alexander Brown to take charge of the Gilgit Scouts.
- On November 1 1947, after J&K ruler Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession with India, and the Indian Army had landed in the Valley to drive out tribal invaders from Pakistan, there was a rebellion against Hari Singh in Gilgit.
- Gilgit Scouts mutinied against India under the leadership of its commander, Major William Alexander Brown who raised the Pakistani flag and subsequently brought G-B under Pakistani administrative control.
- Pakistan did not accept G-B's accession although it took administrative control of the territory
- After India went to the UN and a series of resolutions were passed in the Security Council on the situation in Kashmir, **Pakistan believed that neither G-B nor PoK should be annexed to Pakistan, as this could undermine the international case for a plebiscite in Kashmir.**
- Pakistan also reckons that in the event a plebiscite ever takes place in Kashmir, votes in G-B will be important too.

What is the region's current status?

- Though Pakistan, like India, links G-B's fate to that of Kashmir, its administrative arrangements are different from those in PoK.
- While PoK has its own Constitution that sets out its powers and their limits vis-à-vis Pakistan, G-B has been ruled mostly by executive fiat. Until 2009, the region was simply called Northern Areas.
- It got its present name only with the Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order, 2009, which replaced the Northern Areas Legislative Council with the Legislative Assembly.
- The NALC was an elected body, but had no more than an advisory role to the Pakistan government.
- Though there were demands in Pakistan to provide provisional provincial status to G-B since long time, many factors made a push towards providing this status now.

What do the people in G-B want?

- The people of G-B have been demanding for years that it be **made a part of Pakistan**, they do not have the same constitutional rights Pakistanis have.
- There is virtually no connect with India.
- Some have in the past demanded a merger with PoK, but the people of G-B have **no real connect with Kashmir** either. They belong to several non-Kashmiri ethnicities, and speak various languages, none of these Kashmiri.
- A majority of the estimated 1.5 million G-B residents are **Shias**. There is anger against Pakistan for **unleashing extremist sectarian militant groups** that target Shias
- There is also discontent amongst G-B people over Pakistan dictating the use of their natural resources.
- But the predominant sentiment is that all these will improve once they are part of the Pakistani federation.
- There is a **small movement for independence**, but it has very little traction

Factors that caused Pakistan to change the status of G-B

- The plan to grant G-B provincial status gathered speed over the last one year.
- **India Factor:** The push might have come from India's reassertion of its claims over G-B after the August 5, 2019 reorganisation of Jammu & Kashmir
- **Chinese Factor:** There are also reports that the change in status is also linked to Chinese interests in the region, whose ambitious project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through this region. This region provides Pakistan the only territorial frontier, and thus a land route, with China, where it meets the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.
- **Domestic Politics:** The change in status also comes at a time when Pakistan government is facing protests from opposition parties. This reorganisation of G-B region provides the ruling party the much needed ammunition to bolster its credentials and divert the attention away from protests.

Consequences of the changed status

- It will further strengthen India's argument for changing the status of Jammu & Kashmir and provides diplomatic heft in international forums like UNSC.
- Possibility of escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan, if tit-for-tat approach is adopted by both countries.

- It also signals the strengthening of China-Pakistan axis as Pakistan wants to assure China of security for its CPEC infrastructural project
- Kashmir conflict which was till now bilateral can turn into trilateral conflict especially since China is aggressively pushing for CPEC project which passes through G-B region.

Conclusion

India's security agencies and diplomats must view this new development in a serious manner and take necessary steps to safeguard India's territorial claims over G-B region.

US and Paris Agreement

Context: US formally left the Paris Climate Agreement on 4th Nov 2020, three years after President Donald Trump announced his intention to undo what had been seen as a key achievement of his predecessor Barack Obama.

What is the Paris Agreement?

- In December 2015, 195 countries signed an agreement (came into force on Nov 2016) within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), dealing with greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance
- **Objective:** To slow the process of global warming by limiting a global temperature rise this century well below **2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels** and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Another crucial point in this agreement was attaining **"net zero emissions" between 2050 and 2100**. Nations have pledged "to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century".
- Developed countries were also told to **provide financial resources** to help developing countries in dealing with climate change and for adaptation measures.
- As part of a **review mechanism**, developed countries were also asked to communicate every two years the "indicative" amount of money they would be able to raise over the next two years, and information on how much of it would come from public financial sources.
- In contrast, developing countries have only been "encouraged" to provide such information every two years on a voluntary basis.
- The agreement also includes a **mechanism to address financial losses faced by less developed nations** due to climate change impacts like droughts, floods etc. However, developed nations **won't face financial claims** since it "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation".

So, why did the US leave the Paris agreement?

- During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump had described the Paris Agreement as **"unfair" to US interests**, and had promised to pull out of the agreement if elected.
- So in June 2017, months after his inauguration, Trump announced his government's decision to quit the accord
- The US could not immediately exit the Paris Agreement, however, as United Nations rules permitted a country to apply for leaving three years after the accord came into force, i.e. November 4, 2019.
- The US formally applied to leave on that day, and the departure automatically came into effect on November 4, 2020, at the end of a mandatory year-long waiting period

Trend of US retreating from Global leadership role

Since Trump Presidency (2016 onwards), US has

- Quit the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. cultural agency UNESCO

- Pulled out of Paris accord and Iran nuclear deal
- Cut funding for the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and U.N. agency that helps Palestinian refugees (UNRWA)
- Opposed a U.N. migration pact

What were the criticisms of US's withdrawal from Paris accord?

- The step is against the principle of **common responsibility**.
- The GHGs emissions done in past puts a moral obligation on US to take strict measures to cut it down in future.
- The step taken by US may result into **domino effect**, with other nations too withdrawing from the deal. This would bring to standstill one of the most comprehensive deal for climate change.
- It also provides **China an opportunity to show environmental leadership** especially with its [Climate Commitments](#) made during UN General Assembly in Sep 2020.
- While US is out of Paris deal, many of the US states and companies still consider themselves party to the deal.

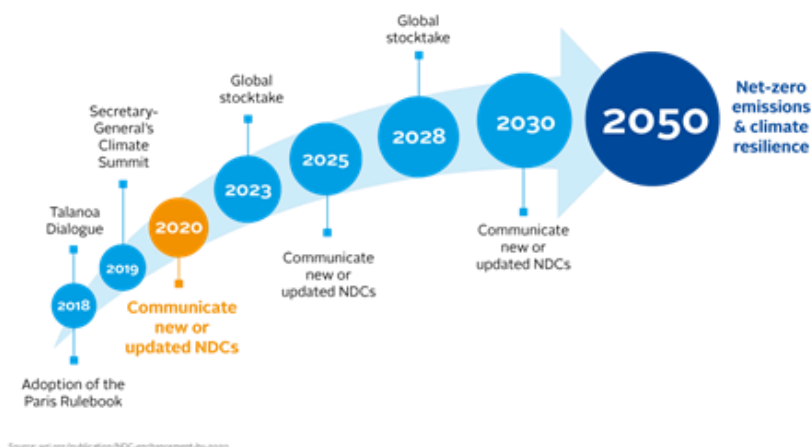
Is there any possibility of US joining back the Paris Accord?

- Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has long maintained that the US would rejoin if he wins the 2020 US Presidential Elections.
- Thirty days after formally applying to the UNFCCC, the US would again become a part of the Paris framework, and would be required to submit its emission-reduction targets for 2030.
- Joe Biden, who might possibly replace Trump as US President from 2021, has proposed a \$2 trillion spending plan that includes promoting clean energy and climate-friendly infrastructure.

India and Climate Emission

- Despite the accelerated economic growth of recent decades India's annual emissions, at 0.5 tonnes per capita, are well below the global average of 1.3 tonnes.
- China's total CO₂ emission is 29.51% of the world and per capita emission is 7.7 whereas USA's total CO₂ emission is 14.34% of the world and per capita emission is 16.1.
- In terms of cumulative emissions, India's contribution by 2017 was only 4% for a population of 1.3 billion, whereas the European Union, with a population of only 448 million, was responsible for 20%.
- India is one of the few countries which is currently on track to fulfilling their Paris Agreement commitments.

AMBITION MECHANISM IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT



Connecting the dots:

- International Solar Alliance
- [US to withdraw from WHO](#)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Global Groupings

In news

- United Nations Industrial Development Organisations (UNIDO) Representative in New Delhi has said that Regional Cluster concept of economic development is playing an important role in Indian success story.

Important value additions

- UNIDO is the specialized agency of the United Nations.
- 170 States are Members of UNIDO as of 1 April 2019
- **Mandate:** To promote and accelerate Inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) in Member States.
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria.
- It was established in 1966 by the UN General Assembly.

Place in news: Tigray region, Ethiopia

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

In news

- Ethiopia is on the brink of a civil war after Ethiopia's Prime Minister announced that he had ordered troops to counter an allegedly violent attack by armed forces in the country's northern Tigray region.

**Important value additions**

- The Tigray Region is the northernmost of the nine regions (kililat) of Ethiopia.
- It is the homeland of the Tigrayan, Irob and Kunama peoples.
- It is also known as Region 1 according to the federal constitution.
- **Capital and largest city:** Mekelle.
- It is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, the Amhara Region to the south and the Afar Region to the east and south east.

Do you know?

- In early November 2020, the region and the Ethiopian federal government entered into conflict, with some gunfire being reported in the capital of Tigray, Mekelle.
- There was conflict in September also, when Tigray held local elections in insubordination of the Ethiopian federal government.
- These elections were considered “illegal” by the federal government, further leading to conflict with Tigray authorities.

AIM–Sirius Innovation Programme 3.0 launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – International Relations& GS-III - Innovation

In news

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Sirius, Russia launched ‘AIM–Sirius Innovation Programme 3.0’.
- It is a 14-day virtual programme for Indian and Russian schoolchildren.

Key takeaways

- The first Indo-Russian bilateral youth innovation initiative, the AIM–Sirius programme seeks to develop technological solutions (both web- and mobile-based) for the two countries.
- Over a two-week programme, 48 students and 16 educators and mentors will create 8 virtual products and mobile applications addressing global challenges in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.

Innovations developed by the student teams will leverage 21st-century technologies such as app development, artificial intelligence, blockchain, machine learning etc.

Lessons from Vietnam and Bangladesh

Context: Bangladesh has become the second largest apparel exporter after China, while Vietnam’s exports have grown by about 240% in the past eight years.

Reason for Vietnam’s success story

- A less **inexpensive workforce**
- **Open trade policy** mainly through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) which ensure that its important trading partners like the U.S., the EU, China, Japan, South Korea and India do not charge import duties on products made in Vietnam
- **Domestic laws modified to attract foreign firms:** Foreign firms can compete for local businesses. For example, EU firms can open shops, enter the retail trade, and bid for both government and private sector tenders. They can take part in electricity, real estate, hospital, defence, and railways projects.
- **FDI linked export strategy:** In 2019-20, Vietnam received investments exceeding \$16 billion. As a result, Vietnam’s exports rose from \$83.5 billion in 2010 to \$279 billion in 2019.

Success Story of Bangladesh

- In Bangladesh, **large export of apparels to the EU and the U.S.** make the most of the country’s export story.
- The EU allows the import of apparel and other products from least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh duty-free.
- India, as a good neighbour, accepts all Bangladesh products duty-free (except alcohol and tobacco).

- Sadly, Bangladesh may not have such advantages in four to seven years as its per capita income rises and it loses the **LDC status**. Bangladesh is working smartly to diversify its export basket.

Which elements of Vietnam and Bangladesh models can India emulate?

- **Supporting Large firms:** The key learning from Bangladesh is the need to support large firms for a quick turnover. Large firms are better positioned to invest in brand building, meeting quality requirements, and marketing. Small firms begin as suppliers to large firms and eventually grow.
- **Focus on Specific Sectors to kick start trade:** Vietnam has changed domestic rules to meet the needs of investors. Most of Vietnam's exports happen in five sectors which has helped increase its growth in trade. In contrast, India's exports are more diversified which are slow to grow but nevertheless provides resilience to global shocks in long term.

Vulnerabilities in Vietnam's growth model

- **High export to GDP ratio (EGR).** Vietnam's EGR is 107%. Such high dependence on exports brings dollars but also makes a country vulnerable to global economic uncertainty.
- The EGR of large economies/exporting countries is a much smaller number. The U.S.'s EGR is 11.7%, Japan's is 18.5%, India's is 18.7%. Even for China, with all its trade problems, the EGR is 18.4%
- **Lack of Organic economic growth:** The quick build-up of exports in Vietnam resulted from large MNC investments. But most of its electronics exports are just the final assembly of goods produced elsewhere. In such cases, national exports look large, but the net dollar gain is small

Conclusion

- India, unlike Vietnam, has a developed domestic and capital market. To further promote manufacturing and investment, India could set up **sectoral industrial zones with pre-approved factory spaces**.
- Even if India follows an Open Trade Policy, it should have a **healthy mix of domestic champions and MNCs**.
- While export remains a priority, it should not be pursued at the expense of other sectors of the economy.

Peace Deal brokered Between Armenia And Azerbaijan

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

In news

- Russia brokered a new peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- [The two countries have been in a military conflict for over six weeks over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus.](#)

Key takeaways

- As per the new peace deal, both sides will now maintain positions in the areas that they currently hold.
- It means a significant gain for Azerbaijan as it has reclaimed over 15-20% of its lost territory during the recent conflict.
- Further, under this agreement, all military operations are suspended.
- Russian peacekeepers will be deployed along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor that connects the region to Armenia.



Important value additions

Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)

- Russia's role in the conflict has been somewhat opaque since it supplies arms to both countries and is in a military alliance with Armenia called the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).
- CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance that was signed on 15 May 1992.
- In 1992, six post-Soviet states belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States signed the Collective Security Treaty (also referred to as the "Tashkent Pact" or "Tashkent Treaty").
- **Members:** Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.
- **Headquarters:** Moscow, Russia.

Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) signed between Japan and Australia

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

In news

- Japan and Australia have signed a landmark defence deal in a bid to counter China's growing influence in the South China Sea and over the Pacific island nations.

Key takeaways

- Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) comes weeks after foreign ministers of the Quad alliance, which includes the US and India, met in Tokyo.
- The pact allows Japanese and Australian troops to visit each other's countries and conduct training and joint operations.
- Australian Prime Minister said that the treaty will strengthen their security ties and facilitate cooperation between defence forces.
- The two sides also agreed on the need for a framework to allow Japanese military to protect Australian forces if needed.

[APEC virtual meet held](#)

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

In news

- Recently, a virtual meeting of the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum was held.
- The meeting was hosted by Malaysia.

Key takeaways

- With growth in the Asia-Pacific region expected to decline by 2.7% this year, APEC's focus was on accelerating economic recovery and developing an affordable vaccine.
- **Focus Areas:** Trade and investment, Digital Economy and Technology, Structural Reform, Economic and Technical Cooperation and Thematic and institutional matters.
- APEC leaders adopted the Putrajaya Vision 2040, a new 20-year growth vision to replace the Bogor Goals where leaders agreed in 1994 to free and open trade and investment.
- They also recognised the importance of a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable trade and investment environment to drive economic recovery at such a challenging time (Covid-19).
- They also discussed the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) agenda and the APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap (AIDER).

Important value additions

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

- **Established:** 1989
- **Members:** 21
- India is not a Member.
- **Members:** Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States.
- Its 21 member economies are home to around 2.8 billion people and represented approximately 59% of world GDP and 49% of world trade in 2015.
- India had requested membership in APEC, and received initial support from the United States, Japan, Australia and Papua New Guinea.
- Officials have decided not to allow India to join as India does not border the Pacific Ocean, which all current members do.
- India was invited to be an observer for the first time in November 2011.

[New Village in Bhutan claimed by China](#)

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

In news

- Recently, Chinese media claimed that a new border village built by China near Bhutan was on Chinese territory.

Key takeaways

- The released images of the village show its location on territory disputed by Bhutan and China.
- The village of Pangda has been newly built and authorities in Yadong county (an administrative region) of Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region have confirmed that 27 households with 124 people voluntarily moved from Shangdui village to Pangda village in September 2020.

- It is for the first time since 2017 that a Chinese residential area has been noticed near the Doklam region, which is strategically important for India.
- Bhutan has officially denied the presence of any Chinese village in its territory.
- According to China's maps, the village is within China's territory.
- China also blames India for the unsettled China-Bhutan border and stalled negotiations by creating the illusion that China is encroaching on Bhutanese territory.



Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

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

In news

- The Scottish parliament passed a landmark legislation that has made period products such as sanitary pads and tampons free of cost to those people who need them.
- The bill is titled, “Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill”.

Key takeaways

- Scotland is the first country to take such a step.
- The bill was passed with the aim of tackling “period poverty”, which is when some people who need period products struggle to afford them.
- **Central objective:** To end the silence and stigma that surrounds menstruation.
- **Aim:** (1) To remove gendered barriers; (2) To ensure that those who menstruate have reasonably convenient access to period products free of charge.

Do you know?

What is ‘period poverty’?

- Certain circumstances make access to sanitary products difficult for women and trans people.
- These include homelessness, coercive, controlling and violent relationships and health conditions such as endometriosis.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Indian Naval Ship Airavat enters Port Sudan under Mission Sagar – II

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

In news

- As part of 'Mission Sagar-II', Indian Naval Ship Airavat recently entered Port Sudan.



Key takeaways

- The Government of India is providing assistance to Friendly Foreign Countries to overcome natural calamities and COVID-19 pandemic.
- INS Airavat is carrying a consignment of 100 Tonnes of food aid for the people of Sudan for the same purpose.
- Mission Sagar-II follows the first 'Mission Sagar' undertaken in May-June 2020, wherein India reached out to Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, and provided food aid and medicines.

As part of Mission Sagar-II, Indian Naval Ship Airavat will deliver food aid to Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.

Virtual Summit between India and Italy held

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

In news

- A Virtual Bilateral Summit between Indian Prime Minister and Italian Prime Minister was held recently.

Key takeaways

- The rapid growth in India-Italy relationship in recent past was appreciated.
- On regional and international issues, both sides agreed to coordinate closely at multilateral fora especially G-20.
- Italy will assume the Presidency of G-20 in December 2021 followed by India in 2022.
- Together, India and Italy will be part of the G20 Troika from December 2020.
- India welcomed Italy's decision to join ISA as soon as the ratification process is completed.

- 15 MoUs/Agreements in various sectors such as energy, fisheries, ship building, design etc. were signed coinciding with the Summit.
- Both countries are keen to firmly put behind the 2012 killing of two Indian crew members of a fishing boat off the coast of Kerala by Italian marines

Do you know?

- Italy is currently India's fifth largest trading partner in the EU.
- Bilateral trade was worth 9.52 billion Euros in 2019.
- India ranks 16th as country of origin for Italian imports.



Under Biden, the future of US-India ties

Context: The long drawn out US elections finally resulted in Joe Biden being declared President-elect. The Biden-Kamala Harris administration will be sworn in on 20th January 2021.

For the US, the Indo-US relationship is an extremely consequential one —

- **China Factor:** India is essential to the US's hopes of counterbalancing China. As a result, security cooperation has become the cornerstone of any Indo-US strategic partnership.
- **New Millennium New Direction:** The George W Bush administration first began the US commitment to co-opting India as a "natural ally", a commitment that resulted in the landmark civil nuclear deal in 2008.
- Since then, while there had been progress, it had also not been as rapid or deep as the US would perhaps have liked.

How has India-US relationship progressed in Trump era?

- **Fast Diplomacy:** In the past four years under the Donald Trump administration, Indo-US security cooperation moved at breakneck speed.
- **Status of Major Defence Partner:** In 2016, the US designated India as a Major Defence Partner, which led to, among other things, India being able to receive access to a wide range of military and dual-use American technologies.
- **Foundational Defence Agreements Signed:** Over the space of three years, three defence agreements – LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA - were reached and signed.
- **Institutional Structure for Strategic Dialogue:** In 2018, the two countries began the 2+2 strategic dialogue, one of the highest level dialogues ever institutionalised.

- **Joint Exercises:** In 2019, the US and India conducted Tiger Triumph, the first ever tri-service (ground, naval, and air forces) exercises between them.
- **QUAD taking shape:** In 2020, Australia joined India, Japan, and the US in conducting the India-led Malabar naval exercises, giving a big impetus to the [Quad](#).
- **Chinese aggressiveness acted as catalyst:** In the US view, while it had always been ready to engage in this level of cooperation, it was the border clashes with China that made India more willing to engage deeply with the US.

Despite both the US and India being on the same page in terms of the deepening relationship, there are obstacles that have remained like:

- **Indian Military's systemic dependence on Russia:** The US believes that India, which is still 60% to 70% dependent on Russia for military resupplies and hardware, will, in the future, have to choose with the kind of warfare that India wants to align itself with. India can no longer choose from an *à la carte* military menu; rather it has to choose a system.
- **India's insistence on Strategic Autonomy:** The real Achilles' heel is, as experts have pointed out, is India's economics and the continuing harping on strategic autonomy. PM Modi's use of power (full majority) to promote a nationalistic agenda is viewed by US as a lost opportunity which has not brought the expected economic growth.
- **Domestic Issues:** President Biden would be more committed to human rights which could lead to a rift with India, on, for example Kashmir.

Potential for India-US Relationship under President Biden

- Despite these obstacles, a Biden administration will not particularly change the relationship. And, in many ways, it may even **come out stronger**.
- Any US concerns, like that of Kashmir, are more likely to be **conveyed privately** rather than publicly.
- Under President Trump, decision-making was more ad hoc and at times chaotic. The dismantling of US national security decision structure by Trump, due to his deep suspicion of bureaucracy, added to this chaos.
- President Biden will restore the **US national security decision structure** – like regular inter-agency meetings, National Security Council meetings – and a process by which bureaucracy recommendations and decisions will make its way up to the President's office.
- Biden is also more likely to be considerate when it comes to **Climate funding**, which India needs so as to fulfil its Paris Climate Commitments
- President Biden will **reverse the US withdrawal of leadership role** in International affairs and help in resurrecting the rules-based international order under the leadership of US. This is in the interest of India because the space left by US will be occupied by China (which is against India's interest)

Conclusion

While it is undeniable that Trump and Modi had a bond, both Biden and Modi are likely to be extremely pragmatic about a relationship which is really about the geopolitical compulsions.

Indian diplomat elected to UN Advisory Committee On Administrative And Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; Important organisations

In news

- Recently, Indian diplomat Vidisha Maitra was elected to the UN Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ).
- ACABQ is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly.

Key takeaways

- The UN General Assembly appoints members of the Advisory Committee.
- Members are selected on the basis of broad geographical representation, personal qualifications and experience.
- The Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, which deals with administrative and budgetary issues, made the recommendation
- She has been elected for a three-year term beginning January 1, 2021.
- India was also elected recently to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for a two-year term beginning January 2021.

Important value additions

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)

- ACABQ consists of 16 members appointed by the Assembly in their individual capacity.
- ACABQ ensures that fund contributions to the UN system are put to good effect and that mandates are properly funded.
- **Functions:** (1) To examine and report on the budget submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly; (2) To advise the General Assembly concerning any administrative and budgetary matters referred to it.

17th ASEAN-India Summit held

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

In news

- Recently, India participated in the 17th ASEAN-India Virtual Summit.
- The current Chair of ASEAN is Vietnam.

Key takeaways

- The summit focused on measures to recover from the economic turmoil triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and ways to further broad-base strategic ties.
- India placed the ASEAN at the centre of India's Act East policy.
- It held that a cohesive and responsive ASEAN is essential for security and growth for all in the region.
- India highlighted the importance of strengthening convergence between India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific, to ensure a free, open, inclusive and rules-based region.
- It also highlighted the importance of cooperation by ASEAN for the Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) Vision.
- India would explore ways to increase trade despite its exit from the 15-nation RCEP agreement in 2019.

- India affirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace in the South China Sea.
- It also underscored the importance of cooperation and regular exchanges in the field of traditional medicines as a source of healthy and holistic living.
- India called for an early review of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA), which is pending for a long time.

Important value additions

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- It is a regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation.
- It was established on 8th August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration).
- **Founding members:** Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- **Present Ten Members:** Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Chairmanship rotates annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States.
- It is India's 4th largest trading partner with about USD 86.9 billion in trade.



'Strategic comfort' with the Maldives

Context: The visit of Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to the Maldives is significant for taking forward bilateral relations

Under Maldivian President Ibrahim Solih, bilateral cooperation, especially on the economic front, has become a 'model' that New Delhi can adopt to make the government's 'Neighbourhood First' policy a sustained success.

India's strategic interests in Maldives are:

- **Geographical Proximity:** Maldives is very close to the west coast of India -it is barely 70 nautical miles away from Minicoy and 300 nautical miles away from India's West coast. Hence a friendly relationship is needed to avoid any maritime territorial disputes.

Value Addition: The one-time claim of Maldives to Minicoy Island was resolved by the Maritime Boundary Treaty of 1976 between the two countries, whereby Maldives has recognized Minicoy as an integral part of India.

- **Close to Commercial Sea lines of Communication:** Its situation at the hub of commercial sea-lanes running through Indian Ocean (particularly the 8° N and 1 ½° N channels). Therefore, close cooperation of Maldives government is needed for prevent piracy in the region and ensure safety of trade routes
- **Third Country's interference:** Maldives potential to allow a third nation's naval presence in the area imbues it with significant strategic importance to India, where India considers itself as an unofficial security guarantor in the region.
- **Radicalization and Threat of Terrorism:** Radicalisation grew rapidly during last decade and it was often said that archipelago accounted for one of the highest numbers of foreign fighters in Syria in terms of per capita. India can ill-afford a neighbour which fails to check Islamic radicalisation.
- **Indian Diaspora:** Indians are the second largest expatriate community in Maldives with an approximate strength of around 25,000 (accounting for ~5.6% of Maldivian population). Close cooperation with Maldives is also important for safety & security of Indians staying in Maldives
- **Multi-lateral Forum:** Maldives is also a member of SAARC. It is important for India to have Maldives on board to maintain its leadership in the region.

Through the decades, India has rushed emergency assistance to the Maldives

- **Operation Cactus:** In 1988, when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels and restored the legitimate leadership under Operation Cactus.
- **The 2004 tsunami** was another occasion where India sent its assistance in terms of food and supplies to rebuild the region
- **The 2014 Drinking Water Scarcity in Male** was prevented from becoming a humanitarian disaster when attended by India sent packaged drinking water to Maldives through five C17 and IL17 transport aircrafts of the Indian Air Force
- **COVID-19 Assistance:** At the peak of the continuing COVID-19 disruption, India rushed \$250 million aid in quick time. New Delhi also rushed medical supplies to the Maldives, started a new cargo ferry and also opened an air travel bubble

Political Challenges in Bilateral Relationship

- Abdulla Yameen (presently leader of opposition Party and jailed for corruption) was in power when the water crisis occurred. Despite early strains in relations, India rushed help on a humanitarian basis.
- **Anti-India Protests by Opposition camp:** Now, the Yameen camp has launched an 'India Out' campaign against New Delhi's massive developmental funding for creating physical, social and community infrastructure
- **Internal Rumbles in Ruling Party:** India should be concerned about the protests as well as the occasional rumbles within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) of Mr. Solih. The political instability in the ruling party can impact the country's ties with India.

Conclusion

- Despite challenges, India can take respite in the 'strategic comfort' of the 'India First' policy of the Solih government.
- Given India's increasing geostrategic concerns in the shared seas, India should be proactive in taking forward the multifaceted cooperation with its maritime neighbour.

China's Railway work Near Arunachal Border

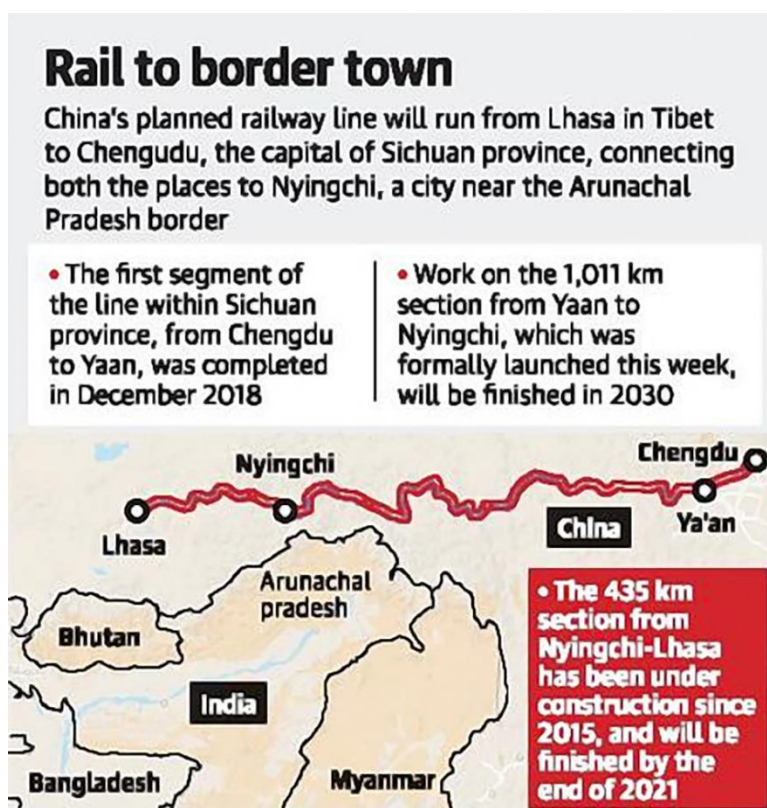
Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- China has begun work on a strategically significant railway line.
- It will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi in Tibet, which lies close to Arunachal Pradesh border.

Key takeaways

- This will be the second such route linking Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) with mainland China.
- Earlier Qinghai-Tibet railway line connected Lhasa to the hinterland.
- The railway line will largely improve the efficiency and convenience of China's military personnel and material transportation and logistical supplies in the border area. Thus, China might be at an advantageous position.
- The fragile ecological environment along the project line, may have ecological concerns for India.



India and RCEP

Context: 15 countries came together and signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on the sidelines of an online ASEAN summit hosted by Vietnam on 15th Nov 2020.

Even as India opted to stay out after walking out of discussions last year, the new trading bloc has made it clear that the door will remain open for India to return to the negotiating table.

What is RCEP?

- RCEP was originally being negotiated between 16 countries — ASEAN members and countries with which they have free trade agreements (FTAs), namely Australia, China, Korea, Japan, New Zealand and India.
- **Objective:** The purpose of the deal is to create an “**integrated market**” spanning all 16 countries. It would make it easier for products and services of each of these countries to be available across this region.
- **Mega Trade deal:** It was described as the “largest” regional trading agreement as the countries involved account for almost half of the world’s population, contribute over a quarter of world exports, and make up around 30% of the global GDP.
- Negotiations to chart out this deal had been on since 2013, and India was expected to be a signatory until its decision in November 2019 to stay out of the deal.

INDIA'S TRADE BALANCE WITH RCEP MEMBERS		
RCEP Member	2018-19	2019-20
ASEAN	-21.85	-23.82
China	-53.58	-48.65
South Korea	-12.05	-10.81
Japan	-7.91	-7.91
New Zealand	-0.25	-0.14
Australia	-9.61	-6.93

All figures in \$ billion

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Why did India walk out?

- **Unfavourable Balance of Trade:** India has trade deficits with 11 of the 15 RCEP countries, and some experts feel that India has been unable to leverage its existing bilateral free trade agreements with several RCEP members to increase exports.
- **Fear of Dumping of Chinese Goods:** India has already signed FTAs with all the countries of RCEP except China. This is the major concern for India, as after signing RCEP cheaper products from China would have flooded the Indian market.
- **Non-acceptance of Auto-trigger Mechanism:** In order to deal with the imminent rise in imports, India had been seeking an auto-trigger mechanism that would have allowed India to raise tariffs on products in instances where imports cross a certain threshold. However, other countries in RCEP were against this proposal.
- **Lack of Consensus on Rules of Origin:** Rules of origin are the criteria used to determine the national source of a product. India was concerned about a “possible circumvention” of rules of origin. The deal did not have sufficient safeguards to prevent routing of the products.

- **Protecting domestic industries:** Throughout the negotiations, the [dairy industry](#) demanded protection as the industry was expected [to face stiff competition from Australia and New Zealand](#) when the deal was signed. Similarly, steel and textiles sectors have also demanded protection.
- **MFN Status:** India wanted RCEP to exclude most-favoured nation (MFN) obligations from the investment chapter, as it did not want to hand out, especially to countries with which it has border disputes, the benefits it was giving to its strategic allies
- **Issue of Market Access:** RCEP also lacked clear assurance over market access issues in countries such as China and non-tariff barriers on Indian companies.
- **Lack of Commitment to resolve above issues:** India had been “consistently” raising “fundamental issues” and concerns throughout the negotiations and was prompted to take this stand as they had not been resolved by the deadline to commit to signing the deal.
- **No deal better than bad agreement:** India’s stance was based on a “clear-eyed calculation” of the gains and costs of entering a new arrangement, and that no pact was better than a “bad agreement”.

How far is China’s presence a factor for India’s decision?

- Apart from economic reasons (fear of dumping), escalating tensions with China are a major reason for India’s hardened position on the deal.
- China’s participation in the deal had already been proving difficult for India due to various economic threats, the clash at Galwan Valley has soured relations between the two countries.
- The various measures India has taken to reduce its exposure to China would have sat uncomfortably with its commitments under RCEP

Why is RCEP important for China?

- China is trying to overcome Covid-19 disruptions and resurrect the supply chain mechanism and possibly put pressure on US President-elect Joe Biden.
- The Indo-Pacific so far ran on **twin tracks of economy and security** with economy on a weak wicket.
- China is trying to strengthen the economic base while the US is focussed on the security aspects.
- For India, RCEP hardly makes a difference as it has FTAs with ASEAN, and CEPAs (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements) with Japan and South Korea already.

What can the decision cost India?

- **Indirectly benefits China:** RCEP is a China-backed trade deal, signing it without India will further strengthen China’s economic power. It will affect India’s neighbourhood as China already tries to influence the region through its deep pockets.
- **Impact on India’s Act East Policy:** There are concerns that India’s decision would impact its bilateral trade ties with RCEP member nations, as they may be more inclined to focus on bolstering economic ties within the bloc.
- **Losing out on Large Market:** The move could potentially leave India with less scope to tap the large market that RCEP presents —the size of the deal is mammoth, as the countries involved account for over 2 billion of the world’s population.
- **Impact on other initiatives:** There are also worries that India’s decision could impact the Australia-India-Japan network in the Indo-Pacific. It could potentially put a spanner in the works on informal talks to promote a Supply Chain Resilience Initiative among the three.

What are India's options now?

- **Can Join in future:** Japan worked hard to keep the RCEP agreement “open for accession by India” and also said that India may participate in RCEP meetings as an “observer”.
- **Observer in RCEP meetings:** RCEP signatory states said they plan to commence negotiations with India once it submits a request of its intention to join the pact “in writing”, and it may participate in meetings as an observer prior to its accession.
- **RCEP not connected to its vision on Indo-Pacific:** Indian government has made it clear that India was not about to step back from its Act East policy, nor was the decision on RCEP connected to its approach to the Indo-Pacific
- **Exploring other alternatives:** There is also a growing view that it would serve India's interest to invest strongly in negotiating bilateral agreements with the US and the EU, both currently a work in progress.

Conclusion

- When India chose to stay out of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, there was much commentary that India might be isolating itself. Three years later, India's position has been recognised by like-minded democracies, and many have said that India's decision was prescient.
- Likewise, India's decision on RCEP which was based on principles will be recognised by other like-minded countries.
- Instead of sitting out and building tariff walls across sectors, it must prod and incentivise the industry to be competitive, and get inside the RCEP tent at the earliest opportune moment.

BRICS adopts new Counter-Terrorism Strategy

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

In news

- The five-nation grouping BRICS has adopted a new counter-terrorism strategy to effectively deal with terrorism.

Key takeaways

- **Objective:** (1) To complement and strengthen the existing bilateral and multilateral ties among the BRICS countries; (2) To make a meaningful contribution to the global efforts of preventing and combating the threat of terrorism.
- The BRICS countries reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any act of terrorism committed is a crime and has no justification.
- They also recognized that the international community should take the necessary steps to enhance cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism, including cross-border movement of terrorists.

Do you know?

- BRICS is the acronym coined to associate five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Capacity building component of PM-FME Scheme inaugurated

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

In news

- Union Minister for Food Processing Industries inaugurated the capacity building component of the PradhanMantri Formalisation of Micro food processing Enterprises scheme (PM-FME Scheme).

Important value additions

PM-FME Scheme

- It was launched under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- It is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- **Aim:** (1) To enhance the competitiveness of existing individual micro-enterprises in the unorganized segment of the food processing industry; (2) To promote formalization of the sector; (3) To provide support to Farmer Producer Organizations, Self Help Groups, and Producers Cooperatives along their entire value chain.
- **Vision:** To directly assist the 2,00,000 micro food processing units for providing financial, technical, and business support for upgradation of existing micro food processing enterprises with an outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore over a period of five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.

India and Bhutan to virtually launch RuPay Card phase-2 in Bhutan

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

In news

- Prime Ministers of India and Bhutan will virtually launch RuPay Card phase-2 in Bhutan in November, 2020 (20th November).



Key takeaways

- The two Prime Ministers had jointly launched phase-1 of the project during Indian PM's visit to Bhutan in August 2019.
- The implementation of phase-1 of RuPay cards in Bhutan has enabled Indian visitors in Bhutan to access ATMs and points of sale terminals across Bhutan.
- The phase-2 will now allow Bhutanese cardholders to access RuPay network in India.

India-Luxembourg Summit held

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

In news

- Recently the first-ever India-Luxembourg Virtual Summit was held.



Key takeaways

- Luxembourg is a founding member of the EU.
- In this context, the two countries exchanged views on further strengthening India-EU relations including forward movement on India-EU trade agreements and investment agreements.
- The Luxembourg Prime Minister conveyed the intention of Luxembourg to join the International Solar Alliance.
- Indian PM also invited Luxembourg to join the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- The leaders looked forward to the 17th Joint Economic Commission between India and the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union to review the economic and trade relations.
- Three agreements were signed coinciding with the Summit. The agreements were: (1) MoU between India International Exchange (India INX) and Luxembourg Stock Exchange; (2) MoU between State Bank of India and Luxembourg Stock Exchange; (3) MoU between Invest India and Luxinnovation

15th G20 Summit held

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

In news

- In a recently held 15th G-20 summit, Indian Prime Minister termed the COVID-19 pandemic as an important turning point in history of humanity and the biggest challenge the world is facing since the World War II.
- **Convened by:** Saudi Arabia in a virtual format.

Key takeaways

- Indian PM called for a new Global Index for the Post-Corona World that comprises four key elements.
 - Creation of a vast Talent Pool
 - Ensuring that Technology reaches all segments of the society

- Transparency in systems of governance
- Dealing with Mother Earth with a spirit of Trusteeship.
- Noting that 'Work from Anywhere' is a new normal in the post-COVID world, he also suggested creation of a G20 Virtual Secretariat as a follow up and documentation repository.
- The G20 Leaders' Summit would culminate in the adoption of the Leaders' Declaration and with Saudi Arabia passing on the Presidency to Italy.

Important value additions

The G20 (or Group of Twenty)

- It is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union (EU).
- **Founded in:** 1999
- **Aim:** To discuss policy pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability. The G20 has expanded its agenda since 2008.
- **20 members:** India, Australia, Brazil, Canada, People's Republic of China, France, Germany, Argentina, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, European Union

Five technologies recommended in Drinking Water and Sanitation to provide Field Level Solutions to the States

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions & GS-III – Sci& Tech

In news

- A multi-disciplinary Technical Committee in the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti has recommended five technologies in Drinking Water and Sanitation to provide Field Level Solutions to the States.
- The Ministry of Jal Shakti gives importance to the infusion and deployment of innovative technological solutions to realize the objective of the JalJeevan Mission to provide Functional Household Tap Connection to every rural home by 2024.

Key takeaways

- The first technology recommended is **GrundfosAQpure**, a solar energy based water treatment plant based on ultra-filtration.
- The Second is **Janajal Water on Wheel**, an IoT based electric vehicle based on GPS location to enable delivery of safe water to the doorstep of households.
- Another technology is **Presto Online Chlorinator**, a non-electricity dependent online chlorinator for disinfection of water for removal of bacterial contamination.
- **Johkasou technology** recommended is an inbuilt sewage and Kitchen and bath water treatment system having advanced anaerobic-aerobic configuration that can be installed underground.
- The last innovative technology is **FBTec®**, a site assembled in a decentralised sewage treatment system using fixed filter media.

Important value additions

JalJeevan Mission

- It envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- It focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level.

- Creation of local infrastructure like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse, would be undertaken in convergence with other government programmes/schemes.
- It is based on a community approach to water and includes extensive Information, Education and Communication as a key component of the mission.
- **Funding Pattern:** The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.

7th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Kazakhstan held

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

In news

- The 7th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Kazakhstan was held recently.



Key takeaways

- During the consultations, the two sides reviewed the entire scope of bilateral cooperation within the framework of their Strategic Partnership.
- The consultations covered political, economic and commercial, energy, defence, space, consular and cultural matters.
- AMoU on "Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects in Kazakhstan" was signed.

Indian Army rejects report on Microwave Weapons

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

In news

- The Indian Army has rejected a report which claimed that the Chinese army had used microwave weapons to drive Indian soldiers away from their positions in eastern Ladakh.

Key takeaways

- These are supposed to be a type of direct energy weapons.
- They aim highly focused energy in the form of sonic, laser, or microwaves, at a target.

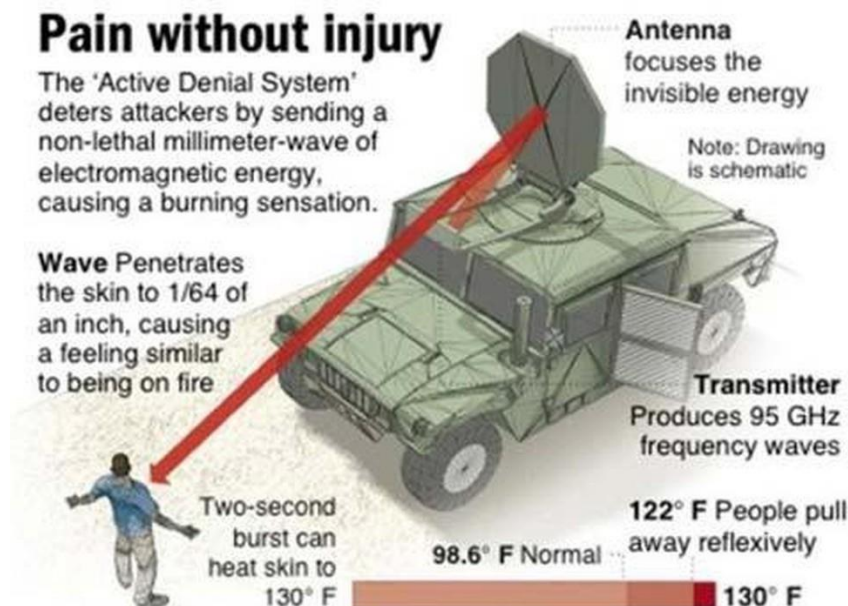
- They use beams of high-frequency electromagnetic radiation to heat the water in a human target's skin, causing pain and discomfort.
- A number of countries are thought to have developed these weapons to target both humans and electronic systems.
- Concerns have been raised on whether they can damage the eyes, or have a carcinogenic impact in the long term.

Do you know?

- China had first put on display its "microwave weapon", called Poly WB-1, at an air show in 2014.
- The United States has also developed a prototype microwave-style weapon, which it calls the "Active Denial System".
- The US apparently deployed such a weapon in Afghanistan, but withdrew it without ever using it against human targets.

Important value additions

- In a microwave oven, an electron tube called a magnetron produces electromagnetic waves (microwaves) that bounce around the metal interior of the appliance, and are absorbed by the food.
- The microwaves agitate the water molecules in the food, and their vibration produces heat that cooks the food.
- Foods with high water content cook faster in a microwave often than drier foods.



[India announces 150 projects for Afghanistan](#)

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

In news

- Recently, at the Afghanistan 2020 Conference, India has announced about 150 projects worth USD 80 million.
- The conference was attended by Afghanistan's President, United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) officials and representatives of other countries.
- Also, the USA has decided to reduce its troop presence in Afghanistan to about 2,500 by January 2021.

Key takeaways

- India will launch phase-IV of high-impact community development projects, which include around 150 projects worth USD 80 million.
- It has signed an agreement for building the Shahtoot dam, which would provide safe drinking water to 2 million residents of Kabul city.
- It builds on the 202 km Pul-e-Khumri transmission line of 2009, through which India provides power to the city.



[SDGs Investor Map For India launched](#)

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

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Invest India have launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Investor Map for India.

Key takeaways

- It laid out 18 Investment Opportunities Areas (IOAs) in six critical SDG enabling sectors, that can help the country push forward on the trajectory of Sustainable Development.
- **The six focus sectors:** Education, healthcare, agriculture and allied activities, financial services, renewable energy and alternatives and sustainable environment.
- Of the 18 IOAs identified, 10 are already mature investable areas that have seen robust Private Equity and Venture Capital activity.
- The remaining eight IOAs are emerging opportunities, which have seen traction from early-stage investors.
- The map has also identified eight 'white spaces', which have seen investor interest and have the potential to grow into IOAs in five to six years with policy support and private sector participation.



Do you know?

- Invest India is the national investment promotion agency under the Commerce & Industry Ministry.

Agreements Between India-Bahrain

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

In news

- Recently, India and Bahrain have agreed to further strengthen their ties, including in areas of defence and maritime security.

Key takeaways

- The bilateral issues, and regional and global matters of mutual interest, included areas of defence and maritime security, space technology, trade and investment, infrastructure, IT, FinTech, health, hydrocarbon and renewable energy.
- Both countries affirmed to further strengthen their Covid-19 related cooperation.
- Bahrain appreciated the assistance provided by India during the pandemic through the supply of medicines, medical equipment and medical professionals.
- They expressed satisfaction on the operationalisation of the Air Bubble arrangement between the two countries.
- India renewed invitation to Bahrain for visiting India for the 3rd India-Bahrain High Joint Commission meeting to be held in the upcoming months.

Do you know?

- Air bubbles (travel corridors or travel bubbles) are systems established between two countries that perceive each other to be safe and allow carriers of both the countries to fly passengers either way without any restrictions.



An advertisement for 'ILP CONNECT - 2021 ONLINE MENTORSHIP for UPSC Preparation'. At the top is a cartoon illustration of a guru with a white beard and orange turban, sitting in a meditative pose. Below this, the text 'ILP CONNECT - 2021' is in a dark blue box, followed by 'ONLINE MENTORSHIP for UPSC Preparation' in orange. In the center, there is a graphic with '50 SEATS LEFT' in large blue and orange letters, next to an hourglass and a clock. At the bottom, a dark blue button with white text says 'REGISTER NOW'. The background features diagonal grey lines and orange and blue geometric shapes.

ECONOMY

Haryana's RERA puts cap on Commission in a first of its kind

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- In a first of its kind order, Haryana's RERA has put a cap on the commission being charged by the brokers while facilitating a land deal.
- Now, no real estate agent in Haryana can charge more than 0.5% commission each from the buyer and the seller per deal.

Important value additions

Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act

- It took effect in May 2016 to regulate and promote the real estate sector.
- **Objective:** It aims to bring about transparency and efficiency in an opaque Industry.
- It has a mandate to protect consumer interest, including establishing a speedy redressal system.
- The Act is applicable all over India, except J&K.
- It applies to all under-construction projects with a plot size above 500 sq. m or projects with 8 apartments or more.
- Each state has to set up its own regulator, keeping the central law as the framework.
- Real estate agents must be registered with the authority before executing any transaction.
- Developers cannot advertise, market, book, sell or invite persons to purchase a plot, apartment or building without registering the project with the regulator.
- The project can be cancelled if rules are not regularly followed.
- Developers are accountable for after-sale services.
- The developer is liable to rectify structural damages for five years.
- After implementation of RERA, the number of new launches has come down because there is greater pressure on developers to be transparent about the use of money.

First attempt at defining Platform Work outside traditional employment category

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II & GS-III– Employment; Inclusive growth

In news

- The Code on Social Security, 2020, for the first time in Indian law, attempted to define 'platform work' outside the traditional employment category.

Key takeaways

- Platform work means a work arrangement outside a traditional employer-employee relationship.
- Organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals for specific problems or services.
- These activities may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment.
- **Significance:** (1) It promises workers flexibility and ownership over work delivery ; (2) Employment Intensive Sector; (3) Potential Sector for growth due to fast pace of Urbanisation; (4) Development of rural areas due to remittances sent by platform workers.

Important value additions

Code on Social Security, 2020

- This will replace nine social security laws such as Maternity Benefit Act, Employees' Provident Fund Act, Employees' Pension Scheme, Employees' Compensation Act,
- It universalizes social security coverage to those working in the unorganised sector.
- Provisions of social security will also be extended to agricultural workers also for the first time.
- It reduces the time limit for receiving gratuity payment from five years to one year for all kinds of employees.

Natural Gas Marketing Reforms

Context: At the India Energy Forum, a much talked about subject was India's Natural Gas Marketing Reforms that was announced in October 2020.

What are the Natural Gas Marketing Reforms recently announced by Government?

- The objective of the policy is to prescribe **standard procedure to discover market price of gas to be sold in the market** by gas producers, through a transparent and competitive process.
- The Director General of Hydrocarbon (DGH) will suggest an **e-bidding platform to producers**. It will list all government entities and other Credible companies. DGH will also issue guidelines for the same.
- Producers will have a choice between different platforms in transparent public domain akin to how coal, spectrum and mineral auctions takes place in the country.
- While producing companies themselves will not be allowed to participate in the bidding process, all other players and **affiliate companies will be allowed to bid**. This will facilitate and promote more competition in marketing of gas
- The policy will also **grant marketing freedom** to the Field Development Plans (FDPs) of those Blocks in which Production Sharing Contracts already provide pricing freedom.

Significance of the reforms

- **Uniformity in Bidding:** This will bring uniformity in the bidding process across the various contractual regimes and policies to avoid ambiguity and contribute towards ease of doing business
- **Enhances Ease of Doing Business:** The whole eco-system of policies relating to production, infrastructure and marketing of natural gas has been made more transparent with a focus on ease of doing business
- **Encouraging investment in domestic production:** These reforms will prove very significant for Atmanirbhar Bharat by encouraging investments in the domestic production of natural gas and reducing import dependence.
- **Climate Friendly:** The increased gas production consumption will help in improvement of environment. For example, when natural gas is burned, it produces 45 percent less carbon dioxide than coal and 30 percent less than oil.
- **Employment generation:** The domestic production will further help in increasing investment in the downstream industries such as City Gas Distribution and related industries. It will also help in creating employment opportunities in the gas consuming sectors including MSMEs.

Criticism of the reforms

1. New reforms doesn't apply to all gas production

- The new e-bidding process will govern discoveries which came on stream from February 2019 onwards. Essentially, the new regime will be applicable to producers from the areas offered under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) rounds
- Government clarified that the existing gas-pricing formula will continue to be in force for production from existing discoveries awarded under the nomination regime
- Almost 80 per cent of Indian domestic gas is produced from blocks given on nomination basis to national oil companies. As a result, this gas doesn't get the benefit of the new marketing freedom given.
- The reason for not freeing up prices of all natural gas is that if gas prices rise, so will the costs of fertiliser and electricity;
- **Consequence is muted domestic Production:** Unless existing producers like ONGC are able to earn more from the gas they produce, they are not going to get the resources to invest in exploring/extracting more gas

2. Existence of multiple types of prices for gas

- There are the 'domestic price guidelines'—this used to be called Administered Price Mechanism (APM) earlier—and gas produced under this is sold at \$1.79 per mmBtu; the costs of production, though, are significantly higher.
- Since keeping gas prices low dissuaded new investment, in 2016, the government raised the prices (in the range of \$4.5 to \$5.5 per mBtu) but only for new discoveries and that too, for gas produced in the deep or ultra-deep waters or high-temperature-high-pressure areas; if the gas was produced onshore, it didn't get the higher price.
- In addition, there are imported prices that are around \$5-7 per mmBtu.
- After reforms, there will be a price for gas that is, for instance, found onshore or in relatively shallow waters; this price will be market-determined.

3. Apart from the fact that the 'marketing' freedom has not been extended to crude oil—and to existing natural gas production

Conclusion

The 'Natural Gas Marketing Reforms' will bear fruit when domestic production takes off and the market matures

UPI Transactions crosses 2 billion mark

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- Recently UPI transactions were in the news.
- According to the data released by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the total number of transactions conducted on BHIM-UPI crossed the 2 billion mark in a month in October 2020.

Key takeaways

- UPI is currently the biggest among the NPCI operated systems.
- Other systems include National Automated Clearing House (NACH), Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS), Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS), RuPay etc.

- Digital transactions were already increasing but the lockdown imposed due to Covid-19 provided a thrust
- Also, India's digital payments industry is likely to grow from Rs. 2,153 trillion to Rs. 7,092 trillion by 2025.

Important value additions

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

- NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India.
- It is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- It is a "Not for Profit" Company under the provisions of Section 25 of Companies Act 1956 (now Section 8 of Companies Act 2013).
- **Objective:** To provide infrastructure to the entire Banking system in India for physical as well as electronic payment and settlement systems.

Do you know?

Challenges of the digital transactions

- Cybercrime. E.g. Malicious Software Cerberus
- Fraudulent claims, chargebacks, fake buyer accounts, promotion/coupon abuse, account takeover, identity theft, etc.

India's manufacturing output shows the strongest growth

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- As per the IHS Markit India Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's manufacturing output showed the strongest growth in 13 years in October 2020.
- The Nomura India Business Resumption Index (NIBRI) has also shown improvement.

Key takeaways

- Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.8 in September to 58.9 in October.
- NIBRI improved to 82.4 in October, a rise of 2.1 points from 80.3 in September.
- NIBRI is the Japanese brokerage's weekly tracker of the pace of normalisation of economic activity.
- Reasons: (1) Increase in Sales; (2) Rise in Export Orders; (3) Improvement in IIP

Important value additions

Purchasing Managers' Index

- PMI is an indicator of business activity - both in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors.
- A composite index is also constructed.
- The PMI summarizes whether market conditions as viewed by purchasing managers are expanding, neutral, or contracting.
- **Purpose:** To provide information about current and future business conditions to company decision makers, analysts, and investors.
- The PMI is usually released at the start of every month.
- It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.

Do you know?

- PMI is compiled by IHS Markit for more than 40 economies worldwide.
- IHS Markit is a global leader in information, analytics and solutions for the major industries and markets that drive economies worldwide.

Sugar Industry: Need for export subsidy

Context: Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal's announced that the central government is not considering an extension of its export subsidy for the 2020-21 sugar season.

The industry has warned of a 'vertical collapse' in the sector due to excessive stock, whose ramification can be felt in the years to come.

Why is the sugar industry rooting for exports even before the start of the season?

- At the start of the (October-November) sugar season, the industry draws up its balance-sheet and takes into consideration the expected production, the carry forward stock of last season, minus domestic consumption and exports, if any.
- This **sugar balance-sheet** determines the availability of sugar for the next season.
- In case of **unusually high stock, ex-mill prices remain low** for the present season as well as for the upcoming season, which result in **liquidity crisis for the sugar sector**.

1	Opening Stock this season (2020-21)	107 lakh tonnes
2	Annual Production Estimation (2020-21)	326 lakh tonne
3	Estimated Diversion for Ethanol production	20 lakh tonnes
4	Total available sugar balance in this season (2020-21) = (1+2)-3	413 lakh tonnes
5	Estimated Domestic Consumption in this season	260 lakh tonnes
6	Opening stock of next season (season of 2021-22) = (4-5)	153 Lakh tonnes

- This unusually high stock in the next season, without an export incentive like a government subsidy, will result in a vertical collapse of the sector.
- One way of correcting this inventory is to promote export of at least 50 lakh tonne of sugar. Then the opening stock would be 105 lakh tonne, providing the mills a healthy inventory as well as liquidity from exports

Why are mills reluctant to export sugar without a government subsidy?

- The mills' reluctance stems from the gap between cost of manufacturing and the current price of raw sugar in international markets.
- Sugar contracts at international markets are trading at Rs 21-22 per kg, while the cost of production is at Rs 32.
- The price mismatch has ruled out any export prospects as this would lead to further loss for the mills.
- Ironically, mills are facing this problem at a time when Indian sugar has made its mark in the international markets.
- Last season, India has reported record sugar export of 60 lakh tonne, of which 57 lakh tonne have already left the country. The remaining consignment is expected to leave by the end of December.

How did the mills manage to export sugar last season?

- The record export level last season was possible only because of the subsidy programme offered by the central government.
- Mills were promised a transport **subsidy of Rs 10.448 per kg of sugar exported**.
- This subsidy had helped mills bridge the difference between production costs and international prices.
- Also, the Union Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies was strict about compliance, which led to mills toeing the line in terms of exports.
- A higher demand in international markets had also seen Indian mills reporting good exports.

Have last season's exports helped mills generate enough liquidity?

- No. The central government is yet to release the export subsidy due to the mills and the total due is as high as Rs 6,900 crore.
- Individual mills had taken loans to facilitate exports and now they have to pay interest to the banks.
- Unpaid interest of Rs 3,000 crore for maintaining buffer stock has also hit hard the balance sheet of mills.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has further delayed the release of subsidy, which has led to many mills not having sufficient liquidity at the start of the season.

But why can't mills concentrate on ethanol production, given the government's emphasis on the fuel additive?

- Recently, the central government has announced a Rs 1-3 per litre rise in the procurement price of ethanol. This is the signal given by the government to mills to divert cane towards production of ethanol rather than sugar.
- Last year, the central government had announced an interest subvention scheme for mills to augment production of ethanol.
- But diversion to ethanol, although a much-needed move, **will require time to materialise**, to augment the capacity (building physical infrastructure)
- With the present capacity, mills can produce 426 crore litres of ethanol, which would require diversion of 15-20 lakh tonnes of sugar.

Conclusion

- While the government's move to encourage mills towards ethanol production is certainly welcome, it would require more capital and time.
- For the current season, in case exports are not made viable, not only will India lose its market share, but mills will certainly feel the liquidity crunch.

Connecting the dots

- [MSP in age of Surplus](#): Sugarcane Pricing and Milk Pricing

[Inter-Ministerial Committee set up To Strengthen The Capital Goods Sector](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- The government has set up a 22-member inter-ministerial committee in strengthening the Capital Goods (CG) Sector to make this sector globally competitive and to become the manufacturing hub for the world.

Key takeaways

- The Committee will look into issues pertaining to the Capital Goods Sector including technology development, mother technology development, global value chains, skill training, global standards, custom duties, etc.
- **Chairmanship:** Secretary of Department Heavy Industries
- The committee shall meet quarterly

Operation Greens – Top To Total Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- Under Operation Greens Scheme TOP to TOTAL, 50% transportation subsidy is now made available for air transportation for 41 notified fruits and vegetables from North-Eastern and Himalayan States to any place in India.

Key takeaways

- Airlines will provide the transport subsidy directly to the supplier by way of charging only 50% of the actual contracted freight charges and will claim the balance 50% from MoFPI as subsidy.
- The scheme was approved and the amended Scheme Guidelines were notified in November 2020.
- All consignment of notified fruits and vegetables irrespective of quantity and price would be eligible for 50% freight subsidy.
- **Eligible airports:** All the airports in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim (Bagdogra), and Tripura from North-East, and Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh among the Hilly States.

Do you know?

- The transportation subsidy was earlier extended under Operation Greens Scheme for Kisan Rail Scheme in December.
- Railways charge only 50% of freight charges on the notified fruits and vegetables.

GST compensation: how some states are borrowing

Context: After Puducherry, Congress-ruled Rajasthan last week became the latest Opposition-ruled state to opt for a special borrowing window for meeting its compensation shortfall under Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Other dissenting states — Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand — are yet to join any of the borrowing options floated by the central government

About GST Compensation

- Before GST, States had the power to levy some indirect taxes on economic activity. Therefore, after GST regime was introduced (in 2017), the Centre promised **guaranteed compensation to the States for the first five years**, for the revenues they lost after the shift from the earlier system.
- The compensation is calculated at a growth rate of 14% keeping 2015-16 as the base year and by levying a **Compensation Cess** on Sin and luxury goods.

Background of the Issue

- The total GST revenue shortfall for the current fiscal (2020-21) was estimated at Rs 3 lakh crore. Compensation cess collection for this fiscal is estimated at Rs 65,000 crore, thus leaving a **compensation deficit/shortfall of Rs 2.35 lakh crore.**
- The Centre distinguished the GST shortfall into two types:
 - (1) Due to GST implementation itself;
 - (2) due to the impact of Covid-19 – which was termed as Act of God
- The GST Compensation Act, 2017 had not envisaged Act of God events like COVID-19 and thus did not have any mechanism to deal with shortfall arising out of such crisis.
- Thus, the Centre had earlier refused to compensate GST shortfall arising due to covid-19 to the states.
- However, States argued that Centre cannot absolve of its responsibility to make up for GST revenue shortfall and thus demanded full compensation amount.

How did Centre try to solve the issue of compensation deficit?

- Of the Rs 2.35 lakh crore compensation shortfall, Rs 1.1 lakh crore has been estimated as shortfall on account of GST implementation, while the rest (1.25 lakh crores) is being estimated as the impact of the pandemic (Act of God).
- In August after GST Council meet, the Centre gave two options to the states
 - a) Borrow Rs **1.10 lakh crores** (revised figures) from a special window facilitated by the RBI at a reasonable G-Sec-linked interest rate. The amount can be repaid after five years ending 2022 from cess collections (on luxury goods).
 - b) Borrow entire Compensation Cess (2.35 Lakh Crores) from the market facilitated by the Centre and RBI. In this case, the burden of repayment is on States and the Union government will provide relaxation of 0.5% in states' borrowing limit under the FRBM Act.
- States will have to bear the cost of borrowing in two cases, albeit at a reasonable interest rate. States had specifically asked the Centre to borrow and pay the compensation cess shortfall to them

What is the Central government's new special window for borrowing?

- The Centre would borrow from the market and then act as an intermediary to arrange **back-to-back loans** to pay the GST compensation shortfall of Rs 1.1 lakh crore to state governments.
- Also, States have been hence given additional **unconditional borrowing freedom of 0.5% of the gross state domestic product (G-SDP)** in FY21.
- The states opting for this window are also eligible to carry forward their unutilised borrowing space to the next financial year.
- This arrangement will **not reflect in the fiscal deficit of the Centre**, and will appear as capital receipts for state governments.
- Kerala, Punjab and Chhattisgarh have insisted on further clarification and inclusion of the balance compensation deficit amount beyond the proposed borrowing of Rs 1.10 lakh crore, too, under the ambit of the back-to-back loan mechanism.

What are the merits of Centre enabled borrowing?

- The earlier proposal was for a special window to be facilitated by the RBI and the Centre, but states would have had to **tap the window separately.**
- One of the primary concerns for earlier mechanism was that it leads to **differential rates with a wide variance in interest rates** between the states with more debt and those with less debt.

- Also, the yields for state development loans (SDLs), which is the tool for market borrowing by states, are generally at a premium, higher than the yield on the central government's G-Secs.
- So, it would have been costlier for states to borrow rather than the Centre borrowing at a uniform rate and then passing it on to them as a back-to-back loan.
- Also, Centre did not go for any immediate hikes in the tax rate as it would have overburdened consumers, especially during the ongoing economic slowdown.

How has the scheme progressed so far?

- Under the special window, the Centre has already borrowed Rs 12,000 crore in two equal instalments and passed it on to **21 states and three Union Territories** on October 23 and November 2.
- The second round of borrowing was done at an interest of 4.42%, and the first round at 5.19%, lower than the cost of borrowing for states.

What is the way forward for the rest?

- The Finance Ministry is now engaged in dialogue with the opposing states to join the scheme.
- Economists say the borrowing issue has only been resolved for the compensation shortfall for this fiscal.
- It remains to be seen how this issue will be resolved for the next fiscal, given that tax revenues are expected to grow at a lower rate than the 14% growth guaranteed to states under the compensation mechanism of GST.

Conclusion

Rather than waiting for the last moment and doing back and forth, the GST Council should have come out with a detailed resolution plan.

Connecting the dots

- Lessons [from GST for One Nation One Ration Card](#)
- The [financial capacity of States is being weakened](#)

Gig Economy and Proposition-22

Context: Gig-economy giants in the US such as Uber, Lyft and DoorDash celebrated a major win last week as voters in California green-signalled Proposition 22

What was the issue all about? Contractors Vs Employees

- When companies such as Uber and Lyft first started in California in the 2010s, they did not hire drivers as employees, and instead classified them as **independent contractors**.
- For drivers, the gig work was supposed to bring greater flexibility than traditional employment.
- The industries argued that they were technology companies, and said that they should not be burdened with the legal requirements applicable to transportation companies.
- Under California's **labour law**, this business model was controversial from the beginning, since the companies did not provide drivers and other workers unemployment insurance, health care, sick leaves or guaranteed pay— the binding responsibilities of an employer.
- The gig business model came under attack in 2018, when the California Supreme Court in its landmark 'Dynamex' ruling held workers were to be treated as employees in every case, except if they were: free from the control and direction of the hirer; performed work outside the usual course of the hirer's business; and were engaged in their own independent business
- The California legislature saw the Dynamex judgment as a welcome move which could rein in the burgeoning gig industry, and in 2019 enshrined it in a state law called Assembly Bill 5 (AB5), that extended employee protections to gig workers.

The battle for Prop 22

- Gig Companies argued that with AB5 law, drivers would be forced to become full-time or leave the platform, and prices would increase.
- The app-based companies came together to draft a **ballot proposal**— a legal measure available in several US states by which citizens can suggest propositions to be put to **popular referendum** in the state, **bypassing the legislature**.
- Named Proposition 22, the ballot proposal aims to exempt ride-sharing and food delivery firms from AB5 law.
- Prop 22 also brings some advantages for gig workers. They would be able to work independently, but with new benefits such as minimum pay, vehicle insurance and some health care options.
- The gig industries poured money into their ‘Yes on Prop. 22’ campaign, raising over \$200 million — the most in California’s history on a proposition campaign — to get voters on their side
- Those opposed to the proposition, such as labour unions, argued that drivers should get full employee protections, and criticised the companies for trying to write their own labour laws.

What the passing of Proposition 22 means?

- The **popular approval of Proposition 22** on November 3 is seen as a major achievement for app-based companies, as it brings stability to their contract-based business model, especially since many of them, such as Uber and Lyft, are yet to turn a profit.
- Enthused, the gig industry has already announced that it would seek to replicate the measure in other states

Criticisms of the Proposition 22

- **Against Labour Protections:** Critics accuse the ballot measure of undoing the achievements of the labour movement of over a century.
- **Wrong Precedent:** With the success of Prop 22, experts worry that traditional businesses in the US would follow the same path as app-based companies to reduce costs – only choosing to hire gig workers and not offer full employment
- **Questions on Democratic Process:** Prop 22 is also criticised for undermining the democratic process. Because of a provision contained in the ballot measure, the California legislature would now require a seven-eighths majority– an unusually high bar– to make any legal amendments affecting gig workers.

Connecting the dots

- Should India also adopt Ballot Proposal tools to get citizen’s feedback on legislations?

[International Financial Services Centres Authority \(Banking\) Regulations, 2020 approved](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- [The International Financial Services Centres Authority \(IFSCA\)](#) approved the International Financial Services Centres Authority (Banking) Regulations, 2020.

Key takeaways

The salient aspects of the Banking Regulations include

- Laying down the requirements for setting up IFSC Banking Units (IBUs)
- Permitting persons resident outside India (having net worth not less than USD 1 Million) to open foreign currency accounts in any freely convertible currency at IFSC Banking Units (IBUs)
- Permitting persons resident in India (having net worth not less than USD 1 Million) to open foreign currency accounts in any freely convertible currency at IBUs to undertake any transaction under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) of the RBI.
- Laying down the permissible activities of IBUs including credit enhancement, credit insurance, and sale, etc.
- Permitting the Authority to determine business that a Banking Unit may be permitted to conduct in INR with persons resident in India and persons resident outside India.
- The above mentioned regulations will be notified by the Government of India in due course.

Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme approved for 10 more sectors

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to introduce the [Production-Linked Incentive \(PLI\) Scheme](#) in the following 10 key sectors for Enhancing India's Manufacturing Capabilities and Enhancing Exports.

Priority	Sectors	Implementing Ministry/Department	Approved financial outlay over a five-year period Rs.crore
1	Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery	NITI Aayog and Department of Heavy Industries	18100
2	Electronic/Technology Products	Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology	5000
3	Automobiles & Auto Components	Department of Heavy Industries	57042
4	Pharmaceuticals drugs	Department of Pharmaceuticals	15000
5	Telecom & Networking Products	Department of Telecom	12195
6	Textile Products: MMF segment and technical textiles	Ministry of Textiles	10683
7	Food Products	Ministry of Food Processing Industries	10900
8	High Efficiency Solar PV Modules	Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	4500
9	White Goods (ACs & LED)	Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade	6238
10	Speciality Steel	Ministry of Steel	6322
Total			145980

Sectors and Implementing Ministry/Department are as follows

- **Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery:** NITI Aayog and Department of Heavy Industries
- **Electronic/Technology Products:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
- **Automobiles & Auto Components:** Department of Heavy Industries
- **Pharmaceuticals drugs:** Department of Pharmaceuticals
- **Telecom & Networking Products:** Department of Telecom
- **Textile Products (MMF segment and technical textiles):** Ministry of Textiles
- **Food Products:** Ministry of Food Processing Industries.
- **High Efficiency Solar PV Modules:** Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

- **White Goods (ACs & LED):** Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- **Speciality Steel:** Ministry of Steel.

Do you know?

Notified PLI schemes are already available in the following sectors:

- **Mobile Manufacturing and Specified Electronic Components:** MEITY.
- **Critical Key Starting materials/Drug Intermediaries and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients:** Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- **Manufacturing of Medical Devices:** Department of Pharmaceuticals

Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana

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

In news

- Union Minister for Finance announced a new scheme of AATMANIRBHAR BHARAT ROZGAR YOJANA to incentivize job creation during COVID-19 recovery

Key takeaways

- If EPFO-registered establishments take in new employees without EPFO registration or those who lost jobs earlier, the Yojana will benefit these employees.
- Beneficiaries / New Employees under the scheme would be:
 - any new employee joining employment in EPFO registered establishments on monthly wages less than Rs.15,000
 - EPF members drawing monthly wage of less than Rs.15,000 who exited from employment during COVID Pandemic from 1st March to 30th September, 2020 and is employed on or after 1st October, 2020.
- Central Govt. will provide subsidy for two years in respect of new eligible employees engaged on or after 1st October, 2020 at following scale:
 - **Establishments employing up to 1000 employees:** Employee's contributions (12% of Wages) & Employer's contributions (12% of wages) totalling 24% of wages
 - Establishments employing more than 1000 employees: Only Employee's EPF contributions (12% of EPF wages)
- The scheme will be effective from October 1, 2020 and operational till 30th June 2021.

Finance Minister Announces Measures On Aatmanirbhar Bharat 3.0

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

In news

- Union Minister for Finance announced various measures, as part of Government of India's stimulus to the economy, under AatmaNirbhar Bharat 3.0.

Key takeaways

- Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, businesses, MUDRA borrowers and individuals (loans for business purposes), has been extended till March 31, 2021.
- 10 more Champion Sectors will be covered under the Production Linked Incentives Scheme to help boost competitiveness of domestic manufacturing.
- A sum of Rs 18000 crore is being provided for PM Awaas Yojana - Urban over and above Rs. 8000 Crore already allocated this year.
- Support for Construction & Infrastructure – Relaxation of Earnest Deposit Money & Performance Security on Government Tenders

- To provide ease of doing business and relief to contractors whose money otherwise remains locked up, performance security on contracts has been reduced from 5-10% to 3%. It will also extend to ongoing contracts and Public Sector Enterprises.
- Differential between circle rate and agreement value in real estate income tax under Section 43 CA of IT Act has been increased from 10% to 20%.
- Government will make ₹6,000 Crore equity investment in debt platform of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), which will help NIIF provide a debt of ₹ 1.1 Lakh Crore for infrastructure projects by 2025.
- Additional outlay of ₹10,000 Crore is being provided for PM Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana to provide rural employment. This will help accelerate rural economy.
- Around ₹3,000 Crore boost is being provided to EXIM Bank for promoting project exports under Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS Scheme).
- ₹900 Crore is being provided to Department of Biotechnology for Research and Development of Indian COVID Vaccine.

UK-Japan: A deal for the post-Brexit era?

Context: The trade agreement was sealed between the U.K. and Japan, marking the UK's first big **post-Brexit** deal on trade.

Key features of the trade deal

- Britain has said the deal meant **99% of its exports to Japan would be tariff-free**, and that it could increase trade by 15.2 billion pounds (\$19.9 billion) in the long run, compared with 2018.
- The deal **removes Britain's tariffs on Japanese cars in stages to zero in 2026**, which is the same as in the Japan-EU trade agreement.
- Britain's has expressed its interest in joining the 11-member **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)** free trade deal. Japan has welcomed Britain's eagerness to join this trade deal.
- Japan is already a member of the CPTPP, which also links Canada, Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

Significance of the deal

- UK will now be able to access Japan's agricultural market, which was earlier done under the ambit of European Union.
- **The trade deal is** modelled on the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, that provides for smooth trade between the nations with reduced duties & procedures
- **Japan's auto industry** will get benefitted in the wake of intense competition unleashed by electric automotive industry of USA.
- The agreement has some **flexibility on rules of origin and data sharing**, besides recognition for additional number of geographical indications
- The deal gives UK the breathing space when it exits the European Union (EU) on December 31, 2020.
- UK wants to make an example of this trade deal with Japanese so to strike accords with other countries.
- Britain views the trade pact with Japan **as a gateway for London's entry into the 11-member CPTPP**

Challenges in the deal

- **Absence of preferential trading terms in agriculture:** U.K. has not won major concessions compared to the EU on farm quotas from Japan.
- **Slow Opening of UK auto sector:** Tokyo has not been able to secure the elimination of British tariffs on cars sooner than (in 2026) under the deal with the EU.
- **Stakes on UK-EU deal:** The Japanese have emphasised the considerable stakes in an EU-U.K. deal, as the country's businesses based in the U.K. rely on European supply chains.
- **Similar demands from EU:** In relation to rules on government aid for ailing companies and subsidies, the U.K. would face pressure from the EU to extend similar conditions in a future relationship
- **Modest Benefit for UK:** As per the assessment of the trade deal between UK & Japan, of the £15.66 billion increase in bilateral trade, 83% of the projected benefits would accrue to Japan. In any case, the overall gain from the pact is a modest 0.07% boost to the U.K.'s GDP, compared to loss of trade after leaving the EU.

Conclusion

The Trade deal reflects UK government's recognition of the new and complex reality, wherein Britain must strike out on its own as it engages with countries around the world.

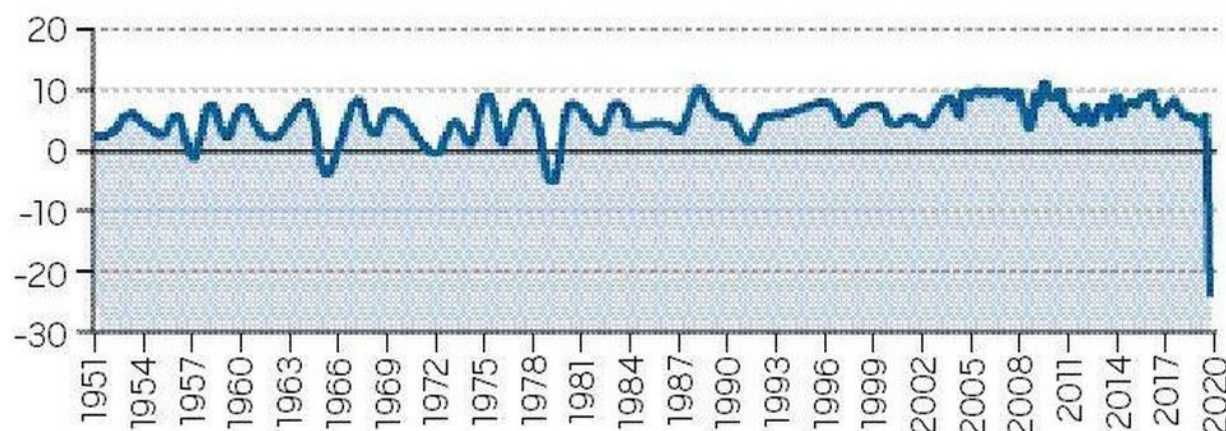
India enters phase of technical recession: RBI

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- In RBI's monthly bulletin of November, it has started "nowcasting" or "the prediction of the present or the very near future of the state of the economy".

INDIA GDP ANNUAL GROWTH RATE, 1951-2020



Source: TradingEconomics, with MoSPI data

Key takeaways

- The very first "nowcast" predicts that India's economy will contract by 8.6% in the second quarter (July, August, September) of the current financial year.
- This pace of contraction is considerably slower than the 23.9% decline in the real GDP during the first quarter.
- However, the contraction of Q2 is crucial because it implies that India has entered a "technical recession" in the first half of 2020-21— for the first time in its history.

Important value additions

Recessionary phase

- It is a phase when the GDP contracts from one quarter to another.

Recession

- When a recessionary phase sustains for long enough, it is called a recession.
- During a recession, a significant decline in economic activity spreads across the economy and can last from a few months to more than a year.

Technical recession

- When real GDP has declined for at least two consecutive quarters.

Digital taxation & OECD: On a weak pillar

Context: The tax challenges pertaining to the digitalisation of the economy have been a contentious issue over the past decade.

In recognition of this, OECD identified it as one of the main areas of focus of the OECD/G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project, leading to the 2015 BEPS Action 1 report.

What is Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS)?

- BEPS refers to tax planning strategies used by multinational enterprises that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to avoid paying tax.
- Although some of the schemes used are illegal, most are not
- BEPS practices cost countries USD 100-240 billion in lost revenue annually.
- Working together within **OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS**, over 135 countries and jurisdictions are collaborating on
 - The implementation of 15 measures to tackle tax avoidance,
 - Improve the coherence of international tax rules
 - Ensure a more transparent tax environment.

What are the concerns with BEPS?

- **Reduced Tax Revenue:** Developing countries' higher reliance on corporate income tax means they suffer from BEPS disproportionately.
- **Disproportionately impacts domestic small firms:** Such tax planning strategies undermines the fairness and integrity of tax systems because businesses that operate across borders can use BEPS to gain a competitive advantage over enterprises that operate at a domestic level.
- **Sets wrong precedent:** Moreover, when taxpayers see multinational corporations legally avoiding income tax, it undermines voluntary compliance by all taxpayers

What is 2015 BEPS Action 1 report?

In 2015, when the OECD released Action Plan 1 report, that contained the pillars that should guide taxation of the digital economy. It recognised

- Neutrality
- Efficiency
- Certainty and simplicity
- Effectiveness and fairness

- Flexibility

OECD, Taxation on digitalisation and BEPS

- The debate and focus on taxing digital companies peaked when countries started implementing uncoordinated, unilateral measures.
- In January 2019, the **OECD released a policy note** that said the renewed international discussions will focus on two central pillars: Pillar One and Pillar Two.
- Pillar One will address the broader challenges related to the digitalisation of the economy and will focus on the **allocation of taxing rights**.
- The aim of Pillar One is to reach a global agreement on adapting the allocation of taxing rights on business profits in a way that expands these rights for market jurisdictions.
- **The OECD Blueprint on Pillar one** provides a solid foundation for a future agreement that would adhere to the concept of net taxation of income, avoid double taxation and be as simple and easy to administer as possible.
- Pillar Two will sort out the remaining BEPS concerns (collectively, BEPS 2 project)

Concerns

- **Changes in International Rules:** The reallocation of taxing rights under Pillar One could lead to significant changes in the international tax rules under which multinational businesses operate and could have important consequences on the overall tax liability of businesses and tax revenues of the countries.
- **Policy Note lacks Consensus:** The Blueprint recognises that it is not a consensus document and that there are several key features of the solution that can only be resolved through political decisions.
- **Requires further Political Action:** The Blueprint notes that political decisions are required on several issues, including the amount of residual profit to be allocated under the new taxing right, the scope of mandatory binding dispute resolution etc.
- **Short on Principles:** The Blueprint falls short on a number of principles detailed in 2015 Action 1 report by OECD.

Conclusion

In the absence of a consensus, the uncertainty caused by the unilateral measures is expected to add to the tax woes of multinationals.

Connecting the dots

- [Dominance of Big Tech](#)

Calibrated Economic Package (Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0) – Part 1

Context: On 12th November, the Union Finance Ministry made a series of announcements comprising the third stimulus package that includes additional expenditure of Rs 2.65 lakh crore.

About Previous Packages

- [The first stimulus](#) focused on containing the damage of the lockdowns by addressing the cash-flow mismatch. This was done using emergency credit facilities, macro-prudential policies, deferred taxes and regulatory forbearance. The objective was to prevent massive bankruptcies

- **The second stimulus** was given to primarily the government employees as they did not witness an income shock as such, with the objective of incentivising them to spend.
- Additionally, the government reiterated its commitment towards maintaining its expenditure and pushed state governments to keep up with their expenditure commitments, including those on capital outlays.

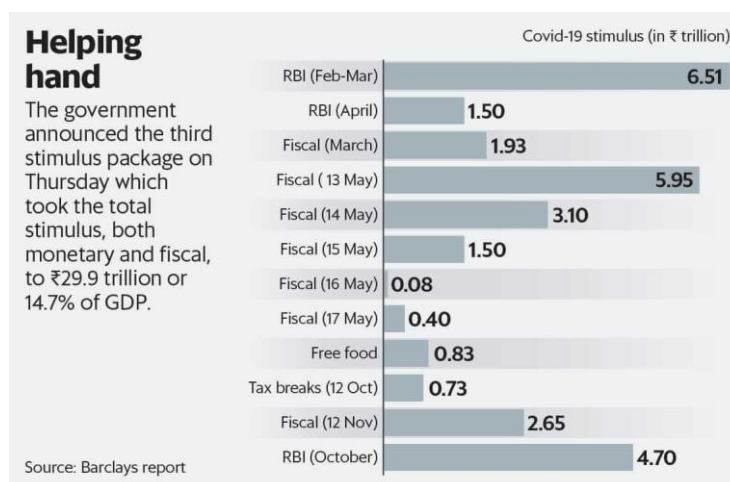


Image Source: [Livemint](https://www.livemint.com)

About the Third Package

1. **Atmanirbhar Bharta Rozgar Yojana:** The new employees hired by the EPFO-registered organisations will receive benefits during COVID-19. If the EPFO registered establishments take in new employees or those who lost jobs earlier will get benefits from government.
2. **Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)** for MSMEs, businesses, MUDRA borrowers and individuals (loans for business purposes), has been extended till March 31, 2021.
3. **New Credit Guarantee Scheme:** A credit guarantee support scheme for health care sector and 26 sectors stressed due to COVID-19 pandemic was also launched. Under this new credit scheme, banks will be able to lend to stressed companies from 26 sectors identified by the K.V. Kamath committee earlier this year.
4. **Production-Linked Incentive:** The PLI scheme worth ₹ 1.46 lakh crore [is being offered to 10 champion sectors](#) which will help boost the efficiency and competitiveness of domestic manufacturing. A total amount of ₹ 1.5 lakh crore has been earmarked across sectors, for the next five years.
5. **Pradhan Mantri Awaaz Yojana Urban:** An additional outlay of ₹ 18,000 crore over budget estimate towards PM Awaaz Yojana Urban has been announced which will help ground 12 lakh houses and complete 18 lakh houses. This will create additional 78 lakh jobs and improve the production and sale of cement and steel.

6. **Income Tax Relief for Developers and Home Buyers** for houses up to ₹ 2 crore which provides an incentive to the middle class to buy homes.
7. **Equity Investment in Debt Platform by NIIF:** The government will make ₹ 6,000 crore equity investment in debt platform of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), which will help NIIF raise ₹ 1.1 lakh crore by 2025 for financing infrastructure project
8. **Total Support:** It comes at a time when the worst seems to be over and the economy seems to be transitioning from the normalisation of economic activity stage to the growth recovery stage. The support totalled ₹2.65 trillion.

The analysis of the package will be covered in Part-2 of the article.

Emergency Retrieval System (ERS) for Power Lines

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- An indigenous technology, Emergency Retrieval System (ERS), for quick retrieval of power transmission in the event of failure of transmission line towers was recently developed. .
- **Developed by:** Structural Engineering Research Centre (SERC), constituent laboratory of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)

Key takeaways

- At present, the ERS systems are imported and the cost is relatively high.
- This technological development will enable the manufacturing in India for the first time, which will be an import substitute.
- Also, it will cost about 40% of imported systems.
- ERS is a lightweight modular system that is used as temporary support structure to restore power immediately after the collapse of transmission line towers during natural calamities such as cyclone/earthquake, or manmade disruptions.
- It is made of structurally highly stable box sections.
- It is lightweight, modular and reusable.
- It can also be assembled quickly at the disaster site for restoration of power in 2-3 days.

Calibrated Economic Package (Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0) – Part 2

Click [here](#) for Part 1 of the article

Merits of the Package

- **Objective of Package:** The measures are designed to maximise the economic impact of fiscal spending, like the various credit guarantee programmes, where the flows triggered by the guarantee are several times the potential fiscal cost
- **Spending is calibrated,** as seen in the continued expansion of the MGNREGA budget, which received its second extension, given that three-fourths of the earlier expanded budget had been used up by October.
- **Issue of Hunger tackled:** The free grains programme was not extended beyond November, as the economy is now more or less fully open, and the risk of abject hunger is lower.
- **Success of PLI Scheme:** The expansion of the Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme to 10 new sectors is a result of the success thus far of the PLI scheme for handsets. The PLI scheme is

as much about self-reliance or cutting down imports, as it is about offering cash incentives to boost domestic production, which is expected to create employment.

- **Stresses Sectors recognised:** The package expands the supply of loanable funds through enlargement of credit guarantee scheme to support stressed sectors
- **Boost to Real Estate Sector:** Tax incentives for home buyers could potentially unleash a price discovery in the real estate market. The real estate sector which has a significant multiplier impact on the economy has high employment generation capabilities.
- **Boosting Employment:** By offering to foot the bill for provident fund contributions, it has nudged companies, big and small, to hire.
- **Urban Poor and Demand for Urban NREGA:** Unsure of whether an urban MGNREGA could be implemented cleanly, and even if so, what its impact would be on rural-urban migration, the Indian government has chosen to target this problem indirectly, through a sharp increase in the budget for urban affordable housing.

Concerns

- **Banks not enthusiastic to lend:** The originally envisaged credit guarantee scheme with a target disbursement of ₹3 trillion has seen just about half of the amount being lent out by banks. This shows that despite low risk, banks are uncomfortable to lend.
- **Future Risk:** Forcing banks to lend to companies where assessing risk has become a challenge due to the pandemic puts banks at a bigger risk, credit guarantee or not.
- **Impacts can be felt in medium term:** The Rs 1,45,980 crore expenditure in the form of production-linked incentives (PLIs) to 10 new sectors will be over five years, and likely kick in only next financial year

Way Forward

- First, a **recalibration of borrowing** needs this year, which could provide some relief to the bond markets.
- Second, **clearing overdue payments**, particularly by state governments — the Centre's decision to clear fertiliser arrears is a step in right direction. This by itself could provide a stimulus to the economy.
- Third, and most important, would be for state and central governments to **build in a stimulus in next year's budget**.

Conclusion

- The package reinforces the '**fiscal conservatism**' ideology of the government — rather than large cash transfers.
- The growth philosophy centres around creating an ecosystem that aids domestic demand, incentivises companies to generate jobs and boost production, and simultaneously extends benefits to those in severe distress, be it firms or individuals

Shifting sands for Asian economies

Context: Discussions on the post-pandemic global economy have often predicted that China's appeal as a business destination would fade, losing favour as the global manufacturing hub.

What was the expectation about realigning global supply chains?

- **Dispersing of Production locations away from China:** Arguments have been made that production would be dispersed to other appealing locations mostly in Asia, and even to those outside.

- **Shift to labour Abundant economies:** It was expected that this relocation of production would benefit emerging labour-abundant economies, as labour costs in China are increasing.
- **China+1 Strategy:** The combination of trade war and the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in firms establishing relatively small-scale operations elsewhere. This is perceived as a buffer against being completely dependent on China, referred to as the 'China +1' strategy.

Some labour-intensive industries, such as textiles and apparels, have been moving to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka but trends in other industries show that businesses have mostly remained in China.

Why China still retains dominance in Global Supply Chain?

There are three reasons for firms to remain in China but wants to pursue China+1 Strategy:

- **Ease of Business in China:** First, starting an enterprise and maintaining operations in China are much easier than elsewhere.
- **Agility:** Second, Chinese firms are nimble and fast, which is evident from the quick recovery of Chinese manufacturing after the lockdown.
- **Shifting production centres requires time:** Third, many global companies have spent decades building supply chains in China. Hence, getting out would mean moving the entire ecosystem, which involves time and expenditure.

This China+1 strategy of global firms has led to an intensification of competition among Asian economies to be that 'plus one' in the emerging manufacturing landscape. **India faces three challenges in this race.**

1. Task of increasing Domestic Public Investment

- According to the IMF, increasing public investment by 1% of GDP could boost GDP by 2.7%, private investment by 10%, and employment by 1.2%, if investments are of high quality and if existing public and private debt burdens do not weaken the response of the private sector.
- In India, even before the pandemic, the growth in domestic investments had been weak, and this seems to be the opportune time to bolster public investments as interest rates are low globally and savings are available.
- Private investments would continue to be depressed, due to the uncertainty on the future economic outlook, which underscores the need to undertake high-quality public investments.

2. India Needs Overhaul in Trade Policy

- Presently, world trade had been rattled by tendencies of rising economic nationalism and unilateralism leading to the return of protectionist policies.
- A revamped trade policy needs to take into cognisance the possibility of two effects of the [RCEP](#): the 'Walmart effect' and a 'switching effect'.
- **Walmart Effect:** This would sustain demand for basic products and help in keeping employee productivity at an optimum level, but may also reduce wages and competition due to sourcing from multiple vendors at competitive rates.
- **Switching effects** would be an outcome of developed economies scouting for new sources to fulfil import demands, which requires firms to be nimble and competitive.
- Trade policy has to recognise the pitfalls of the present two-track mode, one for firms operating in the 'free trade enclaves' and another for the rest. A major fallout of this 'policy dualism' is the dampening of export diversification.

- The challenge is to make exporting activity more attractive for all firms in the economy.

3. Need to increase women's participation in the labour force.

- While India's GDP has grown by around 6% to 7% per year on an average in the recent years, educational levels of women have risen, and fertility rates have fallen, women's labour force participation rate has fallen from 42.7% in 2004–05 to 23.3% in 2017–18.
- This means that three out of four Indian women are neither working nor seeking paid work.
- Globally, India ranks among the bottom ten countries in terms of women's workforce participation.
- When Bangladesh's GDP grew at an average rate of 5.5% during 1991 and 2017, women's participation in the labour force increased from 24% to 36%.
- India could gain hugely if barriers to women's participation in the workforce are removed, for which the manufacturing sector should create labour-intensive jobs that rural and semi-urban women are qualified for.

Conclusion

- The intensity of competition is evident from the fact that after India passed [three labour code Bills](#) on September 23, Indonesian Parliament on October 5 passed a legislation that slashes regulations contained in more than 70 separate existing laws, to open up the country to more foreign investment.
- India's approach to the changed scenario needs to be well-calibrated.

Connecting the dots

- [Supply Chain Resilience Initiative](#)

GIS One District One Product (ODOP) Digital Map Of India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- The Ministry of Food Processing launched the GIS One District One Product (ODOP) digital map of India.

Key takeaways

- The digital ODOP map provides detailed information about ODOP products to all states and facilitates the stakeholders.
- The digital map also has indicators for tribal, SC, ST, and aspirational districts.
- It will enable stakeholders to make concerted efforts for its value chain development.



Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) Crisis

Context: After the failures of IL&FS, Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative Bank and DHFL, and the bailout of Yes Bank, the RBI has now decided to impose a 30-day moratorium on Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd (LVB).

RBI has also put in place a draft scheme for amalgamation of LVB with DBS Bank India, a subsidiary of DBS of Singapore and has raised concerns about the safety of the financial system.

Why was LVB put under moratorium and amalgamated with DBS Bank?

- **Continuous Losses:** The RBI said the financial position of the Chennai-based LVB, which has a network of 563 branches and deposits of Rs 20,973 crore, has undergone a steady decline, with continuous losses over the last three years eroding the bank's net-worth. LVB posted a net loss of Rs 397 crore in the September quarter of FY21, as against a loss of Rs 112 crore in the June quarter
- **Rising NPAs:** Serious governance issues in recent years have led to deterioration in its performance. Almost one fourth of the bank's advances have turned bad assets. Its gross non-performing assets (NPAs) stood 25.4% of its advances as of June 2020, as against 17.3% a year ago.
- **Low Liquidity:** It was also experiencing continuous withdrawal of deposits and low levels of liquidity.
- **Unable to raise Capital:** The bank has not been able to raise adequate capital to address these issues. The bank management had indicated to the RBI that it was in talks with certain investors, but failed to submit any concrete proposal

Are depositors and the financial system safe?

- **Assurance & Insurance by RBI:** The RBI, which put a cap of Rs 25,000 on withdrawals, has assured depositors of the bank that their interest will be protected. One safety net for small depositors is the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), an RBI subsidiary, which gives insurance cover on up to Rs 5 lakh deposits in banks.
- **Amalgamation will prevent further slide:** The combined balance sheet of DBS India and LVB would remain healthy after the proposed amalgamation, with Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) at 12.51% and Common Equity Tier-1 (CET-1) capital at 9.61%, without taking into account the infusion of additional capital.

Rising Crisis in Banking Sector

- The **collapse of IL&FS in 2018** had set off a chain reaction in the financial sector, leading to liquidity issues and defaults
- **Punjab & Maharashtra Co-op Bank** was hit by a loan scam involving HDIL promoters and the bank is yet to be bailed out.
- The near-death experience of **Yes Bank in March 2020** sent jitters among depositors. The RBI bailed out [Yes Bank](#) through a scheme backed by State Bank of India and other banks.
- Shareholders of LVB and Dhanlaxmi Bank recently firing their chief executive officers in the span of a week.

What happens to investors in these banks?

- **Bad Experience for Yes Bank Investors:** Shareholders in Yes Bank faced a significant erosion in wealth as the stock price crashed below Rs 10 per share from a peak of Rs 400 per share
- **Near total loss for existing shareholders of LVB:** In the case of LVB, equity capital is being fully written off. This means existing shareholders face a total loss on their investments unless there are buyers in the secondary market who may ascribe some value to these.
- In its draft scheme for the amalgamation, the RBI said that "On and from the appointed date, the entire amount of the paid-up share capital and reserves and surplus, including the balances in the share/securities premium account of the transferor bank, shall stand written off."

Issues facing old-generation private banks- Lack of strong promoters

- The functioning of many such banks has been under scrutiny in the last couple of years, as most of them do not have strong promoters, making them targets for mergers or forced amalgamation.
- Two other South-based banks – South Indian Bank and Federal Bank – have been operating as board-driven banks without a promoter.
- In KarurVysya Bank, the promoter stake is 2.11% and in Karnataka Bank, there's no promoter.
- The problems in LVB follow the similar challenges faced by Yes Bank as well as Punjab & Maharashtra Co-operative Bank in recent times.

What has been the regulatory response to these failures?

- On July 24, 2004, the RBI, then headed by Y V Reddy, announced a moratorium on private sector lender Global Trust Bank, which was then reeling under huge losses and bad loans. The bank was merged with public sector Oriental Bank of Commerce within 48 hours under an RBI-led rescue plan.
- Nearly 16 years later, the RBI has followed a somewhat similar approach on resuscitation of the troubled lenders of Yes Bank and now LVB.
- The moratorium announcement was followed by a **reconstruction plan for Yes Bank and capital infusion by banks and financial institutions**, with SBI, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC, Axis Bank and others putting in equity capital in the reconstructed entity.

Will loan stress caused by the pandemic impact the banking system?

- **Business Cycle disrupted:** NPAs in the banking sector are expected to increase as the pandemic affects cash flows of people and companies.
- **Differential Impact of Pandemic on Sectors:** However, the impact will differ depending upon the sector, as segments like pharmaceuticals and IT seem to have benefited in terms of revenues. NPA accretion in cash-rich sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, FMCG, chemicals, automobiles is expected to be smaller when compared to areas like hospitality, tourism, aviation and other services.
- **K V Kamath Committee** recently came out with recommendations on the financial parameters required for a one-time loan restructuring window for corporate borrowers under stress due to the pandemic.

Conclusion

- While banking observers agree that the RBI has acted whenever a bank or an NBFC faced trouble, the question remains whether it made the interventions swiftly.

Connecting the dots

- [Yes Bank Crisis](#)

Trade protectionism

Context: Statements made by Minister of External Affairs hints at trade protectionism with disapproval of free trade and globalization.

Tariffs have been increased, FTAs are being demonised, and 'vocal for local', which strikes at the heart of international trade and globalisation, is the new mantra.

Issues

- Refusing to sign [RCEP India](#) is now truly at the margins of the regional and global economy.
- Trade multilateralism at the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) remaining sluggish, FTAs are the gateways for international trade.
- By not being part of any major FTA, India cannot be part of the global value chains.
- India's competitors such as the East Asian nations, as part of RCEP, are in a far superior position to be part of global value chains and attract foreign investment.
- Blaming FTAs for deindustrialization of India means the same old issue with Indian industry — which is the lack of competitiveness and absence of structural reforms.

India is not that open as perceived

- India's applied most favoured nation import tariffs are 13.8%, which is the highest for any major economy.
- According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, on the import restrictiveness index, India figures in the 'very restrictive' category.
- India has initiated anti-dumping measures 972 times (the highest in the world), zealously endeavouring to protect domestic industry.

Globalization and India

- India has been one of the major beneficiaries of economic globalisation — a fact attested by IMF.
- Post-1991, the Indian economy grew at a faster pace, ushering in an era of economic prosperity.
- According to the economist and professor, Arvind Panagariya, poverty in rural and urban India, which stood at close to 40% in 2004-05, almost halved to about 20% by 2011-12.
- This was due to India clocking an average economic growth rate of almost 8% with international trade being a major engine of progress.

Conclusion

- Expecting to attract Foreign Investments and adopting a policy of trade protectionism is

[LNG Fuelling Stations across the golden quadrilateral](#)

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

In news

- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel recently laid the foundation stone for the first 50 LNG fuelling stations, across the golden quadrilateral and major National Highways.

Key takeaways

- Government will set up LNG stations at the distance of 200-300 km on golden quadrilateral, and within 3 years, 1000 LNG stations on all major roads, industrial hubs and mining areas shall be commissioned.
- These fifty LNG stations will be set up and commissioned in partnership by country's Oil & Gas majors such as IOCL, BPCL, HPCL, GAIL, etc.

Important value additions

- Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is natural gas (predominantly methane, CH₄, with some mixture of ethane, C₂H₆) that has been cooled down to liquid form for ease and safety of non-pressurized storage or transport.
- LNG is almost 40% cheaper than diesel.
- It also causes very less pollution.
- LNG use in trucks can reduce Sulphur oxide emissions by 100% and Nitrous oxides emissions by 85%.

World Fisheries Day observed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- The World Fisheries Day is observed on the 21st November every year.
- **Aim:** To draw attention to overfishing, habitat destruction and other serious threats to the sustainability of marine and inland resources.

Key takeaways

- For the first time, the Indian Government will award best performing States in the Fisheries Sector.
- **Best States:** (1) Odisha (amongst Marine states); (2) Uttar Pradesh (amongst Inland states); (3) Assam (amongst Hilly and NE states).

Important value additions

Indian Government's Effort to Improve Fisheries Sector

- **Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF)** during 2018-19: It will cater to creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and inland fisheries sectors to enhance the fish production in the country.
- **Extension of Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) facilities** to fishers and fish farmers to help them in meeting their working capital needs.
- **PradhanMantriMatsyaSampadaYojana:** It aims to achieve 22 million tonnes of fish production by 2024-25. It is also expected to create employment opportunities for 5.5 million people.
- **Blue Revolution:** It focuses on creating an enabling environment for integrated development and management of fisheries for the socio-economic development of the fishers and fish farmers.

Do you know?

- India is the second major producer of fish through aquaculture in the world.
- It is the 4th largest exporter of fish in the world.
- It contributes 7.7% to the global fish production.
- Fish constituted about 10% of total exports from India and almost 20% of agriculture exports in 2017-18.
- The fisheries and aquaculture production contribute around 1% to India's GDP and over 5% to the agricultural GDP.
- Around 28 million people are employed in the fisheries sector in India.

China sells Negative-Yield Bonds

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

In news

- Recently, China sold negative-yield debt for the first time, and this saw a high demand from investors across Europe.
- As yields in Europe are even lower, there was a huge demand for the 4-billion-euro bonds issued by China.

Important value additions

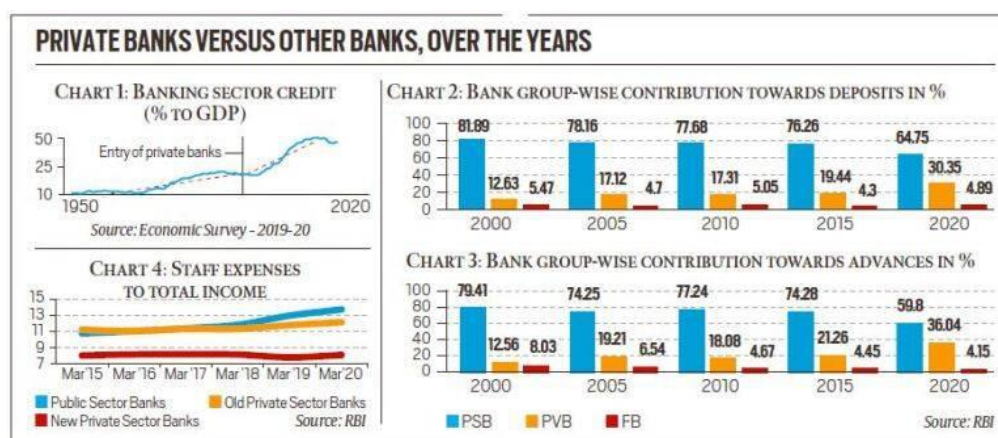
- Negative-yield bonds are debt instruments that offer to pay the investor a maturity amount lower than the purchase price of the bond.
- These are generally issued by central banks or governments, and investors pay interest to the borrower to keep their money with them.
- Negative-yield bonds attract investments during times of stress and uncertainty as investors look to protect their capital from significant erosion.
- At a time when the world is battling the Covid-19 pandemic and interest rates in developed markets across Europe are much lower, investors are looking for relatively better-yielding debt instruments to safeguard their interests.

Corporates as Banks

Context: Internal Working Group of RBI that was constituted to “review extant ownership guidelines and corporate structure for Indian private sector banks”, submitted its report.

A Brief History of Banking in India

- The banking system in any country is of critical importance for sustaining economic growth.
- India’s banking system has changed a lot since Independence when banks were owned by the private sector, resulting in a “large concentration of resources in the hands of a few business families”.
- To achieve “a wider spread of bank credit, prevent its misuse, direct a larger volume of credit flow to priority sectors and to make it an effective instrument of economic development”, the government resorted to the nationalisation of banks in 1969 (14 banks) and again in 1980 (6 banks).
- With economic liberalisation in the early 1990s, the economy’s credit needs grew and private banks re-entered the picture.
- As Chart 1 shows, the entry of Private sector post 1991 economic reforms had a salutary impact on credit growth.



Source: [Indian Express](#)

Why was the IWG constituted and what were its recommendations?

The below pointers provide the background in which the IWG was asked to suggest changes to boost private sector banking in India

- **Low Balance Sheets of Banks:** Even after three decades of rapid growth, “the total balance sheet of banks in India still constitutes less than 70 per cent of the GDP, which is much less compared to global peers” such as China, where this ratio is closer to 175%
- **Inadequate Credit Flow to Private Sector:** Moreover, domestic bank credit to the private sector is just 50% of GDP when in economies such as China, Japan, the US and Korea it is upwards of 150 per cent.
- **Unable to meet Credit Demand of growing Economy:** In other words, India’s banking system has been struggling to meet the credit demands of a growing economy.
- **Need to bolster entire System:** There is only one Indian bank in the top 100 banks globally by size. Further, Indian banks are also one of the least cost-efficient. Clearly, India needs to bolster its banking system if it wants to grow at a fast clip
- **Merits of Private banks:** Private banks are not only more efficient and profitable but also have more risk appetite. It is crucial to note that public sector banks have been steadily losing ground to private banks as Charts 2, 3 and 4 show.

Major Recommendation of IWG:

- **Large corporate/industrial houses may be allowed as promoters of banks** only after necessary amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (to prevent connected lending and exposures between the banks and other financial and non-financial group entities); and strengthening of the supervisory mechanism for large conglomerates, including consolidated supervision.
- **Well run large Non-banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)**, with an asset size of ₹50,000 crore and above, including those which are owned by a corporate house, may be considered for conversion into banks subject to completion of 10 years of operations and meeting due diligence criteria and compliance with additional conditions specified in this regard.
- **For Payments Banks** intending to convert to a Small Finance Bank, track record of 3 years of experience as Payments Bank may be considered as sufficient.

Why is the recommendation to allow large corporates to float their own banks being criticised?

- Historically, RBI has been of the view that the ideal ownership status of banks should promote a balance between efficiency, equity and financial stability.
- A predominantly government-owned banking system tends to be more financially stable because of the trust in government as an institution.
- Moreover, even in private bank ownership, past regulators have preferred it to be well-diversified — that is, no single owner has too much stake.
- More specifically, the main concern in allowing large corporates — that is, business houses having total assets of Rs 5,000 crore or more, where the non-financial business of the group accounts for more than 40% in terms of total assets or gross income — to open their own banks is a **basic conflict of interest**, or more technically, “**connected lending**”.

What is connected lending?

- Simply put, connected lending refers to a situation where the promoter of a bank is also a borrower and, as such, it is possible for a promoter to channel the depositors’ money into their own ventures.
- Connected lending has been happening for a long time and the RBI has been always behind the curve in spotting it.

- The recent episodes in ICICI Bank, Yes Bank, DHFL etc. were all examples of connected lending.
- The so-called **ever-greening of loans** (where one loan after another is extended to enable the borrower to pay back the previous one) is often the starting point of such lending.
- Therefore, it is prudent to keep the class of borrowers (big companies) apart from the class of lenders (banks).
- **Past examples of such mingling** — such as Japan's Keiretsu and Korea's Chaebol — came unstuck during the 1998 crisis with disastrous consequences for the broader economy.

Then why recommend it?

- The Indian economy, especially the private sector, needs money (credit) to grow. Far from being able to extend credit, the government-owned banks are struggling to contain their non-performing assets.
- Government finances were already strained before the Covid crisis. With growth faltering, revenues have plummeted and the government has limited ability to push for growth through the public sector banks.
- Large corporates, with deep pockets, are the ones with the financial resources to fund India's future growth.

Conclusion

The dangers posed to overall financial stability by letting industrial houses have access to relatively inexpensive capital in the form of household savings through banks, howsoever legally regulated, are far too great to risk at the altar of liberalisation of ownership norms.

Connecting the dots

- Twin Balance Sheet Problem
- Narasimham Committee Recommendations (1998)

FDI in Telecom

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure; FDI

In news

- Union Cabinet approved ₹2,480 crore FDI in ATC Telecom Infra Pvt Ltd.
- ATC Asia Pacific Pte. Ltd is looking to acquire 12.32% stake in ATC Telecom Infra Pvt Ltd through the FDI route.
- FDI up to 100% is allowed in Telecom Services Sector wherein 49% under automatic route and beyond 49% through government route subject to observance of licensing and security conditions by the licensee as well as investors as notified by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) from time to time.

India's GDP contracts 7.5% in second quarter

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- As per estimates released by the National Statistical Office, India's GDP contracted 7.5% in the second quarter of 2020-21.

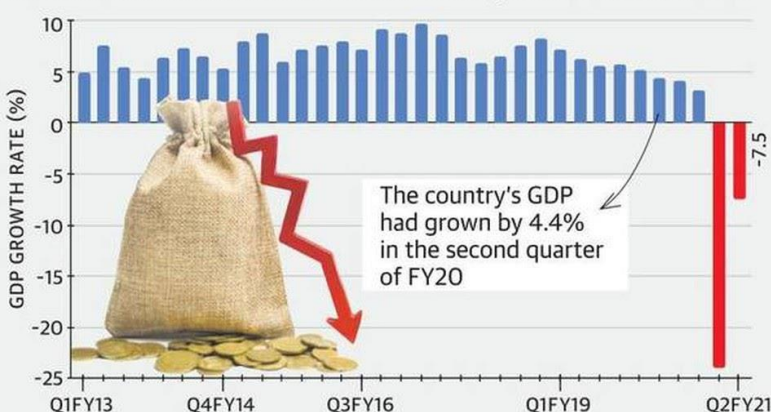
- In the first quarter, India had recorded 23.9% decline.

Key takeaways

- India has now entered a technical recession with two successive quarters of negative growth.
- Agriculture, which was the only sector to record growth between April and June this year, grew at the same pace of 3.4% in the second quarter.
- Manufacturing gross value-added (GVA) showed a sharp recovery to record 0.6% growth between July and September after collapsing 39.3% in the first quarter.
- Electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services also recorded 4.4% growth in the second quarter, recovering from a 7% contraction in Q1.
- But it remained a weak quarter for several sectors, including mining, services such as retail trade and hotels, construction and financial services.
- While the 7.5% contraction in GDP came as a positive surprise, there are concerns about a decline in government spending and the worsening fate of two key sectors compared to the first quarter.

Still in the red

At -7.5%, India's Gross Domestic Product at constant prices contracted for the second consecutive quarter in FY2020-21



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AGRICULTURE

Saffron bowl to expand to the North East soon

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

In news

- The saffron bowl, which was so far confined to Kashmir, may soon expand to the North East of India.
- Plants which were transported from Kashmir to Sikkim, acclimatized there and are now flowering in Yangyang in the Southern part of Sikkim.

Key takeaways

- Saffron production has long been restricted to a limited geographical area in the Union territory of J&K.
- Though the National Mission on Saffron focused on several measures to improve its farming, the measures were still limited to the specified areas of Kashmir.
- North East Centre For Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous body under the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India supported a pilot project to explore the feasibility of growing saffron in North East region of India, with the same quality and higher quantity.
- The Botany and Horticulture department of Sikkim Central University carried out tests to understand the soil and actual pH conditions of Yangyang of Sikkim and found it comparable to saffron growing places of Kashmir.

Important value additions

Saffron

- It is a plant whose dried stigmas (thread-like parts of the flower) are used to make saffron spice.
- Saffron cultivation is believed to have been introduced in Kashmir by Central Asian immigrants around the 1st Century BCE.
- It represents the rich cultural heritage of the J&K region.
- It is a very precious and costly product.
- It is referred to as 'bahukam' in ancient Sanskrit literature.
- It is cultivated and harvested in the Karewa (highlands) of J&K.
- **Uses:** (1) It rejuvenates health; (2) It is used in cosmetics and for medicinal purposes.
- It is usually cultivated during June and July and at some places in August and September.
- Saffron grows well at an altitude of 2000 meters above sea level.
- It needs 12 hours of sunlight.
- It grows in many different soil types but thrives best in calcareous (soil that has calcium carbonate in abundance), humus-rich and well-drained soil with a pH between 6 and 8.
- **Temperature:** Ranging from 35 or 40 degree Celsius in summer to about -15 or -20 degree Celsius in winter.
- It also requires adequate rainfall that is 1000-1500 mm per annum.

Do you know?

- Pampore region, in India, commonly known as Saffron bowl of Kashmir, is the main contributor to saffron production, followed by Budgam, Srinagar, and Kishtiwar districts.

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)

Context: The central government has notified an Ordinance to constitute a Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Adjoining Areas.

Key Points of the Ordinance

- **Overarching Body:** CAQM will supersede all existing bodies, including the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), as well as state governments in matters of air pollution mitigation
- **Abolition of EPCA:** Through the Ordinance, the Centre has dissolved the Environment Pollution Prevention and Control Authority (EPCA) for the NCR.
- **Role of NGT:** Only the National Green Tribunal (NGT), and not civil courts, is authorised to hear cases where the Commission is involved.

What is Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA)?

- EPCA was constituted in 1998 under section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 for the National Capital Region **in compliance with the Supreme Court** order dated January 1998.
- It has the power to take action suo-moto, or on the basis of complaints made by any individual, representative body or organization functioning in the field of environment.
- It takes all necessary steps for controlling vehicular pollution, ensuring compliance of fuel quality standards, monitoring and coordinating action for traffic planning and management.

Composition of CAQM

- **Strength:** The new 18-member Commission brings together the Centre, states, and other stakeholders on one collaborative platform.
- **Chairperson:** It will have a full-time chairperson “who is or has been Secretary to the Government of India or Chief Secretary to the Government of a state”. The chairperson will hold the post for three years or until s/he attains the age of 70 years.
- **State Representatives:** The Commission will also have five ex officio members who are either Chief Secretaries, or Secretaries in charge of the department dealing with environment protection in the States of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh
- **Experts:** Three full-time independent technical members with “specific scientific knowledge and experience in matters relating to air pollution”; a technical member each from the CPCB and nominated by ISRO, ex officio.
- **Civil Society:** Three representatives of NGOs with experience in combating air pollution
- **Others:** It will have members from NitiAayog and several Ministries

Why CAQM was needed?

- **Need for Single Body:** The monitoring and management of air quality in the Delhi NCR region has so far been done piecemeal by multiple bodies including the CPCB, state pollution control boards, the state governments of Delhi, Haryana, Utttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and the EPCA.
- **Holistic Approach:** The problem with the air pollution in Delhi is that the source of the pollution lies elsewhere – that is why it is important to tackle the whole region, rather than piecemeal approach taken by various bodies

- **More Powers:** EPCA was not a statutory body but drew legitimacy from the Supreme Court (M C Mehta vs Union of India (1988)). It did have the authority to issue fines or directions and guidelines to the governments in other states.
- **Failure of previous mechanisms:** Experts say that EPCA has failed miserably in cleaning the air even after being in force for more than 20 years. CAQM's performance will be gauged by changes in the status quo when it comes to ground implementation and strict action on polluters.

Merits of CAQM

- **Effective Mechanism to tackle Pollution:** The permanent Commission envisages a multi-sectoral, public participatory, multi-state dynamic body for combating pollution and with statutory status the body can deal with pollution on war footing
- **More Teeth:** It will now be binding on state governments to follow the directions of the Commission regarding air quality management. It will also have powers to restrict the setting up of industries in vulnerable areas, and will be able to conduct site inspections of industrial units.
- **Penal Powers:** The penalty for non-compliance shall be imprisonment upto five years or fine upto Rs 1 crore, or both.
- **Relieves Supreme Court:** The Centre seeks to relieve the Supreme Court from having to constantly monitor pollution levels through various pollution-related cases.

Criticisms

- **Undemocratic process:** It has been criticised that ordinance was passed with no consultation with states and other stakeholders
- **Doubts over approach:** It is unsure whether a top-down implementation approach through CAQM (without third-party monitoring and citizen-driven enforcement) will work.
- **Inadequate targets:** There is also the lack of a time-bound commitment to clean the air.
- **Overrepresentation of the Central Government:** The Commission has a large number of members from the central government, which has not gone down well with the states. On the other hand, States will have just one member each.

Conclusion

While CAQM is welcome, it alone cannot clean the air. Its success will depend on how it tackles different interest groups; outlines a time-bound commitment to achieving the set standards; ensures adequate personnel and funds for pollution control bodies

Ganga Utsav 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Culture & GS-III - Environment

In news

- Recently, the Ganga Utsav 2020 has begun.
- It celebrates the glory of the National river Ganga.

Key takeaways

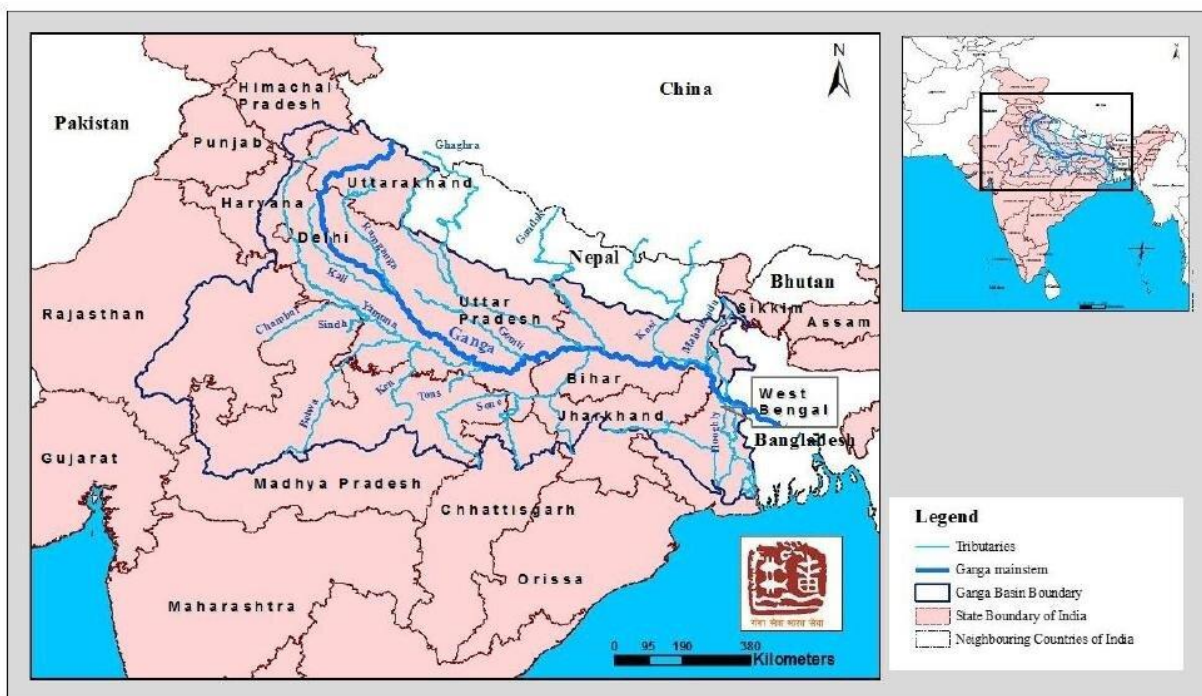
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) celebrates the festival every year.
- **Aim:** To promote stakeholder engagement and ensure public participation.
- It celebrates river Ganga through storytelling, dialogues with eminent personalities, displaying traditional art forms, dance and music performance, etc.

- Ganga Task Force (GTF) also conducted an afforestation drive with National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets and educational tour for youth.
- Mini Ganga Quest was also held which was designed to make youth and students aware of environmental issues and explain their role in conservation.

Important value additions

River Ganga

- It is the longest river of India.
- It is revered by Hindus as the most sacred river on earth.
- It originates in the Gangotri Glacier in the Himalayas as the Bhagirathi River.
- The Ganga river basin is one of the most fertile and densely populated areas of the world.
- The Ganges River Dolphin, an endangered animal, specifically inhabits this river.
- It ends its journey by emptying into the Bay of Bengal.
- Ganga was declared as the National River of India on 4th November 2008.



Air quality in Delhi continues to remain in 'severe' category

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Pollution

In news

- The air quality in Delhi continues to remain in 'severe' category.
- The System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research, SAFAR has advised people to avoid all physical activity outdoors.

Important value additions

System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)

- **Indigenously developed by:** Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune

- **Run by:** India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- **Objective:** (1) To provide Real-time air quality index on 24x7 basis with colour coding along with 72-hour advance weather forecast; (2) To issue Health advisory to prepare citizens well in advance.
- **Parameters monitored: Pollutants:** PM1, PM2.5, PM10, Ozone, CO, NOx (NO, NO2), SO2, BC, Methane (CH4), Non-methane hydrocarbons (NMHC), Black Carbon, VOC's, Benzene and Mercury.
- **Meteorological Parameters:** UV Radiation, Rainfall, Temperature, Humidity, Wind speed, Wind direction, solar radiation.

Tristan DaCunha declared the largest fully protected marine reserves in the Atlantic Ocean

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity
In news

- Tristan da Cunha was declared the largest fully protected marine reserves in the Atlantic Ocean.



Important value additions

Tristan da Cunha

- It is also home to the world's most remote human settlement.
- It is also an isolated UK Overseas Territory.
- It is a remote group of volcanic islands in the South Atlantic Ocean.
- It has its own constitution.
- It is also home to tens of millions of seabirds and several unique land birds.
- It is also home to the World Heritage Site of Gough and Inaccessible Islands, which is one of the most important seabird islands in the world.

Do you know?

- After joining the UK's Blue Belt Programme, it will become the largest no-take zone in the Atlantic and the fourth largest on the planet.
- This means fishing, mining and any such activities will not be allowed.
- This will close over 90% of their waters to harmful activities such as bottom-trawling fishing, sand extraction and deep-sea mining.

India adds two more Ramsar sites

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In news

- India has recently added two more Ramsar sites.
- One is Lonar lake in Maharashtra which is the only crater lake of India.
- The other is Sur Sarovar, also known as Keethamlake in Agra, Uttar Pradesh.

Important value additions

The Ramsar Convention

- It was signed on 2nd February, 1971.
- It is one of the oldest inter-governmental accords signed by member countries.
- **Objective:** To preserve the ecological character of their wetlands of international importance.
- It is named after Ramsar, the Iranian city where the treaty was signed.
- Places chosen for conservation under it are given the tag 'Ramsar site'.
- **The aim of the Ramsar list:** To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits.



Do you know?

- Recently, Kabartal in Bihar's Begusarai district was recognised as a wetland of international importance.
- It is the first such wetland in the state, under the Ramsar Convention, according to the Union Environment Ministry.
- The Asan Conservation Reserve in Dehradun, the first wetland from Uttarakhand to be recognised by Ramsar convention, was added to the list in October this year.

India's First Green Energy Convergence Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In news

- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of PSUs under the Ministry of Power and Department of New & Renewable Energy (DNRE), Goa, have signed a MOU to implement India's first Convergence Project in the State.

Key takeaways

- Under the MoU, EESL and DNRE will carry-out the feasibility studies and subsequent implementation of decentralized solar energy projects.
- EESL shall implement the solar energy projects including; (1) establishment of 100 MW of decentralized ground mounted Solar Power projects on government lands to be used for agricultural pumping; (2) replacing approximately 6,300 agricultural pumps with BEE star rated energy efficient pumps; (3) distribute approximately 16 Lakh LED bulbs for rural domestic households.
- The projects will accelerate the usage of renewable energy sources, especially for agricultural and rural power consumption in the State.

Karnataka to declassify deemed forests

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In news

- Recently, Karnataka Forest Minister announced that the state government would soon declassify 6.64 lakh hectares of the 9.94 lakh hectares of deemed forests in the state (nearly 67%) and hand it over to Revenue authorities.
- The issue of deemed forests is a contentious one in Karnataka, with legislators often alleging that large amounts of agriculture and non-forest land are “unscientifically” classified as such.

Important value additions

- While the concept of deemed forests has not been clearly defined in any law including the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, the Supreme Court in the case of T N GodavarmanThirumalpad (1996) accepted a wide definition of forests under the Act.
- “The word ‘forest’ must be understood according to its dictionary meaning.
- According to the Supreme Court, this description covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise under Forest Conservation Act.
- “The term ‘forest land’ occurring in Section 2 of the Act will not only include ‘forest’ as understood in the dictionary sense, but also any areas recorded as forest in the government record irrespective of the ownership.
- The provisions enacted in the Forest Conservation Act 1980 for the conservation of forest and related matters must apply clearly to all forests.

RoridomycesPhyllostachydis: Bioluminescent variety of mushroom

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

In news

- A mushroom documentation project in the forests of Northeast India has led to a new discovery: a bioluminescent (light emitting) variety of mushroom.



Key takeaways

- The new species — named *Roridomyces phyllostachydis* — was first sighted in August in Meghalaya's Mawlynnong in East Khasi Hills district and later at KrangShuri in West Jaintia Hills district.
- It is now one among the 97 known species of bioluminescent fungi in the world.
- The new species is important because it is the first mushroom in the *Roridomyces* genus to be found in India.
- It was the only member in its genus to have light emitting from its stipe or stalk.

Important value additions

- Bioluminescence is the property of a living organism to produce and emit light.
- Animals, plants, fungi and bacteria show bioluminescence.
- Bioluminescent organisms are usually found in the ocean environments, but they are also found on terrestrial environments.
- The colour of the light emitted by the organism depends on their chemical properties.
- In the case of fungi, the luminescence comes from the enzyme, luciferase.

India Climate Change Knowledge Portal launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment

In news

- India Climate Change Knowledge Portal was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Key takeaways

- The portal will have all the major steps the Government is taking at both national and international levels to address the climate change issues.
- It will be a single-point information resource that provides information on the different climate initiatives taken by various Ministries enabling users to access updated status on these initiatives.

- According to the Central government, India has practically achieved its pre-2020 climate action targets.

Blue Tide phenomenon observed in Maharashtra

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

In news

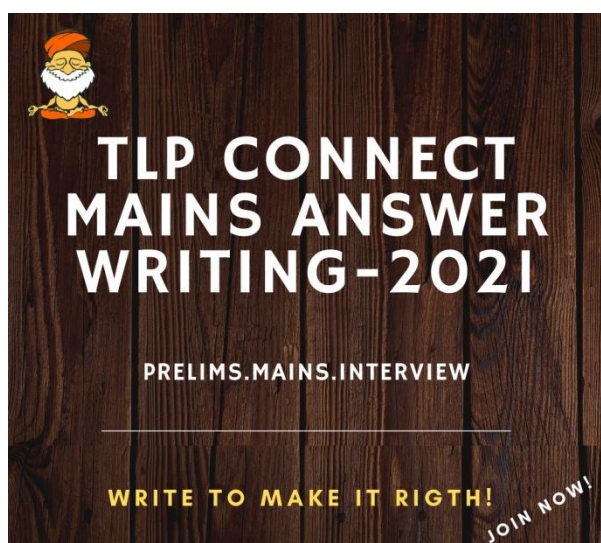
- Over the last few days, visitors to beaches in Maharashtra have witnessed the fluorescent bluish glow when the waves hit the shoreline.

Key takeaways

- The phenomenon is called 'blue tide'.
- It appears when luminescent marine life makes the sea appear a deep shade of blue.
- It occurs when phytoplankton (microscopic marine plants), commonly known as dinoflagellates, produce light through chemical reactions in proteins.
- Waves disturb these unicellular microorganisms and make them release blue light.

Do you know?

- Bioluminescence is the property of a living organism to produce and emit light.
- Animals, plants, fungi and bacteria show bioluminescence.
- A remarkable diversity of marine animals and microbes are able to produce their own light.
- It is found in many marine organisms such as bacteria, algae, jellyfish, worms, crustaceans, sea stars, fish and sharks.
- Luminescence is generally higher in deep-living and planktonic organisms than in shallow species.
- It is an anti-predatory response.
- Bioluminescence is assumed to startle predators, causing them to hesitate.



ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Denmark records SARS-CoV-2 infections that are associated with farmed minks

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

In news

- Denmark, which has recorded more than 55,000 cases of COVID-19, has also recorded over 200 human cases infected with SARS-CoV-2 variants that are associated with farmed minks.



Important value additions

Mink

- These are dark-colored, semiaquatic, carnivorous mammals.
- **Genera:** Neovison and Mustela.
- **Family:** Mustelidae.
- This family also includes weasels, otters and ferrets.
- There are two extant species referred to as "mink": the American mink and the European mink.
- The European mink is listed by the IUCN as Critically Endangered due to an ongoing reduction in numbers.

Do you know?

- Denmark is the world's largest mink producer, with a 15-17 million strong mink population across 1,100 farms.

New Species of frog in Andaman found

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

In news

- Recently a group of scientists has reported a new genus of treefrog from the Andaman Islands called Striped Bubble-nest frog.



Important value additions

Striped Bubble-nest frog

- Biological name: *Rohanixalus vittatus*
- It belongs to the genus of the Old World treefrog family Rhacophoridae.
- This is the first report of a tree frog species from the Andaman Islands.
- They are also known as Asian Glass Frog or see through frogs
- The female (mother) attends the egg clutches until hatching and assists in release of the tadpoles into the water.
- A large number of egg clutches (over 50) of different developmental stages may be found on a single leaf or plant.
- Multiple females usually attend such clutches in a behaviour termed as 'community' egg attendance.
- Frequent male-male combats involving pushing, kicking and dislodging to mate with a female were also reported.

Willow Warbler sighted for the first time in India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity

In news

- Recently, Willow Warbler has been sighted for the first time in India at Vellayani-Punchakkari paddy fields, Kerala.

Important value additions

Willow Warbler

- Scientific Name:** *Phylloscopus trochilus*.
- They breed throughout northern and temperate Europe and the Palearctic.
- They migrate to sub-Saharan Africa during early winter.
- It is one of the longest migrating small birds.
- It weighs only around 10 grams and its long wing feathers help it fly long distances.
- Warblers are generally difficult to identify due to the small size and change in plumage twice a year.
- Threats:** (1) Drought conditions in its wintering quarters; (2) Habitat alterations due to human population expansion.
- IUCN Red List status:** Least Concern.

Do you know?

- Palearctic ecozone is one the Earth's 8 ecozones and covers Asia north of the Himalayas, with parts of western Asia and most of East Asia and Africa north of the Sahara.



An advertisement for IASbaba's e-Classroom Learning Programme (eCLP). At the top is a cartoon illustration of a guru with a white beard and a red turban. Below it, the text "IASbaba's" is written. A blue banner with a large orange number "8" in the center contains the text "Baba's 8 fold path to success!!". Below this, the text "e - Classroom Learning Programme (eCLP)" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. To the left of this text is an illustration of three students: a girl sitting on a stack of books, a boy sitting on a stack of books, and another boy sitting on a stack of books. A lightbulb and gears are also part of the illustration. To the right of the text, a blue banner contains the text "UPSC - 2021". At the bottom right, a blue button with the text "Learn more" is visible.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Water Aerodrome and Sea-Plane service inaugurated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- The Indian Prime Minister inaugurated Water Aerodrome at Kevadia and the [Sea-plane Service](#) connecting Statue of Unity in Kevadia with Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad.
- He also inaugurated Water Aerodrome in Sabarmati Riverfront and the SeaPlane Service from Sabarmati Riverfront to Kevadia.
- These are part of a series of Water Aerodromes being planned to bring the last mile connectivity.

Do you know?

- Seaplanes have the ability to land and take-off from water thus offering access to areas that do not have landing strips or runways.
- Thus it can help in connecting the geographies/regions that have challenges owing to its topography and bring the remotest parts of India into the mainstream aviation network without the high cost of building airports and runways.
- These smaller fixed wing airplanes can land on water bodies like lakes, backwaters and dams, gravel and grass, thus offering easy access to numerous tourist spots as well.

Tectonically Active Zone of Himalayas

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- Recently, a group of scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun have found that the Indus-Tsangpo Suture Zone (ITSZ) of Himalaya is tectonically active.
- The suture zone of Himalaya was conventionally thought to be locked.

Key takeaways

- Sedimentary beds were found to be tilted and thrust broken.
- Rivers were associated with uplifted terraces.
- Bedrock shows brittle deformation at much shallower depths.
- These deformed geological features were dated using the technique of Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL).
- Data of seismicity and denudation rate was also reviewed.
- The region of the ITSZ has been neo-tectonically active since the last 78000-58000 years.
- The finding will have major implications in terms of earthquake study, prediction, understanding the seismic structure of the mountain chains well as its evolution.

Important value additions

- Tectonics is the scientific study of the deformation of the rocks that make up the Earth's crust and the forces that produce such deformation.

- It deals with the folding and faulting of mountain building, gradual upward and downward movements of the crust.
- The ITSZ is a suture zone in the Ladakh region.
- It marks the limit of the Indian plate where it collides with the Eurasian plate and is subducted below the latter.

Do you know?

- **Optically-Stimulated Luminescence:** It is a late quaternary (geological time period that encompasses the most recent 2.6 million years) dating technique used to date the last time quartz sediment was exposed to light.
- **Seismicity:** It refers to the measure of the frequency of earthquakes in a region.
- **Denudation:** It is a long term process in which the wearing and tearing of the surface of the Earth take place.

Hazira-Ghogha Ro-Pax Ferry Service to be inaugurated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Infrastructure

In news

- Indian Prime Minister will inaugurate the Ro-Pax terminal at Hazira and flag off Ro-Pax service between Hazira and Ghogha in Gujarat on Sunday.

Key takeaways

- Hazira-Ghogha Ro-Pax ferry service will work as a Gateway to South Gujarat and Saurashtra region.
- It will reduce the distance between Ghogha and Hazira from 370 Kilometres to 90 Kilometres.
- The reduced cargo travel time will result in huge savings of fuel approximately 9000 litres per day and will lead to reduction in CO2 emission by approximately 24 million tonnes per day.
- With the onset of Ferry services, the port sector, furniture and fertilizer industries in Saurashtra and Kutch region will get a big boost.

FASTags mandatory for all four wheelers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a notification making FASTags mandatory for all four wheel vehicles from 1st January 2021.
- This will apply to old vehicles as well as M and N category of motor vehicles sold before 1st December, 2017.

Key takeaways

- As per Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, the FASTag had been made mandatory for all registration of new four wheeled Vehicles since 1st December 2017.
- It is being supplied by the Vehicle Manufacturer or their dealers.
- It had further been mandated that the renewal of fitness certificate will be done only after the fitment of FASTag for the Transport Vehicles.
- For National Permit Vehicles the fitment of FASTag has been mandated since 1st of October, 2019.
- The Ministry said that a valid FASTag is also mandatory while getting a new third Party Insurance through an amendment in certificate of Insurance, wherein the details of FASTag ID will be captured.
- This will be applicable with effect from 1st of April 2021.

- This notification would be a major step for ensuring that the payment of fees be 100% at Toll Plazas through the Electronic Means only and that the vehicles pass seamlessly through the Fee Plazas.

Important value additions

FASTag

- FASTag is an electronic toll collection system in India
- **Operated by:** National Highway Authority of India.
- It employs Radio Frequency Identification technology for making toll payments directly from the prepaid or savings account linked to it or directly toll owner.

Department of Telecom eases rules for other service providers

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- The Department of Telecom eased rules for other service providers (OSP) in the business process outsourcing (BPO) and information technology-enabled services (ITes).

Key takeaways

- OSPs are companies or firms which provide secondary or tertiary services such as telemarketing, telebanking or telemedicine for various companies, banks or hospital chains.
- The new rules remove the registration requirement for OSPs.
- Such BPOs that are engaged only in data work have been taken out of the category of OSPs altogether.
- With the government recognising OSP employees as extended or remote agents, companies providing such services will no longer have to carry the additional compliance burden of providing the details of all such employees to the DoT.
- There will be no need for renewal of licenses and therefore foreign companies can be invited to set up or expand their other service providing units in India.
- This important change, which takes data-based OSPs completely out of the ambit of BPOs would mean that such firms can function like any other service firm without the strict and cumbersome guidelines such as presence of agent on location.

Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- Recently, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, National Capital Region Transport Corporation Limited (NCRTC) and the New Development Bank (NDB) signed a loan agreement for lending \$500 million for the 'Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System Project'.

Key takeaways

- It is an 82.15 km long, under-construction, semi-high speed rail corridor connecting Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut.
- It is one of the three rapid-rail corridors planned under Phase-I of Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) project of National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC).
- The Rapid Transit System will provide a fast, reliable, safe and comfortable public transport system in the National Capital Region.

- High-speed connectivity will result in balanced economic development across the region, leading to economic benefits to all strata of society and many nodes of development rather than all economic activity happening at one place.
- It will help in reducing traffic congestion and total emissions from the transport sector in NCR.

Important value additions

New Development Bank

- It is a multilateral development bank.
- **Jointly founded by:** BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) at the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil in 2014.
- **Objective:** To support infrastructure and sustainable development efforts in BRICS and other underserved, emerging economies for faster development through innovation and cutting-edge technology.
- **Headquarter:** Shanghai, China.

In 2018, the NDB received observer status in the United Nations General Assembly.

Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- Under the Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) initiative, the government is looking at setting up 5,000 CBG plants by 2023-24 with a production target of 15 million tonnes.
- India will see an investment of Rs 2 lakh crore in setting up 5,000 plants.
- These will produce gas from bio and crop wastes by 2023-24.

Key takeaways

- To boost the availability of affordable and clean transport fuel, an agreement was signed for setting up 900 compressed bio-gas or CBG plants by companies such as Adani Gas and Torrent Gas.
- SATAT provides for generating gas from municipal waste as well as forest and agri waste.
- Animal husbandry and marine wastes are also included.

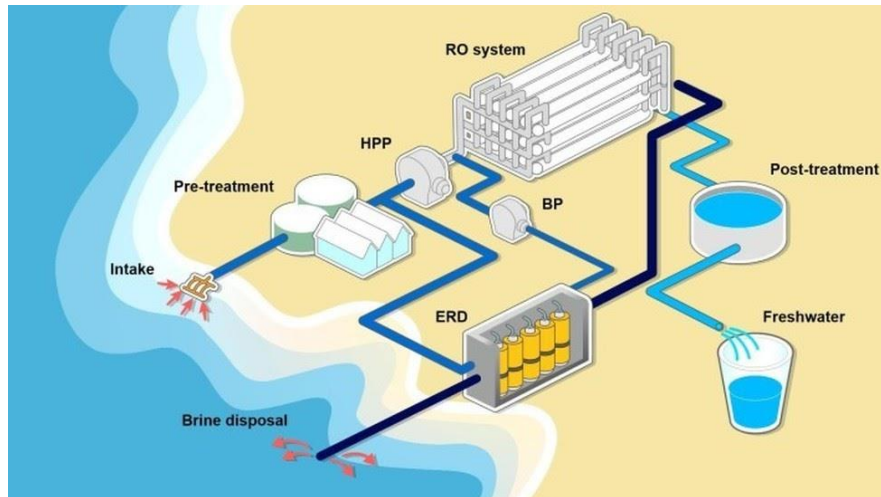
The gas produced at CBG plants can be used as fuel to power automobiles.

Maharashtra sets up Desalination Plants

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

In news

- Maharashtra announced the setting up of a desalination plant in Mumbai.
- It is now the fourth state in India to experiment with the idea.



Key takeaways

- A desalination plant turns salt water into water that is fit to drink.
- The most commonly used technology used for the process is reverse osmosis where an external pressure is applied to push solvents from an area of high-solute concentration to an area of low-solute concentration through a membrane.
- The microscopic pores in the membranes allow water molecules through but leave salt and most other impurities behind, releasing clean water from the other side.
- Desalination is an expensive way of generating drinking water as it requires a high amount of energy.
- The other problem is the disposal of the by-product — highly concentrated brine — of the desalination process.
- While in most places brine is pumped back into the sea, there have been rising complaints that it ends up severely damaging the local ecology around the plant.

Do you know?

- Worldwide, desalination is seen as one possible answer to stave off water crisis.
- These plants are mostly set up in areas that have access to sea water.
- Desalination has largely been limited to affluent countries in the Middle East and has recently started making inroads in parts of the United States and Australia.
- In India, Tamil Nadu has been the pioneer in using this technology, setting up two desalination plants near Chennai in 2010 and then 2013.
- The other states that have proposed these plants are Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

Decisions taken regarding Ensuring Adequate Numbering Resources for Fixed Line and Mobile Services

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- With the consideration of TRAI Recommendation on “Ensuring Adequate Numbering Resources for Fixed Line and Mobile Services”, Department of Telecommunications shall implement certain decisions.

Decisions taken

- All Fixed to Mobile calls will be dialed with prefix '0' from 15th January, 2021.
- There will be no change in dialling plan from fixed to fixed, mobile to fixed and mobile to mobile calls.
- An announcement shall be played whenever a subscriber dials a fixed to mobile call without prefixing '0'.
- All fixed line subscribers will be provided with '0' dialling facility.
- A total of approximately 2539 million numbering series is expected to be generated from the above.
- This will free up sufficient numbering resources for future use.
- With the freeing up of sufficient numbering resources, more number of connections can be added in future which will be beneficial to the mobile customers at large.

NIIF's Debt Platform approved

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news

- To drive infrastructure creation in India, the Union Cabinet approved the infusion of ₹6,000 crore equity in National Infrastructure Investment Fund's (NIIF's) debt platform in the next two years.

Key takeaways

- Out of the proposed amount, ₹2,000 crore will be infused in the current financial year.
- NIIF Debt Platform is sponsored by National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).
- Under NIIF, there are several funds.
- The NIIF's debt platform will raise debt from the bond market and will provide debt/loan to infrastructure companies.
- It will act as an intermediary between the bond market and the infrastructure projects.
- Infrastructure projects do not directly raise money from the bond markets because they lack credibility in such markets.
- The NIIF and its platforms' ratings are good because government has invested 49% equity into it.

Do you know?

- Any fund can raise money through two routes - Equity and Debt and can then invest this money into Equity and Debt again.



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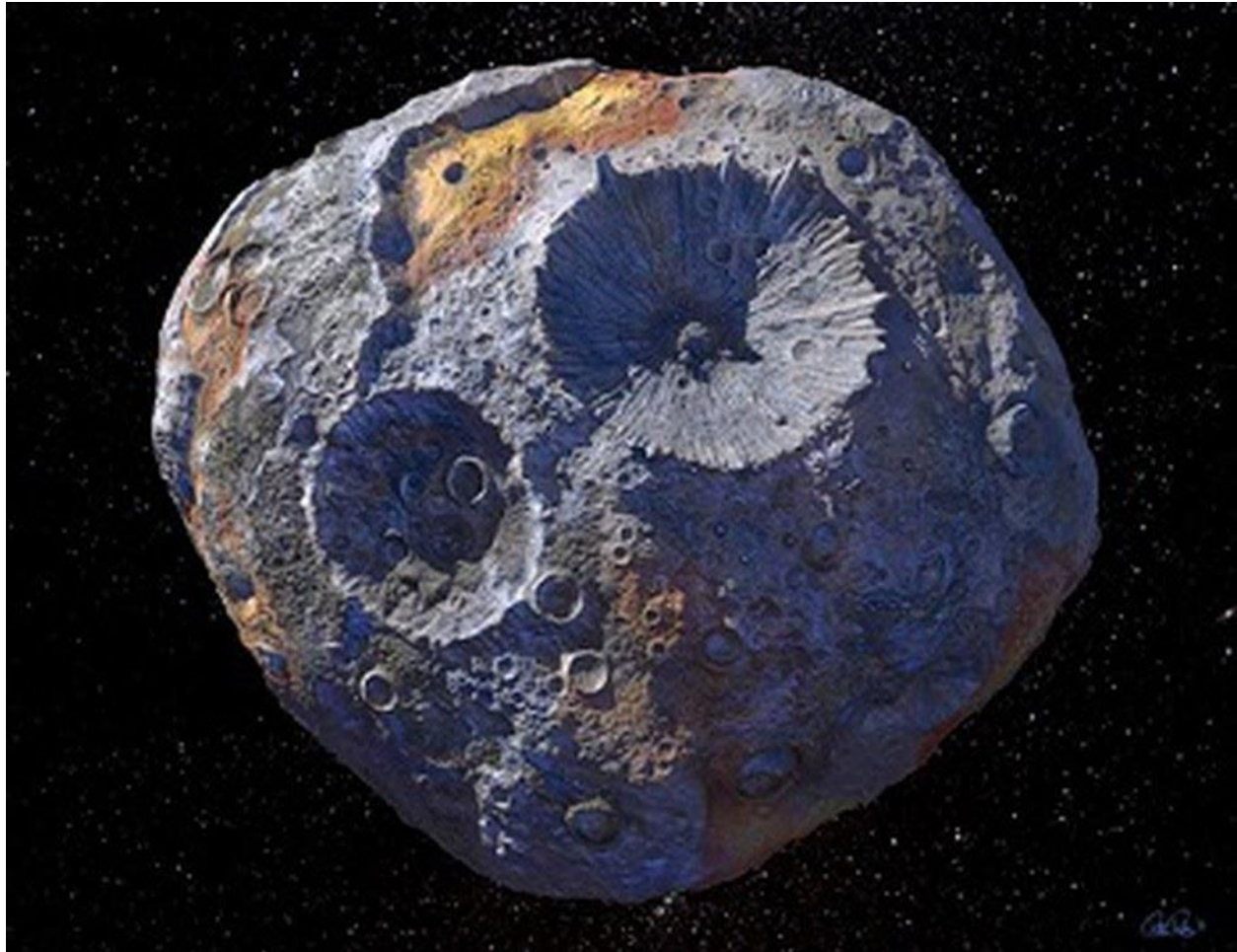
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Asteroid 16 Psyche

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- A recent study has found that asteroid 16 Psyche, which orbits between Mars and Jupiter, could be made entirely of metal.
- It is worth an estimated \$10,000 quadrillion — more than the entire economy of Earth.



Key takeaways

- New images from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope offer a closer view of the asteroid 16 Psyche, whose surface may mostly comprise iron and nickel, similar to the Earth's core.
- Scientists believe that the asteroid may be the leftover core of an earlier planet that lost its crust and mantle after multiple collisions during the creation of our solar system.
- The exact composition and origins of the asteroid will be uncovered in 2022, when NASA sends an unmanned spacecraft to study it up close.

Do you know?

- It is located around 370 million km away from Earth.

- It is one of the most massive objects in the asteroid belt in our solar system.
- The somewhat potato-shaped asteroid has a diameter of around 140 miles,
- It was first discovered on March 17, 1853, by the Italian astronomer Annibale de Gasparis and was named after the ancient Greek goddess of the soul, Psyche.

NMM and HPC facilities result in a 50-fold increase in its economic benefits: NCAER Report

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III –Science and technology

In news

- National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) Report on "Estimating the economic benefits of Investment in Monsoon Mission and High Performance Computing (HPC) Facilities" was recently released.
- **Released by:** Ministry of Science and Technology
- With an initial investment of Rs. 1,000 Crores, NMM and HPC facilities result in a 50-fold increase in its economic benefits.

Key takeaways of the report

- A total of Rs. 1000 crores has been invested in setting up National Monsoon Mission(NMM) and High performance Computing (HPC) facilities by Government of India.
- 76% of the livestock owners are using weather information for taking decisions on modification of shelter; vaccination against seasonal disease; and fodder management.
- 82% of fishermen reported using Ocean State Forecast (OSF) advisories every time before venturing into sea.

Important value additions

National Monsoon Mission

- **Launched by:** Ministry of Earth Sciences in 2012.
- **Aim:** To improve the forecasting skills by setting up a state-of-the-art dynamic prediction system for monsoon rainfall different time scales.
- NMM builds a working partnership between the academic and research and development (R&D) organisations, both national and international.
- Its augmentation with High Performance Computing facilities has helped the country in achieving a paradigm shift in weather and climate modelling for operational weather forecasts.

Pandemics to emerge more often: New Report by IPBES

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health &GS-III –Science and technology

In news

- In a new report released by the IPBES, the authors have warned that future pandemics will emerge more often, they'll spread more rapidly, do more damage to the world and kill more people than COVID-19, unless significant measures are taken.

Key takeaways of the report

- The report notes that COVID-19 is at least the sixth pandemic to have taken place in the last century since the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918.

- Three of the pandemics were caused by influenza viruses, one by HIV followed by SARS and COVID-19.
- While the current pandemic's origins lie in microbes carried by animals, like all pandemics, its emergence has been entirely driven by human activities.
- There are over 1.7 million currently 'undiscovered' viruses that exist in mammals and birds, out of which up to 827,000 could have the ability to infect people.
- More than 70% of emerging diseases, such as Ebola, Zika and Nipah, are caused by microbes found in animals that spill over due to contact among wildlife, livestock and people.
- About 30% of emerging infectious diseases are attributed to land use change, agricultural expansion and urbanisation.
- The report suggests that pandemic risk can be lowered by reducing the human activities that drive loss of biodiversity, by greater conservation of protected areas and through measures that reduce unsustainable exploitation of high biodiversity regions.

Important value additions

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem (IPBES)

- It is an intergovernmental organization established to improve the interface between science and policy on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **Established by:** United Nations
- It functions independently.
- **Formation:** 2012.
- **Headquarters:** Bonn, Germany.

WhatsApp officially announces Ephemeral Messaging feature

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and technology

In news

- The WhatsApp app has officially announced a new feature of Ephemeral Messaging (disappearing messages) to the platform.
- It will be available to all users globally by November 2020.

Important value additions

Ephemeral messaging

- It is the mobile-to-mobile transmission of multimedia messages that automatically disappear from the recipient's screen after the message has been viewed.
- The word "ephemeral" describes something that only lasts for a short period of time.
- Other encrypted messaging apps like Telegram, Signal, Wire already offer such an option.
- By turning on disappearing messages, users will get some more control over which chats are getting saved.
- It has decided the time limit of all users is fixed at seven days.

Mix of X-ray and radio signals observed for the first time

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III - Space

In news

- NASA has observed a mix of X-ray and radio signals never observed before in the Milky Way in April 2020.

- Significantly, the flare-up it observed included the first fast radio burst (FRB) seen within the galaxy.

Key takeaways

- The source of the FRB detected is a very powerful magnetic neutron star, referred to as a magnetar, called SGR 1935+2154 or SGR 1935.
- It is located in the constellation Vulpecula.
- It is estimated to be between 14,000-41,000 light-years away.

Important value additions

Magnetar

- As per NASA, a magnetar is a neutron star, the crushed, city-size remains of a star many times more massive than our Sun.
- The magnetic field of such a star is very powerful, which can be over 10 trillion times stronger than a refrigerator magnet and up to a thousand times stronger than a typical neutron star's.
- Neutron stars are formed when the core of a massive star undergoes gravitational collapse when it reaches the end of its life.

Do you know?

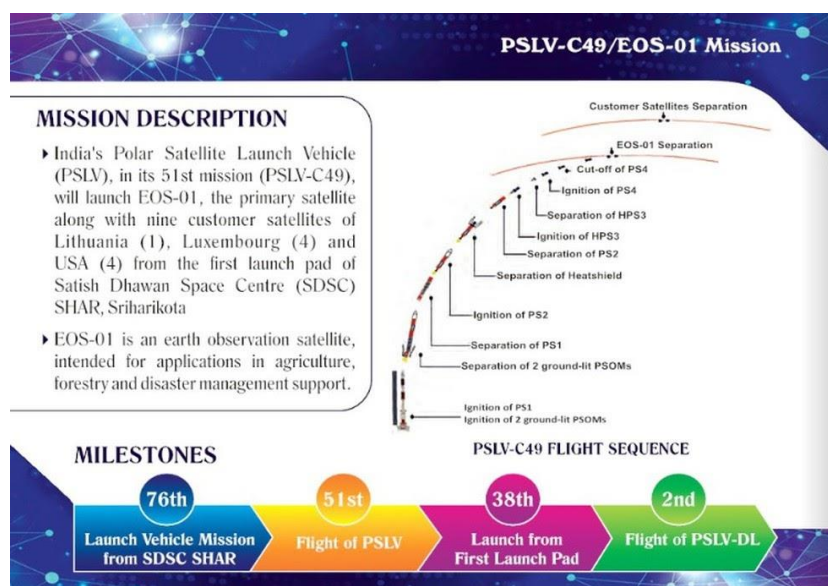
- Essentially, FRBs are bright bursts of radio waves whose durations lie in the millisecond-scale, because of which it is difficult to detect them and determine their position in the sky.
- Radio waves can be produced by astronomical objects with changing magnetic fields.

PSLV-C49 successfully launches EOS-01

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Achievements of Indians; Space

In news

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, in its 51st flight (PSLV-C49), successfully launched EOS-01 along with nine international customer satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota



Key takeaways

- PSLV-C49 is the 2nd flight of PSLV in 'DL' configuration (with 2 solid strap-on motors).

- EOS-01 is an earth observation satellite, intended for applications in agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
- The nine customer satellites from Lithuania (1), Luxembourg (4) and USA (4) were launched under a commercial arrangement with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).

India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2020 to be held virtually

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and technology

In news

- The fourth edition of the India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2020 is scheduled to be held in December.
- It will be held virtually this year given the ongoing pandemic.
- **Ministry:** Minister of Information Technology

Key takeaways

- **Jointly organized by:** The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).
- The event will see 50+ participating countries, 110 + Global Speakers, Start-ups over the three day programme.
- **Theme:** "Inclusive Innovation - Smart, Secure, Sustainable"
- IMC is considered the largest Digital Technology Forum in Asia for bringing together the industry, Government, academia, and other ecosystem players to discuss the latest industry technology trends around major themes such as SG, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of things (IoT) etc.

Do you know?

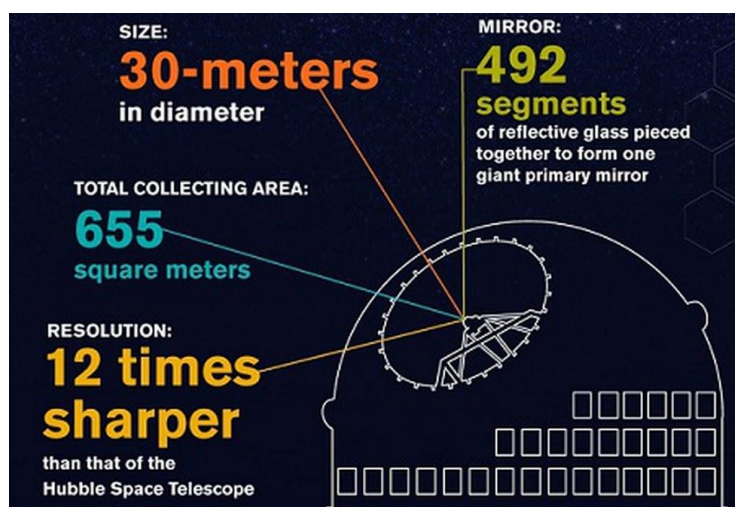
- COAI was constituted in 1995 as a registered, non-governmental society.
- **Vision:** To establish India as the global leader of mobile communications infrastructure, products and services and achieving a national tele density of 100%, including broadband.

Thirty Meter Telescope

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and technology; Space

In news

- 2020 Physics Nobel Laureate Prof. Andrea Ghez had worked closely with Indian astronomers on the design of back-end instruments and possible science prospects of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project being installed at Maunakea in Hawaii.



Key takeaways

- TMT project is an international partnership between CalTech, Universities of California, Canada, Japan, China, and India.
- “Thirty Metre” refers to the 30-metre diameter of the mirror, with 492 segments of glass pieced together.
- Once completed, it would be three times as wide as the world’s largest existing visible-light telescope.
- The larger the mirror, the more light a telescope can collect, which means, in turn, that it can “see” farther, fainter objects.
- It would be more than 200 times more sensitive than current telescopes.
- It would be able to resolve objects 12 times better than the Hubble Space Telescope.
- **Application:** The study of exoplanets

Do you know?

- Already the site of a number of observatories and 13 large telescopes, Mauna Kea is considered sacred by native Hawaiians who believe that such constructions defile the Mauna Kea Mountain.
- If the Thirty Metre Telescope cannot be built on Mauna Kea Mountain in Hawaii, Spain’s Canary Islands is a backup site.

Apophis expected to hit Earth in 2068

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- Asteroid Apophis may hit the Earth in 2068 due to a phenomenon called Yarkovsky effect.
- This effect has eventually accelerated the asteroid's flow and also changed its path.
- As per the new calculations by astronomers at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, asteroid Apophis, which will also be extremely close to Earth on April 13, 2029, is deviating from its actual orbit and may crash into Earth in 2068.

Important value additions

- According to a recent report, the sun can heat an asteroid in a non-uniform way, causing the space rock to radiate heat energy asymmetrically.
- This can cause a thrust or a tiny push in a certain direction, sometimes changing the path of the asteroid.

- This effect is called the Yarkovsky acceleration.
- Before the discovery of Yarkovsky effect, the possibility of the collision was impossible.
- The detection of this effect acting on Apophis means that the 2068 impact scenario is still a possibility.

Do you know?

- The asteroid was discovered in 2004.
- It is named after the Greek God of Chaos.
- It is a 340-meter-wide asteroid. That's about the size of three-and-a-half football fields.

Param Siddhi achieves global ranking of 63

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

In news

1. Indian supercomputer Param Siddhi has achieved global ranking of 63 in TOP 500 most powerful non-distributed computer systems in the world.
2. The rankings were released recently.

Key takeaways

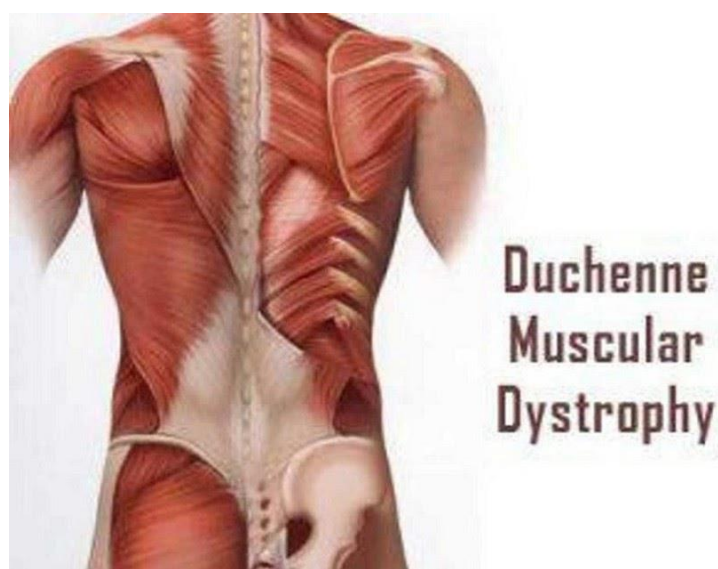
- Param Siddhi is the high performance computing-artificial intelligence (HPC-AI) supercomputer established under National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) at C-DAC.
- **Conceived by:** C-DAC
- **Developed jointly:** Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) under NSM.

Indian Scientist proposes to have found treatment for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health & GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Sci and Tech

In news

- Sandeep Eswarappa, Assistant Professor at IISc, Bengaluru proposes to provide new genetic treatment for duchenne muscular dystrophy.



Important value additions

- Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) is a severe type of muscular dystrophy that primarily affects boys.
- Females with a single copy of the defective gene may show mild symptoms.
- Muscle weakness usually begins around the age of four, and worsens quickly.
- Muscle loss typically occurs first in the thighs and pelvis followed by the arms.
- This can result in trouble standing up.
- Most are unable to walk by the age of 12.
- Scoliosis is also common.
- Some may have intellectual disability.

Do you know?

- It is caused by a mutation in the gene for the protein dystrophin.
- Dystrophin is important to maintain the muscle fiber's cell membrane.
- Although there is no known cure, physical therapy, braces, and corrective surgery may help with some symptoms.

Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) accepted as a component of the World Wide Radio Navigation System

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

In news

- The [Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System \(IRNSS\)](#) has been accepted as a component of the World Wide Radio Navigation System (WWRNS) for operation in the Indian Ocean Region by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
- This will enable merchant vessels to use IRNSS for obtaining position information similar to GPS and GLONASS to assist in the navigation of ships in ocean waters within the area covered by 50°N latitude, 55°E longitude, 5°S latitude and 110°E longitude.

Important value additions

- IRNSS is an independent regional navigation satellite system developed by India.
- It is designed to provide accurate position information service to assist in the navigation of ships in Indian Ocean waters.
- India has become the fourth country in the world to have its independent regional navigation satellite system recognised by the IMO as a part of the WWRNS.
- The other three countries that have its navigation systems recognised by the IMO are the US, Russia and China.

Sentinel-6 Satellite launched

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

In news

- The Copernicus Sentinel-6 Michael Freilich satellite was launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket on November 21.
- **Objective:** Designed to monitor oceans

- Developed jointly by: European Space Agency (ESA), NASA, European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (Eumetsat), the USA's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the EU.



Key takeaways

- This is a part of the next mission dedicated to measuring changes in the global sea level.
- The mission, called the Jason Continuity of Service (Jason-CS) mission, is designed to measure the height of the ocean.
- Height of the ocean is a key component in understanding how the Earth's climate is changing.
- The spacecraft consists of two satellites, out of which one was launched recently, and the other, called Sentinel-6B, shall be launched in 2025.

Do you know?

- Other satellites that have been launched since 1992 to track changes in the oceans on a global scale include the TOPEX/Poseidon, Jason-1 and OSTN/Jason-2, among others.

Coronavirus patients develop Neutralising Antibodies

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

In news

- A new study in Pune has revealed that nearly 85% of the people who had been found infected with novel coronavirus in a serosurvey had developed neutralising antibodies.

Important value additions

- Immunity from a disease-causing virus comes from what are known as “neutralising” or “protective” antibodies.
- Neutralising antibodies, like other antibodies that are created to fight the disease, are proteins.
- These are a small subset of the disease-specific antibodies that are generated once an infection has occurred.
- The neutralising antibodies become special because they have the ability to prevent the entry of the same virus inside human bodies in the future.
- The other antibodies help in fighting off the virus once the infection has already happened.

China's Chang'e-5 lunar mission

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- China's Chang'e-5 lunar mission recently became the first probe in over four decades to attempt to bring back samples of lunar rock from unexplored portion of the Moon.
- The spacecraft is set to return to Earth around December 15, 2020.

Key takeaways

- Chang'e-5 probe is the Chinese National Space Administration's (CNSA) lunar sample return mission.
- **Goal:** To land in the Mons Rumker region of the moon, where it will operate for one lunar day, which is two weeks long and return a 2 kg sample of the lunar rock possibly by digging about 2 metres deep into the surface of the Moon.
- The mission comprises a lunar orbiter, a lander and an ascent probe that will lift the lunar samples back into orbit and return them back to Earth.
- The probe is named after the Chinese Moon goddess who is traditionally accompanied by a white or jade rabbit.

Do you know?

- Early in 2019, China's Chang'e-4 probe successfully transmitted images from the far side of the Moon, also referred to as the dark side.

This was the first probe to land in this portion of the Moon.

Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network

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

In news

- The Indian government is using eVIN (Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network) in association with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to identify primary beneficiaries and vaccine distribution networks.

Key takeaways

- eVIN is an indigenously developed technology.
- It digitises vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application.
- The innovative eVIN was first launched across 12 states in 2015 to support better vaccine logistics management at cold chain points.
- eVIN supports the central government's [Universal Immunization Programme](#) by providing real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points across states and UTs.

Do you know?

- The government has begun its preparations for introduction of Covid-19 vaccine and a National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC) has been formed as the highest group that will guide the strategies for vaccine introduction.

Brain Fingerprinting

Context: A team of CBI officers probing the alleged rape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit girl in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, arrived at **the Gandhinagar-based Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL)** with the four accused. A brain electrical oscillation signature profiling (BEOSP) test will be conducted on all four

What exactly is the BEOSP test?

- Brain Electrical Oscillation Signature Profiling (BEOSP) also known as brain fingerprinting is a **neuro psychological method of interrogation** in which the accused's participation in the crime is investigated by studying their brain's response.
- The BEOSP test is carried out via a process known as **electroencephalogram**, conducted to study the electrical behaviour of the human brain.
- Under this test, the **consent of the accused is first taken** and they are then made to wear caps with dozens of electrodes attached to them.
- The accused are then shown visuals or played audio clips related to the crime to check if there is any triggering of neurons in their brains which then **generate brainwaves**.
- The test results are then studied to determine the participation of the accused in a crime
- To be fair to the accused, forensic experts also prepare probes on the basis of their alibis and then present two hypothesis in front of them to invoke their brain's reaction.
- The tests are based on the phenomenons of 'knowledge' and 'experience'. A person's brain might have knowledge of the crime committed and the alibi they have come up with. But it is the 'experience' of having participated in the crime that determines their guilt.

What differentiates a BEOSP test from a polygraph or a lie detector?

- The BEOSP procedure **does not involve a question answer session** with the accused and is rather a neuro psychological study of their brain.
- In a polygraph test, the accused person's physiological indicators are taken into account which include blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration and skin conductivity.
- However, experts say that while a person might be able to control their pulse rate and BP even in times of distress, a **BEOSP test offers a much more credible result**.

Why were the accused brought to Gandhinagar FSL?

- Founded in 1974, the Gujarat state FSL in Gandhinagar is India's premier laboratory for forensic sciences and technical investigation.
- The FSL has a total of 1100 staff and offers varied services including suspect detection system, computer forensics, narco analysis as well as an accredited 'cow meat' testing mobile laboratory.
- Other states refer their cases here because of the latest cutting edge technological advancements in the laboratory along with sufficient expertise of the staff which are to the international standards

- Among the high-profile cases that were studied by Gujarat FSL were the Nithari serial killings, the Aarushi murder case, the Godhra train burning case, the Shakti Mill gangrape case and the on-going Narcotics Control Bureau case involving Bollywood.

Can these tests be admitted as evidence?

- Not as a standalone.
- In 2010, the Supreme Court passed a judgment in the **Selvi versus State of Karnataka case** where the bench observed that narco analysis, polygraph and brain mapping tests cannot be forced upon any individual without their consent and the test results cannot be admitted solely as evidence.
- However, any information or material discovered during the tests can be made part of the evidence, observed the bench.

Brain Fingerprinting

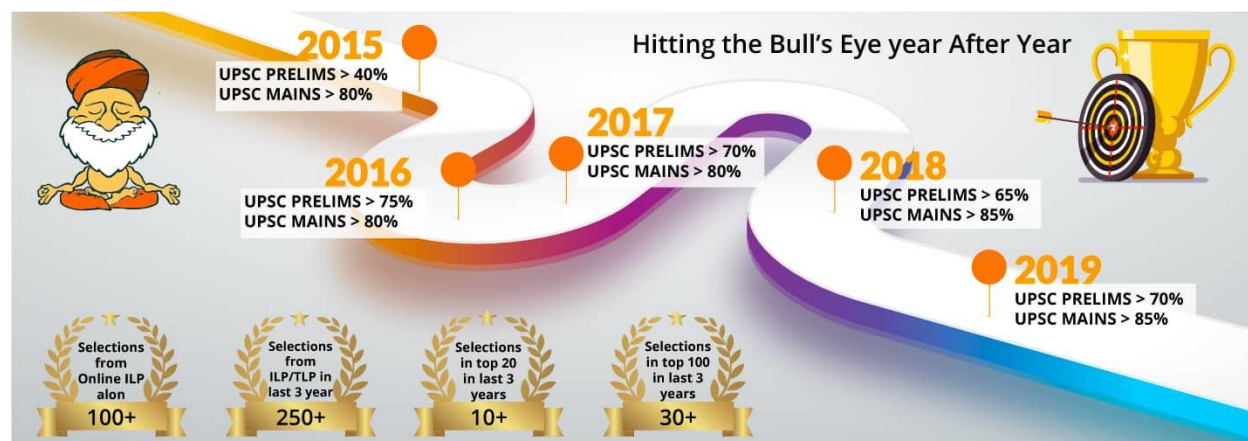
Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Sci & Tech

In news

- The accused in Hathras rape case will undergo brain fingerprinting.

Key takeaways

- Brain Electrical Oscillation Signature Profiling (BEOSP) is also known as brain fingerprinting.
- It is a neuro psychological method of interrogation in which the accused's participation in the crime is investigated by studying their brain's response.
- The BEOSP test is carried out via a process known as electroencephalogram, conducted to study the electrical behaviour of the human brain.
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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

DRDO develops Fire Detection and Suppression System (FDSS)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Disaster Management

In news

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed a technology called "Fire Detection and Suppression System (FDSS)" for passenger buses.

Key takeaways

- FDSS technology can detect fire in buses in less than 30 seconds and extinguish it in 60 seconds thereby reducing the risk to life and property to a significant extent.
- Demonstrations were given on water mist-based FDSS for passenger compartment and aerosol-based FDSS for engine fire.
- The FDSS for passenger compartment comprises a water tank of 80 litre capacity, a 6.8 kg nitrogen cylinder pressurised to 200 bar installed at appropriate location in the bus.
- The FDSS for engine comprises an aerosol generator with which the fire suppression could be achieved within 5 seconds of the system activation.

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

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

In news

- Recently, National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) was in news with regard to [Cyclone Nivar](#).

Important value additions

- At the national level, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) are the key committees involved in the top-level decision-making wrt Disaster Management (DM).
- It deals with major crisis which have serious or national ramifications.
- **Key functions:** (1) Oversee the Command, Control and Coordination of the disaster response; (2) Give direction to the Crisis Management Group (CMG) as deemed necessary.
- **Composition:** Cabinet Secretary (Chairperson); Secretaries of Ministries / Departments and agencies with specific Disaster management responsibilities

Cyclones forecast

Context: Cyclone Nivar, that barrelled through Tamil Nadu and brought copious rain in its wake, was the third major cyclone to land on India's coast this year, besides Amphan and Nisarga.

However, relatively fewer lives were lost compared to the havoc wreaked by Amphan in West Bengal in May. What aided relief operations in the anticipation of Nivar was that it largely conformed to forecasts issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

How are cyclones forecast?

- Over the years, India's ability to track the formation of cyclones has improved significantly.

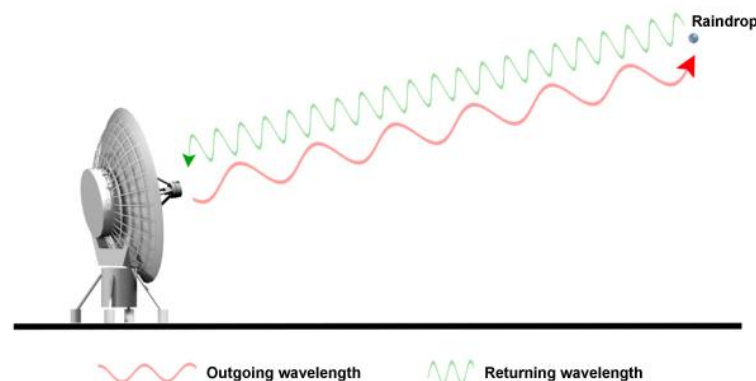
- **Radar Network:** There is a network of 21 doppler weather radars (DWR) in the country (12 along the coast). Depending on where a storm is forming, these radars send pulses of radio waves to gauge the size as well as the speed at which water droplets are moving.
- **Real time feedback:** The earlier generation of radars was unable to track such progress in real time, but with DWRs, now the base standard of weather radars, it is usually possible to detect a potential storm at least four-five days in advance.
- **International Collaborations:** The IMD also collaborates with similar international networks, such as the Japan Meteorological Agency, the U.S. National Hurricane Center, and the U.S. Central Pacific Hurricane Center, and these bodies constantly send warnings and forecasts about changes in the ocean weather.
- **Technologies that supplement radars:** The near ubiquity of ocean-buoys that track changes in ocean sea surface temperatures as well as dedicated meteorological satellites improve the odds of early detection

How radar works?

- The basics of radars is that a beam of energy, called radio waves, is emitted from an antenna. As they strike objects in the atmosphere, the energy is scattered in all directions with some of the energy reflected directly back to the radar.
- The larger the object, the greater the amount of energy that is returned to the radar. That provides us with the ability to "see" rain drops in the atmosphere.
- In addition, the time it takes for the beam of energy to be transmitted and returned to the radar also provides us with the distance to that object.

Doppler radar

- By their design, Doppler radar systems can provide information regarding the *movement* of targets as well as their position.
- When the radar transmits pulses of radio waves, the system keeps track of the **phase (shape, position, and form)** of those pulses.
- By measuring the **shift (or change) in phase** between a transmitted pulse and a received echo, the target's movement directly toward or away from the radar is calculated.
- A positive phase shift implies motion toward the radar and a negative shift indicates motion away from the radar.
- The phase shift effect is similar to the "Doppler shift" observed with sound waves. With the "Doppler shift", the sound pitch of an object moving toward your location is *higher* due to compression (a change in the phase) of sound waves. As an object moves away from your location, sound waves are stretched resulting in a *lower* frequency.



How difficult was it to track Nivar's progress?

- April-June and October-December are India's cyclone seasons.
- The arriving monsoon, as well as its retreat, stir up the surrounding seas and generate cyclones.
- Though the **Bay of Bengal is three times more likely to generate cyclones**, the ones that originate in the Arabian Sea are trickier, as the cyclone, while ostensibly moving away from India's western coast, can suddenly 'recurve' and move back in.
- A challenge with re-curving cyclones is that it is hard for weather models to pick them early on.
- There are also fewer radars along India's west coast than the eastern coast, and all these reasons make the Bay of Bengal cyclones more tractable.
- In this context, Nivar, because it conformed to a fairly predictable trajectory and was not super cyclonic in intensity, gave State administrations in Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh time to prepare, and was far less damaging than Amphan.
- However, the cyclone season is not yet over and more systems are likely to form in the coming weeks, according to the IMD.

How has disaster warning changed?

- **Tracking Depressions:** The formation of cyclones is preceded by 'depressions', and they are often the first warnings. Not all depressions become cyclones, but many coastal States — especially those with a history of being battered — begin organising shelters and evacuation of coastal residents.
- **Suspension of advisories on fish catches:** Sea pockets, where cyclones form, are also places that drive schools of fish and lure fisherfolk. While meteorological agencies give advisories on where fish-catches are likely, they suspend such advisories during storm formation to dissuade fishermen from venturing out.
- **Penetration of Mobile Phones:** The ubiquity of mobile communication makes it much easier to quickly give warnings.
- **Collaboration with Urban Local Bodies:** The IMD also issues flood forecast maps, in collaboration with urban bodies that forecast which pockets in a city are likely to be flooded and where crop damage is likely to be maximum.

Conclusion

- Forecasts, on their own, are important, but they cannot override the importance of preparedness by State agencies.

Connecting the dots

- Questions on Disaster Management along with Synopsis: Click [Here](#)

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

National Cybercrime Reporting Portal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Cybersecurity

In news

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has written to all States to examine and register FIRs based on the complaints received on National Cybercrime Reporting Portal .

Key takeaways

- As per Ministry of Home Affairs, only 2.5% of total complaints registered on the portal are converted into FIRs.
- Through the portal, the Government seeks to promote Cyber Crime Volunteers for identifying, reporting and removal of illegal/unlawful online content.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of registered cybercrimes increased by 63.5% in the year 2019 compared to 2018.

Important value additions

National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal

- It is a citizen-centric initiative enabling citizens to report cybercrimes online.
- It was launched in 2019.
- The portal specifically focuses on crimes against women, children, child pornography, online content pertaining to rapes/gang rapes, etc.
- It also focuses on crimes like stalking, cyberbullying, etc.
- It will improve the capacity of law enforcement agencies.

Budapest Convention

- The Council of Europe's (CoE) Cybercrime Convention, also known as the Budapest Convention is the sole legally binding international multilateral treaty on cybercrime.
- It coordinates cybercrime investigations between nation-states and criminalizes certain cybercrime conduct.
- India is not a party to it.

ENHANCED PINAKA Rocket successfully flight tested

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

In news

- Enhanced PINAKA rocket has been successfully flight tested from Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.
- **Developed by:** Defence Research and Development Organisation, DRDO

Key takeaways

- The enhanced Pinaka along with guidance Pinaka will cover the range between 60 and 90 km.
- It will be deployed by the Indian Army.

Enhanced version of the Pinaka rocket would replace the existing Pinaka Mk-I rockets which are currently under production.

Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) Missile installed inside the DRDO Bhawan

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

In news

- Recently, Defence Minister inaugurated a model of an anti-satellite missile at the DRDO Bhawan.
- The anti-satellite missile system is seen as a symbol of national technological advancement

Important value additions

- 'Mission Shakti' was India's first ever Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Missile Test successfully conducted on 27th March 2019 from Dr AP J Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha.
- A fast-moving Indian orbiting target satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) was neutralised with pinpoint accuracy.
- This was a highly complex mission, conducted at extremely high speed with remarkable precision.
- The successful conduct of Mission Shakti made India the fourth nation in the world with the capability to defend its assets in outer space.



Kalvari-Class Submarine INS Vagir launched

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

In news

- Indian Navy's fifth Kalvari-class Diesel Electric attack submarine INS Vagir was launched at Mazgaon Dock in Mumbai.



Key takeaways

- Indian Naval Ship (INS) Vagir is the fifth among the six Kalvari-class submarines.
- The other vessels in the class are INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, INS Vela and INS Vagsheer.
- Of these Kalvari and Khanderi have been commissioned in 2017 and 2019.
- Vela and Karanj are undergoing sea trials.
- Vagsheer is under construction.

Technical details

- The design of Kalvari class of submarines is based on Scorpene class of submarines.
- This class of submarines have Diesel Electric transmission systems.
- These are primarily attack submarines or 'hunter-killer' type which means they are designed to target and sink adversary naval vessels.
- It can reach the highest speeds of 11 knots when surfaced and 20 knots when submerged.
- These submarines have the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) which enables non-nuclear submarines to operate for a long time without access to surface oxygen.

Do you know?

- Like Kalvari (which means Tiger Shark), Vagir has been named after a Sand Fish, a predatory marine species.
- Khanderi has been named after an Island Fort built by Chhatrapati Shivaji.
- Karanj has also been named after an Island located South of Mumbai.

Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile System successfully test-fired

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

In news

- Recently, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully test-fired Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile system (QRSAM).

Key takeaways

- QRSAM is a canister-based system.

- It means that it is stored and operated from specially designed compartments.
- In the canister, the inside environment is controlled, thus along with making its transport and storage easier, the shelf life of weapons also improves significantly.
- The system is capable of detecting and tracking targets on the move and engaging targets with short halts.
- It is a short range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system.
- It is primarily designed and developed by DRDO to provide a protective shield to moving armoured columns of the Army from enemy aerial attacks.
- The entire weapon system has been configured on a mobile and is capable of providing air defence on the move.
- It has been designed for induction into the Army.

Do you know?

- It has a range of 25 to 30 km.
- It also consists of two radars - Active Array Battery Surveillance Radar and Active Array Battery Multifunction Radar - with one launcher.
- Both radars have 360-degree coverage with “search on move” and “track on move” capabilities.
- The system uses a single stage solid propelled missile.

Unrest along Assam-Mizoram border

Context: The recent violence and tension on the Assam-Mizoram border underlines the differences the two States have about their borders.

Do You Know?

- In 1972 Mizoram was carved out of Assam as a Union Territory.
- Mizoram became a State in 1987.
- National Highway 306 (Earlier NH 54) connects the State of Assam and Mizoram.
- Mizoram ferries all its essentials, food grains, transport fuel and various other goods and machines through NH 306 and hence is called the lifeline of Mizoram

What triggered the unrest?

- Three districts of southern Assam’s Barak Valley — Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj — border Kolasib and Mamit districts of Mizoram.
- On October 9, a farm hut and a betel nut plantation belonging to two Mizoram residents were set on fire in an area bordering Karimganj (Assam) and Mamit districts(Mizoram)
- Some people from **Assam** allegedly pelted stones at Mizoram police personnel the following day and Mizoram residents retaliated.
- **Assam-based organisations blocked NH306** and other roads leading to Mizoram. The blockade was lifted on October 22 after negotiations between the two States and intervention by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- But Mizoram police’s refusal to withdraw from the disputed areas led to another blockade from October 28.
- The situation threatened to get out of control when an Assamese man named Imtiaz Ali Laskar died in custody in Mizoram. While Mizoram claimed he was a drug peddler, Assam said he was a poor firewood collector.

Has the tension eased now?

- The tension eased when personnel of the Border Security Force and SashastraSeemaBal began patrolling three flashpoints on the border.
- The blockade was lifted on November 9.

Was it a one-off conflict?

- No. The last instance of violence along the Assam-Mizoram border was in February 2018, when the MizoZirlai Pawl (students' union) had built a wooden rest-house for farmers in a forest.
- Assam police and forest officials demolished the structure, claiming it was in Assam's territory.
- Members of Mizo Student's union clashed with Assam police personnel, which led to escalation of tensions. The scale of the violence was larger than **earlier intermittent conflicts along the border**.

Is there any other border conflict of Mizoram?

- Mizoram has also had border issues with Tripura, particularly over claims and counter-claims over Phuldungsei village in North Tripura district.
- The Phuldungsei issue, involving a bid to reconstruct an old temple by the [Bru tribal people](#), had flared up almost at the same time as the 2020 Oct blockade.

What is the genesis of the trouble?

Assam's argument	Mizoram's Argument
Authorities in Assam say the contested land belongs to Assam according to revenue records.	Authorities from Mizoram said people from Assam violated the <i>status quo</i> – as agreed upon between the two State governments a few years ago – in “no man's land” to trigger the present crisis.
Officials and locals in Assam claim Mizos have been squatting in areas 1-3 km from the inter-State border.	Mizoram groups disagree, claiming that the authorities in Assam have been using “illegal Bangladeshis” to move 10-12 km inside their territory
Assam follows British-era notification of 1933 for demarcation of boundaries.	<p>Mizo leaders say this 1933 notification is not acceptable as their ancestors had not been consulted.</p> <p>Mizoram insists that the boundary should be demarcated on the basis of a notification in 1875 that distinguished the Lushai Hills (present-day Mizoram and erstwhile district of Assam) from the plains of Cachar.</p> <p>The notification is derived from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873 that makes it obligatory for Indians from outside to possess a travel document to enter Mizoram.</p>

Are there other boundary issues in the northeast?

- Assam has had boundary problems with all its north-eastern neighbours, except Manipur and Tripura that had existed as separate entities.
- **State Reorganisation Post Independence:** The primary reason is that the other States, which were all part of Assam during the British rule, have contested the boundaries since they separated from Assam and became full-fledged States over a period of time (Nagaland Statehood in 1963; Meghalaya, Tripura & Manipur Statehood in 1971; Arunachal Pradesh & Mizoram Statehood in 1987)
- **Constitutional Solution Vs Historical grounds:** Assam has accepted several recommendations of border commissions set up by the Supreme Court, but other States have been sticking to “historical boundaries” that go back to the period before 1826, when the British annexed undivided Assam and included the hills as its provinces.
- **Issue of Nagaland:** The Nagaland government has been insisting that a 16-point agreement of 1960, which led to the creation of Nagaland, also included “restoration” of all Naga territories that had been transferred out of the Naga Hills after the British annexed Assam in 1826.
- **Issue of Meghalaya:** Meghalaya has challenged the Assam Reorganisation Act of 1971, claiming that two blocks in Assam’s KarbiAnglong district belonged to the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills created in 1835.
- **Assam’s point of view:** Assam says its neighbours have encroached upon more than 75,000 hectares of land. Revenue records of the Assam government say Nagaland has encroached upon 19,819.62 hectares, Arunachal Pradesh 5,756.02 hectares and Meghalaya 65.62 hectares since 2001.

Way Forward

- **Burden borne by common man:** The border residents will continue to bear the brunt of the unrest unless an acceptable solution is arrived at.
- **Joint patrolling** by police personnel of both the States with Central forces along the inter-State border.
- **Maintaining Peace & Order:** Apart from drawing up the standard operating procedure for guarding the contentious boundary, state governments need to strengthen coordination between the Superintendents of Police of the border districts for prompt action against criminals and anti-social activities that add to the border tension.

Connecting the dots

- Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Project
- Naga Issue: Click [Here](#) and [Here](#)

Water bomb in the Himalayas

Context: With India-China relations hitting its lowest point since the 1962 war, border infrastructure has come under intense scrutiny.

The construction of several dams along the Yarlung (Brahmaputra) river on the Chinese side has been a repeated cause for concern for Indian officials and the local people, whose livelihoods and security depend on the river.

Peculiar characteristics of Brahmaputra River that is cause of concern

- **Two Floods:** Inhabitants along the river have to deal with two floods annually, one caused by the melting of the Himalayan snow in summer and the other due to the monsoon flows

- **Dangers of Climate Change:** The frequency of these floods have increased and are devastating due to climate change and its impact on high and low flows.
- **Dynamic in nature:** The river is in itself dynamic as frequent landslides and geological activity force it to change course very often.

Water Issues of China

- **Resource Constraints:** China, which is home to close to 20 per cent of the world's population, has only 7 per cent of its water resources.
- **Consequence of Industrialisation:** Severe pollution of its surface and groundwater caused by rapid industrialisation is a source of concern for Chinese planners.
- **Regional Imbalance within China:** China's southern regions are water-rich in comparison to the water-stressed northern part. The southern region is a major food producer and has significant industrial capacity as a consequence of more people living there.
- **River interlinking Plans:** China has an ambitious plan to link its south(water rich) and north(water stressed) through canals, aqueducts and linking of major rivers to ensure water security
- **International Ramifications:** In pursuit of above goals, China, being an upper riparian state in Asia, has been blocking rivers like the Mekong and its tributaries, affecting Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It has caused immense damage to the environment and altered river flows in the region
- **Geopolitical Tool:** Such projects by China has the potential to significantly change the flow rate during times of standoffs and high tensions. In fact, during the 2018 Doklam border standoff between India and China, China stopped communication of water flow levels from its dams, effectively rendering India blind to floods during the standoff.
- **Hegemonic Attitude:** China sees such projects as a continuation of their historic tributary system as the smaller states have no means of effectively resisting or even significant leverage in negotiations. Chinese projects in the Himalayas have only recently begun to operate amid protests from India.

There are now multiple operational dams in the YarlungTsangpo basin with more dams commissioned and under construction. These constructions present a unique challenge for Indian planners because

1. It will lead to degradation of the entire basin

- Massive amounts of silt carried by the river would get blocked by dams leading to a fall in the quality of soil and eventual reduction in agricultural productivity.

2. Impact on Ecological Diversity

- The Brahmaputra basin is one of the world's most ecologically sensitive zones. It is identified as one of the world's 34 biological hotspots.
- This region sees several species of flora and fauna that are endemic to only this part of the world — the Kaziranga National Park houses 35 mammalian species out of which 15 are listed as threatened in the IUCN conservation list.
- The river itself is home to the Gangetic river dolphin, which is listed as critically endangered
- Reduction in flow of waters downstream will have negative consequences of the flora and fauna of the surrounding ecosystem

3. Prone to Disasters

- The location of the dams in the Himalayas poses a risk. Seismologists consider the Himalayas as most vulnerable to earthquakes and seismic activity.
- Landslides resulting from earthquakes pose a significant threat — the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the resultant landslides wiped out several dams and other facilities.
- The sheer size of the infrastructure projects undertaken by China increases the vulnerability of the region to earthquakes and landslides

4. Lives & Livelihoods are in danger

- Close to a million people live in the Brahmaputra basin in India and tens of millions further downstream in Bangladesh.
- The projects in the Himalayas threaten the existence of hundreds of thousands of people.

Way Ahead: There are alternate solutions to solving the water crisis.

- Both sides must cease new constructions on the river and commit to potentially less destructive solutions.
- Building a decentralised network of check dams, rain-capturing lakes and using traditional means of water capture have shown effective results in restoring the ecological balance while supporting the populations of the regions in a sustainable manner.
- It is in the interest of all stakeholders to neutralise this ticking water bomb.

Land-attack Version of BrahMos Missile successfully test-fired

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

In news

- Recently, India has successfully test-fired a land-attack version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Key takeaways

- The range of the missile has been extended to 400 km from the original 290 km.
- Its speed has been maintained at 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound.
- The test was done in a “top-attack” configuration.
- In top attack mode, the missile is required to climb sharply after launch, travel at a certain altitude and then fall on top of the target.
- In direct attack mode, the missile travels at a lower altitude, directly striking the target.

Sea Guardian Drones from US inducted by the Indian Navy

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

In news

- Recently, two American MQ9B Sea Guardian unarmed drones have been inducted by the Indian Navy.
- The drones would be on lease with India for one year.

Important value addition

MQ9B Sea Guardian

- It is the maritime variant of the Predator MQ9 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).
 - It has a maximum endurance of 40 hours and a maximum flying altitude of 40,000 feet.
 - It has a 3600 maritime surveillance radar and an optional multimode maritime surface search radar.
 - It can be used in operations such as Anti-Surface Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief, Search and Rescue, Law Enforcement (Drug Trafficking, Illegal Immigration and Piracy), etc.
 - The drones are meant for carrying out surveillance in the Indian Ocean Region and can be deployed on the China border if asked for and if needed.
-

Information Management And Analysis Centre (IMAC)

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

In news

- Information Management And Analysis Centre (IMAC) was recently in news with regard to 12th anniversary of the 26/11 attacks.

Important value addition

- IMAC was established in November 2014.
 - It is based in Gurgaon, India.
 - It is jointly operated by the Navy and Coast Guard.
 - It is the nodal centre for maritime security information collation and dissemination.
 - It is the cornerstone of the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network for monitoring maritime traffic in India's area of interest.
 - IMAC's task is to facilitate exchange of maritime security information among various national stakeholders, and generate a common operational picture.
 - IMAC tracks only non-military or commercial ships, known as white shipping.
 - Military ships, or grey hull ships, are tracked by the Directorate of Naval Operations, as this is on a classified network.
-

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Super Typhoon Goni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, Super Typhoon Goni hit the Philippines with authorities warning of “catastrophic” conditions in the region expected to receive the hardest hit. Nearly a million people have been evacuated. The strongest typhoon of the year so far made landfall on Catanduanes Island. A week before, Typhoon Molave had hit the same region.
2. Super Typhoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since 2009 the Hong Kong Observatory has divided typhoons into three different classifications: typhoon, severe typhoon and super typhoon. A typhoon has wind speed of 64–79 knots (73–91 mph; 118–149 km/h), a severe typhoon has winds of at least 80 knots (92 mph; 150 km/h), and a super typhoon has winds of at least 100 knots (120 mph; 190 km/h).
3. Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a disease that causes severe damage to the brain because of repeated head injuries and is linked to memory loss, depression and dementia. Former boxers are most commonly diagnosed with it. However, there have been instances of CTE in many other contact sports like pro wrestling, mixed martial arts, ice hockey, rugby, baseball, Australian rules football and football. Dementia is a general term for loss of memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia.
4. COVID-19 Shri Shakti Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MyGov in collaboration with UN Women, launched the COVID-19 Shri Shakti Challenge in April 2020. Objective: To encourage and involve women led startups to come up with innovative solutions that can help in the fight against COVID19 or solve problems that impact a large number of women. This challenge was hosted on the Innovate platform of MyGov that called for applications from women led startups as well as startups who have solutions that address issues faced by a larger number of women.
5. Mallakhamb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This ancient Indian form of sports is drawing in a steady stream of players in the USA due to the efforts of a couple named ChinmayPatankar and PradnyaPatankar. Mallakhamb is one of the few games that is played against gravity. It functions on a synergy of mind and body, employing every muscle in a way that enables a person to develop speed, stamina and better health.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The name derives from the pole used by wrestlers for practising their skills.• Nevertheless, there are two other Mallakhamb styles such as ‘rope mallakhamb’ and ‘hanging mallakhamb’.• Its origin can be traced to earlier part of the 12th century.• A mention of wrestlers exercising on wooden poles is found in the Manasholas, written by Chalukya, in 1153 AD.• It was revived late in the 19th century by Balambhatta Dada Deodhar, physical instructor to Bajirao Peshwa II.
6.	Leishmaniadonovani	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr SusantaKar, Senior Scientist, Molecular Parasitology and Immunology, CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow is chosen for this year's Prof.A N Bhaduri Memorial Lecture Award by Society of Biological Chemists (India) for his contributions towards defining the survival tactics of Leishmania Donovan.• LeishmaniaDonovani is a protozoan parasite that infects macrophages.• It is a causative agent of visceral leishmaniasis (Kala Azar), a lethal infectious disease affecting millions worldwide.
7.	Moto Tunnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recently, Pakistan’s Ministry of Climate Change opened the 129-year-old Moto Tunnel for tourists after its revival at the Ayubia National Park in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.• It is 250-feet long, 6-feet high and 4-feet wide Moto Tunnel carved out of stones and clay.• It is part of the longer ‘nature pipeline walk’ in the Ayubia National Park.
8.	WilamayaPatjxa Hunter	Female <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A female teenager from 9,000 years ago has been identified as the oldest hunter burial found in the Americas.• The finding has overturned the notion that hunting was exclusively a male domain while women only gathered.• An analysis of burial records indicates 30-50% hunters from a similar period were female.• About 9,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers buried a teenager with hunting tools in the Andes mountains of South America.• When researchers analysed the remains, unearthed in 2018, they found that the hunter was a female, aged between 17 and 19 at her death.• During excavations at the high-altitude site WilamayaPatjxa in Peru in 2018, archaeologists found five burial pits with six individuals.• The WilamayaPatjxa female hunter has been identified as the earliest hunter burial found in the Americas
9.	U.S Presidential Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Democrat Joe Biden has been declared the winner of the 2020 US presidential election, defeating Donald Trump, to become the 46th President of the United States.• Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris has also secured her position as the first woman to be the Vice President of the USA.• Harris, is also credited to be the first woman of Indian-American

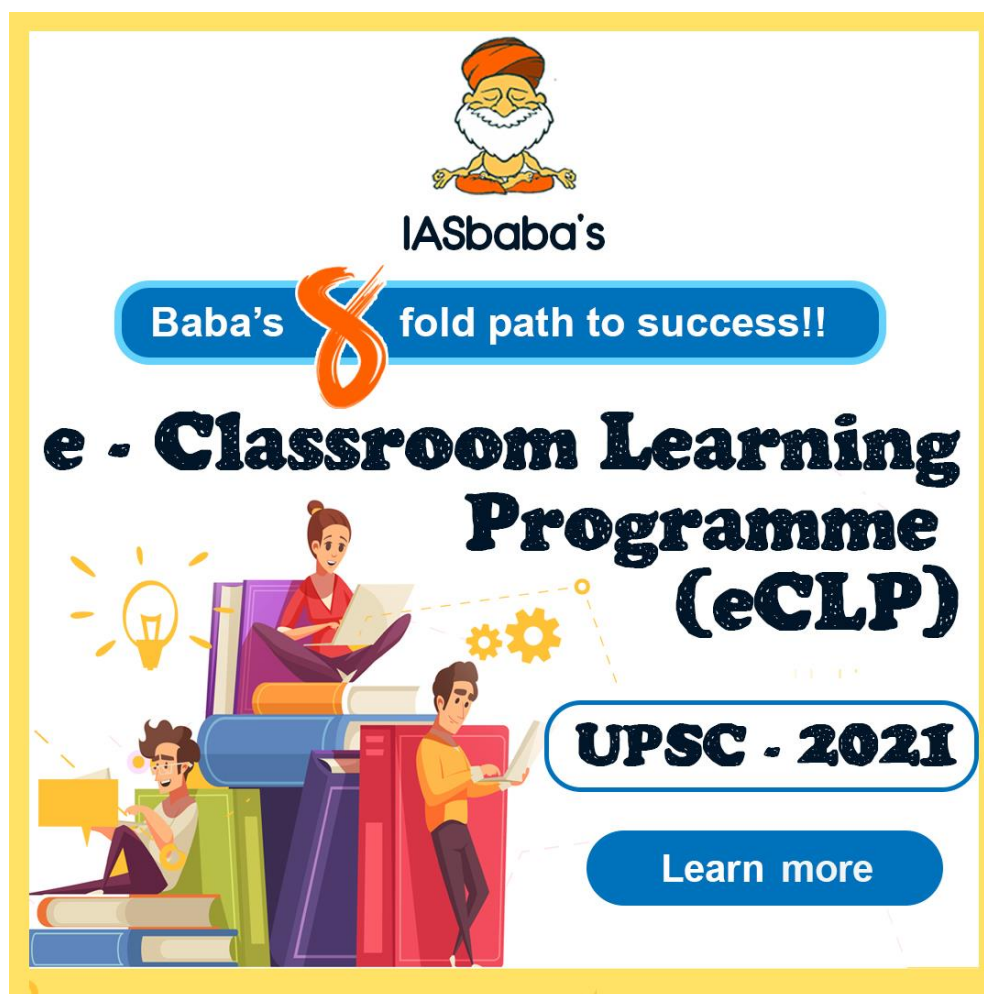
	<p>and African-American origin to be a member of the United States Senate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The electoral college representatives elected by the popular votes will cast their votes to officially elect the new president on the 14th of next month. The new president will thereafter assume office on the 20th of January next year after the inauguration ceremony.
10. Ministry Of Ports, Shipping And Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Prime Minister has said that the Government of India is changing the name of the Ministry of Shipping. It will be known as the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
11. Jingtang Port	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jingtang port was in news recently. The ship named Jag Anand been awaiting anchorage at the Chinese port Jingtang near Tangshan in China's Hebei province since June this year. China has cited COVID-19 regulations for denying departure to the ship The Port of Jingtang is an artificial deep-water international seaport on the coast of Tangshan Municipality, Hebei, in Northern China. Jingtang port is located in Bohai bay (Bohaisea) close to the port of Tianjin.
12. SpaceX's Crew Dragon Spacecraft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft will lift off carrying a crew of four people to the International Space Station (ISS) on a six-month-long mission. The mission is part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program. Objective: To make access to space easier in terms of its cost, so that cargo and crew can be easily transported to and from the ISS, enabling greater scientific research. At the ISS, the Crew-1 team will conduct microgravity studies and deliver new science hardware and experiments that they will carry with them to space aboard the Crew Dragon spacecraft. It is the first spacecraft certified by NASA. This means SpaceX can now operate regular flights to the space station. Earlier in May, NASA's SpaceX Demo-2 test flight lifted off for the ISS, becoming the first crewed flight to launch from American soil since the conclusion of the space shuttle era in 2011.
13. Leonid Meteor Shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leonid meteor showers are currently making their yearly appearance in India. The Leonids emerge from the comet Temple-Tuttle. It takes 33 years to revolve once around the Sun. These meteors are bright and among the fastest moving. The Leonids originate from the constellation Leo the Lion
14. Meteor shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On its journey around the Sun, the Earth passes through large swathes of cosmic debris. The debris is essentially the remnants of comets. As the Earth wades through this cloud of comet waste, the bits of debris create what appears from the ground to be a fireworks


	display in the sky — known as a meteor shower.
15. Statue Of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian Prime Minister unveiled 'Statue of Peace' to mark the 151st Birth Anniversary celebrations of Jainacharya Shree Vijay VallabhSurishwerJiMaharaj. He was a JainAcharya. The statue is made from Ashtadhatu i.e. 8 metals, with Copper being the major constituent. It is installed at Vijay VallabhSadhana Kendra, Jetpura, in Pali, Rajasthan.
16. Shree VallabhSurishwerJiMaharaj (1870-1954)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He led an austere life as a Jain Saint working selflessly and dedicatedly to spread the message of Lord Mahavira. He also worked relentlessly for the welfare of masses, the spread of education, eradication of social evils, wrote inspiring literature and gave active support to the freedom movement and the cause of Swadeshi.
17. Jolly Grant Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental activists and local residents in Uttarakhand are opposing the cutting of trees for a project to expand Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport. Dehradun Airport is also known as Jolly Grant Airport. It is also known as the Air Gateway of Garhwal and plays an important role in the tourism of Uttarakhand. The Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority has proposed the expansion of Jolly Grant airport in Dehradun with the aim of upgrading it to meet international standards. It is proposed to take over 87 hectares of forest land in Doiwala village in Dehradun district, and another 17.41 hectares of non-forest land for the project.
18. Hurricane Iota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hurricane Iota made landfall in Nicaragua in Central America recently. It developed into a category five storm. The Atlantic Hurricane season runs from June to November and covers the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. The Eastern Pacific Hurricane season runs from May 15 to November 30.
19. Tropical cyclones or hurricanes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Such Cyclones use warm, moist air as fuel. Therefore, they form over warm ocean waters near the equator. The tropical cyclones that form over the Atlantic Ocean or the eastern Pacific Ocean are called hurricanes. The ones that form in the Northwest Pacific are called typhoons. Tropical storms that form in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea are called cyclones. Hurricanes are categorised on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, which rates them on a scale of 1 to 5 based on wind speed. Hurricanes that reach category three or higher are called 'major hurricanes' because of their potential to cause devastating damage to life and property.

20. Lilavati Award-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, the Union Minister of Education virtually launched the Lilavati Award-2020. It is AICTE's (All India Council for Technical Education) Innovative education program to empower women. Theme: Women Empowerment Objective: To create awareness about issues like sanitation, hygiene, health, nutrition, literacy, employment, rights among women, etc.
21. Booker Prize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scottish writer Douglas Stuart has won the 2020 Booker Prize for fiction with his debut novel Shuggie Bain, which described a boy growing up in Glasgow in the 1980s with a mother battling addiction.
22. India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, the 30th edition of India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) has been concluded in the Andaman Sea close to the Strait of Malacca. India and Thailand have been carrying out CORPAT along their International Maritime Boundary Line twice a year since 2005. Aims: (1) To keep part of the Indian Ocean safe and secure for commercial shipping and international trade; (2) To ensure effective implementation of the United Nations Conventions on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).
23. India International Cherry Blossom Festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India International Cherry Blossom Festival is the calendar event of Meghalaya which attracts a large number of tourists annually in Shillong. It was cancelled recently due to COVID-19 pandemic. It is the only Cherry Blossoms festival in India.
24. Cherry blossom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a flower of many trees of genus Prunus. Prunuscerasoides is also called wild Himalayan cherry, Indian wild cherry, and sour cherry. It is known in Hindi as padam, pajja, or padmakashtha. Among Hindus in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, it is considered sacred and associated with Vishnu and Shiva.
25. SITMEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Navy (IN) Ships participated in the 2nd edition of India, Singapore and Thailand Trilateral Maritime Exercise SITMEX-20, recently in Andaman Sea. The ships included indigenously built ASW corvette Kamorta and missile corvette Karmuk. The SITMEX series of exercises are conducted to enhance mutual inter-operability and imbibing best practices between IN, Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and Royal Thai Navy (RTN). The 2020 edition of the exercise is being hosted by RSN.
26. SIMBEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Navy is scheduled to host the 27th edition of India - Singapore Bilateral Maritime Exercise SIMBEX-20 from November 23 in Andaman Sea. The exercises are aimed at enhancing mutual inter-operability and imbibing best practices from each other.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2020 edition of SIMBEX will witness participation by Indian Navy ships including destroyer Rana with integral Chetak helicopter and indigenously built corvettes Kamorta and Karmuk.
27. Rodchenkov Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Rodchenkov Act was recently in news. It is passed by the US Senate and will become a law once the US president signs it. It allows the USA to initiate legal proceedings against those involved in running doping rings even if they are not residents of the USA or if the act of doping took place outside the USA. The main objective of the Rodchenkov Act is to bring to book Facilitators of drugs amongst athletes.
28. Mount Vesuvius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Italian Culture Ministry announced the discovery of well-preserved remains of two men, who perished during the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Vesuvius is located in southern Italy near the coastal city of Naples. It is the only active volcano in mainland Europe. Vesuvius has been classified as a complex volcano, one that consists of a complex of two or more vents. It is considered among the most dangerous volcanoes in the world due to its proximity to Naples and surrounding towns.
29. Katchal Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, Katchal Island was in news. The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) towed a fuel tanker back to safe waters which was dangerously drifting towards the pristine Katchal Island in Nicobar due to power failure. Katchal Island was previously known as Tihanyu. It is inhabited by Nicobari Tribes and Migrated Tamilians (For Rubber plantation workers under Sastri-SrimaoBandaranayaka Pact of 1964).
30. Cyclone 'Nivar'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the meteorological department, Cyclone 'Nivar' may make a landfall on Wednesday in Tamil Nadu. The Bay of Bengal will see its second Severe Cyclone of 2020, after Super Cyclone Amphan formed in May. After cyclone Gaja in 2018, this will be the second cyclone to cross Tamil Nadu in the last two years. Its name 'Nivar' has been proposed by Iran.
31. RE-INVEST 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The virtual 3rd Global Renewable Energy Investment Meeting and Expo (RE-Invest 2020) shall be held in recent days which will be inaugurated by Indian PM. The summit is organised by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and will be held from 26 – 28 November 2020. The theme for RE-Invest 2020 is 'Innovations for Sustainable Energy Transition'. It will feature a 3-day conference on renewables and future energy choices, and an exhibition of manufacturers, developers, investors and innovators. It aims to build upon the success of the first two editions held in

	2015 and 2018 and provide an international forum for investment promotion in renewable energy.
32. Lok Virasat organised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's Films Division (FD) is organising Lok Virasat. It is a festival of films on folk art and painting. <p>The films being streamed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kingdom of God: It is a film on the great Indian heritage of art and culture with focus on various folk art traditions. Bhavai - Fading Memories: A film on Bhavai which is a folk art of Gujarat. Naman – Khele: A film on the ancient folk art performed in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra. SahiJata - The Fusion Cult: A film on the unique fusion of music and dance in the form of folk art on the back-drop of the ancient Orissa town of Puri Therukoothu - Dancing For Life: A film depicting the age old Tamil folk art.




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(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Where is Mansar lake situated?

- a) Jammu and Kashmir
- b) Orissa
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Himachal Pradesh

Q.2 Consider the following statements regarding Real Estate Regulation and Development Act:

1. The act is applicable all over India.
2. Each state has to set up its own regulator with its own law as the framework.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.3 16 Psyche was in the news recently. It is associated with which of the following?

- a) An asteroid orbiting between Mars and Jupiter.
- b) Planet Jupiter's newly discovered moon.
- c) Manned spacecraft to be sent to Mars in 2022.
- d) Meteorite that shall enter the Earth's atmosphere in December

Q.4 First seaplane project is recently inaugurated in which of the following state of India?

- a) Gujarat
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Kerala
- d) Tamil Nadu

Q.5 Recently, traces of dairy production with regard to Indus Valley Civilization was recently found in:

- a) Gujarat
- b) Rajasthan

c) Haryana

d) Lahore

Q.6 Consider the following statements regarding Budapest Convention

1. It is the sole legally binding international multilateral treaty on cybercrime.
2. India is not a party to it.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.7 Consider the following statements regarding River Ganga:

1. It originates as Gandak river from Gangotri glacier.
2. The Ganges River Dolphin is found in this river.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.8 National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is an initiative of:

- a) Reserve Bank of India
- b) World Bank
- c) Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
- d) Reliance Group

Q.9 National Monsoon Mission is launched by which of the following ministry?

- a) Ministry of agriculture
- b) Ministry of Science and Technology
- c) Ministry of Earth Sciences
- d) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology

Q.10 Which of the following diseases are caused by microbes found in animals that spill over due to contact among wildlife, livestock and people?

1. Ebola
2. Zika
3. Nipah
4. HIV

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Q.11 Where is the headquarters of Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem situated?

- a) Germany
- b) France
- c) Norway
- d) Switzerland

Q.12 Consider the following statements:

1. Certiorari is a court process to seek judicial review of a decision of a lower court or government agency.
2. Mandamus: A judicial writ issued as a command to an inferior court or ordering a person to perform a public or statutory duty.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.13 Moto Tunnel was in news recently. Where is it located?

- a) Pakistan
- b) Afghanistan
- c) Uzbekistan
- d) India

Q.14 Where is the headquarters of United Nations Industrial Development Organisation situated?

- a) Austria
- b) Australia

- c) Norway
- d) Denmark

Q.15 Avadhanam is associated with which of the following?

- a) Poems
- b) Dance
- c) Drama
- d) Architecture

Q.16 Consider the following statements regarding Ephemeral Messaging:

1. It is the mobile to mobile transmission of multimedia messages that disappears after a certain period.
2. It is being launched by the app WhatsApp for the first time globally.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.17 Body Mass Index is measured as which of the following?

- a) The weight in kg divided by height in metres
- b) The weight in kg divided by the square of the height in in centimetres
- c) Weight in kg divided by height in centimetres
- d) Weight in kg divided by square of the height in metres

Q.18 Consider the following statements regarding EOS-01 satellite recently launched by India:

1. It is an Earth observation satellite.
2. It will be useful in agriculture, Forestry and disaster management.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.19 Tigray region was in news recently. Where is it situated?

- a) Ethiopia
- b) Sudan
- c) Eritrea
- d) Tanzania

Q.20 Consider the following statements regarding Sarnath:

1. It is mentioned by the Buddha as one of the four places of pilgrimage which his devout followers should visit.
2. Buddha gave his first teaching Dhammachakkapavattana Sutta after attaining enlightenment in this city.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.21 Recently, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has developed a technology called "Fire Detection and Suppression System (FDSS)". For which purpose is it developed?

- a) For passenger trains
- b) For passenger buses
- c) For high rise buildings
- d) For navy ships

Q.22 Consider the following statements:

1. 'Mission Shakti' was India's first ever Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Missile.
2. India is the only nation in the world with the capability to defend its assets in outer space.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.23 India Mobile Congress is jointly organised by which of the following?

- a) Department of Telecommunications
- b) Cellular Operators Association of India

c) Council of Scientific & Industrial Research

d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.24 Saffron plants were recently transported from J&K to one of the North eastern regions of India where they acclimatized and flowered. Where were the plants transported?

- a) Sikkim
- b) Arunachal Pradesh
- c) Assam
- d) Tripura

Q.25 Consider the following statements regarding growth conditions of Saffron:

1. It needs 8 hours of daily sunlight.
2. It grows well only in summer.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.26 Yarkovsky effect is associated with which of the following?

- a) Asteroid
- b) Meteor
- c) Earthquake
- d) Saturn Rings

Q.27 Consider the following statements regarding System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR):

1. It is developed by ISRO.
2. It monitors parameters of pollutants only

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.28 Sarna religion was in news recently. It is associated with which of the following state of India?

- a) Madhya Pradesh

- b) Jharkhand
- c) Chhattisgarh
- d) Bihar

Q.29 which of the following Kalvari-class Diesel Electric attack submarine was recently launched?

- a) INS Kalvari
- b) INS Vagir
- c) INS Khanderi
- d) INS Karanj

Q.30 Consider the following statements:

1. A recession is a period of declining economic performance across an entire economy that lasts for several months.
2. Depressions are often identified as recessions lasting longer than three years or resulting in a drop in annual GDP of at least 10%.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.31 Which of the following is not a founding member of ASEAN?

- a) Indonesia
- b) Malaysia
- c) Philippines
- d) Brunei

Q.32 Which of the following remote group of volcanic islands was recently declared the largest fully protected marine reserves in the Atlantic Ocean?

- a) Balleny Islands
- b) American Samoa
- c) Antipodes Islands
- d) Tristan da Cunha

Q.33 Consider the following statements regarding Central Information Commission:

1. The Central Information Commission shall consist of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and such numbers

of Central Information Commissioners (ICs), not exceeding five, as may be deemed necessary.

2. The CIC or an IC may be removed from office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity after the Supreme Court's report on the same.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.34 Which of the following was recently added to Ramsar sites?

1. Lonar lake
2. Asan conservation reserve
3. Kabar Tal
4. Sur Sarovar

Select the correct code

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 4 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1 and 2 only

Q.35 Andes mountain passes through which of the following countries of South America?

1. Venezuela
2. Peru
3. Argentina
4. Brazil
5. Columbia

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 3 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

Q.36 Consider the following statements regarding Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile System (QRSAM):

1. QRSAM is a canister-based system.
2. The system is capable of detecting and tracking targets on the move and engaging targets with short halts.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only

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

Q.37 Recently, statue of peace was unveiled in which of the following state of India by the Indian Prime Minister?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Gujarat
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Bihar

Q.38 Consider the following statements regarding report on Vital statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System

1. Arunachal Pradesh has recorded the highest sex ratio in India.
2. Daman and Diu has recorded the lowest sex ratio in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.39 Reciprocal Access Agreement was recently signed between which of the following countries?

- a) Japan and Australia
- b) USA and Australia
- c) India and USA
- d) India and Japan

Q.40 Which of the following country is not a part of BRICS?

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

Q.41 Consider the following statements:

1. Tropical cyclones that form over Eastern Pacific Ocean are called typhoons.
2. Tropical cyclones that form over Northwest Pacific Ocean are called hurricanes.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.42 India's first green energy conversions project will be implemented in which of the following state of India?

- a) Goa
- b) Rajasthan
- c) Himachal Pradesh
- d) Odisha

Q.43 GIS one district one product digital map of India was recently launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Food Processing
- b) Ministry of Agriculture
- c) Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium enterprises
- d) Ministry of Science and Technology

Q.44 Consider the following statements:

1. Param Siddhi was recently ranked in Top 100 amongst the most powerful non-distributed computer systems in the world.
2. Param Siddhi is the high performance computing-artificial intelligence (HPC-AI) supercomputer established under National Supercomputing Mission (NSM).

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.45 Consider the following statements regarding Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD):

1. It primarily affects females.
2. It is caused by a mutation in the gene for the protein dystrophin.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only

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

Q.46 Consider the following statements regarding Willow Warbler:

1. It is one of the longest migrating small birds.
2. IUCN red list status is least concern.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.47 The headquarters of New Development Bank is situated in which of the following country?

- a) Brazil
- b) Russia
- c) China
- d) South Africa

Q.48 Consider the following statements regarding Liquefied Natural Gas:

1. It is predominantly Ethane with some mixture of Methane.
2. It is 50% costlier than diesel.
3. It causes very less pollution.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Q.49 Which of the following countries have its Navigation systems recognised by international Maritime organisation?

1. Japan
2. USA
3. Russia
4. China
5. India

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- d) 1 and 3 only

Q.50 Consider the following statements:

1. PradhanMantriMatsyaSampadaYojana aims to achieve 22 million tonnes of fish production by 2024-25.
2. Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF) caters to creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities in marine sector only.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 1 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Q.51 Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) provides for generating gas from which of the following wastes?

1. Municipal waste
2. Agricultural waste
3. Animal husbandry waste
4. Marine wastes

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 3 and 4 only
- c) 1 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

Q.52 Consider the following statements:

1. Antibodies are made up of fats.
2. Neutralizing antibodies have the ability to prevent the entry of the same virus inside human body in the future.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.53 Consider the following differences between dementia and delirium:

1. The onset of delirium occurs within a short time. Dementia worsens over gradually.
2. The ability to maintain attention is significantly impaired with Dementia. A

person in early stages of delirium remains generally alert.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.54 Consider the following Technologies which were recommended recently for better drinking water and sanitation facilities:

1. Presto Online Chlorinator is a electricity based online chlorinator for disinfection of water.
2. Johkasou technology is an inbuilt sewage and kitchen treatment system having only aerobic configuration which can be installed underground.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.55 Consider the following statements regarding JalJeevan Mission:

1. It aims to supply 55 litres of water per family.
2. It aims to supply water to every rural household through functional household tap connections by 2030.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.56 Umang app was developed under which of the following Ministry of Indian government?

- a) Ministry of Agriculture
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of External Affairs
- d) Ministry of Electronics and IT

Q.57 Consider the following statement regarding China Chang'E-5 lunar mission which was in news recently:

1. It is the first proverb in 40 years which will attempt to bring back samples of Lunarrock from unexplored portion of the Moon.
2. It will land in the Mons Romkerregion of the Moon.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.58 Negative-yield bonds are generally issued by which of the following?

- a) Central banks
- b) Central governments
- c) Both (a) and (b)
- d) Private companies only

Q.59 Which of the Indian state does not share border with Bhutan?

- a) Sikkim
- b) West Bengal
- c) Assam
- d) Bihar

Q.60 SahakarPragya was recently launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Agriculture
- b) Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
- c) Ministry of Electronics and IT
- d) Ministry of textiles

Q.61 In which of the following states of India the technology of desalination plant has been experimented with?

1. Maharashtra
2. Kerala
3. Andhra Pradesh
4. Gujarat
5. Tamil Nadu

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2, 3 and 5 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 3, 4 and 5 only

Q.62 Consider the following statements:

1. Bhavai is a folk art of Rajasthan.
2. Naman – Kheleisthe ancient folk art performed in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.63 Which of the following sectors allow FDI?

1. Manufacturing of cigars
2. Atomic Energy
3. Telecom services
4. Pharma sector

Which of the following is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 3 only

Q.64 Consider the following statements regarding India Climate Change Knowledge Portal recently launched by India:

1. It will have all the major steps taken by the government at national levels.
2. It will provide information on the climate initiatives taken by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change only.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.65 Which of the following is not correct regarding Brain Fingerprinting?

- a) The accused's participation in the crime is investigated by studying his brain's response.

- b) The test is carried out through a process known as electroencephalogram.
- c) The consent of the accused is not required.
- d) The accused is shown visuals or audio clips related to the crime to study the triggering of neurons that occurs in his brain.

Q.66 Consider the following statements regarding bioluminescence:

1. Only fungi and bacteria show bioluminescence.
2. It is generally higher in shallow species than in the deep-living organisms.
3. It is an anti-predatory response.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 3 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Q.67 Which of the following state recognises Bru tribe as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group?

- a) Mizoram
- b) Assam
- c) Manipur
- d) Tripura

Q.68 Consider the following statements:

1. El Niño refers to the cooling of the ocean surface in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.
2. La Nina is the warm phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

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1 A	18 C	35 D	52 B
2 D	19 A	36 C	53 A
3 A	20 C	37 A	54 D
4 A	21 B	38 A	55 D
5 A	22 A	39 A	56 D
6 C	23 D	40 D	57 C
7 B	24 A	41 D	58 C
8 A	25 D	42 A	59 D
9 C	26 A	43 A	60 A
10 D	27 D	44 C	61 D
11 A	28 B	45 B	62 B
12 C	29 B	46 C	63 C
13 A	30 C	47 C	64 A
14 A	31 D	48 B	65 C
15 A	32 D	49 C	66 C
16 A	33 B	50 B	67 D
17 D	34 C	51 D	68 D


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