

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2021



India's Unemployment Problem
Same Sex Marriage
Military coup in Myanmar
Vaccine Diplomacy
Structural Problems with UTs

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 69th edition of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **FEBRUARY 2021** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

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

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

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

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HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

Community in news: Matua

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- I – Culture

In news

- The Matua community of West Bengal was recently in news.

Important value additions

- The Matua community has members on either side of the Bengal border.
 - It is associated with a religious movement begun in the 1870s by Harichand Thakur of a Namasudra (SC) family, who hailed from Safaldanga in East Bengal.
 - In the early 20th century, his son Guruchand organized the movement socially and politically.
 - In 1915, the Matua Federation was established.
 - Today, Matuas constitute the second-largest SC population of West Bengal.
 - For years, the Matuas were demanding an amendment to the Citizenship Act of 2003, whose provisions made it difficult for refugees to get citizenship.
-

Art in news: Pattachitra

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- I – Culture

In news

- 'Pattachitra' painting was recently in news when Prime Minister cited the example of Bhagyashree Sahu, a young student from Rourkela in Odisha for her keen interest in 'Pattachitra' painting, during his Mann ki Baat program.

Important value additions

- Patta means cloth, and Chitra means picture.
- Pattachitra is a picture painted on a piece of cloth.
- It is based in the states of West Bengal and Odisha.
- **Bengal tradition:** It is centered around Kalighat (in Kolkata). The theme is Not much devotional.
- **Odisha tradition:** It is centered around Puri. Almost all of the Chitrakar community hails from a small village in Puri district called Raghurajpur.
- Odisha paintings are based on Hindu mythology and are especially inspired by Jagannath and the Vaishnava sect.
- All colors used in the Paintings are natural.



Fig: 'Pattachitra' painting

Centenary Celebrations of 'Chauri Chaura' Incident

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

In news

- Indian Prime Minister will inaugurate the Chauri Chaura Centenary Celebrations at Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, on 4th February 2021.
- The day marks 100 years of the 'Chauri Chaura' incident, a landmark event in India's fight for independence.

Important value additions

- The Chauri Chaura incident took place on 4 February 1922 at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of the United Province (modern Uttar Pradesh) in British India.
- In this, a large group of protesters participating in the Non-cooperation movement, clashed with police who opened fire.
- In retaliation the demonstrators attacked and set fire to a police station, killing all of its occupants.
- The incident led to the death of three civilians and 22 policemen.
- Mahatma Gandhi, who was strictly against violence, halted the non-co-operation movement on the national level on 12 February 1922, as a direct result of this incident.

6 New Circles of Archaeological Survey of India created

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- I – Culture

In news

- Archaeological Survey of India, an attached office of Ministry of Culture, Government of India has established Six new Circles by bifurcation of its existing Circles as per details given below:-
1. Rajkot Circle, Gujarat – by bifurcation of Vadodara Circle.

2. Jabalpur Circle, Madhya Pradesh – by bifurcation of Bhopal Circle.
3. Tiruchirappalli (Trichy) Circle, Tamil Nadu – by bifurcation of Chennai & Thrissur Circle.
4. Meerut Circle, Uttar Pradesh – by bifurcation of Agra circle
5. Jhansi Circle, Uttar Pradesh – by bifurcation of Lucknow Circle.
6. Raiganj Circle, West Bengal – by bifurcation of Kolkata Circle.

In addition, Hampi Mini-Circle has been upgraded as a full-fledged Circle and Delhi Mini-Circle merged with Delhi Circle.

Measures by the Government to preserve and promote the traditional cultural heritage of India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- I – Culture

In news

- Minister of Culture and Tourism informed Parliament about the Measures taken by the Government to preserve and promote the traditional cultural heritage of India.

Key takeaways

- The Ministry of Culture formulated a scheme titled “Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”.
- **The objective of the scheme:** Promoting the rich Intangible Cultural Heritage of India.
- India has successfully inscribed 13 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under the 2003 Convention.
- As the first step towards the making of a National Inventory of ICH, the Ministry of Culture (MoC) has put up a list on its website called “National list for ICH”
- The National list of ICH is an attempt to recognize the diversity of Indian Culture embedded in its Intangible Heritage.

Important value additions

Following UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, this list has been classified into five broad domains in which Intangible Cultural Heritage is manifested:

1. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
2. Performing Arts
3. Social practices, Rituals, and Festive events
4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the Universe
5. Traditional Craftsmanship

Related article:

- Culture related terms: [Click here](#)
 - Hawker Culture in Singapore: [Click here](#)
-

Place in the news: Dhekiajuli

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

In news

- Indian Prime Minister recently paid a visit to the historic martyr town of Dhekiajuli in Assam, to lay the foundation stone for two medical colleges and launch a road and highway project.

Important value additions

- Dhekiajuli is associated with the Quit India Movement of 1942.
- Dhekiajuli was home to possibly the youngest martyr of the Indian freedom struggle.
- On September 20, 1942, as part of the Quit India movement, processions of freedom fighters marched to various police stations across several towns in Assam.
- These squads, which were known as 'Mrityu Bahini', or death squads, had wide participation — including women and children — and set out to unfurl the tricolor atop police stations, seen as symbols of colonial power.
- The British administration came down heavily on them.
- In Dhekiajuli, at least 15 people were shot dead, three of them women, including the 12-year-old Tileswari Barua.

Do you know?

- September 20 has for long been observed as Martyrs' Day in Dhekiajuli town.
 - Recently, the Dhekiajuli police station was accorded heritage status and restored by the Assam government.
-

National Monsoon Mission

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

In news

- Minister of Earth Science informed Rajya Sabha about National Monsoon Mission.

Key takeaways

- Under the Monsoon Mission, Ministry has developed state-of-the-art weather and climate prediction models, which are now in operational use.
- These models include models for short-range to medium range (1-10 days), extended-range (10days to 30 days), and seasonal (up to one season).

Targets of Monsoon Mission:

- Development of a seamless prediction system using monsoon mission model, on different time scales, like Seasonal, Extended range, Short-range prediction.
- Initiate and coordinate the working partnership between Indian and foreign institutes to develop a system for the prediction of extremes and climate applications
- Develop and implement a system for climate applications having social impacts (such as agriculture, flood forecast, extreme events forecast, wind energy, etc.)
- Advanced data assimilation system for preparing high-quality data for model predictions.

Major achievements of NMM during the last three years:

- Setting up of an advanced prediction system for Seasonal prediction; Extended range prediction and Very high-resolution Short-range prediction.
 - Commissioning of a Global Ensemble Forecast System (GEFS) for short and medium-range prediction at 12km.
-

[Tholpavakoothu](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Culture

In news

- For the first time, Tholpavakkoothu, the famous shadow leather puppets will tell stories of the epic Ramayana with the help of robots.

Important value additions

- Tholpavakoothu is a form of shadow puppetry.
 - **Practiced in:** Kerala, India.
 - It is performed using leather puppets as a ritual dedicated to Bhadrakali.
 - It is performed in Devi temples in specially built theatres called koothumadams.
 - It is believed to have originated in the ninth century AD.
 - It uses Kamba Ramayana as its basic text.
-

[75 years of Shri Ram Chandra Mission](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Culture

In news

- The Prime Minister recently addressed the event organized to commemorate 75 years of Shri Ram Chandra Mission.

Important value additions

- Shri Ram Chandra Mission (SRCM) is a non-profit organization and a spiritual movement originating in India.
 - It teaches the practice of "Sahaj Marg" or "Heartfulness Meditation".
 - It was registered in 1945 by Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh.
 - **Current headquarter:** Hyderabad, Telangana
 - Sahaj Marg (The Natural Path) is a form of Raja Yoga.
 - It is a meditation system involving meditation, cleaning, and prayer.
-

'Shri Guru Ravidas Vishva Mahapeeth Rashtriya Adhiveshan' held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Culture

In news

- Indian President recently addressed 'Shri Guru Ravidas Vishva Mahapeeth Rashtriya Adhiveshan' in New Delhi.



Important value additions

- He was a Dalit-poet saint.
- He belonged to the Bhakti movement era.
- He probably lived during the 14th to 16th century.
- He belonged to a leather-working Chamar community.
- The 41 hymns of Guru Ravidas have been included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- The famous saint poetess, Mirabai was a disciple of Guru Ravidas.

His teachings

- Everybody is equal in all respects, irrespective of caste, color or a belief in any form of God; Emphasised on universal brotherhood and tolerance.
- God created man and not man created God;
- He abandoned saguna (with attributes, image) forms of supreme beings, and focussed on the nirguna (without attributes, abstract) form of supreme beings.

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POLITY/GOVERNANCE

[National E-Vidhan Application \(NEVA\) Project](#)

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

In news

- National E-Vidhan Application (NEVA) Project in Meghalaya was recently in news.

Important value additions

- e-Vidhan is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) included in Digital India Programme.
- **Nodal Ministry for its implementation:** Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA)
- Funding of NeVA is on the pattern of Central Sponsored Scheme i.e. 60:40; and 90:10 for North East & hilly States and 100% for UTs.
- The funding for e-Vidhan is provided by the MoPA.
- **Technical support:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Do you know?

- Paperless Assembly or e-Assembly is a concept involving electronic means to facilitate the work of Assembly.
- It enables automation of the entire law-making process, tracking of decisions and documents, sharing of information.
- **Aim of NeVA:** To bring all the legislatures of the country together, in one platform thereby creating a massive data depository without having the complexity of multiple applications.
- Further, live webcasting of Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TVs is also available on this application.
- Doordarshan has already been enabled with provision to incorporate similar facilities in respect of State Legislatures.

[US Lawsuit on Fox News: Press Freedom Vs Disinformation](#)

Context: Smartmatic, which makes voting machines, has filed a \$2.7 billion defamation lawsuit against American media powerhouse Fox News for false election claims they had made.

What is the case about?

- In a 258-page lawsuit, the company claimed that the Fox news media invented a story that the election was stolen from Trump and made disparaging statements against Smartmatic, alleging that its machines and software platforms hacked to allow Democrats to seize the election.
- In one show, Smartmatic was represented by Fox News as a “Venezuela company under the control of corrupt dictators from socialist countries.”
- Although these claims did not change the result of the election, Smartmatic claimed that the news media organisation and its hosts **profited in ratings and advertisements** from spreading this narrative
- On the other hand, the **company suffered a loss of reputation** and also received hate mails and death threats from those who believed in these claims

- Fox News moved the court seeking to dismiss the lawsuit claiming it is an **attempt to chill First Amendment** Rights under the Constitution (express recognition of freedom of press)

Significance of the case

- **Fight against fake News:** The lawsuit claiming such huge damages is being seen as a test case for fighting disinformation.
- **Corrective actions of Fox News causes doubt:** Even before the lawsuit has had a hearing, Fox News' cancellation of the show in which the host is a defendant in case, is seen as a course-correction measure.
- **Previous measures yielded little results:** Advertising boycotts, and mass campaigns against fake news have had little impact over the years.
- **Freedom of Press Vs Defamation Law:** With the First Amendment protections, defamation law is rather unsympathetic to the plaintiff (person filing case), especially public figures and those holding public offices. However, it is significant that the lawsuit has been brought about by a private party, which relatively has a higher degree of protection than public figures to protect its rights.
- **Judicial Precedence in Defamation Law:** In the US, the landmark 1964 case New York Times Co. v. Sullivan redefined libel(defamation) law in favour of media. The case set the standard that to win a libel suit in matters involving public concerns, it is not enough to simply prove that a false statement of fact was made but they would be required to prove either malice -a deliberate attempt to harm the plaintiff or a "reckless disregard" for facts. So Smartmatic Company has tough battle to fight
- **Judgement Global Precedence:** Although the express recognition of freedom of press in the First Amendment to the US Constitution places the American media in a unique position, the case is expected to have seminal consequence for balancing press freedoms and penalising disinformation across the globe.

Do You Know?

- India's Constitution, unlike in the US, does not distinguish the press in guaranteeing free speech.
- Article 19(1)(a), which recognises freedom of speech and expression, is for every citizen. The press doesn't qualify as a separate category for rights, but the collective right to free speech includes every individual journalist.
- Compared to the US law, India's civil defamation law is in favour of the plaintiff. The plaintiff would just need to prove that the statement made against him results in lowering his or her reputation and proof of Intent to defame is not required.

Connecting the dots

- On regulation of Digital media (Sudarshan TV Case): Click [here](#)

[Parliamentary Committee and 5G](#)

Context: A standing committee of Lok Sabha on Information Technology has submitted its report on 5G and said that India will miss the 5G bus.

What are the findings of the parliamentary standing committee on IT?

- **Little Progress on ground:** Despite the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) having submitted a report on the steps to make India 5G ready as early as August 2018, there was very little progress on the ground.
- **High Spectrum Prices:** the reserve price for auction of 5G was one of the highest in the world. It needed to be rationalised, taking into account the per capita income of the country and also by comparing it with reserve price mandated by other countries.
- **Inadequate and poor development of test cases:** Globally, as many as 118 telecom service providers across 59 countries have started deploying 5G networks. India is yet to give formal approvals for 5G testing despite all the three major private telecom players having submitted their applications as early as January 2020.
- **Delayed rollout of 5G:** Comparing it to the deployment of other older technologies such as 2G, on which it was late by four years, 3G on which India was as much as a decade late, and 4G on which India missed by the bus by 7 years, the committee concluded that “sufficient preparatory work had not been undertaken for launching of 5G services in India.”
- **Low reach of optical fibre** across India, and deficient back-haul capacity are other factors which is delaying the deployment of 5G in India.

Conclusion

- Not all hope is lost as far as the roll out of 5G in India is concerned
- Even before the findings of the parliamentary committee were made public, the DoT had, in a bid to facilitate faster roll out of new services, reduced the notice period for telcos to six months from one year.
- A reduced time would mean that telcos could as soon as September this year start testing the 5G network for commercial purposes in all three bands, namely low, mid and high frequency spectrum
- Apart from this, the parliamentary committee also hoped that the DoT would reach an understanding with the Department of Space and Ministry of Defence at the earliest to earmark the allocation of spectrum waves.

Connecting the dots

- UK [shutting door on Huawei](#)

[Andhra-Odisha border dispute](#)

Context: Andhra Pradesh recently held panchayat elections in three villages in the Kotia cluster, which is at the centre of a dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

- A day after Andhra notified the panchayat elections here, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated projects worth Rs 18 crore.
- The Odisha government moved the Supreme Court challenging the conduct of elections by AP government.

The Villages

- **Tribal Dominated:** These villages, with a population of nearly 5,000, are located on a remote hilltop on the inter-state border and are inhabited by Kondh tribals.

- **Left-wing extremism:** The region, once a Maoist hotbed which still reports sporadic incidents of violence.
- **Rich Resources:** These villages are also rich in mineral resources like gold, platinum, manganese, bauxite, graphite and limestone.

Brief History of the Dispute

- Prior to April 1, 1936, villages under Kotia panchayat were part of Jeypore Estate.
- In the Constitution of Orissa Order, 1936, published in the Gazette of India, the Government of India demarcated Odisha from the erstwhile Madras Presidency (that included present day Andhra Pradesh)
- In 1942, the Madras government contested the boundary and ordered re-demarcation of the two states.
- In a joint survey of Odisha, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, seven villages of Kotia gram panchayat were recorded as revenue villages and revenue was collected by the Odisha government, but the **exercise left out the 21 villages** now under dispute.
- When the state of Andhra Pradesh was created in 1955, **the villages were not surveyed by the Andhra Pradesh government** either.

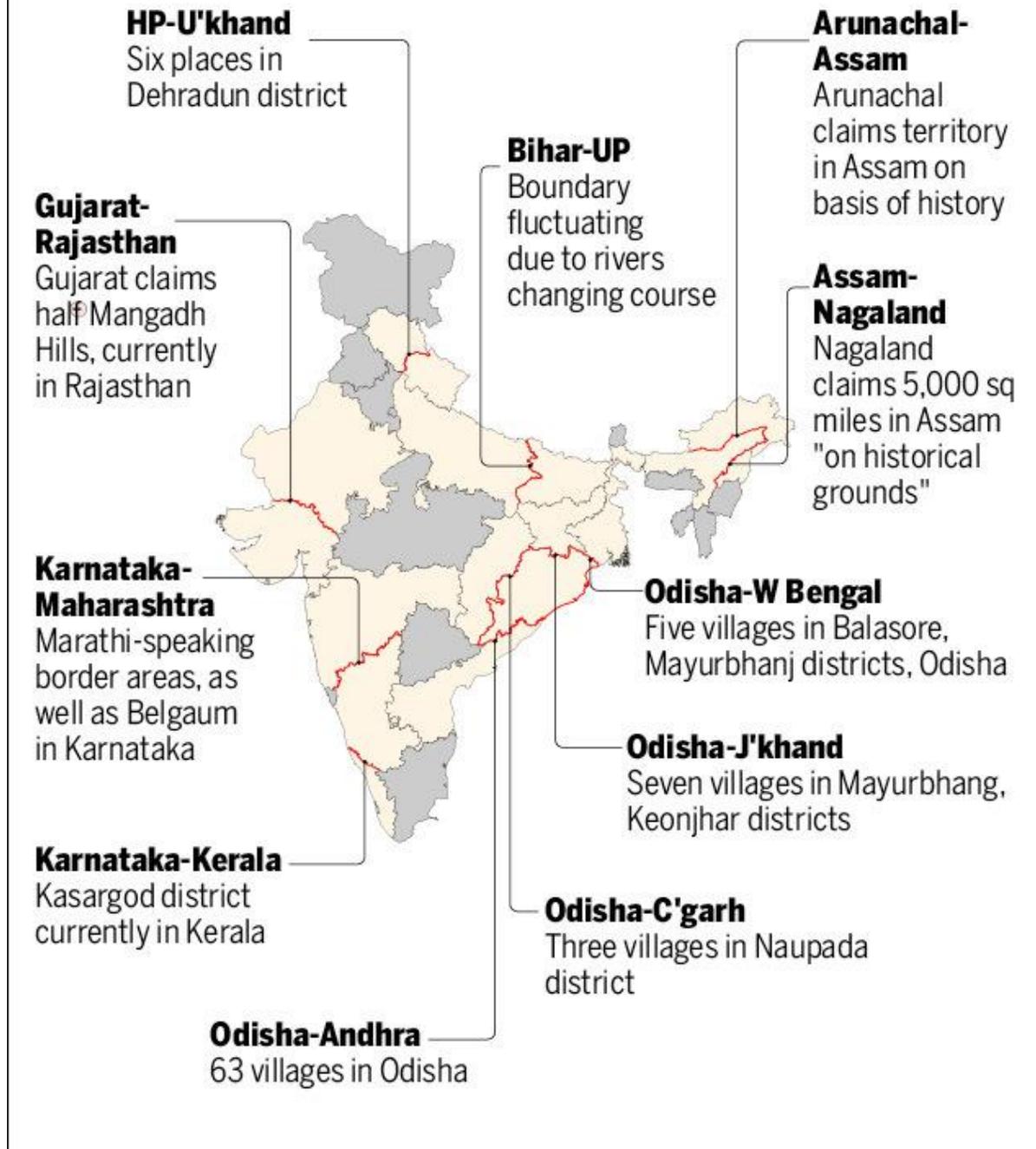
What is the political status of people residing in these disputed villages?

- This is the first time Andhra has held panchayat polls in any of these villages.
- But the villages participate in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections for both states. They are registered as voters for Salur Assembly and Araku Lok Sabha seats of Andhra, and Pottangi Assembly and Koraput Lok Sabha seats of Odisha.
- The villagers enjoy benefits from both states under various schemes.
 - Odisha constructed a gram panchayat office, a village agricultural centre, a boarding school, hostel, implemented MGNREGA, and distributed BPL cards to over 800 families and job cards to 1800 families.
 - The Andhra Pradesh government has built roads, supplied electricity and provided rations to BPL families

CURRENT STATUS

- In the early 1980s, **Odisha filed a case in the Supreme Court** demanding right and possession of jurisdiction over the 21 villages.
- In 2006 however, the court ruled that since disputes belonging to the state boundaries are **not within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court**, the matter can **only be resolved by Parliament** and passed a permanent injunction on the disputed area.

STATES WITH BORDER DISPUTES



Pic Source: [Times of India](#)

Connecting the dots

- Maharashtra- Karnataka Border dispute (Belagavi Issue): Click [here](#)

Constitutional provisions regarding Governors of India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II – Constitution

In news

- Dr. Kiran Bedi was recently removed as Puducherry Lieutenant Governor.
- Telangana Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan has been given additional charge as Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry.

Important value additions

- **Article 153:** There shall be a Governor for each State.
- One person can be appointed as Governor for two or more States.
- The governor acts in 'Dual Capacity' as the Constitutional head of the state and as the representative.
- He acts as a bridge between union and state governments.
- **Article 157 and Article 158:** Eligibility requirements. A governor must:
 - Be a citizen of India.
 - Be at least 35 years of age.
 - Not be a member of the either house of the parliament or house of the state legislature.
 - Not hold any office of profit.
- **Term of office :** 5 years
- It can be terminated earlier by:
 - Dismissal by the President on the advice of the council of ministers.
 - Dismissal by the President whose acts are upheld by courts as unconstitutional and malafide.
 - Resignation by the governor.

Amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act

Context: Union Cabinet ushered in some major amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 in a bid to bring in clarity and also entrust more responsibilities on bureaucrats when it comes to implementing provisions of the law.

What is the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act) 2015?

- **Updated Legislation:** It was introduced and passed in Parliament in 2015 to replace the Juvenile Delinquency Law and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act) 2000.
- **Change in nomenclature:** The Act changes the nomenclature from Juvenile to child or 'child in conflict with law'. Also, it removes the negative connotation associated with the word "juvenile".
- **Special Provisions for Age 16-18 years:** One of the main provisions of the new Act was that juveniles charged with heinous crimes and who are between the ages of 16-18 years would be tried as adults and processed through the adult justice system. This provision received an impetus after the 2012 Delhi gangrape in which one of the accused was just short of 18 years, and was therefore tried as a juvenile.
- **Juvenile Justice Board:** The nature of the crime, and whether the juvenile should be tried as a minor or a child, was to be determined by a Juvenile Justice Board (set up in every district). Also Child Welfare Committees must be set up in every district. Both must have at least one woman member each.

- **Adoption Related Clauses:** Another major provision was that the Act streamlined adoption procedures for orphans, abandoned and surrendered children and the existing Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has been given the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively
- **Inclusion of New Offences:** The Act included several new offences committed against children (like, illegal adoptions, use of child by militant groups, offences against disabled children, etc) which are not adequately covered under any other law.

What are the amendments passed by the Union Cabinet?

1. The inclusion of serious crimes apart from heinous crimes

- It has included for the first time the category of “serious crimes” differentiating it from heinous crimes, while retaining heinous crimes. Both heinous and serious crimes have also been clarified for the first time, **removing any ambiguity.**
- What this means is that for a juvenile to be tried for a heinous crime as an adult, the punishment of the crime should not only have a maximum sentence of seven years or more, but also a minimum sentence of seven years.
- This provision has been made to ensure that children, as much as possible, are protected and kept out of the adult justice system.
- Heinous crimes with a minimum imprisonment of seven years pertain mostly to sexual offences and violent sexual crimes. Crime like the possession and sale of an illegal substance, such as drugs or alcohol, will now fall under the ambit of a “serious crime”.

2. Expanding the purview of district and additional district magistrates

- The NCPCR report of 2019-20 had found that not a single Child Care Institution in the country was found to be 100 per cent compliant to the provisions of the JJ Act.
- **DM and ADMs will monitor the functioning of various agencies** under the JJ Act in every district. This includes the Child Welfare Committees, the Juvenile Justice Boards, the District Child Protection Units and the Special juvenile Protection Units.
- Amendment says that no new children’s home can be opened without the **sanction** of the DM. They are also responsible now for ensuring that CCIs falling in their district are **following all norms and procedures** (earlier the process was relaxed and lacked effective oversight)
- The DM will also carry out **background checks of Child Welfare Committee members**, who are usually social welfare activists, including educational qualifications, as there is no such provision currently to check if a person has a case of girl child abuse against him.
- To hasten the process of adoption and ensure the swift rehabilitation of children into homes and foster homes, the amendment further provides that the DM will also now be in charge of sanctioning adoptions, removing the lengthy court process.

Conclusion

While the amendments have been welcomed by most, in its attempt to provide better protection to children in need of care, the challenge perceived is that of having given too many responsibilities to the DM

Process of delimitation in respect of UT of J&K

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II – Governance; Election; Constitution

In news

- Delimitation Commission held a meeting recently with the Associate Members from UT of J&K.
- **Objective:** To seek their suggestion on the process of delimitation in respect of the UT.

Important value additions

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and state Assembly seats.
 - **Objective of delimitation:** To provide equal representation to equal segments of a population; fair division of geographical areas so that one political party doesn't have an advantage over others in an election.
 - **Constitutional provisions:** Under Article 82, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.
 - Delimitation is carried out by an independent Delimitation Commission.
 - Delimitation Commissions have been set up four times — 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002
 - There was no delimitation after the 1981 and 1991 Censuses.
-

Smartcode Platform launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - II – Policy and governance

In news

- SmartCode Platform was recently launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs

Key takeaways

- SmartCode is a platform that enables all ecosystem stakeholders to contribute to a repository of open-source code for various solutions and applications for urban governance.
 - It is designed to address the challenges that urban local bodies (ULBs) face in the development and deployment of digital applications.
 - It shall enable cities to take advantage of existing codes and customising them to suit local needs, rather than having to develop new solutions from scratch.
 - The source code will be free to use without any licensing or subscription fees
-

Federalism and India's human capital

Context: Investing in human capital through interventions in nutrition, health, and education is critical for sustainable growth.

India's Human Capital

- In the World Bank's Human Capital Index, the country ranked 116th.
- The [National Family Health Survey-5](#) for 2019-20 shows that malnutrition indicators stagnated or declined in most States.
- The National Achievement Survey 2017 and the [Annual Status of Education Report](#) 2018 show poor learning outcomes. There is little convergence across States.

- India spends just 4% of its GDP as public expenditure on human capital (around 1% and 3% on health and education respectively) — one of the lowest among its peers.

Various government initiatives in this regard -like Mission Poshan 2.0' and the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan - are not leading to better outcomes. One reason may be India's record with decentralisation.

- Globally, there has been a gradual shift in the distribution of expenditures and revenue towards sub-national governments.
- These trends are backed by studies demonstrating a positive correlation between decentralisation and human capital.
- In recent years, India has taken some steps towards decentralisation. The Fourteenth Finance Commission increased the States' share in tax devolution from 32% to 42%, which was effectively retained by the [Fifteenth Finance Commission](#).

Issues

- **Lack of Devolution of Powers:** Many States do not clearly demarcate or devolve functions for panchayats and municipalities
- **Disparities in role of Local Bodies:** The 73rd and 74th Amendments bolstered decentralisation by constitutionally recognising panchayats. However, the Constitution lets States determine how they are empowered, resulting in vast disparities in the roles played by third-tier governments.
- **Issue with Article 282:** Article 282 of the Constitution is listed as a 'Miscellaneous Financial Provision', unlike Articles 270 and 275, which fall under 'Distribution of Revenues between the Union and the State. Article 282 is normally meant for special, temporary or ad hoc schemes.
- **Issue with Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs):** These typically have a cost-sharing model, thereby pre-empting the States' fiscal space.
- **Third-tier governments are not fiscally empowered.** The collection of property tax, a major source of revenue for third-tier governments, is very low in India (under 0.2% of GDP, compared to 3% of GDP in some other nations).
- **Institutional Failure:** Many States have not constituted or completed State Finance Commissions (SFCs) on time.

Way Ahead

- Centre should play an enabling role, for instance, encouraging knowledge-sharing between States.
- For States to play a bigger role in human capital interventions, they need adequate fiscal resources.
- States should rationalise their priorities to focus on human capital development.
- The Centre should refrain from offsetting tax devolution by altering cost-sharing ratios of CSSs and increasing cesses.
- Heavy reliance on CSSs should be reduced, and tax devolution and grants-in-aid should be the primary sources of vertical fiscal transfers.
- Panchayats and municipalities need to be vested with the functions listed in the Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules.

Conclusion

- Leveraging the true potential of our multi-level federal system represents the best way forward towards developing human capital.

Connecting the dots

- Competitive and Cooperative Federalism
-

Structural Problems with Union Territories

Context: Recently, some MLAs of ruling Congress Party from the Puducherry legislative assembly resigned which reduced the party's majority in the House abruptly and lead to the fall of the government.

Do You Know?

- Resigning from the membership of the House is every member's right.
- But according to Article 190 of the Constitution, the resignation should be voluntary or genuine. If the Speaker has information to the contrary, he or she is not obliged to accept the resignation.

What is the recent issue with Federalism?

- There is by now a familiar pattern to the resignations of MLAs. Such resignations take place largely from the ruling parties in the States which are opposed to the ruling party at the Centre thus leading to fall of state/UT government.
- This mode of toppling the government has an advantage in that no MLA has to defect and face disqualification and get a bad name.
- However, this is not the only way where the elected governments in Union territories are undermined. There are many constitutional and legal provisions that reflect the structural fragility of UTs

Structural Fragility of Union Territories

1. Composition of the Legislature

- Article 239A was originally brought in 1962 to enable Parliament to create legislatures for the UTs (objective was to fulfil the democratic aspirations of people in UTs through providing legislatures & Council of Ministers)
- However, a simple amendment in the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 can create a legislature with more than 50% nominated members. The question remain as to how a predominantly nominated House promote representative Democracy.

2. Issue of Nomination

- In a 33-member House for Puducherry, three are to be nominated by the Central government. However, no qualification is laid down either in Article 239A or the Government of Union Territories Act, making it liable to political misuse.
- So, when the Union government nominated three BJP members to the Assembly without consulting the government, it was challenged in the court.
- Finally, the Supreme Court (*K. Lakshminarayanan v. Union of India, 2019*) held that the Union government is not required to consult the State government for nominating members to the Assembly and the nominated members have the same right to vote as the elected members.

3. Administrators Power

- As per Section 44 of the Government of Union Territories Act and Article 239 AA(4) of Constitution, the administrator has the right to disagree with the decisions of the Council of Ministers and then refer them to the President for a final decision (on aid & advice of Union government).
- The weaponisation of this constitutional provision is done in full measure when the UT is ruled by a different political party.

- Although in [NCT of Delhi v. Union of India](#) (2019), the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had said that the administrator should not misuse this power to frustrate the functioning of the elected government in the territory, the ground reality has unchanged

Conclusion

- Experience shows that the UTs having legislatures with ultimate control vested in the central administrator are not workable.
- The solution lies in the removal of the legal and constitutional provisions which weaken the structural fragility of UTs and instead provide them with more freedom so as to fulfil democratic aspiration of the people.

Connecting the dots

- Process of [delimitation in respect of UT of J&K](#)
 - [Jurisdictional conflict in the running of Delhi](#)
-

[Anti-defection law](#)

About

- The anti-defection law was included in the Constitution as the Tenth Schedule in 1985 to combat the “evil of political defections”.
- The main purpose was to preserve the stability of governments and insulate them from defections of legislators from the treasury benches.
- Any Member of Parliament (MP) or that of a State legislature (MLA) would be disqualified from their office if they voted on any motion contrary to the directions issued by their party.
- The provision was not limited to confidence motions or money bills (which are quasi-confidence motions).
- It applies to all votes in the House, on every Bill and every other issue. It even applies to the Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils, which have no say in the stability of the government.

Issues

- Therefore, an MP (or MLA) has absolutely no freedom to vote their judgement on any issue. They have to blindly follow the direction of the party.
- This provision goes against the concept of representative democracy.
- The anti-defection law makes the MP neither a delegate of the constituency nor a national legislator but converts them to be just an agent of the party.
- The legislator is accountable to voters, and the government is accountable to legislators. (This should be the norm of representative democracy).
- The chain of accountability has been broken by making legislators accountable primarily to the party.
- So, the party forming the government — is unable to hold the government to account.
- Legislators cannot justify their positions on various issues to the people who elected them to the post.
- The law hollows out our legislatures > If an MP has no freedom to take decisions on policy and legislative proposals, what would be the incentive to put in the effort to understand the different policy choices and their outcomes.
- The anti-defection bill weakens the accountability mechanism.

- It does not even provide stability. The political system has found ways to topple governments.

Conclusion

- The anti-defection law has been detrimental to the functioning of our legislatures as deliberative bodies which hold the executive to account on behalf of citizens.
- It has turned them into fora to endorse the decision of the government on Bills and budgets.
- And it has not even done the job of preserving the stability of governments.



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SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Sub-categorisation of OBCs: G Rohini Commission

Context: On January 21, the Centre has extended the tenure of The Commission to Examine Sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) headed by Justice G Rohini, former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court. The commission now has until July 31 to submit its report.

Three decades of Mandal Movement: Click [here](#)

What is sub-categorisation of OBCs?

- **OBCs are granted 27% reservation** in jobs and education under the central government.
- In September 2020, a Constitution Bench of the [Supreme Court reopened the legal debate on sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes](#) for reservations.
- The sub-categorisation debate arises out of the perception that **only a few affluent communities** among the over 2,600 included in the Central List of OBCs have secured a major part of this 27% reservation.
- The argument for sub-categorisation — or creating categories within OBCs for reservation — is that it would **ensure “equitable distribution”** of representation among all OBC communities.

Formation of Commission

- To examine this inequitable enjoyment of benefits of reservation, the Rohini Commission was constituted on October 2, 2017.
- At that time, it was given 12 weeks to submit its report, but has been given several extensions since, the latest one being the 10th.
- The other member in the Commission is former journalist Jitendra Bajaj, director of the Centre for Policy Studies.
- Before the Rohini Commission was set up, the Centre had granted constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).
- The Rohini Commission operates out of an office at Vigyan Bhawan Annexue and its expenses are borne by the NCBC. Until December 2020, over Rs 1.92 crore have been spent on the Commission including salary, consultant fee and other expenses.

What are the Commission’s terms of reference?

It was originally set up with three terms of reference:

- To examine the **extent of inequitable distribution** of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
- To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and **parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation** within such OBCs;
- To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

A fourth term of reference was added on January 22, 2020, when the Cabinet granted it an extension:

- To study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs and **recommend correction of any repetitions**, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.
- This was added following a letter to the government from the Commission on July 30, 2019 that said the Commission has noted several ambiguities in the list and these needs to be clarified before sub-categorising the central list.

What progress has it made so far?

- In its letter to the government on July 30, 2019, the Commission wrote that it is **ready with the draft report** (on sub-categorisation).
- It is widely understood that the report could have **huge political consequences** and face a judicial review.
- Following the latest term of reference given (on January 22, 2020) to the Commission, it is studying the list of communities in the central list.
- A hurdle for the Commission has been the **absence of data** for the population of various communities to compare with their representation in jobs and admissions.
- The commission initially proposed all-India survey for an estimate of the **caste-wise population of OBCs** but later said that it has dropped the idea of undertaking such survey.
- On August 31, 2018, then Home Minister had announced that in **Census 2021**, data of OBCs will also be collected, but since then the government has been silent on this, whereas groups of OBCs have been demanding enumeration of OBCs in the Census.

What is the extent of OBC recruitment in central jobs?

- As per the report submitted to the NCBC by the Department of Personnel and Training on July 24, 2020, OBC representation is
 - 16.51 % in group-A central government services
 - 13.38 % in group-B
 - 21.25 % in group-C (excluding safai karmacharis)
 - 17.72 % in group-C (safai karmacharis).
- This data was for only 42 ministries/departments of the central government.
- It is reported that a number of posts reserved for OBCs were being filled by people of general category as OBC candidates were declared **“NFS” (None Found Suitable)**. Home Minister has asked the NCBC to collect countrywide data on this and NCBC is yet to collect and process the data of the “NFS”.
- The government is also contemplating revision of the income limit for the creamy layer for the OBCs.

What have its findings been so far?

In 2018, the Commission analysed the data of 1.3 lakh central jobs given under OBC quota over the preceding five years and OBC admissions to central higher education institutions, including universities, IITs, NITs, IIMs and AIIMS, over the preceding three years. The findings were:

- 97% of all jobs and educational seats have gone to just 25% of all sub-castes classified as OBCs;
- 24.95% of these jobs and seats have gone to just 10 OBC communities;
- 983 OBC communities — 37% of the total — have zero representation in jobs and educational institutions;
- 994 OBC sub-castes have a total representation of only 2.68% in recruitment and admissions.

[National Family Planning Program: Measures For Population Control](#)

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

In news

- The Government has been implementing the National Family Planning Program which provides voluntary and informed choices to the beneficiaries through a target-free approach to check population increase in the country.

Important value additions

- A National Population Policy was formulated in 2000.
- **Objective:** Attaining population stabilisation by 2045.
- **New Contraceptive Choices:** The current contraceptive basket has been expanded with inclusion of two new contraceptives- Injectable contraceptive (Antara programme) and Centchroman (Chhaya).
- **Post-partum Intrauterine contraceptive device(PPIUCD) incentive scheme** under which PPIUCD services are provided post-delivery.
- **Compensation scheme** for sterilization acceptors which provides compensation for loss of wages to the beneficiary and also to the service provider and team for conducting sterilisation.
- **National Family Planning Indemnity Scheme (NFPIS)** under which clients are compensated in the eventualities of death, complication, and failure following sterilization operations.
- **Family Planning Logistics Management Information System (FP-LMIS):** Dedicated software has been launched to ensure smooth forecasting, procurement, and distribution of family planning commodities across all the levels of health facilities.
- **Mission Parivar Vikas** has been introduced for substantially increasing access to contraceptives and family planning services in seven high focus states having a Total Fertility Rate of more than 3 namely Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Assam.
- **Scheme for Home Delivery of contraceptives** by ASHAs at doorstep of beneficiaries has been taken up.
- **Scheme for provision of Pregnancy Testing Kits** in the drug kits of ASHA for use in communities.

[Community in news: Koch Rajbangshis](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Society

In news

- The Koch Rajbangshis community was in news recently.



Important value additions

- They are a community that traces its roots to the Kamata kingdom, which comprised parts of Assam, West Bengal, and adjoining territories.
 - In the medieval period, the community was dominant and ruled their territory of Kamatapur, which comprised a large part of Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar, and India's north-east.
 - After Independence, the princely state of Cooch Behar became part of West Bengal.
 - Today, Koch Rajbongshis are found in Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, and Bihar, and in Bangladesh, Nepal, and some parts of Bhutan.
 - They are estimated to number over 33 lakh in West Bengal, mostly the northern districts, and have a large presence in Assam.
-

[National Action Plan for Migrant Workers](#)

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

In news

- NITI Aayog has constituted a sub-group to prepare a National Action Plan for Migrant Workers.

Key takeaways

- **Composition:** Members from various Ministries, subject experts, NGOs, and civil society organisations.
- **Objective:** To prepare a tangible action plan to address issues related to migrant workers.

Important value additions

OSH Code

- Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 was subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code)
 - The Code was notified in September 2020
 - **Provision of OSH Code:** Decent working conditions, minimum wages, grievances redressal mechanisms, protection from abuse and exploitation, enhancement of skills, and social security.
 - **Target:** All categories of organised and unorganised workers including Migrant workers.
 - **Applicability:** Every establishment in which 10 or more inter-state migrant workers are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding 12 months.
-

[SAKSHAM \(Shramik Shakti Manch\) launched](#)

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

In news

- Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) has launched SAKSHAM (Shramik Shakti Manch).
- TIFAC is an autonomous organization under the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India

Key takeaways

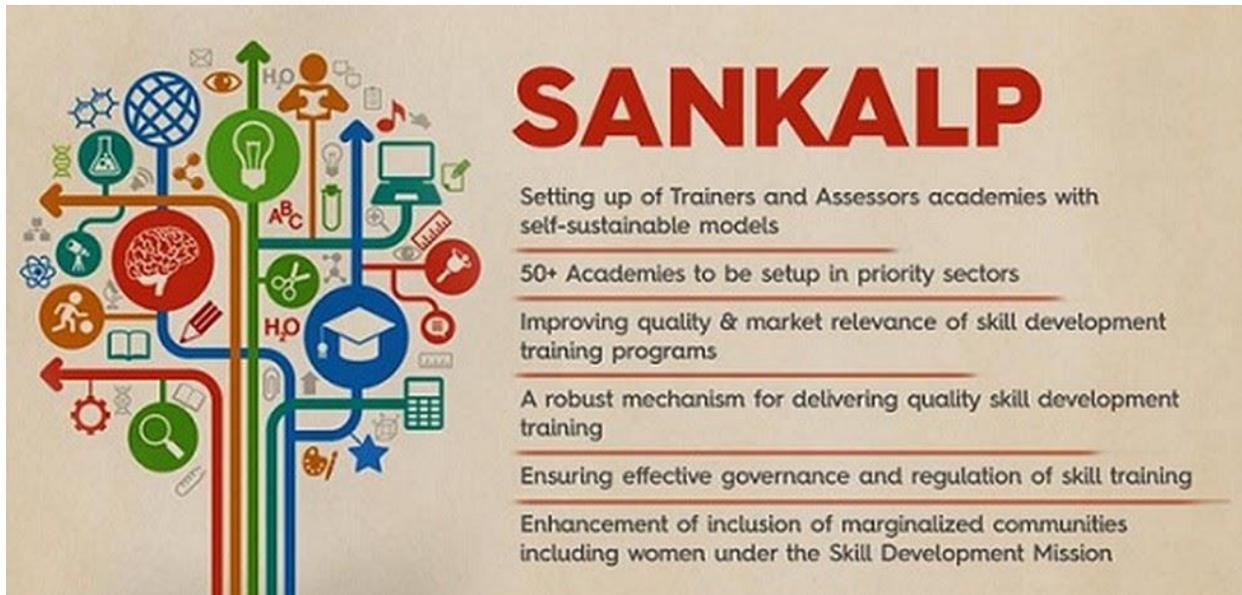
- It is a job portal for mapping the skills of Shramiks with regard to requirements of MSMEs.
 - **Objective:** To directly connect Shramiks with MSMEs and facilitate their placement
 - The portal will help eliminate labour contractors.
 - It shall help identification of skill proficiency level and development of Skill Cards for Shramiks.
 - The portal uses algorithm and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for availability of Shramiks.
 - The portal was initially launched in two districts and is now being launched as an all India portal.
-

[SANKALP \(Skills Acquisition And Knowledge Awareness For Livelihood Promotion\)](#)

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

In news

- ‘Transforming skilling through strategic partnerships under SANKALP’ function was recently held.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)



Important value additions

- SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion) is a World Bank loan assisted programme
- **Objective:** To strengthen the district skill administration and the District Skill Committees (DSCs).
- It is a two-year academic programme.
- It comes with an in-built component of on-ground practical experience with the district administration.
- It will also support the Training of Trainer (ToT) system in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- MSDE has instituted the "Awards for Excellence in District Skill Development Planning (DSDP Awards)" under SANKALP in 2018.

Schemes related to skill development

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

In news

- Rajya Sabha was informed about the Status of Skilled Youths in India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)

Key takeaways

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** For imparting short duration skill development training through Short-Term Training (STT) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to youth across all States/UTs.
- **Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme:** Providing vocational skills to non-literates, neo-literates and school dropouts by identifying skills that have a market in the region of their establishment.

- **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS):** For promoting apprenticeship training and increasing the engagement of apprentices by providing financial support to industrial establishments undertaking apprenticeship programme under The Apprentices Act, 1961.
- **Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS):** Long term training programme in 137 trades are provided through 14,788 ITIs in India.

Internal Migration in India

Context: The distress migration of [internal migrants during the lockdown times](#) was most enduring memory of that period that even moved [Supreme Court to take cognisance](#) of their plight.

Eleven months since the March 2020 lockdowns, the situation is considerably different.

India's Internal Migration

- **Huge Numbers:** India has an estimated 600 million migrants. In other words, roughly half of India is living in a place where it wasn't born.
- **Intra-State Migration:** An estimated 400 million Indians "migrate" within the district they live in. The next 140 million migrate from one district to another but within the same state.
- **Inter-State Migration:** And only about 60 million — that is, just 10% of all internal migrants — move from one state to another.
- **Rural Migration:** The most dominant form of migration is from rural to rural areas. Only about 20% of the total migration (600 million) is from rural to urban areas.
- **Urban Migration:** 20% of the total migration is from one urban area to another urban area. As such, urban migration (rural to urban as well as urban to urban) accounts for 40% of the total migration.
- **Potential for increase in future:** As India adopts a strategy of rapid urbanisation — for example, by building so-called smart cities and essentially using cities as centres of economic growth — levels of internal migration will increase further.
- **COVID-19 induced Shock:** It is estimated that close to 60 million moved back to their "source" rural areas in the wake of pandemic-induced lockdowns. That number is roughly six-times the official estimates. That estimate also gives a measure of the sense of labour shock that India's economy faced as migrants moved back.

The concern of "vulnerable circular migrants"

- 200 million were broadly affected by the Covid disruption.
- The worst-hit were "vulnerable circular migrants". These are people who are "vulnerable" because of their weak position in the job market and "circular" migrants because even though they **work in urban settings, they continue to have a foothold in the rural areas.**
- Such migrants work in construction sites or small factories or as rickshaw pullers in the city but when such employment avenues dwindle, they go back to their rural setting.
- They constitute **75% of the informal economy outside agriculture** — most shocks, be it demonetisation or GST or the pandemic disruption, tend to rob them of their livelihood.

Conclusion

- India's proportion of internal migrants (as a percentage of the overall population) is much lower than some of the comparable countries such as Russia, China, South Africa and Brazil — all have much higher urbanisation ratios, which is a proxy for migration level.

- In-depth understanding of labour class is needed to avoid the repeat of distress witnessed during COVID-19 lockdown period.

Connecting the dots

- New Version of Labour Codes: click [here](#)
-

Community in news: Devendra Kula Vellalar

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Society

In news

- Devendra Kula Vellalar community was in news recently.
- The media has reported about its delisting from Scheduled Castes which is misinformation according to the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Key takeaways

- The Ministry has stated that the Cabinet has approved for categorizing 7 SC communities into Devendra Kula Vellalar.
- A Bill for categorizing these communities under the SC list is already introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Do you know?

- The Pallar, who prefers to be called Mallar, is a Tamil sub-caste of Peasant found in Tamil Nadu.
 - Community members refer to themselves as Devendra Kula Vellalar (DKV), a name reflecting that they were created by the god Devendra.
-

Vaccine Hesitancy

- Vaccine hesitancy is defined as a **reluctance or refusal** to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccine services.

What factors has led to Vaccine Hesitancy?

The debates around hesitancy for COVID-19 vaccines include

- concerns over safety, efficacy, and side effects due to the record-breaking timelines of the vaccines
- competition among several companies, misinformation
- Religious taboos
- A storm of misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines
- Susceptible of people to misinformation due to existing biases, information overload and limited attention spans.

Way Ahead

- The target audience must be the swing population i.e., people who are skeptical but can be persuaded through scientific facts and proper communication.
- Use the **celebrity effect** — the ability of prominent personalities to influence others to take vaccines.

- Celebrities can serve as agents of positive social change, erasing scepticism associated with vaccine adoption and prompting information-seeking and preventative behaviours
- **Fact-check** any news related to COVID-19 vaccines.
- The infodemic around vaccines can be tackled only by actively debunking myths, misinformation and fake news on COVID-19 vaccines.

Connecting the dots

- Sociological analysis of rumours: Click [here](#)

Conclusive Land Titling

Context: In 2020, even as [laws for farm reform](#) and [labour code reform](#) were being enacted, the government's think tank, NITI Aayog, took steps to initiate land reforms by drafting Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling. This was sent to States and UTs seeking their comments.

How does the current system work?

- India currently follows a system of **presumptive land titling**. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined **through details of past transactions**.
- Ownership, then, is established on the basis of current possession.
- **Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions**, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.
- Holding registration papers does not actually involve the government or the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land.

What will change in the new system of Conclusive Land Titling?

- On the other hand, under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership.
- The title is **granted by the government**, which takes the responsibility for accuracy.
- Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to **settle disputes with the government, not the title holder**.
- Further, under conclusive land titling, the government may provide compensation to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership.
- The Bill circulated by the NITI Aayog in 2020 calls for Land Authorities to be set up by each State government, which will appoint a Title Registration Officer (TRO) to prepare and publish a draft list of land titles based on existing records and documents

Why is conclusive land titling needed?

- **Reduced Litigation:** It will drastically lower litigation related to land. According to World Bank Study, land-related disputes accounted for two-thirds of all pending court cases in India.
- **Quick resolution of land disputes:** It will also reduce the time taken for resolving land related litigation. A NITI Aayog study shows that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.

- **Eases Documentation for owners & reduces ambiguity:** Right now, because land titles are based on transactions, people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership,
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Once conclusive titling is in place, investors who want to purchase land for business activities will be able to do so without facing the constant risk that their ownership may be questioned and their entire investment may go to waste
- **Faster Infrastructural Development:** Land disputes and unclear titling also create hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction, leading to costly delays and inefficiency. Conclusive titling will help overcome these challenges.
- **Attracts Investment:** The delay in acquiring land due to ambiguity in land ownership reduces the appetite for investment in many sectors of the economy. Conclusive land titling will remove such ambiguities attracting foreign investment and promoting active land market.
- **Enhances Government Revenue:** In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available. Ambiguity in ownership also results in a black market for land transactions, which deprives the government of taxes.
- **Enhances access to cheaper institutional credit:** Access to agricultural credit is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral. Without being able to prove their ownership of land, rural people often get trapped in private money lenders debt trap. Proper ownership will enable people to access cheaper institutional credit.

Challenges Ahead

- **Lack of Updation:** Land records have not been updated for decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas
- **Issue of Inheritance:** Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance.
- **Can create more problems:** Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.
- **Federal Set up:** There is also the challenge of Federalism in a multi-party set up like ours. Here, States have to enact the laws and implement with full spirit to make it a success
- **Weak Local Bodies:** Survey needs to be conducted at local level for conclusively proving ownership with involvement of community. However, local governments have not been provided with the resources or manpower to conduct such surveys.

Way Ahead

Comprehensive village-level surveys with community involvement are a necessary precursor to the land titling process. Relying on current records or even satellite imagery will not provide the same accuracy as actual, on-the-ground, local surveys

[Draft National Policy On Migrant Workers](#)

Context: Spurred by the [exodus of 10 million migrants \(as per government estimates\) from big cities during the Covid-19 lockdown](#), NITI Aayog, along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, has prepared a draft national migrant labour policy.

Key Features of Draft Policy

- **Rights Based Approach:** The policy rejects a handout approach, opting instead for a rights-based framework. The draft describes two approaches to policy design: one focussed on cash transfers, special quotas, and [reservations](#) and the other which enhances the agency and capability of the

community and thereby remove aspects that come in the way of an individual's own natural ability to thrive

- **Acknowledgement:** Migration should be acknowledged as an integral part of development and government policies should not hinder but seek to facilitate internal migration.
- **Policy should have Long Term Goal:** The goal according to draft policy should not be to provide temporary or permanent economic or social aids that is rather limited approach, but goal should be on a more permanent basis
- **Legislation:** The NITI Aayog's policy draft mentions that the Ministry of Labour and Employment should amend The Inter State Migrant Workers Act, 1979 for "effective utilisation to protect migrants".
- **Need for Effective Coordination:** It identifies the Ministry of Labour and Employment as the nodal Ministry for coordination between various agencies/ department and implementation of policies related to Migrants.
- **Institutional Mechanism through Special Unit:** The draft suggests to create a special unit under Labour Ministry to help converge the activities of other Ministries. This unit would manage migration resource centres in high migration zones, a national labour Helpline, links of worker households to government schemes, and inter-state migration management bodies.
- **Inter-State Coordination:** On the inter-state migration management bodies, it says that labour departments of source and destination states along major migration corridors, should work together through the migrant worker cells. Labour officers from source states can be deputed to destinations – e.g., Bihar's experiment to have a joint labour commissioner at Bihar Bhavan in New Delhi.
- **Enhanced Role of Local Bodies:** Policies should "promote the role of panchayats to aid migrant workers" and integrate urban and rural policies to improve the conditions of migration. Panchayats should maintain a database of migrant workers, issue identity cards and pass books, and provide "migration management and governance" through training, placement, and social-security benefit assurance
- **Ways to stem migration:** Even as it underlines the key role of migration in development, the draft recommends steps to stem migration. The draft asks source states to raise minimum wages to "bring major shift in local livelihood of tribal that may result in stemming migration to some extent".
- **Importance of Data:** The draft calls for a central database to help employers "fill the gap between demand and supply" and ensure "maximum benefit of social welfare schemes". It asks the Ministries and the Census office to be consistent with the definitions of migrants and subpopulations, capture seasonal and circular migrants, and incorporate migrant-specific variables in existing surveys.
- **Education for Migrant Children:** The Ministry of Education should take measures under the Right to Education Act to mainstream migrant children's education, to map migrant children, and to provide local-language teachers in migrant destinations.
- **Grievance Redressal:** The National Legal Services authority (NALSA) and Ministry of Labour should set up grievance handling cells and fast track legal responses for trafficking, minimum wage violations, and workplace abuses and accidents for migrant workers.

Connecting the dots

- [National Action Plan for Migrant Workers](#)
-

'Population Versus Planet' Conference held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Society

In news

- 'Population versus Planet' Conference was held recently.
- It is a part of WION and Zee Media's year-long campaign called 'Mission Sustainability: Population Vs. Planet'.

Key takeaways

- World population has witnessed an increase from 1 billion in the year 1800 to 7.8 billion today.
- India's population has increased from 36 crore in 1951 to 121.02 crore in 2011.
- It has witnessed significant decline in both fertility and mortality rates.
- The birth rate has reduced from 40.8/1000 in 1951 to 20.0 in 2018.
- Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined from 6.0 in 1951 to 2.2 in 2015-16.
- Death rate in India has declined from 7 in 2012 to 6.2 in 2018.
- According to Population projection for India and States 2011-2036, the TFR is expected to decline further.
- The youth population in the age group of 15-24 years is projected to decline from 233 million in 2011 to 227 million in 2036.
- The proportion of the working age population is expected to increase from 61% in 2011 to 65% in 2036.

India's Unemployment Problem

Context: Twitter trend whereby government was asked to provide jobs for unemployed youth of our Country.

Just before the Covid crisis at the end of 2019-20 financial year, India had around **403.5 million** employed people and around 35 million (or 3.5 crore) openly unemployed people (those who are seeking work and not finding it) in the country.

Issues

- **Addition of Job Seekers Every Year:** Given India's population growth, each year there are close to 20 million (or 2 crore) people who enter the working-age population of 15 to 59 years.
- **Recovery Post Pandemic:** As of January 2021, India had only about 400 million employed (pre-COVID it was 403.5 million). At one level this is good news because far more had lost jobs and many seem to have regained employment as the economy has started recovering.
- **Steady Decline in number of Employed People:** As per CMIE data since 2016, the total number of employed people in India has been steadily coming down. It was 407.3 million in 2016-17 and then fell to 405.9 million in 2017-18, and to 400.9 million at the end of 2018-19.
- **Unemployment has larger Impact on Society:** Each unemployed person is part of a larger family — implying millions of families suffering from the lack of employment opportunities.
- **Falling Labour Force Participation rate:** Even though people have skills they may not be in position to enter labour market for variety of reasons. For instance, if law and order is poor or if cultural mores can prevent women to seek work. Also, men can give up looking for work after repeated failed attempts. As a result, India's labour force participation rate (LFPR) falls. India's LFPR is about 40% (in most developed countries it is 60%)

- **Jobless Growth:** Typically, fast economic growth takes care of unemployment worries. However, due to distorted economic structure (service led growth) India's growth has not translated into jobs. What was required is labour intensive manufacturing led growth providing jobs for millions
- **Technological Advancement & Unemployment:** The GDP can continue to go up as more and more companies become more productive by replacing labour with capital (machinery) but that will only deepen India's unemployment problem.
- **Criticism of Government's role in Creating Jobs:** The mantra of "minimum government" espoused in [Union Budget for 2021-22](#) essentially undercuts the government's role in directly creating new jobs. While on paper this makes sense, the timing is questionable. That's because the Indian economy is quite weak and the private sector has already shown its preference by choosing to cut jobs and boost its profits

Conclusion

Typically, fast economic growth takes care of unemployment worries. However, in India's case, one cannot assume that.

Connecting the dots

- Historic Recession: On India's GDP slump: Click [Here](#)
- Banking Health: NPAs and COVID-19: Click [Here](#)

[Dutch Indian Water Alliance For Leadership Initiative \(DIWALI\)](#)

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

In news

- Dutch Indian Water Alliance For Leadership Initiative (DIWALI) was established recently between India and Netherlands
- **Objective:** To find solutions for water related challenges



Key takeaways

- The experts from both countries would explore the potential and sustainability of Dutch Solutions to resolve challenges in specific water-challenged sites in India.
- Scalable, sustainable, and affordable solutions shall be given importance.
- **Led by:** Dutch consortia titled "Water for Change. Integrative and Fit-for-Purpose Water Sensitive Design Framework for Fast-Growing Livable Cities" and IIT Roorkee as the lead and other consortia members - MANIT, Bhopal; CEPT University, Ahmedabad; IIT Gandhinagar; CWRDM, Calicut.

Endangered Languages

- There are 7,000 living languages in the world and around 3,000 are considered as 'endangered'. This means that almost half of the planet's current [linguistic diversity](#) is under threat.
- The situation in India is alarming. Some 197 languages are in various stages of endangerment in our country, more than any other country in the world.
- India may have lost 220 languages since 1961. There were 1,100 languages since 1961, based on the Census number of 1,652 mother tongues. Another 150 languages could vanish in the next 50 years.

What happens when a language dies?

- When a language declines, that knowledge system is completely gone. With the loss of language comes the loss of everything in culture and loss of solidarity.
- When a language dies, its speakers decide to migrate. First, they migrate to another language and then they physically start migrating to another region.
- The second thing that happens is that their traditional livelihood patterns go down. They may have some special skills and that disappears.
- Thirdly, a unique way of looking at the world disappears. Every language is a unique worldview.

Mother Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTBMLE)

- It could play a key role in preserving tribal languages, claim linguistic experts.
- Ignoring mother tongue- based intervention in early childhood for tribal children could potentially impede the early childhood learning process.

Way Ahead

- Tribal languages should be endorsed through innovative, cultural and entertainment programmes, suggest linguistic experts.
- There is a need to promote tribal languages as a medium of communication and education in tribal-dominated districts. It can significantly reduce the communication gap and school dropout rate.
- It is important to integrate indigenous knowledge systems alongside modern sciences in the curriculum of schools.
- Tribal languages are fundamental to understand the world we live in, our origin, the roots that we all came from and what humans are capable of.
- We need to create livelihood support for the speakers of the language. If they have livelihood available within their language, nobody would want to switch from their language to any other language.

Connecting the dots

- [Challenges of non-scheduled languages](#)
 - Yuelu Proclamation
-

Same Sex Marriage

Context: The Delhi High Court was hearing three separate petitions by same-sex couples seeking to declare that the Special Marriage Act (SMA) and Foreign Marriage Act (FMA) ought to apply to all couples regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Opposition by Centre/ Stance by Government with regard to petition in HC

- **Not compatible with Indian Family Concept:** Living together as partners and having sexual relationship by same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children.
- **Not Codified:** Marriage between two individuals of the same gender is “neither recognised nor accepted in any uncodified personal law or any codified statutory law”.
- **Issue with Personal Laws:** Any interference with the existing marriage laws would cause complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws in the country. It may lead to further anomalies with laws governing marriages of persons belonging to the Christian or Muslim faith.
- Registration of marriage of same-sex persons also results in violation of existing personal as well as codified law provisions — such as ‘degrees of prohibited relationship’; ‘conditions of marriage’; ‘ceremonial and ritual requirements’ under the personal laws governing the individuals.
- **No Fundamental Right to same-sex marriage:** Supreme Court judgment in the Navtej Singh Johar case “does not extend the right to privacy to include a fundamental right in the nature of a right to marry by two individuals of same gender”.
- **Legislative Challenges:** Any other interpretation except treating ‘husband’ as a biological man and ‘wife’ as a biological woman will make all statutory provisions unworkable. In a same sex marriage, it is neither possible nor feasible to term one as ‘husband’ and the other as ‘wife’ in the context of legislative scheme of various statute
- **Domain of Legislature:** The considerations of “societal morality” are relevant in considering the validity of a law and it is for the Legislature to enforce such societal morality and public acceptance based upon Indian ethos.

Connecting the dots

- Navtej Singh Johar case
 - K S Puttaswamy Judgement
 - NALSAR Case
-

WOMEN ISSUE

Nai Roshni: A scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women

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

In news

- “Nai Roshni”, a scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women is being implemented across India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Minority affairs

Key takeaways

- **Aim:** To empower and instill confidence in women by providing knowledge, tools, and techniques for interacting with Government systems, banks, and other institutions at all levels.
- This includes empowerment of the trainee women so that they become independent and confident members of society.
- The scheme provides for six days training programme followed by handholding for one year.
- The training covers issues relating to women viz. The leadership of Women through participation in decision making, Educational Programmes for women, Health and Hygiene, Legal rights of women, Financial Literacy, Digital Literacy, Swachh Bharat, Life Skills, and Advocacy for Social and Behavioural change.
- The Scheme is being implemented through NGOs enrolled under the Nai Roshni Scheme.

Do you know?

- In Seekho Aur Kamao (Learn & Earn) Scheme, 33% of the total beneficiaries are women.
 - Similarly in the Nai Manzil scheme, 30% of the total beneficiaries are women.
 - These schemes help in the economic empowerment of the Minority women
-

"Skill training on Gender Sensitisation and Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) at the workplace" launched

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

In news

- “Skill training on Gender Sensitisation and Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) at the workplace” was recently launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

Key takeaways

- **Implementation Agency:** Management and Entrepreneurship and Professional Skill Council (MEPSC)
 - It is a six-month project.
 - It will be implemented in 15 districts across 3 states of Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab to train 1800 trainees and 240 training professionals.
-

Sexual harassment at workplace: Acquittal of Priya Ramani

Brief Background of the issue:

- In October 2018, journalist Priya Ramani shared her story on social media about being sexually harassed in 1993 by BJP leader and minister M.J. Akbar, back in the day when he was editor of *Asian Age*.
- Subsequently, nearly 20 other women also shared accounts of sexual harassment at Akbar's hands and supported the claim made by her.
- Following Priya Ramani's charges, MJ Akbar filed a **criminal defamation complaint** against her in Delhi Court denying all the charges. Under pressure, MJ Akbar resigned in 2018.
- In Feb 2021, the Court accepted the defence presented by Ramani and acquitted her of the charge of criminal defamation under Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code.
- The Court observed that the accused had spoken the 'truth in furtherance of public interest' which is an exception to criminal defamation under Section 499, IPC.

Issues

- **Disbelief and Fear of Job Loss:** Women speaking up against sexual harassment are often disbelieved. Calling out their boss as a perpetrator means an instant loss of job and pay.
- **Institutional Failure:** Sexual harassment is a problem of institutions rather than of individuals alone. Institutional mechanisms have systemically failed to protect women or provide justice.
- **Tool of Patriarchy:** The world over, employers deploy sexual harassment as a means to discipline and control women workers.
- **Poor Implementation:** For factory workers, domestic workers, street vendors, sanitation and waste workers, construction workers, sex workers, labour laws or laws against sexual harassment exist only on paper.
- **Failure to Unionise:** Women who spoke were unanimous that individual complaints were not an option: They needed unions to fight collectively. The Labour Codes passed by the central government make it all but impossible for workers to unionise.

The SC Verdict

- **Time not a constraint in Right to Speak:** The verdict urged society to "understand that sometimes a victim may for years not speak up due to mental trauma," and underlined that a woman has a right to speak up about the abuse, even after decades.
- **Private Matter and issue of evidence:** It pointed out that since sexual harassment typically takes place in private, women's testimonies cannot be dismissed as untrue or defamatory simply because they are unable to provide other witnesses to back their allegations.
- **Social Media:** Survivors are justified in sharing their testimonies on media or social media platforms as a form of self-defence.
- **Against Fundamental Rights:** Sexual abuse violates the constitutionally recognised rights to dignity (Article 21) and equality (Articles 14 and 15), and that (a man's) right to reputation cannot be protected at the cost of (a woman's) right to dignity.

Connecting the dots

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

- Disha Act of Andhra Pradesh: Click [here](#)
- Don't you think acts of sexual violence are deeply traumatic for survivors, and that it takes great courage and faith in the system to report them?



PRELIMS EXCLUSIVE PROGRAMME (PEP) - 2021

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

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



HEALTH ISSUE

Pulse Polio Programme For 2021

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- President of India launched the Pulse Polio Programme for 2021 by administering polio drops to children less than five years old at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Key takeaways

- The drops were on the eve of the Polio National Immunization Day, observed on the 31st January 2021, popularly known as Polio Ravivar.
- Around 17 crore children of less than 5 years of age will be given polio drops as part of the drive of the Government of India to sustain the polio-free status of the country.
- The strategy of the Pulse Polio Immunization Programme was conceived in December 1993 and it was rolled out from 2nd October 1994 when the first child was immunized against Polio as part of this program.
- The last case of Polio in India was reported in Howrah on 13th January 2011.
- India has been free of Polio for a decade now.

Do you know?

- Polio-free certification' of the entire South-East Asia Region of WHO including India on the 27th of March 2014 was a huge accomplishment in the history of India and Global Public Health.

Related articles:

- Polio Disease: [Click here](#)
- Examining Polio's success for other diseases: [Click here](#)

What is polio disease?

- Polio (also called Poliomyelitis) is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus
- The virus invades the nervous system and can cause *permanent paralysis*
- Polio is spread through *person-to-person contact* and can spread rapidly through a community
- Most infected people (90%) have **no symptoms or very mild symptoms**
- **However**, one in 200 infections leads to permanent paralysis (can't move parts of the body) and even death



Economic Survey 2020-21: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- Key Finding of Economic Survey 2020-21 Reveals Strong Positive Impact of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) on Health Outcomes.

Observations by the Survey:

- The proportion of households with any usual member covered under health insurance or financing scheme increased by 54% from NFHS 4 to NFHS 5 in the states that adopted PMJAY.
- It decreased by 10% in the states that did not adopt PMJAY.
- The proportion reflects the success of PMJAY in enhancing health insurance coverage.
- The reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) was 20% compared to 12% in PMJAY and non-PMJAY states respectively.
- The proportion of people ensuring family planning rose across all the states between the two surveys.
- The increase is much more significant in the states that adopted PM-JAY indicating its effectiveness.

- The proportion of women with total unmet family planning needs decreased by 31% in the PMJAY states.
- The decline in the non-PMJAY states was merely 10%.

Related articles:

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana: [Click here](#)

[Research on Various Aspects of Medicinal Plants](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Ministry of AYUSH, under its Central Sector Scheme on ‘Conservation, Development and Sustainable Management of Medicinal Plants’ is supporting research & development projects on various aspects of medicinal plants to government as well as private universities/research institutions/organizations across the country.

Key takeaways

- Researches undertaken at the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) under the Ministry of AYUSH have developed 24 new drugs.
- Also, the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) has developed herbal formulations through their supported researches at CSIR-CIMAP, CSIR-NBRI, and CSIR-CDRI.
- Technology has been transferred to industry for its commercialization.
- ICAR- DMAPR is also focusing on researches and plant genetic resources/quality planting material.
- Institutes that are engaged in developing new medicines can take the advantage of such quality planting material.
- Ministry of AYUSH under its Central Sector Scheme for Promotion of International Cooperation, (IC Scheme), undertakes various measures to promote & propagate AYUSH systems of medicine including Ayurveda across the globe.
- Also, the CCRAS, has signed various Agreements/MoU for promotion of Ayurveda/Ayurvedic Medicines Internationally.

Important value additions

The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB)

- It has been established by Government of India to coordinate with all matters relating to Medicinal Plants and Support Policies and Programs for growth of trade, export, conservation and cultivation.
- The board is working under Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha & Homeopathy (AYUSH).

Related articles:

- NMPB Consortia For Medicinal Plants: [Click here](#)
-

[India Post and Tata Memorial Centre release a Special Cover on World Cancer Day](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- India Post, Mumbai Region, in collaboration with the Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai released a Special Cover on World Cancer Day (February 4).

Important value additions

World Cancer Day

- **Objective:** To save millions of preventable deaths each year through raising awareness and by pressing governments to take action against Cancer.
 - **Organized by:** Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), an International NGO that exists to help the global health community accelerate the fight against cancer.
 - NGO was founded in 1933 and is based in Geneva, Switzerland.
 - **Origin of World Cancer Day:** Paris Charter adopted at the World Summit Against Cancer for the New Millenium in Paris in 2000.
 - **Theme:** In 2019, Union for International Cancer Control, launched a new 3-year campaign with the theme: "I Am and I Will."
 - The campaign is an empowering call-to-action urging for personal commitment and represents the power of individual action taken now to impact the future.
-

[FSSAI amends its rules to cap trans-fatty acids \(TFAs\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has amended its rules to cap trans-fatty acids (TFAs) in food products, just weeks after it tightened the norms for oils and fats.

What are trans-fatty acids?

■ Industrially produced trans-fatty acids (TFA) are found in **baked and fried foods**, pre-packaged snacks, cooking oils

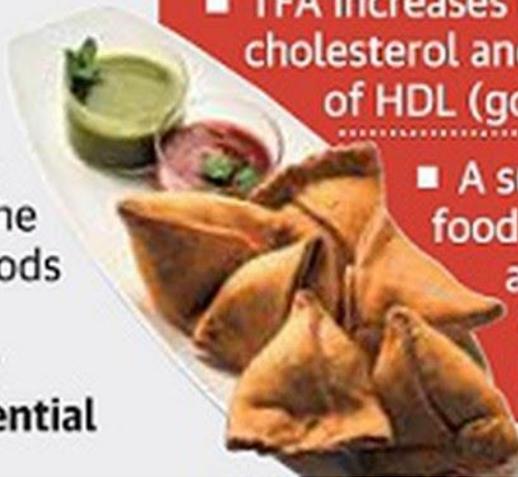
■ They cost less than animal fats such as butter and increase the shelf life of foods and oils by **lowering their oxidation potential**

■ TFA is said to increase risk of **coronary heart disease**

■ Globally, increased TFA intake is estimated to be responsible for more than **5,00,000 deaths** per year

■ TFA increases levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and decreases levels of HDL (good) cholesterol

■ A survey of street food in Delhi and Haryana found that **25% of snacks** had high levels of TFA



SOURCE: WHO

Key takeaways

- Food products in which edible oils and fats are used as an ingredient shall not contain industrial trans-fatty acids more than 2% by mass of the total oils/fats present in the product, on and from 1st January 2022.
- The 2% cap is considered to be the elimination of trans-fatty acids, which India will achieve by 2022.
- In December 2020, the FSSAI had capped TFAs in oils and fats to 3% by 2021, and 2% by 2022 from the current levels of 5%.

Important value additions

- Trans-fatty acids are created in an industrial process that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid, increase the shelf life of food items, and for use as an adulterant as they are cheap.
- They are present in baked, fried, processed foods and adulterated ghee, which become solid at room temperature.
- They are the most harmful form of fats as they clog arteries and cause hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular diseases.
- The WHO has called for the elimination of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids from the global food supply by 2023.

[National AYUSH Mission \(NAM\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- Central Government is implementing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National AYUSH Mission (NAM) through States/UTs for development and promotion of AYUSH systems of medicine including Ayurvedic system.

Key takeaways

- The Mission inter-alia makes the following provisions for the promotion of AYUSH systems including the Ayurvedic system:
 1. Co-location of AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centers (PHCs), Community Health Centers (CHCs), and Districts Hospitals (DHs).
 2. Up-gradation of exclusive State Government AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries.
 3. Setting up of up to 50 bedded integrated AYUSH Hospital.
 4. Upgradation of State Government Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate Educational Institutions.
 5. Setting up of new State Government AYUSH Educational Institutions in the States where it is not available in Government Sector.
 6. Strengthening of State Government/State Government Co-operatives/PSUs for manufacturing of quality medicines in AYUSH Systems.
 7. Strengthening of State Drug Testing Laboratories
 8. Support for the cultivation of Medicinal Plant including processing and post-harvest management to ensure supply of quality raw material for AYUSH medicine and other products.

[World Unani Day](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- World Unani Day was celebrated on February 11, 2021.
- **Objective:** To spread awareness about health care delivery through the Unani system of medicine through its preventive and curative philosophy.

Important value additions

- World Unani Day is celebrated every year to mark the birth anniversary of Hakim Ajmal Khan.
- **Principles of Unani System:** It postulates the presence of four humor in the body: dam (blood), balgham (phlegm), safra (yellow bile) and sauda (black bile).
- The quality and quantity of four humor affect the state of health and disease in the body.
- **Origin:** Greece.
- In India, it was introduced by Arabs and Persians sometime around the 11th century.

[Detailed Genome Map Of Malaria Vector unveiled](#)

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

In news

- Scientists have unveiled the detailed genome of the malaria mosquito vector.
- Thousands of new genes vital for the development of genetic control strategies of disease transmission were revealed.

Key takeaways

- To engineer advanced forms of defence against malaria transmission, scientists require intricate knowledge of the genomes of vector mosquitoes.
- CRISPR technology is a gene-editing tool that allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function.
- They produced a new reference genome for the Asian malaria vector mosquito *Anopheles stephensi*.
- With the newly upgraded *Anopheles stephensi* genome, the team unearthed more than 3,000 genes.
- These genes play key roles in blood-feeding and the metabolism of ingested blood meal, reproduction, and immunity against microbial parasites.

Do you know?

- The National goal of malaria elimination in India is by 2030.

Related articles:

- World Malaria Report, 2020 released: [Click here](#)
- Plasmodium Ovale: Uncommon type of Malaria: [Click here](#)

[Lessons from COVID-19 for TB Control](#)

Context: The WHO reports that there are more than 10 million active TB cases in India. The country loses more than 4,00,000 lives every year due to TB (COVID-19 Pandemic resulted 1,54,000 deaths over one-year period).

Tuberculosis is a social disease because of following reasons

- Due to overcrowding and malnutrition, it **disproportionately affects the poor** and the marginalised.
- The stigma and myths associated with this disease lead to **underreporting** and under-diagnosis.
- The long-drawn multi-drug treatment leads to **poor compliance and drug-resistance**, which hamper recovery.
- **Complications** increase with a pre-existing illness like diabetes or co-infection with HIV.
- Finally, the chronic nature of the disease and propensity to damage multiple organs **increase mortality risk**.

The lessons learned during the COVID-19 battle can do a lot in controlling TB i.e. Community driven efforts can help government's target of TB-free India by 2025

- Since TB spreads through droplets of infected persons, **physical distancing** can reduce disease transmission.

- Patients with **TB must wear a mask** to prevent the spread of infection, and persons in the patient's regular contact should wear a mask for self-protection.
- **Early diagnosis and treatment** are the keys to success. One should use new diagnostic techniques that gives rapid and ultraprecise results compared to the traditional sputum test.
- Finally, **instant case notification** helps in better case tracking and contact monitoring.
- The fight against COVID-19 has led to increased **awareness of respiratory infections**, which may help remove the stigma associated with TB.
- India's efforts to contain the coronavirus succeeded due to improved **coordination among central and state governments** and innovative media campaigns which can be replicated for TB

Conclusion

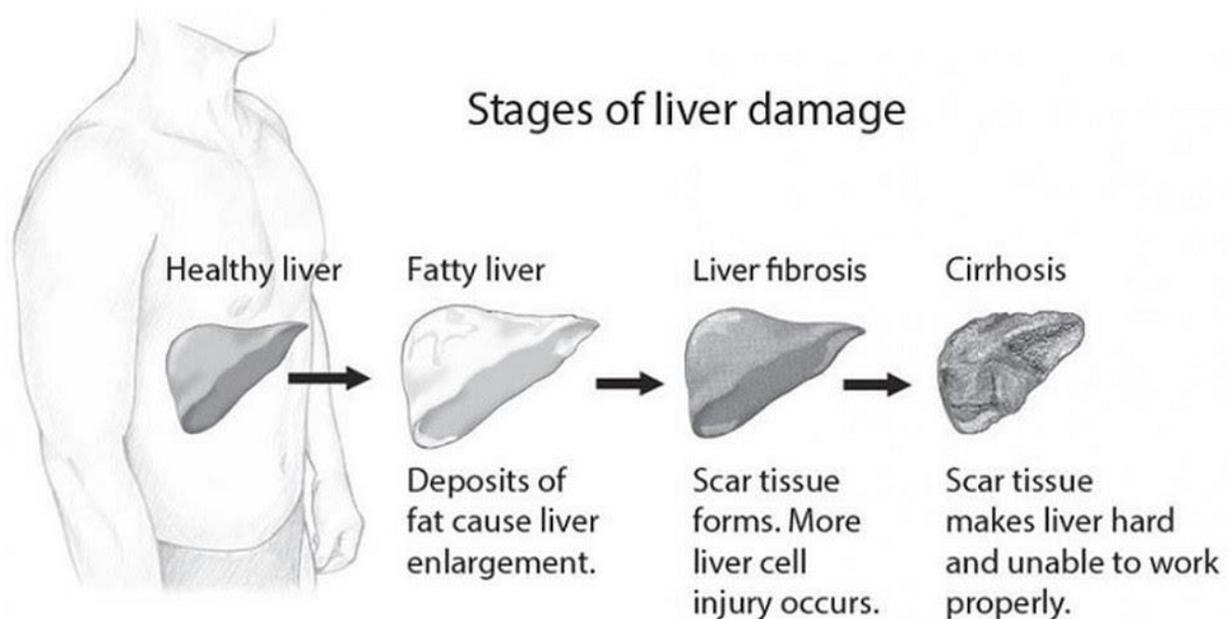
A successful community-driven strategy, as shown during the Swachh Bharat campaign or COVID-19 control, if dovetailed with the existing TB control programme, which provides free diagnosis and treatment, can accelerate TB elimination.

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Health

In news

- According to the Health Ministry, India has become the first country in the world to identify the need for action for Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease.



Key takeaways

- Operational guidelines have been launched for the integration of NAFLD with the National Programme for Prevention & Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke.

- NAFLD is an umbrella term for a range of liver conditions affecting people who drink little to no alcohol.
- Main characteristic of NAFLD is too much fat stored in liver cells.
- It is becoming increasingly common around the world, especially in Western nations.
- Some individuals with NAFLD can develop non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).
- NASH is an aggressive form of fatty liver disease, marked by liver inflammation which may progress to advanced scarring (cirrhosis) and liver failure.

Related articles:

[National Family Health Survey 2020](#)

[Health Data Management Policy](#)



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CONNECT TO CONQUER

The Bond of GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA - Continued...

**A NEVER BEFORE INITIATIVE
UPSC/IAS 2021 PREPARATION**



ONE-TO-ONE MENTORSHIP
By Mohan Sir
Founder IASbaba

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Implementation of ONORC scheme

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

In news

- The Department under Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution in association with State/UT Governments is implementing the 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) plan for nation-wide portability of ration cards under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA).
- So far, the facility has been enabled in 32 States/UTs covering almost 86% of the NFSA population of the country.

Important value additions

One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) plan

- Under ONORC, the beneficiaries can lift their entitled foodgrains from any ePoS (electronic Point of Sale device) enabled Fair Price Shop (FPS) of their choice by using their same/existing ration cards with biometric authentication on the ePoS device at the time of lifting the foodgrains through portability.
- No direction has been given to States/UTs for the issuance of new ration cards to beneficiaries under ONORC.
- However, for the sake of uniformity under ONORC operations, States/UTs have been advised to adopt a standard bi-lingual format for ration cards whenever they decide to issue/print new ration cards under NFSA in the future.
- The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) under NFSA is operated under the joint responsibilities of the Central and State/UT Governments.
- **Responsibility of State/UT Governments:** Identification of eligible beneficiaries under NFSA, issuance of ration cards to them, lifting of foodgrains from the designated depots, distribution to ration cardholders as per their entitlements through FPSs, etc.
- Directions under Section-38 of the NFSA have been issued to all States/UTs to cover all eligible disabled persons under the NFSA.

Salient Features of NFSA

- Public Distribution System (PDS) is now governed by provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA).
- Coverage under PDS is de-linked from the erstwhile 'poverty estimates'.
- The Act provides coverage for nearly 2/3rd of the country's total population, basis Census 2011 population estimates.
- 75% of Rural and 50% of Urban population is entitled to receive highly subsidised foodgrains under two categories of beneficiaries – Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households and Priority Households (PHH).
- State/UT-wise coverage is determined by the erstwhile Planning Commission (now NITI Ayog) on the basis of 2011-12 Household Consumption Expenditure survey of NSSO.

- The Act entitles 35 kg of foodgrains per AAY Household per month, whereas 5 Kg of foodgrain per PHH Person per month.
- Identification of beneficiaries/households under NFSA is done by respective State/UT Government, which is required to frame its own criteria.
- Highly subsidised Central Issue Prices of Re.1, Rs.2 and Rs.3 for Coarse-grains, Wheat and Rice respectively, kept unchanged till June 2019.
- No reduction in foodgrains allocation to any State/UT under NFSA. Allocation gaps if any, are covered with Tide-Over allocation
- Eldest woman of the beneficiary household (18 years or above) is considered as 'Head of Family' for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
- Grievance redressal mechanism at different levels is provisioned for Women Empowerment.
- Provisions for disclosure of records relating to PDS operations for enhanced transparency
- Assistance to States/UTs for meeting expenditure on intra-State transportation & handling of foodgrains and FPS Dealers' margin

Related articles:

- Inclusion of the Disabled in National Food Security Act, 2013: [Click here](#)
-

[Chairman of National Safety Council appointed](#)

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

In news

- The Ministry of Labour & Employment has appointed Shri S.N. Subrahmanyam, CEO and Managing Director, L&T Ltd, as the Chairman of the National Safety Council for three years.

Important value additions

National Safety Council

- National Safety Council is a non-profit, self-financing apex body at the national level in India.
 - **Objective:** To generate, develop and sustain a voluntary movement on Safety, Health, and Environment (SHE) at the national level.
 - It is an autonomous body.
 - **Set up by:** Ministry of Labour and Employment in 1965.
 - It was registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and subsequently, as a Public Trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950.
-

[Rs 16000 crores allocated to Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana \(PMFBY\)](#)

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

In news

- To boost the safety of farmers' crops and ensure the maximum benefit of crop insurance reaches farmers, the Government of India has allocated Rs 16000 crores for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) for the fiscal year 2021-22.



Key takeaways

- This is a budgetary increase of around Rs 305 crore as against the previous fiscal year 2020-21.
- The scheme extends coverage for the entire cropping cycle from pre-sowing to post-harvest including coverage for losses arising out of prevented sowing and mid-season adversities.

Important value additions

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

Related articles:

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) successfully completes 5 Years of operations: [Click here](#)
-

Modifications in Pre And Post Matric Scholarship Schemes

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

In news

- Lok Sabha was informed about the Modifications in Pre and Post Matric Scholarship Schemes for SCs and OBCs.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

Important changes introduced in the scheme

- **Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC students:**
 - The funding pattern - fixed sharing pattern of 60:40 between Centre and the States (90:10 in case of North Eastern States) or Notional Allocation whichever is lower.
 - The Annual Family Income limit increased from Rs. 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh.
 - Rates of maintenance allowances were also increased.
 - **Post-Matric Scholarship for SC students:**
 - It shall continue from 2020-21 to 2025-26
 - Funding pattern - sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the States (90:10 in case of NE States)
 - **Pre-Matric Scholarship for OBCs and Post Matric Scholarship for OBCs:**
 - Pre-Matric Scholarship increased from Rs.1 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakh per annum.
 - Post Matric Scholarship increased from Rs.1.5 lakh to Rs.2.5 lakh per annum.
-

Steps taken by the Government for Child Beggars

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - I – Social Issues & GS- II - Welfare schemes

In news

- Lok Sabha recently informed about the steps related to Child Beggars.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Women and Child Development

Key takeaways

- **The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act)** is the primary law for children in the country.
- As per Section 2 of the Act,2015, a child who is found working in contravention of labour laws or is found begging is included as a “child in need of care and protection”.
- As per Section 76, whoever employs any child for the purpose of begging shall be punishable with imprisonment upto five years and fine of one lakh rupees.
- **Child Protection Services (CPS)** under Integrated Child Development Services scheme supports the children in difficult circumstances including child beggars and destitute children.
- Institutional care is provided through Child Care Institutions (CCIs), as a rehabilitative measure.

- The scheme supports 24x7 emergency helpline service for children in distress conditions (toll free number, 1098 from anywhere in India).
- A pilot project is undertaken for **Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons** engaged in the act of begging in 10 cities.
- It includes education of children engaged in begging/children of persons engaged in the begging.

Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) rolled out

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

In news

- Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) was recently rolled out.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship



Key takeaways

- The fellows under MGNF will acquire academic expertise and technical competency in understanding the overall skill ecosystem along with being attached to District Skill Committees (DSCs).
 - It will help them manage the skill development planning at the district level through the mechanism of formulating District Skill Development Plans (DSDPs).
 - The first pilot MGNF which had 69 fellows working across 69 districts was successful.
 - The Ministry is now expanding MGNF to all remaining districts in India.
 - The Ministry has sought academic partnership with only the IIMs.
-

Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan launched

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

In news

- Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan under Jal Jeevan Mission- Urban, JJM-U was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs

Budget 2022 - Transforming Urban Landscape
PEY JAL SURVEKSHAN - PILOT

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Government of India

Pey Jal Survekshan 2021

Pilot Cities

Rohtak, Agra, Surat, Badalapur, Tumkur, Kochi, Patiala, Churu, Bhubaneswar, Madurai

First Step towards Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban)

Launch at 1.00 PM on 16 February, 2021

Key takeaways

- It will be conducted in cities to ascertain equitable distribution of water, reuse of wastewater and mapping of water bodies with respect to quantity and quality of water through a challenge process.
- It will be first launched in 10 cities- Agra, Badlapur, Bhubaneswar, Churu, Kochi, Madurai, Patiala, Rohtak, Surat and Tumkur.
- JJM-U is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with SDG - 6.

Related articles:

- Jal Jeevan Mission: [Click here](#)
- Margadarshika for Gram Panchayats and Paani Samitis: [Click here](#)

Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram

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

In news

- Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports informed Lok Sabha about Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram.

Important value additions

Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK)

- The Scheme Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK) is an ongoing Central Sector Scheme.
- The budget allocation of the scheme RYSK for the year 2020-21 is Rs.486.48 Crores.
- It is an umbrella scheme.

The 7 sub-schemes under scheme RYSK are:

1. Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan.
2. National Youth Corps.
3. National Programme for Youth and Adolescent Development.
4. International Cooperation.
5. Youth Hostels.
6. Assistance to Scouting and Guiding Organisations.
7. National Young Leaders Programme.

Enrolment module for TECHNOGRAHIS launched

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

In news

- An Enrolment Module for TECHNOGRAHIS has been launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

Key takeaways

- TECHNOGRAHIS are students from IITs, NITs, engineering, planning and architecture colleges, faculty members, academicians, and stakeholders.
- MoHUA is promoting six Light House Projects (LHPs) as Live Laboratories for transfer of technology to the field.
- The LHPs are model housing projects.
- About 1,000 houses at each location are being built with allied infrastructure facilities.
- Interested candidates can register themselves to visit these Live Laboratories in LHP sites for learning, consultation, generation of ideas and solutions, experimentation, innovation, and technical awareness.
- They will also get regular updates from the sites for information dissemination till the completion of the LHPs.



INTERNATIONAL

UK Special Visa Scheme For Hong Kong Residents

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

In news

- The UK is opening a special visa scheme that will allow lakhs of Hong Kong residents a chance to migrate and eventually apply for British citizenship.



Key takeaways

- The visas will be issued to those in Hong Kong who hold a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents and will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.
- Applicants who get the visa can live and work in the UK for 5 years, after which they apply for settlement. Twelve months after this, they can apply for citizenship.
- The move is considered the UK's most generous welcoming of foreign workers since the entry of new EU citizens in 2004.
- The move comes months after China imposed a sweeping national security law over the Hong Kong, aiming for pro-democracy protests that had captured global attention since 2019.

Related articles:

- Hong Kong National Security Law: [Click here](#)
-

[New Start Nuclear Arms Control Treaty](#)

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

In news

- United States has extended the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) nuclear arms control treaty with Russia for five years.

Key takeaways

- USA President and his Russian counterpart reportedly discussed it and subsequently, Russian President signed it into law on Friday.
- It is a treaty on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms.
- It came into force on 5th February, 2011.
- It is a successor to the START framework of 1991 (at the end of the Cold War) that limited both sides to 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles and 6,000 warheads.
- It continues the process of verifiably reducing the USA and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals by limiting both sides to 700 strategic launchers and 1,550 warheads.

Related articles:

- Russia proposes to Extend New START Treaty: [Click here](#)
-

[1st India-EU High-Level Dialogue On Trade And Investment](#)

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

In news

- The 1st High-Level Dialogue (HLD), co-chaired by the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and the European Union Executive Vice-President & Trade Commissioner was held recently.



Key takeaways

- Commitment to the establishment of this Dialogue was a major outcome of the 15th India-EU Leader's Summit held in July 2020, with an objective for Ministerial level guidance towards the bilateral trade and investment relations.
- The Ministers also agreed to meet within the next three months, with an objective for reaching consensus on a host of bilateral trade & investment cooperation issues viz. a bilateral Regulatory Dialogue; an India-EU Multilateral Dialogue to explore further possibilities of cooperation; etc.

[USA plans to re-engage with United Nations Human Rights Council](#)

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

In news

- The USA has announced plans to re-engage with the much-maligned UN Human Rights Council that the former President withdrew from almost three years ago.

Important value additions

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system.
 - **Location:** Geneva.
 - **Establishment:** It was founded in 2006.
 - It replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) that had been strongly criticised for allowing countries with poor human rights records to be members.
 - **Functions:** (1) It investigates allegations of breaches of human rights in UN member states; (2) It also addresses important thematic human rights issues such as freedom of expression, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the rights of racial and ethnic minorities.
 - The UNHRC works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
 - **Membership:** 47 Member States elected by the UN General Assembly.
 - The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution.
 - Members of the Council serve for three years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
 - India has been elected to the UNHRC for three years beginning January 1, 2019.
 - India had previously been elected to the UNHRC for the 2011-2014 and 2014-2017 terms.
-

[Nord Stream 2 Pipeline](#)

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

In news

- In a development that could increase tensions between the USA and Germany, the association which is building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has said that it has resumed work on the controversial project.



Key takeaways

- In 2015, Gazprom and 5 other European energy firms decided to build Nord Stream 2, valued at around \$11 billion.
- The 1,200 km pipeline will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany.
- It will carry 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year.
- The under-construction pipeline will run along with the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system, and the two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic meters of gas to Germany per year.

Why is the pipeline controversial?

- Nord Stream 2 has drawn criticism from the US, where it is believed that the project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas, thus strengthening its President.
- Currently, EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.

[MoU signed for the construction of the Lalandar Dam](#)

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

In news

- MoU was signed for the construction of the Lalandar [Shatoot] Dam between India and Afghanistan recently.

Key takeaways

- The project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan.
- **Benefits:** (1) Meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City; (2) Provide irrigation water to nearby areas; (3) Rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network; (4) Aid in flood protection and management efforts in the area; (5) Provide electricity to the region.

Do you know?

- This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan, after the India- Afghanistan Friendship Dam [Salma Dam], which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.
-

[ICC ruling on jurisdiction in Palestinian Territories](#)

Context: The International Criminal Court (ICC) said that the court has jurisdiction over war crimes committed in the Palestinian territories, a ruling that was welcomed by Palestinians and criticized by Israel.

About ICC

- Governed by an international treaty called '**The Rome Statute**', 2002 the ICC is the world's first permanent international criminal court.
- It investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.
- Through international criminal justice, ICC aims to hold those responsible for their crimes and to help prevent these crimes from happening again.
- The ICC is intended to complement, not to replace, national criminal systems; it prosecutes cases only when States do not are unwilling or unable to do so genuinely.
- **ICC is not a UN organization** but it has a cooperation agreement with the United Nations.
- When a situation is not within the Court's jurisdiction, the United Nations Security Council can refer the situation to the ICC granting it jurisdiction. This has been done in the situations in Darfur (Sudan) and Libya.
- **India is not a party to Rome Statute along with US and China.**

What is the present judgment all about?

- This ruling was really a result of the Palestinian Authority gaining formal membership of international criminal court in 2015. Israel is not a member of the ICC.
- According to this ruling, the ICC would have **jurisdiction to investigate potential war crimes committed** in Palestinian territories.
- The Court's territorial jurisdiction in the Situation in Palestine extends to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, namely Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem
- The judges however said the jurisdiction **does not "imply any attempt to determine Palestinian statehood**, which is uncertain, or national borders."

Response to the ruling

- **Israel:** It denounced the ruling saying that the ICC was investigating Israel for "fake war crimes", calling it "pure anti-Semitism".

- **US:** It also objected to the ICC's decision
- **Palestine:** Palestine welcome the ruling and said it was an "historic day" and that Israel had previously been treated "above the law."

Significance of the ruling

- This is a significant step forward in the **quest for justice and accountability** involving the unaccountable 53-year-old occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza
- The ruling could lead to criminal investigations of Israel and Palestinian **militant groups including Hamas.**

What is India's stance?

- Israel has been pushing India to take a stand against the ICC ruling, but Delhi is reluctant to do so given its own geopolitical interests (doesn't want to antagonise Islamic States)
- India has conveyed to Israel through diplomatic channels that since India is not a member of the Rome Statute, it would not want to comment or take a position on any of the court's decisions or rulings.

[Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement \(CECPA\)](#)

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

In news

- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.

Key takeaways

- The India-Mauritius CECPA will be the first trade Agreement to be signed by India with any African country.
- It is a limited agreement.
- It will cover Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Trade in Services, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons, Telecom, Financial services, Customs Procedures and Cooperation in other Areas.
- CECPA provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- Both sides have also agreed to negotiate an Automatic Trigger Safeguard Mechanism (ATSM) for a limited number of highly sensitive products within two years of the Signing of the Agreement.



[CECPA between India and Mauritius](#)

Context: Cabinet approved the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius which is aimed at liberalising trade between the two countries.

About the agreement

- **Kind of a free trade agreement:** CECPA, similar to FTA, will cover 310 export items for India, including foodstuff and beverages, agricultural products, textile, base metals, electricals and electronic items, plastics and chemicals, etc.
- **Includes Trade and Services:** In such agreements, the two trading partners cut or eliminate duties on a host of products besides liberalising norms to promote services trade.
- **Covers all aspects:** It will cover trade in goods, rules of origin, trade in services, Technical Barriers to Trade like Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, dispute settlement, movement of natural persons, telecom, financial services, customs procedures and cooperation in other areas.
- **Mauritius will benefit** from preferential market access into India for 615 products, including frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, beer, alcoholic drinks, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel.
- This instance will be India's first such trade pact with an **African nation**.

Economic Relationship between India and Mauritius

- Bilateral trade between the countries had dipped to \$690 million in 2019-20 from \$1.2 billion in 2018-19.
- While India's exports in 2019-20 aggregated to \$662 million, imports stood at just \$27.89 million.
- Mauritius imports petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, cereals, cotton, electrical machinery, apparel and clothing accessories, while India's imports include iron and steel, pearls, precious/semi-precious stones, etc.

- Mauritius was also the second largest source of foreign direct investment into India in 2019-20, accounting for around \$8.24 billion (about Rs 57,785 crore) for the year.
-

Australia Vs Facebook: News Media Bargaining Code

Context: Australian PM Morrison has launched a global diplomatic offensive to drum up support for Australia's proposed law (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020).

The bill mandates a bargaining code that aims to force Google and Facebook to compensate media companies for using their content

Australian PM has reached out to Indian and Canadian PM to discuss on such type of regulations.

Australia's legislation – Voluntary Mechanism was not the solution

- Back in 2017, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommended a voluntary code with an aim to address the negotiating skew between major digital platforms and media businesses
- Based on these recommendations, the Australian government in 2019 asked various stakeholders and the ACCC to **develop this voluntary code**.
- The ACCC, however, pointed out in April 2020 that the businesses were **not likely to reach an agreement voluntarily**. This paved way for drafting a mandatory code.
- The provision of mandatory code requiring Google & FB to enter into payment negotiations with media companies — with an arbiter mandated to adjudicate if no agreement is reached — or face heavy fines, has met with resistance.
- The arbiter is deemed **important mainly for smaller publishers** who may face a negotiation skew with the platforms.
- **European authorities** have specifically linked payments to copyright, without putting a forcing device into the agreements.
- Australia's code, on the other hand, is almost entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets vis-à-vis the tech majors, and has some coercive features as well.

What is the core issue between Tech Giants and Regulators?

- While links to news may not be direct advertising money-spinners for Facebook or Google, both see the presence of news as an important aspect of audience engagement with their products.
- Google and Facebook are two of the largest and most profitable companies in history – and each holds far more bargaining power than any news publisher. The news media bargaining code sets out to **undo this imbalance**.
- The fight in Australia is in fact, centred on how much control these companies would be able to retain on their payout process — operational aspects such as deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithm

Response by Tech Giants

- **Threatens:** In January 2021 when bill was being introduced, Google threatened to remove its search engine from Australia, and Facebook warned it could block Australian users from posting or sharing news links.
- **Arguments of Google & FB:** They say that the media industry was already benefiting from traffic routed to them by the digital platforms, and that the proposed rules would expose the Internet companies to “unmanageable levels of financial and operational risk”.
- **Conciliatory position of Google:** Google has backtracked and has moved ahead to sign a deal with one of the News Corporation

- **Retaliation by FB:** However, Facebook— which has 17 million users in Australia — retaliated with a news blackout, blocking all news links on its platform.
- **Consequences of FB's actions:** In the process, FB also ended up silencing some emergency services, and reportedly removed posts from Australia's Bureau of Meteorology, state health departments, fire and rescue services, charities, and emergency and crisis services.

The Debate in India

- According to a FICCI-EY report for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country — making up approximately 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.
- With 282 million unique visitors, India is the second largest online news consuming nation after China.
- In India, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% year-on-year to Rs 27,900 crore and are expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.
- A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to begin in any meaningful way.

Conclusion

- Australia's legislation sets a precedent in regulating social media across geographies, and is being closely watched the world over.

Connecting the dots:

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

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INDIA AND THE WORLD

INDIA-SRILANKA: India Out of Colombo Port Project

Context: After the strong opposition from trade unions across the country, the Sri Lankan government was forced to renege on a 2019 agreement with India and Japan to develop the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Sri Lankan PM announced the operation of the east terminal would be done by Sri Lanka Ports Authority on its own.

How has India reacted?

To Sri Lankan PM's statement that ECT development and operation will be done on its own, a news that was seen as embarrassing the Indian side, India's first response was that the island nation should not be taking a decision in a unilateral manner on an existing tripartite agreement.

What is Sri Lanka's compensatory offer to India?

- After the Sri Lankan decision reneging on the 2019 agreement, the country's cabinet has now approved a proposal to develop the west terminal of the Colombo port as a Public Private Partnership with Japan and India.
- Arguments given by Sri Lanka in favour of West Terminal offer are:
 - Commercially, the west terminal offer is better for India as it gives 85% stake for developers of the West Terminal against the 49% in ECT.
 - Geo-politically too, West Terminal is almost the same if security aspect and the necessity to have a port terminal in Sri Lanka is considered
 - West Terminal is no smaller in size or depth compared to the East Terminal
 - Development of the ECT is partially completed while the development of the West Terminal has to start from scratch

What made Sri Lanka change its word on ECT?

- **Agreement under earlier government:** As per the agreement signed by the former Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration in 2019, India and Japan together was to hold 49% stake in ECT.
- **Pressure from Colombo port trade unions:** President was under pressure as trade unions were protesting opposing privatization of the port and demanded cancellation of the 2019 agreement. Also during the talks with government, trade unions quoted his own presidential manifesto that was contrary to this 2019 agreement.
- **Support for protests from other sections of society:** While there were reports and allegations among diplomatic circle that the Chinese had played a role in instigating port unions protest against India's interest, some 223 Sri Lankan unions from different walks of life, including trade unions and civil societies groups, declared support for the port trade unions demand to cancel the ECT agreement.

Will there be similar protests and crises if India accepts the West Terminal offer?

- Ahead of “unilaterally” cancelling the ECT agreement, the Sri Lanka government also managed to get **the written consent of unions** in this regard, in which 22 out of 23 Unions signed and gave a letter agreeing to support the government in its plans to **develop the West Terminal with private investment**.
- There is a specific point in the consent letter of unions that said: “We will support a good investment decision that the government would take in future in relation to the west terminal.”
- This is commercially a better deal for Indian Company Adani. And unions had also agreed to mention both east and west terminal decisions in one cabinet paper.
- ViyathMaga (Professionals for a Better Future), a network of academics, professionals and entrepreneurs, had played a key role in the final round negotiations between the unions and the government, which had led to the latest WTC proposal

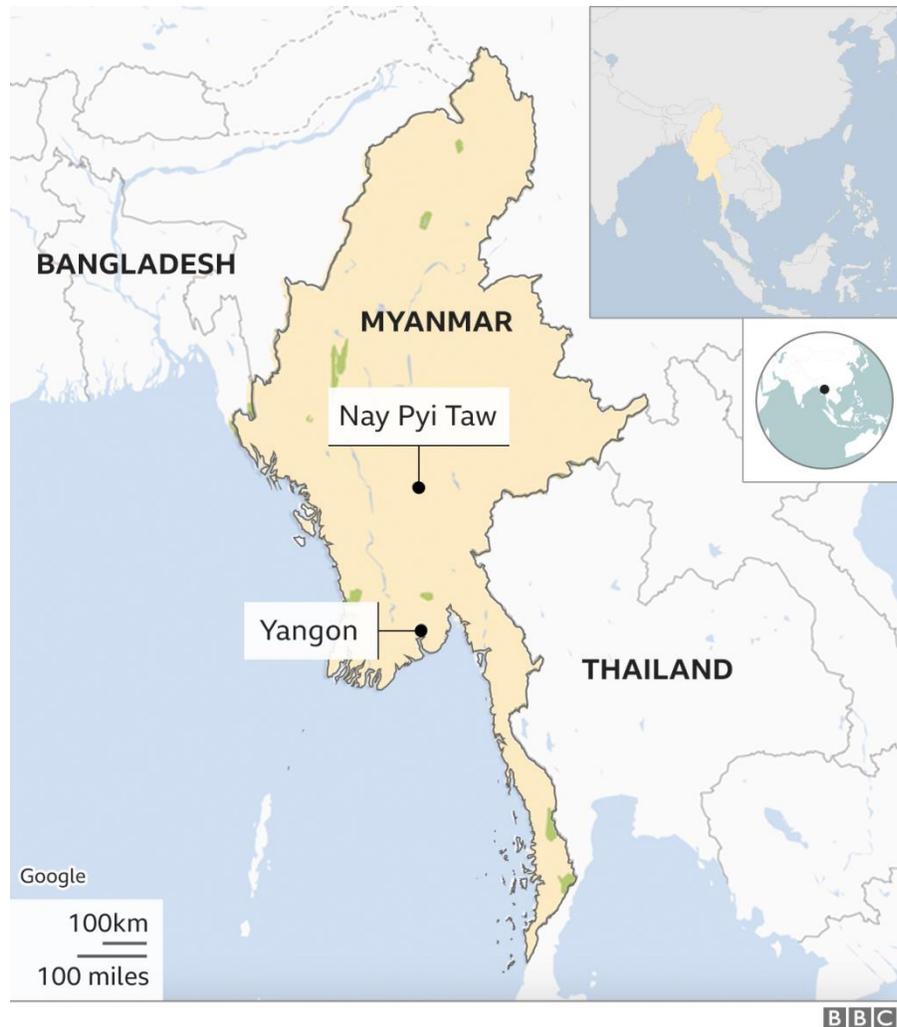
Connecting the dots

- String of Pearl Strategy of China
 - Hambantota Port Project – Leased out to China
-

[Military coup in Myanmar](#)

Context: The Myanmar military (known as tatmadaw) grabbed power in a coup on February 1 morning, ahead of a scheduled meeting of the country’s newly elected Parliament.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to a landslide win in the 2020 elections has been detained. In a broadcast, the military declared a one-year state of emergency in Myanmar.



About Aung San Suu Kyi

- Ms Suu Kyi is the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, General Aung San. He was assassinated when she was only two years old, just before Myanmar gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.
- After her return from abroad, Suu Kyi rose to prominence in 1988 uprising against military rule and advocated for peaceful Democratic transition. Her NLD party won the 1990 election which was nullified by Military. She was then detained and house arrested for nearly two decades until 2010 when she was released.
- Her personal struggle to bring democracy to then military-ruled Myanmar (also known as Burma) - made her an international symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of oppression.
- Despite her landslide victory in 2015, the Myanmar constitution forbade her from becoming president because she has children who are foreign nationals. But Ms Suu Kyi, now 75, was widely seen as de facto leader.
- Her official title was state counsellor.

What triggered the 2021 coup?

- **NLD Sweeping elections:** Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi and her ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) clinched a second consecutive landslide win in 2020 national elections with the party gaining 396 of the 498 contested seats in the bicameral parliament.
- **People Voting for Democracy:** The 2020 victory gave NLD nine more seats than it won in 2015 when it had swept to power in Myanmar's first democratic elections after decades of military rule.
- **Allegation by Military over election results:** The military has alleged that the general elections held in November 2020 were full of "irregularities" and that therefore, the results — a sweep for NLD — are not valid. Military questioned the veracity of some 9 million votes cast in the election.
- **Demands of Military rejected:** The military had demanded that the United Elections Commission (UEC) of Myanmar which oversees elections, or the government, or outgoing parliamentarians prove at a special session before the new parliament convenes on February 1, that the elections were free and fair. The demand had been rejected.
- **Free and Fair elections were conducted:** The UEC has said it had found no evidence of any voting malpractice or fraud. It has said that each vote was "counted transparently and witnessed by election candidates, election staff, the media, observers and others civil society organisation.

Democratic transition halted

- **2008 Constitution:** It was the military that drafted the 2008 Constitution, and put it to a questionable referendum in April that year. The Constitution was the military's "roadmap to democracy", which it had been forced to adopt under increasing pressure from the west.
- **Military's role was safeguarded:** But the military made sure to safeguard in the Constitution its own role and supremacy in national affairs. Under its provisions, the military reserves for itself 25% of seats in both Houses of Parliament, to which it appoints serving military officials. Also, a political party which is a proxy for the military contests elections.
- **Constitutional Reform:** Myanmar's democratic transition had been a work in progress. The results of the 2020 election, held during the pandemic, were being seen by the NLD as a mandate for its plan of constitutional reform, through which it aimed to do away with the military's role in politics and governance. But this was never going to be easy, given the tight constitutional restrictions for amendments.
- **Military wanted to retain Power:** Underneath its allegations of "irregularities" in the 2020 election, it appears that the military felt threatened by Suu Kyi's undiminished, even increasing popularity despite five years of incumbency. Also, despite the iron-clad clauses in the Constitution protecting the military's role, the generals seemed to have sensed that Suu Kyi would use her fresh mandate to restore civilian supremacy in national affairs. This fear ultimately lead to coup.
- **International Criticism against Coup:** diplomatic missions of several countries like Australia, Canada, EU, USA, UK issued a joint statement that said "We urge the military, and all other parties in the country, to adhere to democratic norms, and we oppose any attempt to alter the outcome of the elections or impede Myanmar's democratic transition."

How was relation between Government and Military in the first term?

- **Cordial Relations:** Suu Kyi had gone easy on the military in the first term. At one point, she referred to the generals as reminding her of "sweet uncles".

- **Stood behind Military in Rohingya Crackdown:** Suu Kyi appeared to back the Army in its brutal crackdown against the Rohingya, which forced nearly a million to escape to Bangladesh. Suu Kyi later appeared at the [International Court of Justice to defend the Army in a case against Myanmar for war crimes](#) against the Rohingya.
- **Focus during first term was uniting minorities:** From 2015 until last year, Suu Kyi was focused on her other project — building peace with more than two dozen minority militias that were at war with the Myanmar state, so that all minorities could come together.
- **Realization that Military needs to be pushed back:** The conciliation efforts between minority militias was called the “21st century Panglong Conference”, after a similar effort by her father in the 1940s. But a ceasefire agreement in 2015 was only partially successful, and a series of meetings yielded no positive outcome, giving rise to the conviction that peace would return when the military was pushed back.

India and Myanmar over the years and the impact of Coup

- **Initial Support for Pro-Democracy movement:** After joining the campaign for Suu Kyi’s release in the 1990s, New Delhi recalibrated its position to begin a full engagement with the junta although this upset Myanmar’s pro-democracy movement and the NLD in particular.
- **Engagement with Military for securing North-East:** In return for India’s engagement with them, the Myanmar military cracked down on the ULFA and other militant groups of India’s Northeast in safe havens in Myanmar. Senior generals visited India regularly, stopping in Bodh Gaya on the way to or back from Delhi.
- **Suu Kyi moving closer to China:** Since 2015, India’s supportive stand on the Army crackdown on Rohingya has ensured the friendship continued, although Suu Kyi herself did not particularly warm to the NDA government. In recent years, as she was shunned by the West, Suu Kyi had increasingly turned to Beijing, and President Xi Jinping had rolled out the red carpet for her.
- **Impact of Military Coup on bilateral relation:** India is unlikely to draw back from its engagement with the military, although it has expressed concern at the sudden developments in Myanmar. The competition with China for influence in the region extends to Myanmar, vital to India’s strategic and economic interests from West Bengal and the Northeast to Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

- Ironically, it could be China that may end up exerting most pressure on the Myanmar military to release Suu Kyi and step back.
- Although Myanmar’s generals resent China’s outsize influence in their country, they would still fall in line for Beijing.
- The US has threatened sanctions but this may no longer be seen as the best way forward, as they tend to hurt ordinary people more than they do the leaders they are aimed at. Engagement is now seen as key to such situations.

Connecting the dots

- [Chief of Defence Staff in India](#)
-

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

Context: The Covid-19 pandemic’s impact on India has been especially grim. Given the interconnectedness of world systems, it is crucial to examine how partnerships can be built around the process of recovery, especially with countries in Africa.

Pandemic in Africa

- **Lower cases due to young demography:** While Africa was one of the last regions to be hit by the virus, and with deaths over 35,000, it has reported lower case numbers than Asia and even Europe in terms of containing the spread, likely due to its young demography.
- **Multi-stakeholder response controlled spread:** Cooperation among African leaders, the African Union, and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has led to an increase in testing capacity, resource mobilisation, and measures to contain the spread of the virus. In addition to state efforts, civil society organisations and young activists across African countries have been crucial to mobilise resources, spread awareness, and find solutions.

Economic Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Africa

- **Reduced Trade:** Africa has been deeply affected by reduced intra-African trade numbers, with dwindling demand from the EU, US, China, and other markets causing a supply-and-demand shock.
- **Could erode progress made on poverty front:** Sub Saharan Africa's real per capita GDP could shrink by -5.4 per cent this year, which could effectively roll back a decade of progress with 49 million Africans likely to be pushed into poverty.
- **Unemployment:** It is estimated that 30 million jobs will probably disappear in the wake of economic disruption caused by the Pandemic
- **Longer time to recovery:** Larger economies like Nigeria, South Africa and Angola are not expected to see real GDP growth return to pre-Covid-19 levels until 2023 and 2024, respectively.
- **Exposed weak welfare state:** The pandemic has also laid bare the relatively weak state of social welfare schemes and health infrastructure in the region.

How India can help Africa at this crucial juncture?

1. Build on the momentum

- Already, the India-Africa health cooperation is multidimensional, comprehensive, and involves national, state, and subnational actors working toward augmenting African institutional and individual capacities.
- It includes exporting low-cost generics, building health infrastructure, providing aid, technical assistance, and hosting medical tourists.
- In the recent past, India-Africa relationship has picked up momentum— with regular high-level visits, increasing diplomatic footprint, diversified engagement across sectors, and a vibrant diaspora — which it can build upon during this unprecedented crisis.

2. Partner in supplying low-cost Covid-19 vaccines to the region

- As the “pharmacy of the world,” while India has already dispatched medicines including hydroxychloroquine and other drugs to over 25 African countries, it could also become a critical partner in supplying low-cost Covid-19 vaccines to the region
- While the Serum Institute of India (SII) has stated that it will begin sending supplies to the WHO-backed COVAX initiative, the South African health ministry has confirmed that it has entered an agreement with SII and would get 1.5 million doses of vaccine in the next two months.

3. Comprehensive strengthening of Africa's health systems.

- Indian pharmaceutical companies can also play a role in boosting African pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity

- The Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa, a business idea developed in 2007, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA), which became operational on January 1, 2021, can boost pharmaceutical manufacturing in Africa.
- Private actors in India's health sector already have a significant presence in Africa. The recent MoU between the Health Federation of India (NATHEALTH) and the Africa Health Federation (AHF) aimed at building healthcare ecosystems, increasing investments, and creating cross-country partnerships recognises the sheer business potential of a robust partnership in health.

4. Boosting e-initiatives

- The Indian government could also play the role of a facilitator and create working groups with medical professionals to host video or teleconferences with counterparts from African countries.
- The e-ArogyaBharti (Tele-medicine) Project, part of the e-VBAB launched in October 2019, seems to be a step in that direction
- The e-VBAB project which also includes e-VidyaBharti (Tele-education), is entirely funded by the Indian government. It builds on the Pan-Africa e-network Project and promises access to premier Indian education institutions and to medical experts in the country.

5. Multilateral Efforts

- Indian actors can also take the lead in initiating and pushing for more multilateral efforts by stakeholders like the WHO or the UN to do more for African recovery.

Conclusion

While it can be argued that the Covid-19 crisis has had serious implications for India and the country has huge domestic obligations to deal with, partnering with Africa at this critical juncture in our shared reality will add immense value to the rich historicity of India-Africa solidarity.

Connecting the dots

- India's neighbourhood Policy
-

[1st India-Bahrain Joint Working Group meeting in the field of Renewable Energy](#)

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

In news

- The 1st meeting of the Joint Working Group in the field of Renewable Energy between India and the Kingdom of Bahrain was held recently.

Key takeaways

- A Memorandum of Understanding between India and Bahrain was signed in July 2018 for promoting bilateral cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy.
- Now, both sides have underscored the importance of renewable energy to meet climate change goals.
- They presented the initiatives taken, progress made and future targets set by their respective governments and opportunities available in this sector.
- They agreed on sharing experience, expertise, and best practices.

- Both sides agreed to forge deeper engagement in capacity building and focused cooperation between concerned agencies and the private sector of the two countries in this sector, particularly in the field of solar, wind, and clean hydrogen.
-

Vaccine Diplomacy

While the leading and advanced countries have been mindlessly selfish in hoarding approved vaccines, it is the Global South countries, India and China, which have provided a ray of hope to most countries.

Vaccine Nationalism

- The development of vaccines is a classic story of global cooperation between the North and the South.
- Unfortunately, the increasing nationalist tendencies of the democratic World during the pandemic have challenged the positive narrative on global cooperation.
- When a country manages to secure doses of vaccines for its own citizens or residents and prioritises its own domestic markets before they are made available in other countries it is known as 'vaccine nationalism'
- The reason countries are going for pre-purchase agreements is because of the longer duration for companies to manufacture such vaccines. It is predicted that worldwide supply may not reach 1 billion doses until the first quarter of 2022

Is Vaccine Nationalism New?

- A similar situation happened in 2009 during the H1N1 flu pandemic.
- Australia, the first country to come up with a vaccine, blocked exports while some of the wealthiest countries entered into pre-purchase agreements with several pharmaceutical companies.
- The US alone obtained the right to buy 600,000 doses.
- It was only when the H1N1 pandemic began to recede that developed countries offered to donate vaccine doses to poorer economies.
- However, it must be noted that H1N1 was a milder disease and its impact was far lesser than Covid-19

Advance Purchase Contracts

- Advance purchase contracts made by some advanced countries for potential vaccines would vaccinate their population many times.
- The expectation that an early vaccination will bring back normalcy and a required push to economic growth fuelled many advanced countries to engage in vaccine battles.
- Advanced countries have turned their back on the need of poor countries to access COVID-19 vaccines.

Impact of such actions

- **Inequitable Access:** Such advance agreements will make the initial vaccines unaffordable and inaccessible to majority of world population apart from those living in the rich countries
- **Slows Economic Recovery:** If countries with a large number of cases lag in obtaining the vaccine, the disease will continue to disrupt domestic economy and thus its ability to recover from Pandemic induced shock.

- **Deepens the Inequality:** The gap between the Global North and the Global South is going to further deepen as productivity of human resources are further eroded in Global South due to their inaccessibility of vaccines & continuance of suffering from Pandemic.

India and Vaccine Diplomacy

- India has displayed **empathy to poor countries' needs**.
- India has taken a position that a significant percentage of the approved doses will be permitted for exports.
- While its exports to **neighbouring countries will be under grant mode**, initial shipment of vaccines to least developed countries will be free of cost.
- India is in its first phase of vaccination to cover health-care workers, exports from India are helping other countries also in initiating phase one of their vaccination programme.
- India's approach only reinforces the need of having **coordinated global efforts** in bringing COVID-19 under control.
- This has consolidated India's name as the **world's pharmacy**.
- It has further enhanced the **Soft Power of India** and generated **goodwill** among these developing & least developed countries.
- This helps dispel the perception amongst neighbourhood that India is hegemonic and a "Big Brother". Instead it shows that India is a "**Responsible Power**"

China and Vaccine Diplomacy

- With the coronavirus largely stamped out at home, China could sell more of its vaccines abroad.
- Vaccines "will be made a global public good," Xi promised the World Health Assembly in May 2020.
- "vaccine diplomacy" has become a tool to **assuage some of the anger over China's missteps**, helping shore up its global standing at a time when it has been under pressure from the United States and others.
- China's efficiency at home has not translated into an easy triumph abroad. Chinese vaccines have **lower efficacy rates**.
- Officials in Brazil and Turkey have **complained about delays**. Still, many countries who have signed up for them have acknowledged that they could not afford to wait months for those made by the Americans or Europeans

COVAX

- The COVAX project is a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, an ambitious programme based on funding from high and middle-income countries.
- COVAX is a unique case of global cooperation and a strategic shift to enhance global development outcomes.

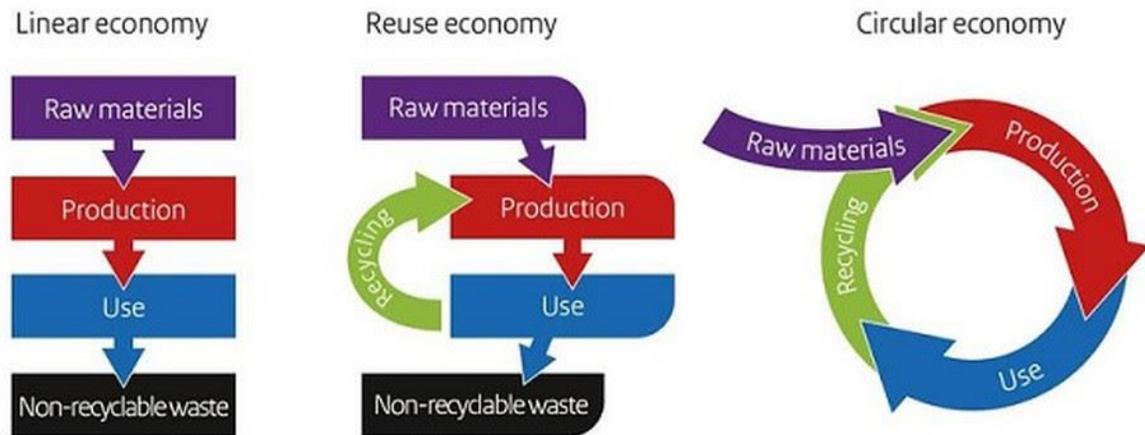
[India-Australia Circular Economy \(I-ACE\) Hackathon, 2021](#)

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

In news

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Australia’s national science agency (CSIRO) kick started the India-Australia Circular Economy (I-ACE) Hackathon, 2021.
- **Goal:** To enable talented innovative students and start-ups from Australia and India to address common national issues through innovative technology solutions

From a linear to a circular economy



Key themes for the hackathon:

- Innovation in packaging reducing packaging waste
- Innovation in food supply chains avoiding waste
- Creating opportunities for plastic waste reduction
- Recycling critical energy metals and e-waste

Do you know?

- A 'circular economy' model employs waste management and focuses on reusing, recycling and responsible manufacture.
- It can support the development of new industries and jobs, reducing emissions and increasing efficient use of natural resources.

[Agreements signed between India and Maldives](#)

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

In news

- India and Maldives signed agreements on wide range of domains.
- These included fish processing, public broadcasting, sustainable urban development, road infrastructure and housing.



Key takeaways

- The broadcasting agreement is for cooperation between Prasar Bharati and official State Media of Maldives.
- It intends to facilitate collaboration and capacity building in the field of public broadcasting.
- Over one lakh additional doses of [COVID vaccine](#) were also handed over to Maldives.
- India has signed a 50 million dollar Line of Credit agreement in defence sector with the Maldives which will facilitate capability building in the maritime domain.
- The UTF Harbour Project agreement was also signed with Maldives.
- The project agreement will strengthen Maldivian Coast Guard capability and facilitate regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief efforts.
- India also extended a new line of credit of US dollar 40 million for the development of new sports infrastructure in the Maldives.

Related articles:

- [‘Strategic comfort’ with the Maldives](#)
 - [Direct Cargo Ferry Service Between India & Maldives](#)
-

ECONOMY

[Economic Survey 2020-21: Employment](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Employment

In news

- The Economic Survey 2020-21 states that the years 2019 and 2020 are landmark years in the history of labor reforms.

Key takeaways

- The country saw nearly 29 Central Labour laws being amalgamated, rationalized, and simplified into four labor codes viz.:
 1. the Code on Wages, 2019,
 2. the Industrial Relations Code, 2020,
 3. the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and
 4. the Code on Social Security, 2020
 - COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of urban casual workers, who account for 11.2% of the urban workforce (All-India) as per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), January-March, 2020.
 - Industry-wise estimates on workforce show that 'Agriculture' is still the largest employer with 42.5% of the workforce.
 - The next important industry is 'other services' where 13.8% were engaged.
-

[Economic Survey 2020-21: Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana \(ABRY\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy

In news

- The Economic Survey says that ABRY, a component of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package announced in November 2020 has a total estimated outlay of Rs 22,810 crore for the scheme period i.e., up to wage month 31st May 2023.

The scheme proposes to pay:

- Entire employees' and employers' contribution i.e. 24% of wages towards EPF in respect of new employees in establishments employing **up to 1000 employees** during the period from October 2020 to June 2021 and also to re-employ who lost their jobs due to COVID-19.
 - Only employees' share of EPF contribution (i.e. 12 percent) of wages in respect of new employees in establishments employing **more than 1000 employees** during the period from October 2020 to June 2021, and also to re-employees who lost their jobs due to COVID-19.
 - To provide relief to the organized sector employees, a notification issued on 28th March 2020 by the Government provisioning a non-refundable advance of 75 percent of the outstanding balance or 3 months' wages whichever is lower, allowed to the members of EPFO.
 - Under Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) financial assistance was given to building & other construction workers (BOCW) which largely included migrant workers from the funds collected under BOCW's cess.
-

[Economic Survey 2020-21: Banking Sector](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy

In news

- According to Economic Survey 2020-21, the Gross Non-Performing Assets ratio of Scheduled Commercial Banks decreased from 8.21% at the end of March 2020 to 7.49% at the end of September 2020.

Key takeaways

- This has to be seen in conjunction with the asset classification relief provided to borrowers on account of the pandemic, says the Economic Survey.
- Further, the Capital to risk-weighted asset ratio of Scheduled Commercial Banks increased from 14.7% to 15.8% between March 2020 and September 2020 with improvement in both Public and Private sector banks.
- The recovery rate for the Scheduled Commercial Banks through Insolvency & Bankruptcy code-IBC (since its inception) has been over 45%
- Due to the pandemic, the initiation of the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) was suspended for any default.
- The suspension along with continued clearance has allowed a small decline in accumulated cases.
- The financial flows to the real economy remained constrained on account of subdued credit growth by both banks and Non-Banking Financial Corporations.
- The credit growth of banks slowed down to 6.7% as of January 1, 2021.

[8th edition of the India International Silk Fair inaugurated](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy

In news

- Union Textiles Minister recently inaugurated the 8th edition of the India International Silk Fair virtually.

Key takeaways

- The fair is considered to be India's biggest silk fair.
- It is the Sourcing Fair for silk and silk blend products.
- **Organised by:** Indian Silk Export Promotion Council
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Textiles
- **Sponsored by:** Department of Commerce

Important value additions

- India is the 2nd largest producer of Silk.

- India is the only country in the world that produces all four major varieties of silk i.e. Mulberry, Eri, Tassar, and Muga.
- **Mulberry silk:** Mainly in Karnataka
- **Non-mulberry Silk:** Temperate tussar silk in Maharashtra, WB, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh; Tropical tussar silk in sub-himalayan belt (Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, etc); Muga Silk in Assam and Eri silk in Assam, Odisha, Bihar
- India has around **11 Geographical Indications (GI)** such as: Pochampally Ikat, Chanderpaul Silk, Mysore Silk, Kanchipuram Silk, Muga Silk, Salem Silk, Arni Silk, Champa Silk, Bhagalpur Silk, Banaras Brocade and Sarees, etc.

Related articles:

- Types of silk and challenges of India's silk industry: [Click here](#)
-

[Budget 2021-22: Disinvestment](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Investment; Economy

In news

- Union Minister for Finance while presenting the Union Budget FY 2021-22 announced that the government has approved a policy of strategic disinvestment of public sector enterprises that will provide a clear roadmap for disinvestment in all non-strategic and strategic sectors.

Key takeaways

- Existing CPSEs, Public Sector Banks, and Public Sector Insurance Companies shall be covered under it.
- **Twofold classification of Sectors to be disinvested :**
- **Strategic Sector:** Bare minimum presence of the public sector enterprises and remaining shall be privatized or merged or made subsidiaries with other CPSEs or closed.
- Following 4 sectors to come under it :
 1. Atomic energy, Space and Defence
 2. Transport and Telecommunications
 3. Power, Petroleum, Coal, and other minerals
 4. Banking, Insurance, and financial services
- **Non- Strategic Sector:** In this sector, CPSEs will be privatized, otherwise shall be closed.

Important value additions

- An industry is considered strategic if it has large innovative spill overs and if it provides a substantial infrastructure for other firms in the same or related industries.
- Earlier, the strategic sectors were defined on the basis of industrial policy.
- The government classified Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) as 'strategic' and 'non-strategic' on the basis of industrial policy that keeps on changing from time-to-time.
- According to this, the Strategic sector PSUs are:
 1. Arms & Ammunition of defence equipment

2. Defence aircraft & warships
3. Atomic energy
4. Applications of radiation to agriculture, medicine and non-strategic industry
5. Railways
- All other PSUs apart from the strategic sectors fall under Non-strategic Sector including Power Discoms.

Do you know?

- Disinvestment is the action of an organization or government selling or liquidating an asset or subsidiary.
 - The primary objective is to maximize the return on investment (ROI) related to capital goods, labor, and infrastructure.
-

Budget 2021-22: Minimum Government, Maximum Governance

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

In news

- Presenting the Union Budget 2021-22 in Parliament, the Union Minister for Finance outlined the plans for reforms in one of the six pillars of the budget i.e. of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.

Key takeaways

- The forthcoming Census could be the first digital census in the history of India and has been allocated Rs. 3,768 crore in the year 2021-2022.
 - It is proposed to set up a Conciliation Mechanism and mandate its use for quick resolution of contractual disputes to increase ease of doing business.
 - This will instill confidence in private investors and contractors.
 - To bring about transparency, efficiency, and governance reforms in the nursing profession, **The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill** will be introduced by the government for passing.
 - It is also proposed to take further measures to rationalize the functioning of Tribunals.
 - The Centre will give a grant of Rs. 300 crore to the Government of Goa for celebrating the diamond jubilee year of the state's liberation from Portuguese rule.
-

Budget 2021: The 10 biggest takeaways

Context: Union government presented its Budget for the coming financial year (2021-22) that offered not only a direction for growth but also a strong intent for reforms.

The top 10 important highlights of Budget were

1. An Expenditure Budget: Union Government has found space for imparting a fiscal impulse in 2021-22. Compared with a Capital Expenditure of Rs 4.12 lakh crore in Revised Estimate (RE) of 2020-21, government has hiked it 34.46% to Rs 5.54 lakh crore in 2021-22.

- Choosing capital expenditure might appear like a unsympathetic choice — because it does not involve money to be handed over directly to the needy (and there are a lot of genuinely needy people in the wake of the Covid-19 disruption).
- Instead, it is investment into **raising the productive capacity in the economy**, which is the best chance India has to return to a path of sustainable economic growth.

2. A Reform Signal: Two public-sector banks and one state-owned general insurance company to be lined up for disinvestment. FDI in insurance to be hiked to 74% from 49% now. There will also be Initial Public Offering for LIC.

3. No Populism, But Focus on Growth: Despite being a tough year for the aam admi, government has avoided giving any income tax relief. No increase in standard deduction, no raise in the tax slabs.

4. Health Gets Its Due: In a year when the world was ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, Union Government gives health the attention it merited. Health allocation jumped 137% to Rs 2,23,846 crore in 2021-22 compared with Rs 94,452 crore in 2020-21 that includes Rs 35,000 crore for the Covid-19 vaccine. Government has promised to provide further funds, if required.

5. [Bad Bank](#): After dithering for almost six years, the government has finally decided to set up an asset reconstruction company that will take over the bad loans of banks, giving them flexibility to finance the economic recovery.

6. Development Finance Institutions (DFI) Reborn: The idea was dead with most earlier DFIs including IDBI and ICICI turning into banks. To provide debt to long gestation projects, a new DFI with a capital of Rs 20,000 crore.

- The trouble in financing infrastructure in the recent past has been that such projects typically require long-term financing.
- Using public sector banks to finance such projects, as India did, led to the banks being straddled with huge NPAs.
- For one, such banks did not have the expertise to assess risk accurately. Moreover, regular banks faced an asset-liability mismatch — in other words, they accepted deposits (their liabilities) for a short term but extended loans (their assets) over a much longer term.
- The DFI proposed will have statutory backing, but will be professionally managed. Lending portfolio of Rs 5 lakh crore within three years.

7. Asset Monetisation : This is an ongoing exercise, where the government has not done much to inspire confidence. National Monetisation Pipeline of potential assets of NHAI, PGCIL, Railways, airports, warehouses, sports stadiums.

8. Highway Projects in Election Bound States: Four poll-bound states get major highway projects: Tamil Nadu (3,500 km – Rs 1.03 lakh crore), Kerala (1,100 km – Rs 65,000 crore), West Bengal (675 km – Rs 25,000 crore) and Assam (1,300 km – Rs 34,000 crore).

9. Strategic Disinvestment – Needs Political/ Bureaucratic Push: NITI Aayog asked to short list non-core PSUs for strategic sale. After a poor show in 2020-21, the government has estimated disinvestment receipts at Rs 1,75,000 crore.

10. Growth Vs Prudence – Tilting Towards Growth: Fiscal deficit estimated at 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2021-22; it is estimated to touch 9.5% in 2020-21. It will be brought down to 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26.

What about the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan? How has it influenced the Budget?

- The sum and substance of the Atmanirbhar Abhiyan is to promote domestic industry by either preventing imported goods (by raising import duties) from undermining domestic producers or helping domestic companies to source cheap imports (by reducing import duties).
- MSMEs and other user industries have been severely hit by a recent sharp rise in iron and steel prices. Therefore, government proposed reducing Customs duty uniformly to 7.5% on semis, flat, and long products of non-alloy, alloy, and stainless steels. Further, government revoked antidumping and Countervailing Duties on certain steel products. This allows companies to source cheap imports that acts as raw materials in their production process.
- Similarly, to help MSMEs in the domestic textile industry, government reduced the basic customs duty on goods like nylon chips, nylon fiber & yarn etc. that acts a raw materials for textile sector.
- For MSMEs in the leather industry, government withdrew the exemption on imports — in other words, make imports difficult — of certain kind of leathers as they are domestically produced in good quantity and quality, mostly by MSMEs.
- Similarly, government raised **customs duty on finished synthetic gem stones** to encourage their domestic processing.
- To benefit farmers, government proposed raising customs duty on cotton from nil to 10% and on raw silk and silk yarn from 10% to 15%
- Overall, with these steps the government hopes that the beleaguered MSMEs and the related informal workforce will receive a boost.

Will the Budget help in creating more employment?

- The upshot of the emerging Budget strategy is that the government would rather like to spend on building capital resources and in doing so “**crowd in**” **private investments**, which, in turn, will be the source of new jobs.
- But that is the logic on paper. In the real world, **job creation will take time**. For those who lost their jobs during the pandemic or those who could not get their first one, the outlook is still grainy.
- That’s because economic recovery — especially of the order which creates lots of jobs and quickly — still eludes India.
- In 2021-22, India will register fast economic growth but the fact is this will only make up for the output lost in 2020-21.
- It is significant that India was growing by just about 4% (in 2019-20) going into the Covid crisis. Growing at 7% or 8% coming out of it (that is 2022-23 onwards) is not a foregone conclusion.

Connecting the dots

- Offbudget Borrowing
 - [Fiscal Council: Why India needs it?](#)
-

[KAPILA campaign launched for Intellectual Property](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Intellectual Property

In news

- KAPILA campaign was in news recently.

Important value additions

KAPILA

- The Government launched a campaign namely Kalam Program for Intellectual Property Literacy and Awareness Campaign (KAPILA) for Intellectual Property Literacy and creating patent awareness on 15th October 2020.
- **Objectives:**
 1. creating awareness regarding Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Higher Education Institutions(HEIs),
 2. enabling of IP protection of inventions originating from faculty and students of HEIs,
 3. development of Credit Course on IPR,
 4. training program on IPR for faculty and students of HEIs and
 5. sensitization and development of a vibrant IP filing system.
- So far, total of 46,556 users have been registered for KAPILA.

Related articles:

- Objectives of India's IPR Policy: [Click here](#)
-

[MFIs: Digital and Physical Micro-lending](#)

Context: Micro-lending is in the news again for the wrong reasons – first is related to Assam and the second is related to Digital Micro Lending.

What is microfinance?

- Microfinance is a basis of financial services for entrepreneurs and small businesses deficient in contact with banking and associated services.
- The two key systems for the release of financial services to such customers include '**relationship-based banking**' for individual entrepreneurs and small businesses along with '**group-based models**' where several entrepreneurs come together to apply for loans and other services as a group.
- The interest rates charged by microfinance institutes (MFIs) are lower than those charged by normal banks.
- Usually, their area of operations of extending small loans are rural areas and among **low-income people** in urban areas.
- The model had its genesis as a **poverty alleviation tool**, focused on economic and social upliftment of the marginalised sections through lending of small amounts of money **without any collateral** to women for income-generating activities
- Lack of security and high operating costs are some of the major limitations faced by the banks while providing loans to poor people. These limitations led to the development of microfinance

in India as an alternative to provide loans to the poor with an aim to create **financial inclusion** and equality.

- MFIs act as **supplements to Banks** as they not only offer micro credit but they also provide other financial services like savings, insurance, remittance and non-financial services like individual counseling, training and support to start own business etc.

Salient Features of Microfinance

- Borrowers are from the low income group
- Loans are of small amount – micro loans
- Short duration loans
- Loans are offered without collaterals
- High frequency of repayment
- Loans are generally taken for income generation purpose

Microfinance in India

- **SEWA Cooperative Bank** was initiated in 1974 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, by Ela Bhatt which is now one of the first modern-day microfinance institutions of the country.
- MFIs in India exist as NGOs (registered as societies or trusts), Section 25 companies and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) offered financial services to the unbanked people, especially women and later decided to experiment with a very different model, which is now popularly known as **Self-help Groups (SHGs)**.
- Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), cooperative societies and other large lenders have played an important role in **providing refinance facility** to MFIs.
- Banks have also leveraged the Self-Help Group (SHGs) channel to provide direct credit to group borrowers.

Do You Know?

- MFI loan portfolio has reached Rs 2.31 lakh crore at the end of FY2020, touching the lives of 5.89 crore customers.
- Some of the MFIs, that qualify certain criteria and are non-deposit taking entities, come under RBI wings for Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) Regulation and supervision. These “Last Mile Financiers” are known as NBFC MFI.
- The objective of covering them under RBI was to make these NBFC MFIs healthy and accountable.

What is the issue of MFI in Assam?

- Assam government passed a bill which barred micro-finance institutions (MFIs) from lending to vulnerable sections of society. It was a response to a backlash against MFIs.
- A large number of borrowers working in tea plantations had taken loans from MFIs. RBI noted that the **economic slowdown** in tea plantations and [anti-Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act](#) disruptions led to rise in the delinquencies.
- MFIs started sending collectors for recoveries to the borrowers, leading first to the backlash and then the political response in terms of the bill.
- In 2010, the Andhra Pradesh government also passed similar legislation like the one in Assam against MFIs leading to a crisis in the industry.

- Though the scale of lending is lesser in Assam and is unlikely to drive MFIs to a crisis, finance is not about scale alone but interconnectedness of the players.

What is the issue with Digital Micro-lending?

- Digital lending platforms have mushroomed and there are criticisms of high interest rates, hidden charges, unacceptable recovery methods and misuse of data of borrowers.
- RBI expressed caution against digital lending platforms and constituted a working group to study both regulated and unregulated digital lending so that an appropriate regulatory approach can be put in place.
- Fintechs will soon be criticised for being Shylocks and loan sharks. Pre-2008 crisis, financiers were the cynosure of all eyes and post-crisis they were branded as devils of the game.

Way Ahead

- In 1870s, a similar backlash emerged in Poona and Ahmednagar districts of the Bombay presidency. The agriculture boom in the early 1860s led farmers to take loans from moneylenders. As the boom went bust, farmers were unable to pay these loans. The moneylenders took away land placed as collateral, fuelling protests and riots.
- Government responded by passing the Deccan Agricultural Relief Act in 1879 that barred the arrest of the agriculturist-debtor and saved his immovable property from attachment and sale, unless specifically pledged. However, this and other related legislations enacted did not have the desired impact.
- Therefore, government of the day must learn from the previous incidents before passing laws that restrict the working of MFIs. One should go for an honest review of the entire issue by engaging with all the stakeholders involved in this sector.

Connecting the dots

- Challenges with MFI and need for Social Impact Monitoring: Click [here](#)
-

[RBI to give small investors direct access to Government Securities](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy

In news

- The RBI has informed that it will give small investors direct access to its government securities (G-sec) trading platform.

Key takeaways

- Retail investors can directly open their gilt accounts with RBI, and trade in government securities.
- It is being described as a major structural reform.
- The two key categories are:
 1. treasury bills – short-term instruments that mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and
 2. dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years.

Do you know?

- A "**Gilt Account**" means an **account** opened and maintained for holding Government securities, by an entity or a person including a person resident outside India' with a "Custodian" permitted by the RBI.
- G-secs are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.

Important value additions

- Like bank fixed deposits, g-secs are not tax-free.
- They are generally considered the safest form of investment because they are backed by the government.
- So, the risk of default is almost nil.
- However, they are subject to fluctuations in interest rates. So, they are not completely risk-free.

[The Central Bank of Sri Lanka \(CBSL\) settled a \\$400 million currency swap facility from the RBI](#)

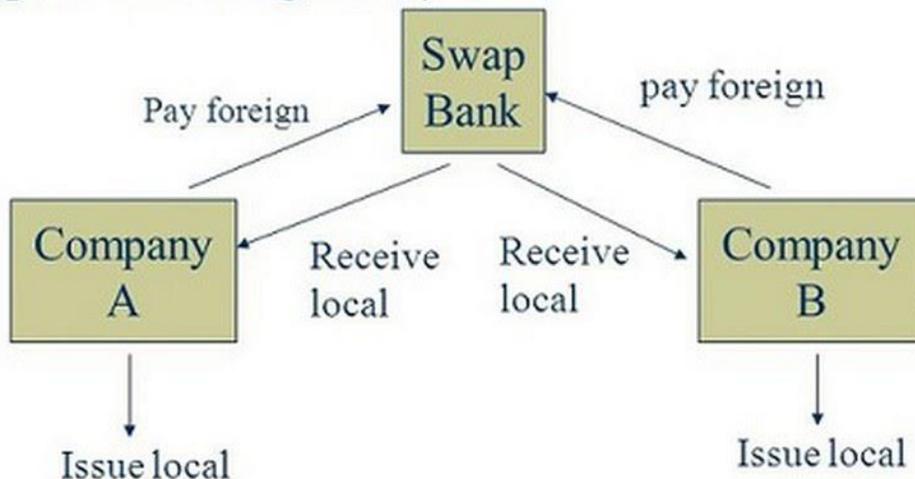
Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – International relations & GS – III - Economy

In news

- The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) settled a \$400 million currency swap facility from the RBI.
- The two countries had agreed upon meeting the terms.

Currency Swaps

Typically, a company should have a **comparative advantage** in borrowing locally



Key takeaways

- The CBSL obtained the swap facility on July 31, 2020, for an initial period of three months, to cope with the severe economic impact of the pandemic.
- Subsequently, the RBI provided a three-month rollover at CBSL's request, until February 1, 2021.
- A further extension would require Sri Lanka to have a successfully negotiated staff-level agreement for an IMF programme, which Sri Lanka does not have at present.

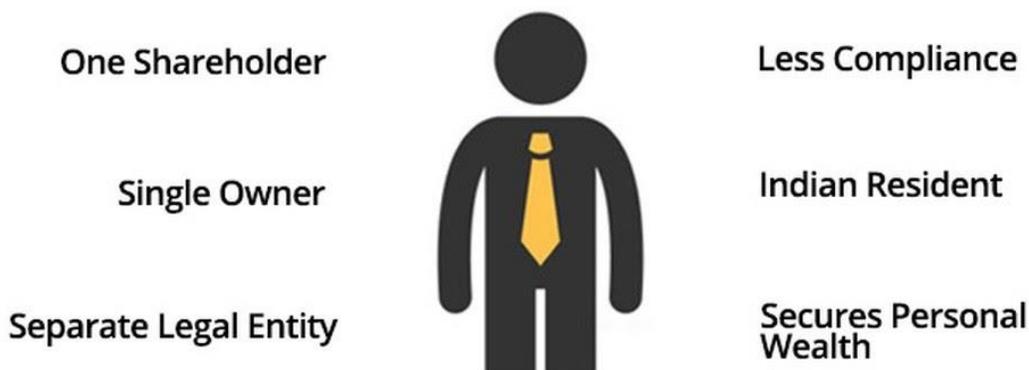
Important value additions

- Currency swap agreements involve trade in local currencies, where countries pay for imports and exports at pre-determined rates of exchange without the involvement of a third country currency like the US dollar.
 - It reduces the risk of volatility against the third currency and does away with the charges involved in multiple currency exchanges.
-

One-person Companies and why we need it

Context: In her Budget speech, Union Finance announced measures to ease norms on setting up one-person companies (OPCs).

Characteristics of OPC



What is an one-person company?

- As the name suggests, an one-person company is a company that can be formed by just one person as a shareholder.
- These companies can be contrasted with **private companies, which require a minimum of two members** to get going.
- However, for all practical purposes, these are **like private companies**.
- However, **the regulatory procedures** for single-person company is much more **simplified** in comparison to a normal company
- It is not as if there was no scope for an individual with aspirations in business prior to the introduction of OPC as a concept.

- As an individual, a person could get into business through a **sole proprietorship mode**, and this is a path that is still available.

What is the difference between single-person and sole proprietorship company?

- A single-person company and sole proprietorship differ significantly in how they are perceived in the eyes of law.
- For single-person company, the person and the company are **considered separate legal entities**.
- In sole proprietorship, the owner and the business are considered the same.
- This has an important implication when it comes to the **liability of the individual member or owner**. In a one-person company, the sole owner's liability is limited to that person's investment.
- In a sole proprietorship set-up, however, the owner has unlimited liability as they are not considered different legal entities.

Is this a new idea?

- No. Such a concept already exists in many countries.
- In India, the concept was introduced in the **Companies Act of 2013**.
- Its introduction was based on the suggestions of the **J.J. Irani Committee Report on Company Law**, which submitted its recommendations in 2005.
- Pointing out that there was a need for a framework for small enterprises, the committee said small companies would contribute significantly to the Indian economy, but because of their size, they could not be burdened with the same level of compliance requirements as large public-listed companies.
- The report, while talking about **giving entrepreneurial instincts of the people an outlet in the age of information technology**, said, "It would not be reasonable to expect that every entrepreneur who is capable of developing his ideas and participating in the marketplace should do it through an association of persons."
- While making a case for one-person companies, the committee also said, "Such an entity may be provided with a simpler regime through exemptions so that the **single entrepreneur is not compelled to fritter away his time, energy and resources on procedural matters.**"

What was the follow up on the committee report?

- The law on one-person companies that took shape, as a result, **exempted such companies from many procedural requirements**, and, in some cases, provided relaxations.
- For instance, such a company does not need to conduct an annual general meeting, which is a requirement for other companies. A one-person company also does not require signatures of both its company secretary and director on its annual returns. One is enough.
- There was, however, **criticism** that some rules governing a one-person company were restrictive in nature. This year's Union Budget has dealt with some of these concerns.

How many OPCs does India have?

- The number of OPCs was 2,238 (out of a total of about 1 million companies) as on March 31, 2015.
- According to data compiled by the Monthly Information Bulletin on Corporate Sector, there were 34,235 one-person companies out of a total number of about 1.3 million active companies in India, as on December 31, 2020.

- Data also show that more than half of the OPCs are in business services.

What has changed for these companies with the new measures in this year's Budget?

- One of the measures that the Finance Minister has announced in the Budget pertains to the **removal of restrictions on paid-up capital and turnover.**
- The 2014 rule, which stated that a one-person company would cease to have that status once its paid-up share capital exceeds ₹50 lakh or its average turnover for the preceding three years exceeds ₹2 crore, has been lifted.
- The proposals also include, “reducing the residency limit for an Indian citizen to set up an OPC from 182 days to 120 days and also **allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to incorporate OPCs in India.**” Earlier, only an Indian citizen and an Indian resident could start a single-person company.
- These changes come alongside a proposal to **increase the capital base and turnover threshold for companies that can be classified as ‘small’,** which means they can enjoy easy compliance requirements a bit longer.
- The capital base limit has been increased from ₹50 lakh to ₹2 crore, and the **turnover limit has been increased from ₹2 crore to ₹20 crore.**

Conclusion

- The government's proposal is seen as a move to encourage corporatisation of small businesses.
 - It is useful for entrepreneurs to have this option while deciding to start a business.
-

Fifteenth Finance Commission (15th FC)

Context: In Nov 2017, this 15th Finance Commission was set up. The recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission will cover a period of five years starting from 1st April 2020. This Commission was headed by Shri **N.K.Singh**, former Member of Parliament and former Secretary to the Government of India.

The commission was required to submit two reports, one for 2020-21 and the second covering the period of five years from 2021-22 to 2025-26

Basis for extension

- First, the abolition of Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir required the Commission to make an estimation excluding the Union Territory.
- Second, the deceleration in growth and low inflation has substantially slowed down the nominal GDP growth making projections for medium term risky.
- Finally, poor revenue performance of tax collection and more particularly Goods and Services Tax combined with the fact that the compensation agreement to the loss of revenue to the States was effective only two years of the period of 15FC posed uncertainties

If not for extension, making medium-term projections in the current scenario would have entailed serious risks.

For Interim Report on 2020-21: Click [here](#)

Key Points of the 15th Finance Commission report for 2021-26 tabled in Parliament are

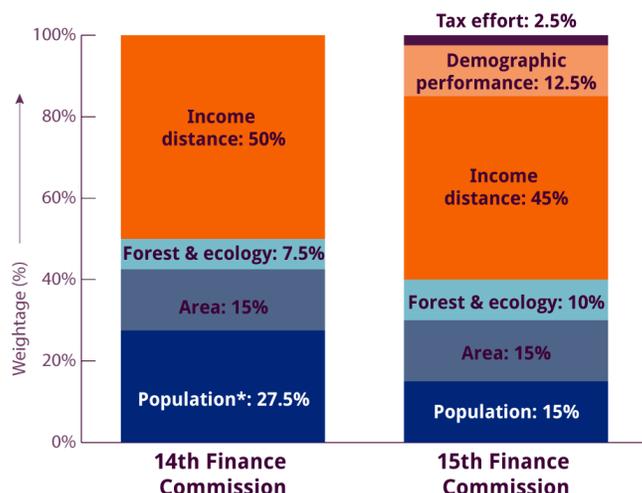
1. Vertical Devolution -Devolution of Taxes of the Union to States-

- It has recommended maintaining the vertical devolution at 41% - the same as in its [interim report](#) for 2020-21.
- It is at the same level of 42% of the divisible pool as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission.
- It has made the required adjustment of about 1% due to the changed status of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir
- In XVFC's assessment, gross tax revenues for 5-year period is expected to be 135.2 lakh crore. Out of that, Divisible pool (after deducting cesses and surcharges & cost of collection) is estimated to be 103 lakh crore.
- States' share at 41 per cent of divisible pool comes to 42.2 lakh crore for 2021-26 period.
- Including total grants of Rs. 10.33 lakh crore (details later) and tax devolution of Rs. 42.2 lakh crore, aggregate transfers to States is estimated to remain at around 50.9 per cent of the divisible pool during 2021-26 period.
- Total XVFC transfers (devolution + grants) constitutes about 34 per cent of estimated Gross Revenue Receipts of the Union leaving adequate fiscal space for the Union to meet its resource requirements and spending obligations on national development priorities.

2. Horizontal Devolution (Allocation Between the States):

- For horizontal devolution, it has suggested 12.5% weightage to demographic performance, 45% to income, 15% each to population and area, 10% to forest and ecology and 2.5% to tax and fiscal efforts.
- On horizontal devolution, while XVFC agreed that the Census 2011 population data better represents the present need of States, to be fair to, as well as reward, the States which have done better on the demographic front, XVFC has assigned a 12.5 per cent weight to the demographic performance criterion.
- XVFC has re-introduced tax effort criterion to reward fiscal performance

Revenue-sharing formulas in the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions



3. Revenue Deficit Grants to States:

- Revenue deficit grants emanate from the requirement to meet the fiscal needs of the States on their revenue accounts that remain to be met, even after considering their own tax and non-tax resources and tax devolution to them.
- Revenue Deficit is defined as the difference between revenue or current expenditure and revenue receipts, that includes tax and non-tax.
- It has recommended post-devolution revenue deficit grants amounting to about Rs. 2.94 lakh crores over the five-year period ending FY26.
- The number of states qualifying for the revenue deficit grants decreases from 17 in FY22, the first year of the award period to 6 in FY26, the last year.

4. Performance Based Incentives and Grants to States:

These grants revolve around four main themes.

- The first is the social sector, where it has focused on health and education.
- Second is the rural economy, where it has focused on agriculture and the maintenance of rural roads.
- The rural economy plays a significant role in the country as it encompasses two-thirds of the country's population, 70% of the total workforce and 46% of national income.
- Third, governance and administrative reforms under which it has recommended grants for judiciary, statistics and aspirational districts and blocks.
- Fourth, it has developed a performance-based incentive system for the power sector, which is not linked to grants but provides an important, additional borrowing window for States.

5. Fiscal Space for Centre:

- Total 15th Finance Commission transfers (devolution + grants) constitutes about 34% of estimated Gross Revenue Receipts to the Union, leaving adequate fiscal space to meet its resource requirements and spending obligations on national development priorities.
- Provided range for fiscal deficit and debt path of both the Union and States.
- Additional borrowing room to States based on performance in power sector reforms.
- XVFC has recognised that the FRBM Act needs a major restructuring and recommended that the time-table for defining and achieving debt sustainability may be examined by a **High-powered Inter-governmental Group**.
- This High-powered Inter-Governmental Group could also be tasked to oversee the implementation of the 15th Finance Commission's diverse recommendations.
- State Governments may explore formation of independent public debt management cells which will chart their borrowing programme efficiently.

6. Grants to Local Governments:

- The total size of the grant to local governments should be Rs. 4.3 lakh crore for the period 2021-26.
- Of these total grants, Rs. 8,000 crore is performance-based grants for incubation of new cities and Rs. 450 crore is for shared municipal services.
- A sum of Rs. 2.3 lakh crore is earmarked for rural local bodies, Rs.1.2 lakh crore for urban local bodies and Rs. 70,051 crore for health grants through local governments.

- Urban local bodies have been categorised into two groups, based on population, and different norms have been used for flow of grants to each, based on their specific needs and aspirations.
- Basic grants are proposed only for cities/towns having a population of less than a million. For Million-Plus cities, 100 per cent of the grants are performance-linked through the Million-Plus Cities Challenge Fund (MCF)
- MCF amount is linked to the performance of these cities in improving their air quality and meeting the service level benchmarks for urban drinking water supply, sanitation and solid waste management.

7. Health

- XVFC has recommend that health spending by States should be increased to more than 8 per cent of their budget by 2022.
- Given the inter-State disparity in the availability of medical doctors, it is essential to constitute an All India Medical and Health Service as is envisaged under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 1951.
- The total grants-in-aid support to the health sector over the award period works out to Rs. 1 lakh crore, which is 10.3 per cent of the total grants-in-aid recommended by XVFC. The grants for the health sector will be unconditional.
- XVFC has recommend health grants aggregating to Rs. 70,051 crore for urban health and wellness centres (HWCs), building-less sub centre, PHCs, CHCs, block level public health units, support for diagnostic infrastructure for the primary healthcare activities and conversion of rural sub centres and PHCs to HWCs. These grants will be released to the local governments.

8. Defence and Internal Security

- The Union Government may constitute in the Public Account of India, a dedicated non-lapsable fund, Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS). The total indicative size of the proposed MFDIS over the period 2021-26 is Rs. 2.3 lakh crore.

9. Disaster Risk Management

- Mitigation Funds should be set up at both the national and State levels, in line with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act.
- The Mitigation Fund should be used for those local level and community-based interventions which reduce risks and promote environment-friendly settlements and livelihood practices.
- XVFC has recommended the total corpus of Rs.1.6 lakh crore for States for disaster management for the duration of 2021-26, of which the Union's share is Rs. 1.2 lakh crore and States' share is Rs. 37,552 crore.
- XVFC has recommended six earmarked allocations for a total amount of Rs. 11,950 crore for certain priority areas, namely, two under the NDRF (Expansion and Modernisation of Fire Services and Resettlement of Displaced People affected by Erosion) and four under the NDMF (Catalytic Assistance to Twelve Most Drought-prone States, Managing Seismic and Landslide Risks in Ten Hill States, Reducing the Risk of Urban Flooding in Seven Most Populous Cities and Mitigation Measures to Prevent Erosion).

Connecting the dots

- N K Singh Committee report on FRBM review

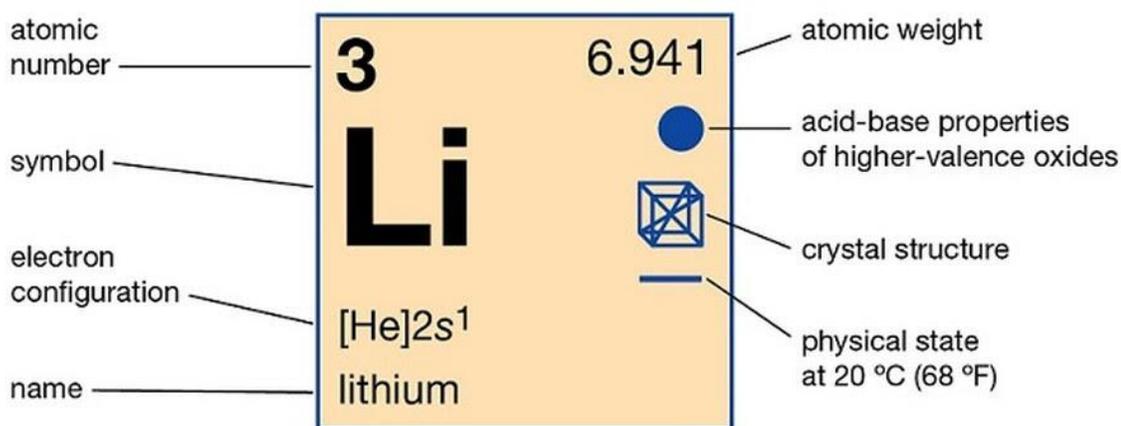
Lithium Reserves in Karnataka

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

In news

- Atomic Minerals Directorate issues clarification on media reports about Lithium Reserves in Karnataka.

Lithium



 Alkali metals	 Solid
 Body-centred cubic	 Strongly basic

Key takeaways

- Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD), a constituent unit of the Department of Atomic Energy and Geological Survey of India are two agencies that are involved in mineral exploration.
- Lithium is a key element for new technologies.
- It finds its use in ceramics, glass, telecommunication, and aerospace industries.
- The thermonuclear application makes Lithium a “Prescribed substance” under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 which permits AMD for exploration of Lithium in various geological domains of the country.
- Recently, news items on Lithium exploration and resource of Allapatna – Marlagalla sector, Mandya district, Karnataka have been published in various media.
- In some media, the estimates of lithium metal have been quoted to be as high as 14,100 tonnes in a small patch of the surveyed area in Mandya district.
- The Directorate has clarified that exploration efforts have so far established ~1600 tonnes of lithium in the inferred category (low level of confidence).

Privatisation of Banks

Context: In the [Union Budget for 2021-22](#), the government has announced taking up the privatisation of two public sector banks (in addition to IDBI Bank) and one general insurance company in the upcoming fiscal.

Laying down a clear policy roadmap for disinvestment, the government has identified four strategic sectors in which it will have bare minimum presence.

1. Atomic energy, space and defence;
2. Transport and telecommunications;
3. Power, petroleum, coal and other minerals;
4. Banking, insurance and financial services.

All CPSEs in other sectors will be privatised.

Do You Know?

- PSU banks are under dual control, with the RBI supervising the banking operations and the Finance Ministry handling ownership issues.
- Many committees had proposed bringing down the government stake in public banks below 51% — the Narasimham Committee proposed 33% and the P J Nayak Committee suggested below 50%.

Which are the two PSBs that will be Privatised?

- Currently, there are **ten nationalised banks in addition to IDBI Bank and SBI**.
- While the government is unlikely to touch the top three including SBI, smaller and middle-level banks are likely to be privatised.
- Government has not disclosed which two banks will be privatised this fiscal.
- The two banks that will now be privatised will be selected through a process in which NITI Aayog will make recommendations, which will be considered by a core group of secretaries on disinvestment and then the Alternative Mechanism (or Group of Ministers).

Reasons for Privatising Public Sector Banks

- **Previous reform measures have not yielded results:** Years of capital injections and governance reforms have not been able to improve the financial position of in public sector banks significantly. Many of them have higher levels of stressed assets than private banks, and also lag the latter on profitability, market capitalisation and dividend payment record.
- **Aligned with Long Term Goal:** Privatisation of two public sector banks will set the ball rolling for a long-term project that envisages only a handful of state-owned banks, with the rest either consolidated with strong banks or privatised.
- **Reduces Government Burden:** Privatisation will free up the government, the majority owner, from continuing to provide equity support to the banks year after year. The government front-loaded Rs 70,000 crore into government-run banks in September 2019, Rs 80,000 crore in in FY18, and Rs 1.06 lakh crore in FY19 through recapitalisation bonds.
- **Rationalisation of Banks in Post-COVID Scenario:** After the Covid-related regulatory relaxations are lifted, banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses. This would mean the government would again need to inject equity into weak public sector banks. The government is trying to strengthen the strong banks and also minimise their numbers through privatisation.

- **Changed Approach to Financial Sector Problems:** Privatisation and proposal of setting up an asset reconstruction company entirely owned by banks, underline an approach of finding market-led solutions to challenges in the financial sector.
- **Private Participation promotes innovation in market:** Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36% in 2020 from 21.26% in 2015, while public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% from 74.28%. They have expanded the market share through new innovative products, latest technology, and better services.

What are the challenges associated with increasing Privatisation of Banks?

1. Private banks are not without faults

- In the last couple of years, some questions have arisen over the performance of private banks, especially on governance issues.
- ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar was sacked for allegedly extending dubious loans.
- Yes Bank CEO Rana Kapoor was not given extension by the RBI and now faces investigations by various agencies.
- Lakshmi Vilas Bank faced operational issues and was recently merged with DBS Bank of Singapore.
- Former Axis Bank MD Shikha Sharma too was denied an extension.
- Moreover, when the RBI ordered an asset quality review of banks in 2015, many private sector banks, including Yes Bank, were found under-reporting NPAs.

2. Dangers of private banks repeating the mistakes of 1960s

- There is widespread perception that the private sector then was not sufficiently aware of its larger social responsibilities and was more concerned with profit.
- This made private banks unwilling to diversify their loan portfolios as this would raise transaction costs and reduce profits.
- The expansion of branches was mostly in urban areas, and rural and semi-urban areas continued to go unserved

Conclusion

The initial plan of the government was to privatise four. Depending on the success with the first two, the government is likely to go for divestment in another two or three banks in the next financial year.

Connecting the dots

- Corporates as Banks: Click [here](#)

[Arbitration And Conciliation \(Amendment\) Bill 2021](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Economy

In news

- Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill 2021 was passed recently in the Lok Sabha.

Key takeaways

- It seeks to amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.
 - It contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration.
 - It defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.
 - It specifies that a stay on the arbitral award can be provided if the court is satisfied that the relevant arbitration agreement was induced by fraud or corruption.
 - This change will be effective from October 23, 2015
 - It removes the Schedule for arbitrators.
 - The qualifications, experience, and norms for accreditation of arbitrators will be specified under the regulations.
-

[PLI Scheme For Telecom And Networking Products](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Manufacturing; Economy

In news

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Telecom and Networking Products (T&N Products) with a budgetary outlay of Rs. 12,195 crore.

Key takeaways

- The Scheme intends to promote the manufacture of T&N Products in India.
- It proposes a financial incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract investments in the target segments in order to encourage Make in India.
- The scheme will also encourage exports.
- There will be a minimum investment threshold of Rs.10 crore for MSME with incentives from 7% to 4 % and Rs. 100 crore for others with incentives from 6% to 4 % over 5 year above Base Year.
- The applicants with higher investments than specified threshold under MSME and Non MSME categories will be selected through transparent process

Related articles:

- Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme approved for 10 more sectors: [Click here](#)
 - PLI Schemes For Promoting Domestic Manufacturing Of Bulk Drugs & Medical Devices revised: [Click here](#)
-

[JB Ekka Committee to be formed](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Economy

In news

- A one-man committee under Principal Secretary Dr. JB Ekka will be formed for equal wages of small tea workers of Assam.

Key takeaways

- Also, the Assam government has announced the increase in wage of [tea](#) garden workers from Rs 167 to Rs 217 per day.
- The tea garden managements pay the wages which is fixed by the government.

- The tea tribe community of Assam also faces exploitation, economic backwardness, poor health conditions and low literacy rates.
- In the Union Budget 2020-21, Rs 1,000 crore was announced for the welfare of tea workers in Assam and West Bengal.

Related articles:

- [Need of developing backward and forward linkages to improve plantation products' exports.](#)
 - [Highway projects in Assam](#)
-

[RBI releases the Annual Report of the Ombudsman Schemes](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Economy

In news

- The [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) released the Annual Report of the Ombudsman Schemes for 2019-20 recently.
- RBI has 3 Ombudsmen- Banking, [Non-Banking Finance Company \(i.e. NBFC\)](#) and digital transactions.
- A common man can approach these Ombudsmen for their grievances.
- These Schemes are being merged and integrated into a single scheme which will be rolled out from June 2021.
- There was an increase of around 65% in the receipt of complaints.
- 92% of them have been resolved.

Related articles:

- [Tougher regulatory framework for NBFCs](#)
 - [Risk-based internal audit norms for NBFCs, UCBs introduced](#)
-

[Uber drivers to be considered workers and not freelance contractors: UK Supreme Court](#)

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

In news

- The UK Supreme Court ruled that Uber drivers were to be considered workers and not freelance contractors.
- This order shall make them eligible for all employment related benefits such as minimum wage, annual leaves, and insurance.

Key takeaways

- With this ruling, Uber and other service providing platforms could also potentially face legal and regulatory challenges in India.
- Besides, Indian budget 2021-22 has mandated that the law on minimum wages would now apply to workers of all categories including those associated with platforms such as Uber.
- Such workers would now be covered by the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC).

Important value additions

- In November 2020, the government had come out with specific norms for apps such as Uber and Ola.
- Under them, these apps could charge a maximum of 20% commission per ride from driver partners, while also capping the total number of working hours per day at 12.
- Maximum fare is also provided that these platforms could charge customers even during high demand peak hours.
- They would have to provide drivers with insurance. ce

Do you know?

- A gig economy is a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organizations hire independent workers for short-term commitments.

Related articles:

- Gig Economy and Proposition-22: [Click here](#)
- The gig economy: [Click here](#)
- Gig Workers and its skewed terms: [Click here](#)

[Governing Council of NITI Aayog](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Economy

In news

- The sixth meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog was held recently.

Way forward

The NITI Aayog meeting had six key issues on its agenda

- Making India a manufacturing powerhouse
- Re-imagining agriculture
- Improving physical infra
- Accelerating human resources development
- Improving service delivery at the grassroots level
- Health and nutrition

 We have to honour this enthusiasm of the private sector and give it as much opportunity in the Aatman-irbhar Bharat campaign

NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER



Key takeaways

- Governing Council consists of Chief Ministers of all states and Lt. Governors of Union Territories.
- The Agenda for the Sixth Council Meeting comprised the following items:
 1. Making India a Manufacturing Powerhouse
 2. Reimagining Agriculture
 3. Improving Physical Infrastructure
 4. Accelerating Human Resources Development
 5. Improving Service Delivery at Grassroots Level
 6. Health and Nutrition

Artisan-based SFURTI Clusters inaugurated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Economy

In news

- 50 artisan-based **SFURTI** clusters, spread over 18 States were recently inaugurated.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of MSME
- Artisans shall be supported in the traditional segments of muslin, khadi, coir, handlooms, woodcraft, pottery, carpet weaving, agro-processing, etc.

Important value additions

- **Objective of Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI):** To organize traditional industries and artisans into clusters to make them competitive and increase their income.

- SFURTI clusters are of two types:
 1. Regular Cluster (500 artisans) with Government assistance of up to Rs.2.5 crore
 2. Major Cluster (more than 500 artisans) with Government assistance up to Rs.5 crore
- The artisans are organized into SPVs which can be:
 1. a Society registered under Societies (Registration) Act, 1860,
 2. a Co-operative Society under an appropriate statute,
 3. a Producer Company under Section 465 (1) of Companies Act, 2013 (18 of 2013),
 4. a Section 8 Company under the Companies Act, 2013 (18 of 2013) or (v) a Trust.

Related articles:

- [Guidelines to Support Artisans in Beekeeping & Pottery Activities](#)

[India Toy Fair 2021](#)

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

In news

- The Indian Prime Minister will inaugurate The India Toy Fair 2021 on 27th February.

Key takeaways

- **Aim:** To boost toy manufacturing in India.
- It shall bring together all stakeholders including buyers, sellers, students, teachers, designers etc.
- Sustainable linkages shall be created which will encourage dialogue for the overall development of the industry.

Do you know?

- **'Toycathon'** was recently established for innovative toys/games concepts.
- Toycathon-2021 is conceived to challenge India's innovative minds to conceptualize novel Toy and Games based on Bharatiya civilization, history, culture, mythology and ethos.

[Integrated Bamboo Treatment Plant inaugurated](#)

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

In news

- Integrated Bamboo Treatment Plant was inaugurated in the North East Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC) in Byrnihat near Guwahati, Assam.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)

Key takeaways

- The plant is based on vacuum-pressure-impregnation technique.
- **Funded by:** [National Bamboo Mission \(NBM\)](#) and North Eastern Council (NEC).
- This is an initiative of the central government to make India self-reliant in bamboo industry and create employment in this sector.

Important value additions

- The Union Territory of J & K will set up [three Bamboo Clusters](#) through collaboration from NECBDC.
- Under these clusters, Agarbatti, baskets and charcoal shall be produced respectively.
- Home grown bamboo is exempt from the purview of the 100 year old Indian Forest Act.
- During the COVID-pandemic, the import duty on Agarbatti coming from other countries has been hiked to nearly 35%.
- This will discourage import of bamboo made Aggarbatties and encourage domestic production.

Related articles:

[Bamboo shoots can be among cheapest immunity boosters](#)

[Bamboo Clusters launched](#)

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AGRICULTURE

[Kritagya: Agri India Hackathon](#)

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

In news

- Union Minister of Agriculture recently informed Lok Sabha about Agri India Hackathon.

Important value additions

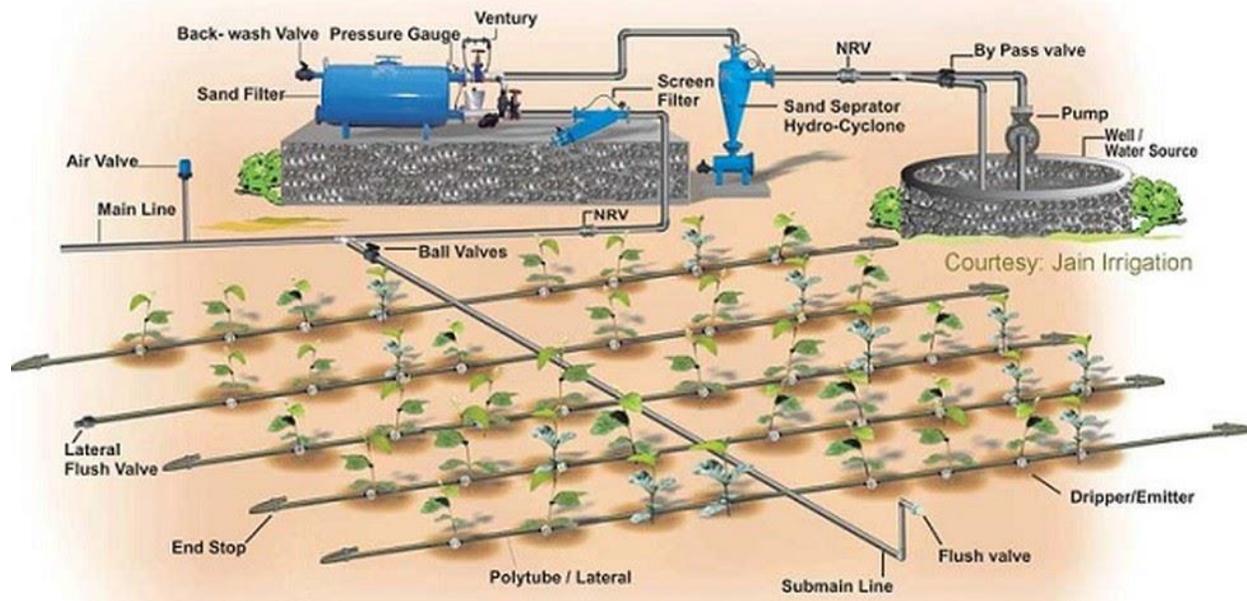
- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has started organising KRITAGYA- a National level hackathon in August 2020 to promote innovation in agriculture and allied sectors in the country.
 - The advantages of organising Agri-Hackathon are to allow the students along with faculties, innovators for showcasing their innovative approaches & technologies in agriculture and allied sectors.
 - ICAR has also put in place an Institutional mechanism through Research Institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and Agriculture Universities (AUs) to address the problems being faced by the farming sector.
-

[‘Per Drop More Crop’](#)

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

In news

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW) is implementing a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of ‘Per Drop More Crop’ component of ‘Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY-PDMC)’ from 2015-16 in all the States of the country.



Key takeaways

- It focuses on enhancing water use efficiency at farm level through Micro Irrigation viz. Drip and Sprinkler irrigation systems.
- Besides promoting Micro Irrigation, this component also supports micro level water storage or water conservation/management activities to supplement source creation for Micro Irrigation.
- Efforts are being made to converge 'Per Drop More Crop' Scheme with Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY), Namami Gange Districts, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Surakshaevem Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM), Water Harvesting Structures through Watershed Development component of PMKSY to propagate micro irrigation intensively
- With a view to provide impetus to the Micro Irrigation in the country, the Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF) with a corpus of Rs. 5000 Crore was created with NABARD during 2018-19.
- The Government provides 3% interest subvention on loans extended to State Govt. under MIF.

Important value additions

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)

- PMKSY is a centrally sponsored scheme
- **Launched in:** 2015
- **Motto:** Har Khet Ko Paani
- **Objectives:** (1) To expand cultivated areas with assured irrigation, reduce wastage of water and improve water use efficiency; (2) To create protective irrigation by harnessing rainwater at micro level; (3) To enhance recharge of aquifers

Related articles:

- Mobile Application for Geo Tagging launched by Ministry of Jal Shakti: [Click here](#)

Central Research Institute In Kalahandi For Soyabean

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Agriculture

In news

- The Union Minister of Agriculture informed Rajya Sabha about the setting up a Central Research Institute in Kalahandi for Soyabean.

Key takeaways

- The Kalahandi district of Odisha produces Soybean on a very limited scale.
- The ICAR has established a national-level research Institute on Soybean in 1987 namely, ICAR-Indian Institute of Soybean Research, Indore (Madhya Pradesh) to conduct basic and strategic research on the crop.
- Besides this, ICAR is also implementing an All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on Soybean since 1967 in association with the State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) to develop location-specific high yielding varieties and production technologies required to increase Soybean production in the country.
- The ICAR-AICRP on Soybean has one voluntary center at Regional Research & Technology Transfer Station, Bhawanipatna (Kalahandi) under the Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology, Bhubaneswar.
- This station is undertaking need-based and location-specific research on Soybean for hot & moist sub-humid climate of Odisha comprising of Kalahandi, Bolangir, and Koraput.

Important value additions

- The soybean or soya bean (*Glycine max*) is a species of legume native to East Asia, widely grown for its edible bean.
 - Traditional unfermented food uses of soybeans include soy milk, from which tofu and tofu skin are made.
 - Soybeans contain significant amounts of phytic acid, dietary minerals, and B vitamins.
 - Soy vegetable oil, used in the food and industrial applications, is another product of processing the soybean crop.
 - Soybean is the most important protein source for feed farm animals, which in turn, yields animal protein for human consumption.
 - **Cultivation conditions:** Climates with hot summers, with optimum growing conditions in mean temperatures of 20 to 30 °C; temperatures of below 20 °C and over 40 °C stunt growth significantly.
 - They can grow in a wide range of soils, with optimum growth in moist alluvial soils with good organic content.
 - Soybeans, like most legumes, perform nitrogen fixation by establishing a symbiotic relationship with the bacterium *Bradyrhizobium japonicum*.
-

Parliament informed about Agricultural Mechanization

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

In news

- The government of India informed Parliament about the initiatives to Promote Farm Mechanization.

Key takeaways

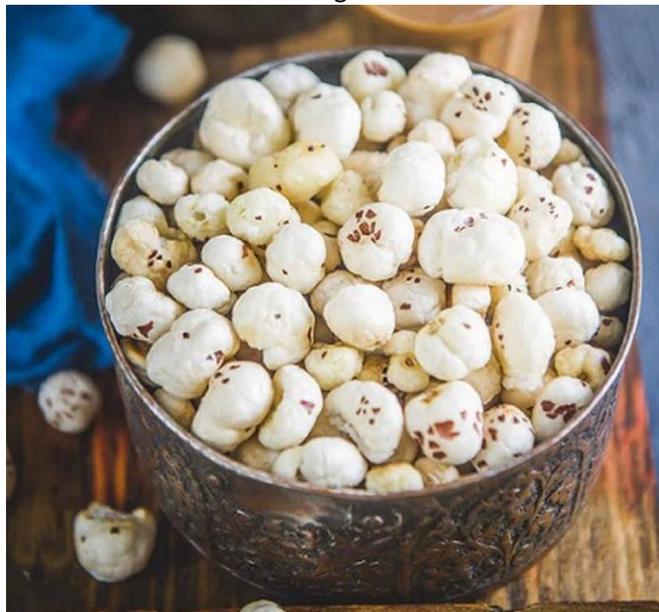
- A special dedicated scheme 'Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)' has been introduced by the Government of India in 2014-15.
 - **Aim:** To make farm machines accessible and affordable for the small and marginal farmers (SMFs) through the establishment of Custom Hiring Centers(CHCs), creating Hubs for hi-tech & high-value farm equipment and Farm Machinery Banks.
 - Distribution of various subsidized agricultural equipment and machines to individual farmers is also one of the activities under the scheme.
 - For 2021-22 Rs. 1050 crore budget has been allocated for SMAM which is higher than the last year.
 - **Significance:** Agricultural mechanization is crucial in the agriculture sector as it contributes towards improving the efficiency of the inputs used in crop production thereby also increasing the productivity of crops.
-

[National Research Centre For Makhana](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Agriculture

In news

- Union Minister of Agriculture informed Lok Sabha about National Research Centre for Makhana.



Key takeaways

- ICAR-National Research Centre (NRC) for Makhana, Darbhanga (Bihar) was sanctioned by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Govt. of India, as a new scheme during the

9th Five Year Plan period (1997–2002) for Conservation, Research & Development of the Makhana crop.

- However, during the 10th plan period (2002-2007), the NRC for Makhana was merged and brought under the administrative control of ICAR-Research Complex for Eastern Region (RCER), Patna, without changing the mandate.
- Darbhanga in particular and Mithila, in general, is the major Makhana producing region in the country.

Important value additions

- In India, makhana cultivation takes place mainly in West Bengal, Bihar, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and UP.
- But, Bihar alone is the largest producer of Makhana with 90 percent of overall production across the world.
- It belongs to the Nymphaeaceae family.
- It is a perennial plant.
- It grows in stagnant water like ponds, swamps, and wetlands in the tropical climatic areas very much similar to the lotus.

Effects of Excessive Use Of Fertilizer

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

In news

- Investigations carried out over five decades have indicated that continuous use of nitrogenous fertilizer alone had harmful effects on soil health and crop productivity.
- Micronutrients were also becoming deficient.

Key takeaways

Steps taken by the government

- National Mission on Soil Health Card launched to promote soil test based balanced and judicious fertilizer application
- Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) promotes organic farming.
- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCD-NER) also promotes organic farming.
- Farmers being educated on all these aspects through Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and agricultural universities.

Related articles:

- Kiwis Of Ziro Valley: [Click here](#)

Seaweeds Mission launched for commercial farming of seaweeds

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

In news

- Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC) has launched a Seaweed Mission.
- **Objective:** Commercial farming of seaweeds and its processing for value addition towards boosting national economy.

The Mission shall undertake following activities:

- Establishing model demonstration farms over one hectare for cultivation of economically important seaweeds in nearshore and onshore along the Indian coasts.
- Establishment of seaweed nurseries for supplying seed material for large scale farming
- Onshore cultivation for (i) Seedling supply facility (ii) Seaweed cultivation for processing
- Setting up of processing plant for production of plant growth stimulants (sap) and industrially important cell wall polysaccharides such as agar, agarose, carrageenan and alginates from fresh seaweeds

Advantages of the Mission:

- By an estimate, if cultivation is done in 5% of the EEZ area of India, it can: (1) provide employment to ~ 50 million people; (2) set up new seaweed industry; (3) contribute to national GDP; (4) increase ocean productivity; (5) reduce algal blooms, (6) increase Carbon sequestration; (7) provide bio-ethanol of 6.6 billion litres.

Do you know?

- Out of the global seaweed production of around 32 million tons, fresh weight is valued around 12 billion USD.
- China produces ~57 %, Indonesia ~28%, whereas India is having a mere share of ~0.01-0.02%.

[Agri-market freedom: Lessons from China & Israel](#)

Context: The farmers protest against newly enacted farm laws provides us an opportunity to compare India's agricultural system with those present in other countries which have done exceptionally well.

Do You Know?

- All the three countries — India, China and Israel — started off their new political journey in late 1940s, but today China's per capita income in dollar terms is almost five times that of India, and Israel's almost 20 times higher than India.
- absolute poverty head count ratio at \$1.9 per day (2011 purchasing power parity) definition was only 0.7 per cent in China as against 13.4 per cent in India in 2015

Problems with Indian Agri-Policies

- Indian agri-food policies remained **more consumer-oriented** with a view to "protect the poor". In the process, they never allowed farmers to enjoy the best prices they could get from free markets within India or abroad.
- **Export controls**, stocking limits on traders, movement restrictions, etc all continued at the hint of any price rise.
- The net result of all this was **farmers' incomes remained low** and so did those of landless agri-labourers.
- Today, Indian agriculture is saddled with more agri-labourers (55 per cent) than cultivators and are supported by huge subsidies, are in a **low-level equilibrium trap of poverty**.

Case Study of China

- **Agri-output:** China produces three times more agri-output than India from a smaller arable area.
- **Similar case of fragmented landholding:** The average holding size in China was just 0.9 ha in 2016-18, smaller than India's 1.08 ha in 2015-16. Therefore, landholding size is not that big a hindrance for agri-growth.
- **Early start of Reforms:** China started off its economic reforms in 1978 by taking up agriculture first. It dismantled its commune system of land holdings and liberated agri-markets that allowed farmers to get much higher prices for their produce.
- **Agri-growth:** As a result of early reforms, in 1978-84, farmers' incomes in China increased by almost 14 per cent per annum, more than doubling in six years. In India, the 1991 reforms bypassed agriculture. There was only some indirect effect when tariffs on manufactured goods were reduced.
- **Foundation for manufacturing growth:** Success of early agri-reform gave political legitimacy for further reforms as masses gained, and also generated demand for industrial goods, sowing the seeds of a manufacturing revolution in China
- **Economic Contribution:** Agriculture contributes just 8 per cent of overall GDP in China compared to about 17 per cent in India.
- **Employment:** About 26 per cent of China's workforce is in agriculture, while India is still stuck with 42 per cent.

Case Study of Israel

- **Water accounting:** This has made it turn a desert into cultivating high-value crops for exports (citrus fruits, dates, olives) by using every drop of water and recycling urban waste water for agriculture, by de-salinisation of sea waters
- **Depleting Groundwater table in India:** It is so alarming in a state like Punjab where almost 80 per cent of blocks are over-exploited or critical, meaning the withdrawal of water is much more than the recharge.
- Until India breaks away from the policy of free power for agriculture, there would be no incentive for farmers to save water.

Way Forward:

Indian agriculture has the potential to double or even triple its output in the next 15-20 years. Many countries have done it and we can do it, too, provided our agri-food policy framework takes a dramatic turn,

- From being subsidy-led to investment-driven
- From being consumer-oriented to producer-oriented,
- From being supply-oriented to demand-driven by linking farms with factories and foreign markets
- From being business as usual to an innovations-centred system.

Connecting the dots

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

[Agriculture granted conditional exemption for Remotely Piloted Aircraft System \(RPAS\) usage](#)

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

In news

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has granted conditional exemption for Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) usage to the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoAFW).

Key takeaways

- RPAS can now be used for remote sensing data collection in agricultural areas under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- The exemption shall be valid from the one year from the date of issue of the permission

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ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Denmark's Artificial Energy Island Project

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Environment

In news

- The Danish government approved a plan to build an artificial island in the North Sea as part of its effort to switch to green energy.



Key takeaways

- The project is being called the largest construction project to be undertaken in Denmark's history with an estimated cost of DKK 210 billion.
 - An energy island is based on a platform that serves as a hub for electricity generation from surrounding offshore wind farms.
 - The artificial island will be located about 80 km into the North Sea and the majority of it will be owned by the Danish government.
 - Its primary purpose is to provide large-scale offshore wind power.
 - The idea is to connect and distribute power between Denmark and neighbouring countries.
 - The move has come after the EU announced its plans to transform its electricity system to rely mostly on renewables within a decade and to increase its offshore wind energy capacity by over 25-fold by the year 2050.
-

[World Sustainable Development Summit 2021](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Environment

In news

- The Indian Prime Minister will inaugurate the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021 on 10th February.



Important value additions

- **Theme:** Redefining our common future: Safe and secure environment for all.
- It is the 20th edition of The Energy and Resources Institute's (TERI) flagship event
- The Summit will bring together a wide number of governments, business leaders, academicians, climate scientists, youth, and civil society in the fight against climate change.
- **key partners of the Summit:** India's Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and Ministry of Earth Sciences.

[World's Smallest Reptile discovered in Madagascar](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Biodiversity

In news

- A chameleon discovered in Madagascar by scientists from Germany and Madagascar may be the world's smallest adult reptile.
- The discovery has been reported in the journal Scientific Reports.

Key takeaways

- The team found one male and one female of the species, named *Brookesia nana*, during an expedition in 2012.
- The male has a length (snout to vent) of 13.5 mm and a total length of 21.6 mm when the tail is included.
- Previously, the chameleon species *Brookesia Micra* was thought to be the smallest.

Do you know?

- The longest, the reticulated python, at 6.25 m is almost as long as 289 *Brookesia nanas*.
- Madagascar is home to tiny lizards and also the smallest species of snakes.
- One possible reason for such small species is the so-called “island effect” that causes species on small islands to get smaller.



[Green Tax on Vehicle owners](#)

Context: Union Transport Minister announced approval of a ‘green tax’ on vehicles of specified vintage, as a means of dissuading people from using polluting vehicles.

What are the major features of the measure?

- **Additional Road Tax on Older Vehicles:** Among the major features of the measure is a 10%-25% additional green tax on the road tax payable by commercial transport vehicles that are older than eight years at the time of fitness certification renewal, and for personal vehicles after 15 years.
- **Exemptions:** The policy provides exemptions for tractors, harvesters and tillers used in farms, hybrid, electric, ethanol, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered vehicles.

- **Incentivising Mass Transport:** The policy proposes lower green tax for public transport vehicles such as buses.
- **Vehicles in Polluted Cities:** A higher additional 50% of road tax is proposed for vehicles in highly polluted cities, as well as differential tax based on fuel and vehicle type, such as diesel.
- **Older Government Vehicles:** Vehicles of government departments and public sector units that are older than 15 years are to be deregistered and scrapped.
- **Separate Fund:** Green tax funds are to be kept in a separate account to help States measure pollution and tackle it
- The policy is **scheduled to come into force on April 1, 2022**

Does scrapping old vehicles carry big benefits?

- **Benefits Automobile Sector:** Scrapping of old vehicles give a boost to the automobile industry and related businesses by stimulating demand, and lead to recovery of steel, aluminium, plastic and so on for recycling, on the other.
- **Environment Friendly:** Newer vehicles conforming to stricter emissions and fuel efficiency standards are more environment-friendly, and have modern safety features.
- **Precedence by other countries:** Globally, accelerated vehicle replacement schemes have been used in several countries. The most notable were those in Europe, besides the high-profile, \$3 billion “Cash for Clunkers” or CARS (or Car Allowance Rebate System) programme in the U.S. after the 2008 recession.
- **Higher Efficiency Norms reduced fuel usage:** The benefits from vehicle replacements can be gauged from Transport Ministry data: commercial vehicles making up 5% of the vehicle fleet but contribute an estimated 65-70% of total vehicular pollution. The BEE estimates that higher efficiency norms could result in a fuel use reduction of 22.97 million tons by 2025 in India.

Is the proposed policy for scrappage workable?

- In 2015 during drafting stages, Transport Minister Mr. Gadkari said the idea was to give a **certificate to owners selling off old vehicles** of specified age, which could be redeemed for a discount of ₹30,000 to ₹50,000 for new passenger vehicles.
- For a commercial vehicle, the benefits including taxes would be an estimated ₹1.5 lakh. This idea did not progress, however, and among those who expressed reservations on high costs was NITI Aayog.
- The Aayog was concerned that some sections may not be in a position to retire old vehicles because of the **high capital cost**.
- The proposals in earlier drafts also envisaged tax discounts for those who exchanged old motors for new ones.
- The present initiative, however, has the limited objective of **nudging the owners of older vehicles to sell them off rather than pay a green tax penalty**.
- Without sufficient incentive or penalty, and careful targeting of vehicles with knowledge of their condition, a tax penalty could be less of a disincentive to commercial vehicle owners, since **the tax would be far lower than its resale value and earnings potential; there would be no compulsion to retire it**.
- Continued operation of the vehicles would defeat the clean air objective and bring no cheer to the automobile industry

What are the options available to tweak the policy?

- For a clean-up, commercial transport vehicles are of highest concern: on fuel efficiency, emissions and safety.
- The Centre could offer a green new deal with financial options such as loans and grants to smaller operators to scrap their junk vehicles, while escalating the green tax annually to achieve the nudge effect.
- A second stimulus to bus companies could help green the fleet and cut pollution.
- Small operators such as autorickshaws could be offered low-interest loans, particularly to move to electric vehicles.

Connecting the dots

- Carbon Cess
-

[India's First CNG Tractor to be launched](#)

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

In news

- India's first-ever diesel Tractor, converted to CNG, will be formally launched on February 12, 2021.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Road Transport and Highways

Key takeaways

- The conversion will help farmers increase their income, by lowering costs, and help to create job opportunities in rural India.
 - It is also reported that the retrofitted tractor produces more power/equal in comparison to Diesel-run engine.
 - Overall emissions are reduced by 70% as compared to Diesel.
 - It will help farmers to save up to 50% on the fuel cost.
-

[Species in news: Leatherback Sea Turtle](#)

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

In news

- Some conservationists are worried about the fate of the Giant Leatherback turtles.
- NITI Aayog has laid down proposals for tourism and port development in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Key takeaways

- NITI Aayog's tourism vision includes a proposal for a mega-shipment port at Galathea Bay on Great Nicobar Island.
- Also, the Little Andaman plan proposes phased growth of tourism on this untouched island, which may lead to the de-reservation of over 200 sq km of rainforests and also of about 140 sq km of the Onge Tribal Reserve.

Important value additions

Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

- It is the largest of the seven species of sea turtles.
- Other species are: Olive Ridley turtle, Green turtle, Hawksbill turtle, Loggerhead turtle, Leatherback turtle
- Except the Loggerhead, the remaining four species nest along the Indian coast.
- It is found in all oceans except the Arctic and the Antarctic.
- Within the Indian Ocean, they nest only in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- It is the only living species in the genus *Dermochelys* and family *Dermochelyidae*.
- It can easily be differentiated from other modern sea turtles by its lack of a bony shell.
- They are listed in Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Do you know?

- The Ministry of Environment has released National Marine Turtle Action Plan in which A&N Islands are given prominent importance.
- According to the plan, India has identified all its important sea turtle nesting habitats as 'Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas'.
- These areas have been included in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) – 1.
- South Bay and West Bay on Little Andaman and Galathea on Great Nicobar, are mentioned as "Important Marine Turtle Habitats in India"

Related articles

- Mass nesting of Olive Ridleys: [Click here](#)



[WCCB wins Asia Environmental Enforcement Award-2020](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Environment

In news

- The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) has received the Asia Environmental Enforcement Award-2020.
- **Awarded by:** United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Key takeaways

- WCCB got the award twice in three years.
- It has been awarded this year under the Innovation category.

Important value additions :

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)

- It is a statutory body constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- **Mandate:** To combat organized wildlife crime in the country.
- **Headquarter:** New Delhi
- **Regional offices:** Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Jabalpur
- WCCB has developed an online Wildlife Crime Database Management System to get real time data to analyse trends in wildlife crimes across India.
- This system has been successfully used for carrying out operations such as Operation Save Kurma, Thunderbird, Wildnet, Lesknow, Birbil, Thunderstorm, Lesknow-II etc resulting in huge seizures of Tiger/Leopard Skin/bones, Rhino Horn, Elephant Ivory etc.

Hyderabad emerges as Tree Cities Of The World

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Environment

In news

- Hyderabad has won a green contest among cities in India, and emerged one of the 'Tree Cities of the World'.

Key takeaways

- **Awarded by:** Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- Hyderabad has maintained urban forestry under its Haritha Haram programme and its Urban Forest Parks plan.
- The city was evaluated on five metrics: 'Establish Responsibility', 'Set the Rules', 'Know What You Have', 'Allocate the Resources', and 'Celebrate the Achievements'.

Greenpeace Analysis Of Cost To The Economy Due To Air Pollution

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

In news

- Greenpeace Southeast Asia recently carried out analysis of cost to the economy due to air pollution.
- According to the report, Air pollution claimed approximately 54,000 lives in Delhi in 2020.

Key takeaways

- Six Indian cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Lucknow — feature in the global analysis.
- Globally, approximately 1,60,000 deaths have been attributed to PM (particulate matter) 2.5 air pollution.

- These deaths have occurred in the five most populous cities — Delhi, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo.
- The 'Cost Estimator' tool was used for the study.
- It is an online tool that estimates the real-time health impact and economic cost from fine PM 2.5 air pollution in major world cities.

'Go Electric' Campaign launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Environment

In news

- "Go Electric" Campaign was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Union Ministry for Road Transport & Highways
- **Objective:** To spread awareness on the benefits of e-mobility and EV Charging Infrastructure and electric cooking in India.



Key takeaways

- The campaign would help in reducing the import dependence.
- It would be an important step towards a cleaner and greener future.
- It will also boost the confidence of Electric Vehicle manufacturers.

Do you know?

- Electric fuel is a major alternative for fossil fuels.

- These fuels have an import bill of Rs. 8 lakh Crore.
- The electric fuel has low cost, reduced emissions.
- It is also indigenous.

Carbon Watch App: To assess Carbon Footprint

Context: Chandigarh became the first state or Union Territory in India to launch Carbon Watch, a mobile application to assess the carbon footprint of an individual.

What is Carbon Footprint?

- Carbon footprint is the amount of greenhouse gases-especially carbon dioxide-released into the atmosphere by a particular human activity.
- It is expressed as a weight of CO₂ emissions produced in tonnes.
- It can be a broad measure or be applied to the actions of an individual, a family, an event, an organization, or even an entire nation.
- Carbon footprint includes direct emissions, such as from driving a car, as well as whatever emissions are required to consume any goods and services (indirect)
- Carbon footprint is different from **ecological footprint**. While the carbon footprint measures the emission of gases that contribute to global warming, the ecological footprint focuses on measuring the use of bio-productive space.

About the app

- The application that can be downloaded on mobile focuses on individual's actions and calculates the carbon footprint based on four parameters: **Water, Energy, Waste Generation and Transport** (Vehicular movement)
- The application will also provide information such as the national and world average of the emission, and the individual's level of emission generation.
- The motive behind this application is making people Climate-Smart Citizens while enabling them capable of accessing their carbon footprint, along with providing them with steps to reduce it
- The mobile application will suggest methods to reduce the carbon footprints as per the information furnished by the individuals.
- It also sensitizes people about their lifestyle emissions, their impact and possible countermeasures to mitigate the same.

Effects of Higher Carbon Footprint

- Increase in Carbon dioxide concentration in atmosphere causes Global Warming i.e [Greenhouse gas effect](#)
- Climate Change
- Melting of Polar Caps
- Depletion of resources: Due to changed Carbon concentration in biosphere
- Increasing Incidents of Severe Weather
- Changes in food supply

Methods of Reducing Carbon Footprint

- **Water:** Adopting better agronomic practices (like [drip irrigation](#)), shifting dietary basket from water guzzling cereal crops to water conserving millets (also Health benefits), recycling of water in industries, smart water metering at households

- **Energy:** Using renewable energy (shift from carbon intensive coal), smart metering, [Energy sector Reforms](#) particularly in DISCOMs, Using energy efficient appliances
- **Waste:** Adopting the 4 R's- Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.
- **Transportation:** Using Public Transport, bicycles, car pooling
- **Market mechanism like [Carbon Trading](#):** Individuals and companies can also offset some of their carbon dioxide emissions by purchasing carbon credits, the money from which can go into projects such as planting trees or investing in renewable energy.
- **International Collaboration:** Implementation of the Climate change conventions like the [Paris Agreement](#) and Indian initiatives for the same must be fast forwarded.

Connecting the dots

- The benefits of [Carbon Tax](#)

[SWACHH ICONIC PLACES](#)

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

In news

- 12 iconic sites under Phase IV of Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) were recently announced.
- **Ministry:** The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), Ministry of Jal Shakti in association with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and the concerned State/UT governments.



Important value additions

- Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) is an initiative of [Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen \(SBM-G\)](#)

- **Aim:** To transform the iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places as 'Swachh Tourist Destinations' in India.
 - **Objective:** To achieve a distinctly higher level of Sanitation/Cleanliness at these places
 - The places are:
 1. Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra
 2. Sanchi Stupa, Madhya Pradesh
 3. Kumbhalgarh Fort, Rajasthan
 4. Jaisalmer Fort, Rajasthan
 5. Ramdevra, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan
 6. Golconda Fort, Hyderabad, Telangana
 7. Sun Temple, Konark, Odisha
 8. Rock Garden, Chandigarh
 9. Dal Lake, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir
 10. Banke Bihari Temple, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
 11. Agra Fort, Agra, Uttar Pradesh
 12. Kalighat Temple, West Bengal
-

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Mandarin Duck

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Biodiversity

In news

- Mandarin duck was recently spotted in the Maguri-Motapung beel (wetland) in Assam.



Important value additions

- It is considered the most beautiful duck in the world.
- It is a small-exotic looking bird native to East Asia.
- The migratory duck breeds in Russia, Korea, Japan and north-eastern parts of China.
- It now has established populations in Western Europe and America too.
- The duck, however, rarely visits India as it does not fall in its usual migratory route.
- **IUCN Status:** Least Concern.

Maguri beel

- The Maguri Motapung wetland is located close to the Dibru Saikhowa National Park in Upper Assam.
- It is an Important Bird Area.

Black-browed Babbler rediscovered after 170 years

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Biodiversity

In news

- Black-browed Babbler has been rediscovered after 170 years in the rainforests of Borneo, Indonesia.

Key takeaways

- It was earlier assumed to be extinct.
- This bird is often called 'the biggest enigma in Indonesian ornithology.'



Photo courtesy: [The Guardian](#)

Related articles:

[Leuser Ecosystem](#)

[Significance of Dead Coral Reef](#)

[Caracal included in list of critically endangered species](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Biodiversity

In news

- [The caracal](#), a medium-sized wildcat was recently included in the list of critically endangered species.
- **Agencies:** The [National Board for Wildlife](#) and Union Ministry of Environment
- It is found in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat.



Important value additions

- Some experts believe that the animal is on the verge of extinction in India.
 - The recovery programme for critically endangered species in India now includes 22 wildlife species.
 - Besides India, the caracal is found across Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia.
 - While it flourishes in parts of Africa, its numbers in Asia are declining.
 - The wildcat has long legs, a short face, long canine teeth, and distinctive ears — long and pointy, with tufts of black hair at their tips.
-



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INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Metroneo: Innovative system of mass transport

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure

In news

- By making a sizeable budgetary allocation for MetroNeo in the Union Budget, the way has been paved for the innovative system of mass transport, which could soon be replicated across the country.

Key takeaways

- To be adopted for the first time in the country in Maharashtra's Nashik, MetroNeo is a comfortable, rapid, energy-efficient, and less noisy transport medium.
 - The central government recently urged all state governments to consider using MetroNeo technology in their tier-2 and tier-3 cities.
 - The MetroNeo service consists of electric bus coaches – their lengths varying from 18 to 25 meters – with a carrying capacity of 200 to 300 passengers at a time.
 - The buses will have rubber tyres and draw power from an overhead electric wire with 600-750 V DC supply, similar to railways or trams.
 - The buses will be air-conditioned, with an automatic door closing system, level boarding, comfortable seats, passenger announcement system, and an information system with an electronic display.
 - The stations will be similar to other Metro rail stations.
-

South African Covid Variant

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure

In news

- The WHO has identified three new variants of coronavirus originating in the UK, Brazil, and now in South Africa.



Key takeaways

- Of the three, the latest South African variant known as 20H/501Y.V2 or B.1.351 appears to be more infectious than the original virus.
- This potentially more concerning variant, which has been spotted since December 22 last year and spread to nearly 40 countries including the United States.
- The South African variant carries a mutation called N501Y that appears to make it more contagious or easy to spread.
- This variant “is less susceptible to antibody neutralization” than previous variants.
- This South African variant has become a major cause of worry because of its unusually large number of mutations, especially in the spike protein, which the virus uses to gain entry into the cells within the human body.

Related articles:

- Coronavirus variant circulating in the UK defined by many mutations: [Click here](#)
- B.1.1.7 Lineage: New variant of SARS-CoV-2: [Click here](#)

Issues with Urban Mobility

Context: Urbanization is supposed to bring modernity and prosperity. The Western example showed how a mass movement off the farm and into cities went together with great leaps in productivity. The hope that a similar experience would be repeated in India resulted in vesting a great deal of hope in cities

The Union Budget 2021-22 has recognised the multiplier effects of Urbanization and has made provisions for it.

What are the key provisions made for Urbanization in Budget 2021?

- **Expansion of Metro rail network:** A total of 702 km of conventional Metro lines were in operation and 1,016 km of Metro and Regional Rapid Transit System lines were under construction in 27 cities. Government announced Central funding of ₹1,957 crore, ₹63,246 crore and ₹14,788 crore for the Kochi, Chennai and Bengaluru Metro projects,
- **Augmentation of city bus service:** A new scheme will be launched at a cost of ₹18,000 crore to support augmentation of public bus transport services. The scheme will facilitate deployment of innovative PPP models to enable private sector players to finance, acquire, operate and maintain over 20,000 buses
- **Metro Connectivity in Tier-2 areas:** Two new Metro technologies, MetroLite and MetroNeo, would be used in tier-2 cities and peripheral parts of tier-1 cities to provide connectivity at a lower cost compared to conventional Metro systems.

Issue with Urban Commuting

- **Poor Bus Infrastructure:** India's ratio of buses to population is a low 1.2 per 1,000 people, compared to 8.6 in Thailand and 6.5 in South Africa, although some States like Karnataka are well ahead of the national average
- **Pandemic shifted people to personal transport:** COVID-19 has had the perverse effect of driving people away to the safety of personal car and two-wheeler bubbles.
- **Private Sector Participation in bus transport:** Licensed private urban bus services remain a politically sensitive topic in many States, where State monopolies coexist with unregulated paratransit, and it will take a major effort to convince them that a bus renaissance is a good post-pandemic recovery strategy.
- **Weak Regulations by umbrella authorities:** State governments, which retain effective control over urban development rather than city administrations, have failed to operationalise the umbrella authorities to regulate transport.
- **Vehicular Exhaust causing Pollution:** As per a WHO study, 14 out of top-15 most-polluted cities in the world are in India. Rising pollution levels also translate into economic losses. As per current estimates the World Bank, the losses amount to 7.7% of the nation's GDP.
- **Traffic Congestion:** Vehicles in some metros move at an average speed of 17kph. The congestion on the roads doesn't exist in silos, and its adverse effects are carried forward to productivity and economic growth. As per the BCG-Uber report, the combined estimate of losses caused due to congestion in the top-four metro cities of India is worth more than \$22 billion per annum.
- **Multi-purpose use of roads in business zones:** Roads in cities are multi-purpose public goods, used by various classes of motorized and non-motorized vehicles to travel, park, street-selling etc. Non-transportation uses of the roadway do slow down motorized vehicles.
- **Innovative Products still at nascent stage:** Common mobility cards that would help citizens use bus, train and feeder networks seamlessly were largely in pilot project mode even before the pandemic
- **Expensive Mass Transport:** There is valid criticism that the existing paradigm is one of "exclusionary urbanisation", which makes Metro and bus services expensive for the majority, particularly for those forced to live in the suburbs due to housing costs, and sometimes making the per kilometre cost of using a two-wheeler more attractive.

- **Poor Recognition of Urban areas:** Census 2011 showed that the number of Census Towns, which are urban for census purposes but not named urban local bodies, grew tremendously over a decade. They lack access to funding, infrastructure and capacity to meet the needs of large populations even now

Way Forward

- **Enhanced Investments:** Standard policy recommendations such as congestion pricing or other types of travel restrictions may do little to improve mobility. Instead, potentially costly travel infrastructure investments may be the only way to improve urban mobility
- **Comprehensive Approach:** Centre is required to work with State governments to integrate key areas with its transport vision, such as affordable inner-city housing, including rental projects, access to civic services and health care, and enhanced sustainability, greenery and walkability

Connecting the dots

- Smart Cities Mission
 - Hyperloop Technology: Click [here](#)
-

[Andhra Pradesh becomes second State to undertake power sector reforms](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure

In news

- Andhra Pradesh has become the second State to undertake the power sector reforms stipulated by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.

Key takeaways

- As part of the reforms, the State has started Direct Benefit transfer (DBT) of electricity subsidy to farmers with effect from September, 2020.
- Thus, the State has successfully implemented one out of the three stipulated reforms in the power sector.
- Besides Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh has also undertaken reforms in the power sector.

Important value additions

- As per the guidelines issued by the Department of Expenditure, the States undertaking reforms in power sector are granted permission to raise additional financial resources of up to 0.25 percent of the GSDP.
 - This is linked to a set of 3 reforms in the sector:
 1. 0.05 % of GSDP for reduction in Aggregate Technical & Commercial losses in the State as per prescribed targets.
 2. Another 0.05 % of GSDP is allowed for reduction in the gap between Average Cost of Supply and Average Revenue Realisation (ACS-ARR gap) in the State as per prescribed targets.
 3. Finally, 0.15 % of GSDP of the State on introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to all farmers in the State in lieu of free/ subsidised electricity. For this, the State government has to frame a scheme for transfer of cash and implement the scheme in at least one district by 31st December, 2020.
-

Ropeways And Alternate Mobility Solutions

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure

In news

- The Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways will, from now on, also look after the development of Ropeways and Alternate Mobility Solutions.

Key takeaways

- The Ministry will also look after the construction, research, and policy in this area.
- Formulation of institutional, financial, and regulatory framework for the technology will also fall under the ambit of this move.
- The move is expected to give a boost to the sector, by setting up a regulatory regime, and facilitating research and new technology to come into this sector.
- An amendment to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 has been notified, to enable this step.

The important benefits of this step could be:

- Last mile connectivity for remote locations
 - Reducing congestion on mainstream roads
 - Chance to develop world-class ropeway infrastructure
 - Setting up of an organised and dedicated rope-way and alternative mobility solutions industry
 - New technology, like CPT – Cable Propelled Transit coming to the sector
 - Setting safety norms for unregulated ropeways
-

Guidelines For Floating Structures issued

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Infrastructure

In news

- Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways has issued the guidelines for floating structures with a vision to set up world-class floating infrastructure all along the coastline in the upcoming projects.

Key takeaways

- The guidelines set out technical aspects for implementation of Floating Jetties or Platforms for Marinas, Minor Harbors, Fishing Harbours, etc. in coastal areas, estuaries, waterways, rivers, and reservoirs.
- These guidelines may also be suitably utilized for floating platforms in various waterborne systems.
- Floating structure because of its inherent advantages is an attractive solution.
- The benefits of floating jetties include their cost-effectiveness, faster implementation, easily expandable, and have minimal environmental impacts.

Do you know?

- Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has successfully implemented a few projects including setting up of passenger floating jetties in Goa, water-aerodromes at Sabarmati River and at Sardar Sarovar Dam for the seaplane services which are working satisfactorily.

Related articles:

- Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS): [Click here](#)
- India's First Seaplane Project: [Click here](#)

[Study to examine judicial decisions for infrastructure projects commissioned](#)

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

In news

- The NITI Aayog has commissioned a study that seeks to examine the unintended economic consequences of judicial decisions that have hindered and stalled big-infrastructure projects on environmental grounds.
- The study is to be undertaken by the Jaipur-headquartered CUTS (Consumer Unity and Trust Society) Centre for Competition, Investment, and Economic Regulation, which also has an international presence.

Obstacle course

Some projects/companies which have hit the hurdle

<p>MOPA AIRPORT, GOA The SC in 2019 suspended environmental clearance but lifted it in Jan. 2020 after imposing several conditions</p>	<p>SAND MINING, UTTAR PRADESH The National Green Tribunal in 2013 suspended sand mining operations and directed that environmental clearances be obtained from authorities</p>
<p>STERLITE COPPER, THOOTHUKUDI, T.N. The SC in Dec. rejected a proposal made by Vedanta to operate its closed copper plant. The Madras HC and the T.N. govt. had ordered the closure of the plant</p>	<p>CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN & AROUND DELHI The NGT imposed a ban on construction activities but specific instances are not known</p>
<p>IRON ORE MINING, GOA In 2018, the SC quashed 88 mining leases for violation of mining procedures and asked the State govt. to issue fresh leases</p>	

Key takeaways

- The document appears to suggest that judgments that negatively impact major infrastructure projects don't adequately consider the economic fallout — in terms of loss of jobs and revenue.
- Doing so would contribute to public discourse among policymakers for promoting an economically responsible approach by the judiciary in its decisions.
- The project brief says that it intends to examine five major projects that have been "impacted" by judicial decisions of the Supreme Court or the National Green Tribunal.
- It plans to do this by interviewing people who have been affected by the closure of the projects, environmental campaigners, experts, and assessing the business impact of the closure.
- Projects to be analysed include the construction of an airport in Mopa, Goa; cessation of iron ore mining in Goa, and the shutting down of the Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.
- The others are decisions by the NGT involving sand mining, and construction activities in the National Capital Region.

[Dobhi – Durgapur Natural Gas Pipeline section inaugurated](#)

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

In news

- Prime Minister recently dedicated to the nation the LPG import terminal, 348 km Dobhi – Durgapur Natural Gas Pipeline section.
- The section is part of the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga project.

Key takeaways

- Foundation stone was also laid for the second Catalytic-Isodewaxing unit of Haldia Refinery.
- These projects will also help Haldia to grow into a major hub of export-import.
- The Pipeline will benefit West Bengal and 10 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand.
- This second Catalytic Dewaxing Unit will reduce our dependence on import with regard to lube-based oils.

[Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020](#)

Context: Parliament has passed landmark Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020

The Bill seeks to provide for regulation, operation and planning of major ports in India and provide greater autonomy to these ports. It seeks to replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.



Key features of the Bill include:

- Application of Act:** The Bill will apply to 12 major ports — Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai, JNPT, Marmugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Kamarajar (earlier Ennore), V O Chidambarnar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia). These together had handled 705 million tonnes (MT) of cargo in 2019-20.
- Major Port Authorities Board:** The Bill provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port. These Boards will replace the existing Port Trusts.
- Composition of Board:** It will comprise of a Chairperson and a deputy Chairperson, both of whom will be appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a selection committee. Board will include one member each from state government, Railway & Defence

Ministry and Customs department. Additionally, 2-4 independent members and two members representing interest of employees of Port authority will be part of Board.

- **Powers of the Port Board:** The Bill allows the Board to use its property, assets and funds as deemed fit for the development of the major port. To meet its capital and working expenditure requirements, the Board may raise loans from banks, financial institutions and from abroad.
- **Autonomy to Board:** They have been delegated full powers to enter into contracts, planning and development, fixing of tariff except in national interest, security and emergency arising out of inaction and default. In the present MPT Act, 1963 prior approval of the Central Government was required in 22 instances.
- **Push to Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects:** The Bill defines PPP projects as projects taken up through a concession contract by the Board. For such projects, the Board may fix the tariff for the initial bidding purposes but the appointed concessionaire will be free to fix the actual tariffs based on market conditions
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** The Bill provides that the Board may use its funds for providing social benefits. This includes development of infrastructure in areas such as education, health, housing, and skill development.
- **Adjudicatory Board:** The Bill provides for the constitution of an Adjudicatory Board by the central government. This Board will replace the existing Tariff Authority for Major Ports(TAMP) constituted under the 1963 Act. This Board look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaires and also reviews stressed PPP projects

Significance of the Bill

- **Similar to Global Institutional Structure:** It modernises the institutional structure of these ports. The bill reorients the governance model in central ports to landlord port model in line with the successful global practice
- **Decentralisation:** The bill aims at decentralizing decision making and to infuse professionalism in governance of major ports.
- **Transparency:** It imparts faster and transparent decision making benefiting the stakeholders and better project execution capability.
- **Compact Board:** A simplified composition of the Board of Port Authority will comprise of 11 to 13 Members representing various interests (earlier 17 to 19 Members). A compact Board with professional independent Members will strengthen decision making and strategic planning.
- **Boost to Port Sector:** This will empower the Major Ports to perform with greater efficiency on account of full autonomy in decision making which in turn promotes the expansion of port infrastructure and facilitate trade and commerce. It ensures optimum utilisation of the coastal line in the country through competitive ports.
- **Not Privatisation:** The new Act is not intended to privatise major ports but aimed at boosting their decision-making powers in order to compete with private ports. It is seen as the first step in the corporatisation of Ports and then enabling them to list on stock exchange

Connecting the dots

- Corporatisation of Ordnance Factory Board
-

Sagarika: First full-fledged international cruise terminal

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Indian Prime Minister inaugurated various projects in Kochi, Kerala recently.

Key takeaways

- **Sagarika**, the International Cruise Terminal in Kochi was inaugurated.
 - It is India's first full-fledged international cruise terminal.
 - Inauguration of the **Marine Engineering Training Institute** of Cochin Shipyard Ltd. will help those wanting to study marine engineering.
 - **South Coal Berth** would bring down logistics costs and improve cargo capacities.
 - **Propylene Derivative Petrochemical Project (PDPP)** will help strengthen India's journey towards being Aatmanirbhar as it will save foreign exchange.
 - With **Ro-Ro Vessels**, a distance of almost 30 km on road will become 3.5 km through waterways leading to less congestion and more convenience, commerce and capacity-building.
-

All kinds of Steel allowed In Highway Construction

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Orders were issued recently that all steel – whether produced from ore, billets, pellets or melting of scrap - would be allowed to be used for National Highway construction.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- The steel must meet the standards required for specific grades of steel.

Key takeaways

- The steel proposed to be used would be tested in NABL-accredited laboratories before approval.
 - The decision was taken in view of the increase in steel prices, which could impact the cost of building national highways.
 - With this step, the supplier base for steel would increase, leading to more competition and better price discovery by the markets.
-

Oil & Gas Projects In Tamil Nadu

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Indian Prime Minister laid down the foundation of key projects of the oil & gas sector in Tamil Nadu on 17th February 2021.

Key takeaways

- The Ramanathapuram – Thoothukudi natural gas pipeline shall be inaugurated.
- This pipeline is a section of the Ennore- Thiruvallur- Bengaluru- Puducherry- Nagapattinam- Madurai- Tuticorin Natural Gas Pipeline.

- **Benefits:** It will help utilise gas from ONGC Gas fields and deliver natural gas as feedstock to industries and other commercial customers.
 - Gasoline Desulphurisation Unit shall be inaugurated at Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited, Manali.
 - It will produce low sulfur (less than 8 ppm) environment-friendly gasoline, help reduce emissions and contribute towards a cleaner environment.
-

[Mahabahu-Brahmaputra to be launched](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Indian Prime Minister will launch the ‘Mahabahu-Brahmaputra’ in Assam on 18th February 2021.

Key takeaways

- The launch of Mahabahu-Brahmaputra will be marked by the following:
 - The Ro-Pax vessel operations between Neamati-Majuli Island, North Guwahati-South Guwahati, and Dhubri-Hatsingimari;
 - Shilanyas of Inland Water Transport (IWT) Terminal at Jogighopa
 - Various tourist jetties on River Brahmaputra
 - Launch of digital solutions for Ease-of-Doing-Business.
 - **Aim:** Providing seamless connectivity to the Eastern parts of India.
-

[Infrastructural projects to be inaugurated in Kerala](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

320 KV Pugalur (Tamil Nadu) - Thrissur (Kerala) power transmission project:

- It is India's first High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Project
- It will facilitate transfer of 2000 MW power from the western region and help meet the growth in load for Kerala.
- It will also ensure a 35-40% less land footprint compared to a conventional HVDC system.

50 MW Kasaragod Solar Power Project

- It has been developed under the National Solar Energy Mission.

Integrated Command and Control Centre at Thiruvananthapuram:

- It is being set up to host Smart Solutions for Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation,
- It will act as a common point of action during emergency situations to facilitate coordinated action, and decision making among various agencies like police, civil supplies, revenue, health and fire fighting

Smart Roads Project in Thiruvananthapuram

- The project envisages converting 37 Kms of existing roads to world-class smart roads by bringing all overhead utilities underneath and undertaking road and junction improvements.
- It will have features like safe pathways, storm water drains, underground ducts for electrical, and communication lines.

Water Treatment Plant at Aruvikkara

- It is being built under the AMRUT Mission.
- It will boost supply of drinking water to Thiruvananthapuram

Important value additions

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)

- It was launched in 2015.
- **Aim:** to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for urban transformation by implementing urban revival projects.

The National Solar Mission

- **Objectives:** To promote solar power.
- The mission is one of the several policies of the National Action Plan on Climate Change.
- The program was inaugurated as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission in 2010 with a target of 20 GW by 2022.
- This was later increased to 100 GW in 2015 to be achieved by 2030.
- India increased its solar power generation capacity by nearly 5 times from 2,650 MW in 2014 to almost 12,000 MW in 2017.
- The original target of 20 GW was surpassed in 2018, four years ahead of the 2022 deadline.

Related articles:

- Urban infrastructure projects AMRUT Yojana: [Click here](#)
- Inauguration of 750 MW Rewa Solar Project: [Click here](#)
- India's Solar Energy Push: [Click here](#)

[Central Electricity Regulatory Commission \(CERC\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Polity and Governance & GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) was in news recently when Pravas Kumar Singh took oath as its Member.

Important value additions

Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC)

- **Established by:** Government of India
- It is the Central Commission for the Electricity Act, 2003 which has repealed the ERC Act, 1998.

- **Composition:** Chairperson and four other Members including Chairperson, Central Electricity Authority who is the ex-officio Member of the Commission.
 - **Functions:** (1) To regulate the tariff of generating companies owned or controlled by the Central Government; (2) To regulate the inter-State transmission of electricity; (3) To determine tariff for such transmission of electricity.
 - CERC also advises the Central Government on the formulation of the National Electricity Policy and Tariff Policy.
-

[Production Linked Incentive Scheme For Pharmaceuticals](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Economy; Manufacturing sector

In news

- The Union Cabinet has approved [Production Linked Incentive \(PLI\) Scheme](#) for Pharmaceuticals for Financial Year 2020-21 to 2028-29.

Key takeaways

- The Scheme is expected to bring in investment of Rs.15,000 crore in the pharmaceutical sector.
- It will be part of the umbrella scheme for the Development of the Pharmaceutical Industry.
- **Objective:** (1) To enhance India's manufacturing capabilities by increasing investment; (2) Product diversification to include high-value goods.
- **Target Groups:** The manufacturers who are registered in India will be grouped based on their Global Manufacturing Revenue (GMR) to ensure wider applicability of the scheme
- **Quantum of Incentive:** 15,000 crores.
- **Category of Goods covered:**
 1. **Category 1:** Biopharmaceuticals; Complex generic drugs; Patented drugs or drugs nearing patent expiry; Cell-based or gene therapy drugs; Orphan drugs; Other drugs as approved.
 2. **Category 2:** Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, Key Starting Materials, Drug Intermediates.
 3. **Category 3:** Drugs not covered under Category 1 and 2.

Related articles:

[Expansion of Production-Linked Incentive Scheme](#)

[PLI For Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing](#)

[LPG to be transported Through Inland Waterways](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Infrastructure

In news

- Now, LPG can be transported through Inland Waterways.
- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has signed MoU with MOL (Asia Oceania) Pvt. Ltd for transportation of LPG through National Waterways-1 and 2
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

Key takeaways

- MOL Group will invest for construction and operation under [Make-in-India](#) initiative.
- This project will help reduce the carbon footprints, lowering the overall logistics cost.
- It shall also contribute to [UJJWALA](#) scheme.
- **Significance Of Project:** Currently, 60% of the LPG is transported through road. Strikes by transporters, road blockages also cause delay in transportation sometimes. Also, there are some areas which are difficult to approach through rail or road especially in the North-East region



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ethylene glycol: a chemical found in antifreeze

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

In news

- Eleven US soldiers recently fell sick after accidentally drinking ethylene glycol, a chemical found in antifreeze.

Important value additions

- Ethylene glycol is an industrial compound found in consumer products including automotive antifreeze, hydraulic brake fluids, some stamp pad inks, ballpoint pens, solvents, paints, plastics, films, and cosmetics, and is also used as a pharmaceutical vehicle.
 - It is a synthetic liquid, which is odourless.
 - It is used to make antifreeze and de-icing solutions for cars, airplanes, and boats.
 - Ethylene glycol has a sweet taste and is often accidentally or intentionally ingested.
 - Once ingested, ethylene glycol is chemically broken down into toxic compounds.
 - These by-products then affect the central nervous system (CNS), the heart, and then the kidneys.
 - The ingestion of sufficient amounts can be fatal.
 - Ethylene glycol can be disseminated through indoor air, water, food, outdoor air, and agricultural products.
-

Budget 2021-22: Science & Tech

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

In news

- To strengthen the overall research ecosystem of the country, the Union Budget FY 2021-22 announced a slew of new initiatives to boost innovation and R&D in the country.

INNOVATION AND R&D



- The first unmanned launch is slated for Dec 2021
- As part of the Gaganyaan mission activities, four Indian astronauts are being trained on Generic Space Flight aspects, in Russia.
- National Research Foundation with an outlay of ₹ 50,000 crore to strengthen overall research ecosystem of the country
- To launch a Deep Ocean Mission of more than ₹ 4,000 crore to cover deep ocean survey exploration and conserve deep sea bio diversity
- New Space India Limited (NSIL), a PSU under the Department of Space to launch PSLV-CS51, carrying the Amazonia Satellite from Brazil, along with a few smaller Indian satellites

Key takeaways

- The Finance Minister proposed an outlay of Rs 50,000 crore, spread over five years, for the National Research Foundation.
- Rs 1,500 crore has been proposed for a scheme that will provide financial incentives to promote digital modes of payment and further boost digital transactions.
- A new initiative called **National Language Translation Mission (NTLM)** has been proposed that will digitize the wealth of governance-and-policy-related knowledge on the Internet and be made available in major Indian languages.
- **New Space India Limited (NSIL)**, a PSU under the Department of Space, will execute the PSLV-CS51 launch, carrying the Amazonia Satellite from Brazil, along with a few smaller Indian satellites.
- Four Indian astronauts are also being trained on Generic Space Flight aspects, in Russia for the Gaganyaan Mission, slated to be launched in December 2021.
- To better understand the realm of Oceans, Finance Minister proposed to launch a **Deep Ocean Mission** with a budget outlay of more than Rs 4,000 crores, over five years.

[Stardust 1.0: The first rocket to run on biofuel](#)

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

In news

- On January 31, Stardust 1.0 was launched from Loring Commerce Centre in Maine, US, a former military base.

Key takeaways

- It became the first commercial space launch powered by biofuel, which is non-toxic for the environment as opposed to traditionally used rocket fuel.
- Stardust 1.0 is a launch vehicle suited for student and budget payloads.
- The rocket is 20 feet tall and has a mass of roughly 250 kg.
- The rocket can carry a maximum payload mass of 8 kg.
- These rockets will help to launch small satellites called cubesats into space in a way that is relatively cheaper than using traditional rocket fuel and is less toxic for the environment.

Important value additions

- Biofuels are obtained from biomass, which can be converted directly into liquid fuels that can be used as transportation fuels.
- The two most common kinds of biofuels in use today are ethanol and biodiesel.
- They both represent the first generation of biofuel technology.
- Ethanol is renewable and made from different kinds of plant materials.
- Biodiesel is produced by combining alcohol with new and used vegetable oils, animal fats, or recycled cooking grease.

Do you know?

- Other companies are working towards making access to space easier.
- One of them is Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's Space Company called Blue Origin.
- Last year in October, the company tested a rocket system called New Shepard.
- The rocket system is meant to take tourists to space eventually and offers flights to space over 100 km above Earth and accommodation for payloads.
- Such efforts are a part of a growing number of commercial space companies that are working to provide easier and cheaper access to space to laypeople and also to make access to space cost-effective for purposes of academic research, corporate technology development, and entrepreneurial ventures among others.

Related articles:

- How biofuels can double farm incomes: [Click here](#)
-

[Stardust 1.0: The first rocket to run on biofuel](#)

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-

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Start-ups, Innovation

In news

- Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) has been approved for the period of next four years starting from 2021-22.

Key takeaways

- It will be implemented with an effect from 1st April 2021.
 - **Aim:** To provide financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry and commercialization.
 - Rs. 945 Crore corpus will be divided over the next 4 years for providing seed funding to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India.
 - The scheme is expected to support about 3600 startups.
-

Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Project

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

In news

- A global collaboration for the world's largest radio telescope took formal shape with the constitution of an Intergovernmental Council recently.

Key takeaways

- The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) project spans two continents and involves the participation of 20 countries.
- The SKA is not a single telescope but will be an array of antennas strategically designed and set up in South Africa and Australia.
- It is expected to be ready for carrying out observations towards the end of this decade.
- **Goals:** Studying the universe and its evolution, the origin and evolution of cosmic magnetism, and dark energy and evolution of galaxies.
- It is proposed to be built in two phases, with an estimated 1.8 billion euros required for phase-I, planned over the next ten years.

Do you know?

- **Headquarter:** United Kingdom
 - The telescope in South Africa will have 197 dishes and will be located in the Karoo region.
 - The telescope in Australia will have 1,31,072 antennas, and will be installed on the campus of the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory.
 - India is also participating in SKAO through the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
-

Social Media Regulation: Centre's Notice to Twitter

Context: The Centre has issued notice to Twitter after the micro-blogging site restored more than 250 accounts that had been suspended earlier on the government's 'legal demand'.

Background of the Notice issued

- **Farmer protest & Social Media Campaign:** The issue pertains to tweets put out by some handles on the ongoing farmer protests as also a hashtag that suggested that a farmer genocide was being planned.
- **Reaction by Ministry:** The Ministry of Electronics and IT ordered these handles (257 URLs and one hashtag) to be blocked on the grounds that they were spreading dangerous misinformation about the protests.
- **Twitter's Response:** Twitter initially complied with the order but then restored these tweets and handles, which included those of media houses.
- **Basis of Government's Order:** The Government's initial order was issued under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

What is Section 69A of IT Act, 2000?

It empowers the government to direct an intermediary to block any information for public access in the interest of

- sovereignty and integrity of India
- defence of India
- security of the State
- Friendly relations with foreign States
- Public order or
- Preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above

This is the same Section under which hundreds of [Chinese apps have been banned](#) in recent months.

Are platforms required to comply with government requests?

- Cooperation between technology services companies and law enforcement agencies is now deemed a vital **part of fighting cybercrime**, and various other crimes that are committed using computer resources.
- These cover hacking, digital impersonation and theft of data.
- The **potential of the Internet** and its offshoots such as mail and messaging services and social media networks to disseminate potentially harmful content such as hate speech, rumours, inflammatory and provocative messages and child pornography, has led to law enforcement officials constantly seeking to curb the ill-effects of using the medium.
- Therefore, **most nations have framed laws** mandating cooperation by Internet service providers or web hosting service providers and other intermediaries to cooperate with law and order authorities in certain circumstances.

What does the law in India cover?

- In India, the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, as amended from time to time, governs all activities related to the use of computer resources.
- It **covers all 'intermediaries'** who play a role in the use of computer resources and electronic records.
- The term 'intermediaries' includes providers of telecom service, network service, Internet service and web hosting, besides search engines, online payment and auction sites, online marketplaces and cyber cafes.
- It includes any person who, on behalf of another, "receives, stores or transmits" any electronic record. **Social media platforms would fall under this definition.**
- Section 69 of the Act confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions "to intercept, monitor or decrypt...any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource".

How does the government block websites and networks?

- Section 69A, for similar reasons and grounds on which it can intercept or monitor information, **enables the Centre** to ask any agency of the government, or any intermediary, **to block access to the public of any information** generated, transmitted, received or stored or hosted on any computer resource.
- Any such request for blocking access must be **based on reasons given in writing.**
- Procedures and safeguards have been incorporated in the rules framed for the purpose.

What are the obligations of intermediaries under Indian law?

- Intermediaries are required to **preserve and retain specified information in a manner and format prescribed** by the Centre for a specified duration. Contravention of this provision may attract a prison term that may go up to three years, besides a fine.
- When a direction is given for monitoring, interception or decryption, the intermediary, and any person in charge of a computer resource, **should extend technical assistance in the form of giving access or securing access** to the resource involved, and **must comply with the request** to intercept or monitor or decrypt the information concerned.
- Failure to extend such assistance may entail a prison term of up to seven years, besides a fine.
- Failure to comply with a direction to block access to the public on a government's written request also attracts a **prison term of up to seven years, besides a fine.**
- The Act also empowers the government to collect and monitor data on traffic. When an authorised agency asks for technical assistance in this regard, the intermediary must comply with the request. Non-compliance may lead to a prison term of up to three years, besides a fine.

Is the liability of the intermediary absolute?

- No.
- Section 79 of the Act makes it clear that “an **intermediary shall not be liable for any third-party information**, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him”.
- This **section protects intermediaries** such as Internet and data service providers and those hosting websites from being made liable for content that users may post or generate.
- However, the exemption from liability does not apply if there is evidence that the intermediary abetted or induced the commission of the unlawful act involved.
- Also, the provision casts a responsibility on intermediaries to remove the offensive content or block access to it upon getting “actual knowledge” of an unlawful act being committed using their resources, or as soon as it is brought to their notice.
- In **Shreya Singhal vs U.O.I (2015)**, the **Supreme Court** read down the provision to mean that the intermediaries ought to act only “upon receiving actual knowledge that a **court order has been passed**, asking [them] to expeditiously remove or disable access to certain material”.
- This was because the court felt that intermediaries such as Google or Facebook may receive millions of requests, and it may not be possible for them to judge which of these were legitimate.

What has been the government's actions post Shreya Singhal Case?

- The role of the intermediaries was spelt out in separate rules framed for the purpose in 2011. In **2018, the Centre favoured coming up with fresh updates to the existing rules** on intermediaries' responsibilities, but the draft courted controversy.
- This was because one of the proposed changes was that intermediaries should help **identify originators of offensive content.**
- This led to misgivings that this could aid **privacy violations and online surveillance.**
- Also, tech companies that use **end-to-end encryption** argued that they could not open a backdoor for identifying originators, as it would be a breach of promise to their subscribers.
- Other proposed changes, which have not been acted upon, include rules that **intermediaries should deploy automated tools for proactively removing** or disabling public access to unlawful information, and to have a 24x7 mechanism to deal with requisitions of law enforcement.

Critical Analysis of the issue

- **Provocation over Social media can lead to violence:** In a very sensitive setting, one that at least at one point was simmering with the potential for large-scale violence, provocation of any kind using social media platforms is unacceptable. Hence, regulation of internet intermediaries by government for the maintenance of Public Order & Peace is essential.
- **Twitter's action is slippery slope:** The world over, technology platforms have enough safeguards to act as intermediaries without being liable for the content that is published. But Twitter's act of defying the orders as per the law means it is on slippery territory.
- **Section 69 Upheld by SC:** Though the use of Section 69A has been often criticised for the secrecy surrounding the process, it was upheld by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India* (2015).
- **Hashtag cannot be defended on grounds of Article 19(1)(a):** While there are many grounds on which this Government's handling of the farm protests can be criticised, it can be said that the hashtag that it wanted blocked was not merely distasteful but seriously problematic, and indefensible on the grounds of freedom of speech.

Conclusion

What further happens in this face-off will be of interest not just for the two parties but for the governments of the world as well as the platforms of the world.

Connecting the dots

- The dominance of Big Tech: Click [here](#)
-

[Law in news: Information Technology Act, 2000](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Information technology, Sci & tech

In news

- The Centre has issued notice to Twitter after the site restored more than 250 accounts that had been suspended earlier on the government's 'legal demand'.

Important value additions

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- It covers all 'intermediaries' who play a role in the use of computer resources and electronic records.
- **The term 'intermediaries' includes:** Providers of telecom service, network service, Internet service, and web hosting, search engines, online payment and auction sites, online marketplaces, and cyber cafes.
- It also includes any person who, on behalf of another, "receives, stores or transmits" any electronic record including Social media platforms as well.

Centre's powers vis-à-vis intermediaries:

- Section 69 of the Act confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions “to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource.
 - **The grounds on which these powers may be exercised are:** in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defense of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offense relating to these, or for investigating any offense.
 - Section 69A also enables the Centre to ask any agency of the government, or any intermediary, to block access to the public of any information generated, transmitted, received or stored, or hosted on any computer resource.
 - Procedures and safeguards have been incorporated in the rules framed for the purpose.
-

JATP – Center Of Excellence (JATP – CoE)

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

In news

- DRDO signed an MoU with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru for the creation of JATP–Center of Excellence (JATP – CoE) in the premises of IISc to expand the scope and objective of the existing Joint Advanced Technology Program.

Key takeaways

- The JATP-CoE will enable Directed Basic & Applied Research and engage with premier research institutes through multi-disciplinary & multi-institutional collaboration.
- The focused research efforts at the centre will lead to realization of indigenous technologies in the critical areas to develop state of art technologies.
- As per the MoU, DRDO will support JATP in equipping it with advanced and unique research facilities that will enable the faculty and scholars to conduct advanced research.
- DRDO will facilitate advanced research to utilize technology outcomes in futuristic applications.

Do you know?

- JATP was created by President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 1983 where the DRDO scientists actively collaborated with the faculty of IISc to work on various missile technologies.
-

Properties of the 99th element in the periodic table reported

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

In news

- A team of scientists at the Berkeley Lab has reported some of the properties of element 99 in the periodic table called “Einsteinium”, named after Albert Einstein.

Key takeaways

- For the first time, researchers have been able to characterise some of the properties of this element.

- It was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called “Ivy Mike” in the Pacific Ocean).
 - The most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.
 - Because of its high radioactivity and short half-life of all einsteinium isotopes, even if the element was present on Earth during its formation, it has most certainly decayed.
 - This is the reason that it cannot be found in nature and needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.
-

[UAE's Hope Mission](#)

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

In news

- The UAE’s first mission to Mars entered its orbit, seven months after the UAE's ‘Hope Probe’ was launched from Tanegashima in Japan.

Key takeaways

- With this, the UAE has become the fifth country after the US, Russia, China, the EU, and India, to reach the Martian orbit.
 - The unmanned spacecraft is called ‘Al-Amal’ — the Arabic word for hope.
 - The historic event was timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE’s seven emirates.
 - Carrying three instruments, including a high-resolution camera and a spectrometer, the spacecraft is on an orbital mission to collect data on Martian climate dynamics and help scientists understand why Mars’s atmosphere is decaying into space.
 - Hope is the UAE’s fourth space mission and first interplanetary one.
 - The previous three were all Earth-observation satellites.
 - Its overall mission life is one Martian year, which is about 687 days on Earth.
-

[On cryptocurrencies and regulation](#)

Context: Government has proposed bringing in a law on cryptocurrencies so as to put an end to the existing ambiguity over the legality of these currencies in India.

What is cryptocurrency?

- A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that is secured by cryptography, which makes it nearly impossible to counterfeit or double-spend.
- Many cryptocurrencies are decentralized networks based on blockchain technology—a distributed ledger enforced by a disparate network of computers

Regulation of Cryptocurrencies

- The government has, from time to time, suggested that it does not consider cryptocurrencies to be legal tender.
- The disapproval of cryptocurrencies by government is due to fact that such currencies are highly volatile, used for illicit Internet transactions, and wholly outside the ambit of the state.

- In 2018, the RBI did send a circular to banks directing them not to provide services for those trading in cryptocurrencies.
- Those challenging the RBI Circular in Supreme Court had argued that these were commodities and not currencies. Therefore, RBI did not have the jurisdiction.
- The circular was set aside by SC, which found it to be “disproportionate”.
- Regulatory bodies like RBI and Sebi etc also don’t have a legal framework to directly regulate cryptocurrencies as they are neither currencies nor assets or securities or commodities issued by an identifiable user

Challenges

- This legal ambivalence has not, however, been able to prevent cryptocurrencies from having a growing user base in India.
- Their attraction may only grow now, given that the most well-known of them as also the most valuable, Bitcoin, has hit new peaks in price and is gaining influential followers such as Tesla founder Elon Musk.
- Cryptocurrency exchanges, which have sprung up, are reportedly lobbying with the government to make sure these currencies are regulated rather than banned outright.

Way Forward

- Smart regulation is preferable, as a ban on something that is based on a technology of distributed ledger **cannot be implemented for all practical purposes.**
- Even in China, where cryptocurrencies have been banned and the Internet is controlled, trading in cryptocurrencies has been low but not non-existent.
- The government must resist the idea of a ban and push for smart regulation.

Connecting the dots

- Blockchain and Voting: Click [Here](#)

[How tech can transform law enforcement](#)

Context: There is an urgent need for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to adopt technology in their operations as it can act as a force multiplier. This is especially true in India where the police to population ratio is less than 150 per 100,000 (UN recommended number is 222)

Following are the ways in which LEAs can use technology to increase their efficiency and effectiveness:

1. Digitising Citizen-Facing Services: By providing digital access to the police, citizens can avail services from the comfort of their home. For instance: The Punjab Police has a citizen-facing portal, Saanjh, which provides online services for downloading FIRS and searching for stolen vehicles and lost mobiles, among other services

2. Departmental Monitoring: Technology can also be used to provide senior police officials dashboard views for their areas of jurisdiction, identify trends, patterns, outliers and take corrective action.

3. Citizen Awareness: Digital portals, social media can be used by LEAs to reach out directly to citizens — providing information on traffic jams, how to protect against cybercrime, dispelling rumours, countering fake news.

4. Crime Detection: Due to increasing usage of phones, it will difficult to analyse the records of Call Detail Records (CDRs) manually. CDR analysis tools can be used to identify call patterns, most frequently called numbers, geo-location, and help in tracking missing persons, lost mobiles, movement, and establish relationships between criminal associates.

5. Leveraging AI and Big Data: Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to match fingerprints, facial images, analyse CCTV footage and recognise vehicle number plates. Big Data can be used to integrate data from multiple sources such as social media tools, financial institutions, travel records, hotel stays, CDRs and criminal records. This helps in creating 360-degree view of the criminal and draw linkages between criminal associates.

6. Crime Prevention: Big Data can play a major role as it can be used to identify crime patterns and hot spots. AI can be used to draw correlations between the type of crime, time, location. Given the high number of postings and transfers in the police, these dashboards can help the newly transferred officer to get up to speed quickly.

7. Riot Control: Sentiment analysis of social media chatter can be used to identify potential riots (including location and time) as well as track the source of rumours designed to create communal disharmony. Social media can also be used to provide authentic information to public to dispel rumours.

8. Human Resource Management: Key performance indicators such as the time taken to file a charge-sheet, types of crimes solved, time taken to address complaints, citizen feedback scores can be used to determine an officer's performance in a more objective manner.

9. Integrating Criminal Justice System: The five pillars of the criminal justice system are police, courts, prosecution, jails and forensics. Countless man-years are lost in taking physical files from one place to another. Real-time integration between the information technology systems of these pillars will help in reducing duplicate data entry and errors.

Conclusion

Technology integration will significantly increase the efficiency of our LEAs and, at the same time, drastically reduce the time taken to provide justice. It can be a win-win for all the key stakeholders

Connecting the dots

- Police reforms: Click [here](#)
 - Custodial Deaths: Click [here](#)
-

One of the strongest flares reported from a supermassive black hole, BL Lacertae

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

In news

- Indian Astronomers have reported one of the strongest flares from a supermassive black hole called BL Lacertae.

Key takeaways

- Feeding supermassive black holes have complicated emission mechanisms.
- They emit jets of charged particles traveling nearly at the speed of light.
- They are one of the most luminous and energetic objects in the Universe.
- BL Lacertae blazar is 10 million light-years away.
- It can be observed with the help of a relatively small telescope.
- The whole Earth Blazar Telescope (WEBT) had predicted the flares.
- **Significance:** (1) It can help trace the mass of the black hole and the source of this emission; (2) It can provide a lead to probe into mysteries and trace events at different stages of evolution of the Universe.

Social Media Regulation: Centre's Notice to Twitter – Part 2

Click [here](#) for the Part 1 of the issue (Background of issue & analysis from legal perspective)

Twitter has not complied fully with the Indian government's statutory orders under Section 69A of IT Act because of following arguments

- **Legitimate Voices:** Twitter has said that the government's blocking list had accounts of journalists, activists, and politicians whose accounts appear to be bonafide; that their posts are legitimate expression
- **Disproportionate Order:** Twitter has said that it reasonably believes that keeping them blocked would be a disproportionate act contrary to both Indian law and the platform's charter objectives.

Criticism of Twitter Actions

- **Disrespecting Indian Laws:** Twitter is an intermediary bound by statutory orders of the government under the Act, and its refusal shows a lack of respect for Indian law.
- **Twitter is not the Judge:** Twitter, as a private company, cannot adjudicate or sit in appeal over the government's judgment on what is proportionate or lawful. It may challenge the order in a court, but cannot simply choose to comply partially or not at all
- **Inconsistency in its actions:** [Twitter's blocking of Donald Trump's account](#) even while he was the sitting President of the U.S. and its refusal to block here shows it denying parity to India with the U.S.
- **Impunity of Big Tech:** Twitter's defiance indicates the increasing power and impunity of Big Tech, requiring a clear and unequivocal zero tolerance response.

Counter Arguments to Criticisms

- **Powers of Government is not absolute:** Twitter appears to have justifiably formed an informed opinion that the blocking orders, even if validly issued under Section 69A(1) of the IT Act, are partly not lawful and that it is confident of succeeding in a challenge to the orders should the government take any coercive action to enforce them.
- **Upholding Fundamental Rights:** It is undeniable that platforms such as Twitter have significant control over how people's right to free and informed speech is fulfilled. Mechanically following government orders without regard to their lawfulness, necessity or proportionality will seriously impact their audience's fundamental rights
- **Checks on arbitrary Power needed for Democracy:** The tension between two powerful entities — the government and social media platforms — on questions of which speech to promote and whose speech to curtail is healthy and constructive. It acts as a check on the arbitrary power that would prevail if both were on the same side as a matter of routine.
- **Not a fair comparison with Trumps case:** With regard to US President's Trump's misleading tweets, Twitter initially resorted to the less intrusive measure of flagging his content, followed by limiting its reach before suspending his account. All of these actions were *suo motu* and not under government orders.

Conclusion

- Social media platforms enjoy better immunity and warmer first amendment protection under U.S. law that help them better guard their users' interests against government action. The attempt to extend similar safeguards to Indian users, who also in theory are guaranteed the same protection under a universal human rights regime, is welcome.
- Structural and institutional solutions must be found to limit the power of both the government and Big Tech and to enforce their obligation to act rationally and responsibly.

Connecting the dots

- The dominance of Big Tech: Click [here](#)

[Sandes: an instant messaging platform](#)

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

In news

- An instant messaging platform was launched recently called Sandes on the lines of WhatsApp.
- **Launched by:** National Informatics Centre

Key takeaways

- Sandes can be used for all kinds of communications by anyone with a mobile number or email id.
- Its interface is similar to other apps currently available.

Do you know?

- The National Informatics Centre is an attached office under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in the Indian government.

- The NIC provides infrastructure to help support the delivery of government IT services and the delivery of some of the initiatives of Digital India.
-

Geo-Spatial Sector - Deregulated

Context: The Ministry of Science and Technology released new guidelines for the Geo-spatial sector in India, which deregulates existing protocol and liberalises the sector to a more competitive field.

What is geo-spatial data?

- Geospatial data is data about objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface of the earth.
- The location may be **static** in the short-term, like the location of a road, an earthquake event, or **dynamic** like a moving vehicle or pedestrian, the spread of an infectious disease.
- Geospatial data combines location information, attribute information (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned), and often also temporal information or the time at which the location and attributes exist.
- Geo-spatial data has now become **imperative for the government in planning** for infrastructure, development, social development, natural calamities as well as the economy with more and more sectors relying heavily on this data.
- The past decade has seen an increase in the **use of geo-spatial data in daily life** with various apps such as food delivery apps like Swiggy or Zomato, e-commerce like Amazon or even weather apps.

What is the present policy on geo-spatial data?

- There are **strict restrictions** on the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination of geo-spatial data and mapping under the current regime driven by internal as well as external **security concerns**.
- Private companies need to navigate a **system of permissions** from different departments of the government (Home, defence, etc.) to be able to collect, create or disseminate geo-spatial data.

Why has the government deregulated geo-spatial data?

- This system of acquiring licenses or permission has delayed projects for both private companies and government agencies.
- The deregulation **eliminates the requirement of permissions** as well as scrutiny, even for security concerns.
- Indian **companies now can self-attest**, conforming to government guidelines without actually having to be monitored by a government agency.
- There is also a **huge lack of data in the country** which impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses which are data-based.
- The mapping of the entire country, that too with high accuracy, by the Indian government alone could take decades. Therefore, opening up the sector and incentivising the private sector will **speed up the process of mapping**.
- Large amounts of geo-spatial data are also **available on global platforms**, which makes the regulation of data that is freely available in other countries, untenable.

Deregulation

- Geospatial data that used to be restricted will now be freely available in India for Indian companies.
- They will no longer be subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals before they collect, generate, prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital geospatial data and maps within the territory of India.

Benefits of deregulation:

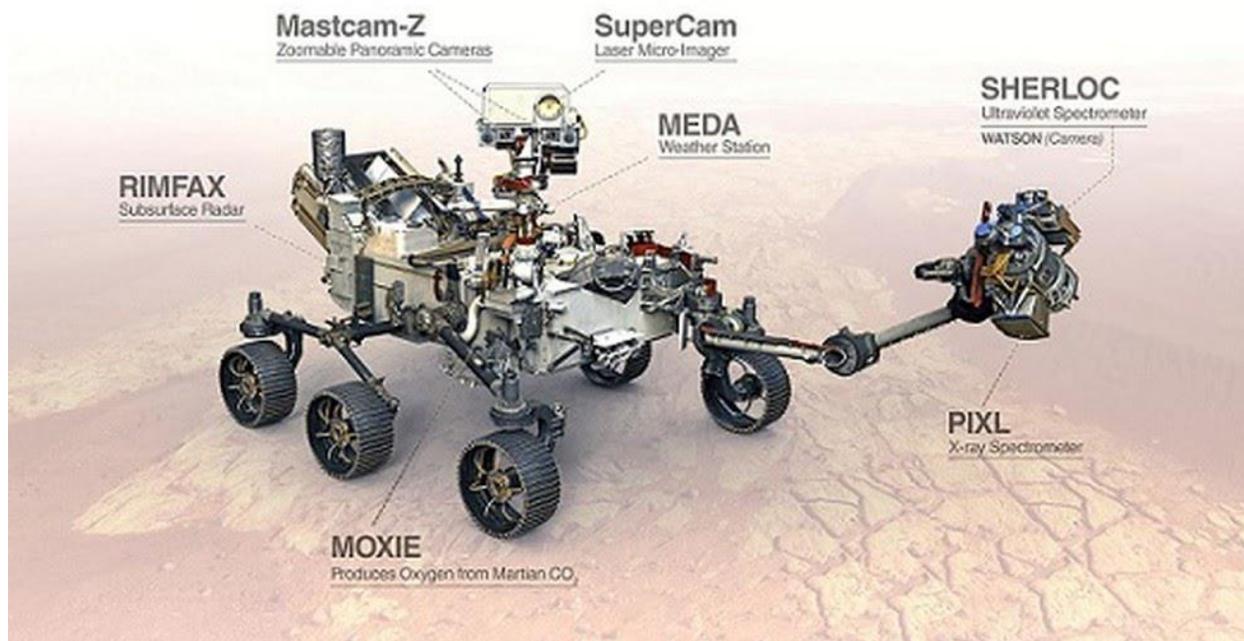
- **Increase Competitiveness in sector:** By liberalising the system, the government will ensure more players in the field, competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market
- **Evidence-based Policy making:** This will ensure that more accurate data is available to both the government to formulate plans and administer its programmes. Maps and accurate geospatial data are crucial for national infrastructure projects such as linkages of rivers, creation of industrial corridors and deploying smart power systems.
- **Boost to Start-ups:** Liberalisation of the mapping industry and democratization of existing datasets will spur domestic innovation and enable Indian companies to compete in the global mapping ecosystem by leveraging modern geospatial technologies.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Indian companies will be able to develop indigenous apps, for example an Indian version of google maps.
- **Employment generation:** The move will unlock tremendous opportunities for the country's private sector, public sector, and research institutions, to drive innovations and build scalable solutions which will in turn generate employment
- **Increased Investment and boost to Economy:** The government also expects an increase in investment in the geo-spatial sector by companies, and also an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn will boost the economy

[NASA's Perseverance and China's Tianwen-1 set to land on Mars](#)

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

In news

- NASA's Perseverance and China's Tianwen-1 are set to land on Mars on February 18 and in May 2021 respectively.



NASA's Perseverance Rover

- It is the most sophisticated Mission.
- It is set to land at Jezero Crater, which was likely filled with water in the past.
- It is NASA's 4th generation, Mars Rover.
- **Goal:** To look for biosignatures in the dried-up lake bed at Jezero Crater.

Tianwen-1

- Tianwen-1 is the first mission to Mars from China.
- It carries an orbiter, a lander, and a rover.
- It will orbit Mars for a few months before attempting to land in May this year.

Green Hydrogen

Context: Less than four months after the USA announced an investment up to \$100 million in hydrogen production and fuel cell technologies R & D, India has announced a National Hydrogen Mission (NHM). Finance Minister in the Union budget for 2020-21 formally proposed for NHM which aims for **generation of hydrogen from green power resources**. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) will publish the draft regulations within a month.

Pilot Projects underway in India

- In October, Delhi became the first Indian city to operate buses running on hydrogen spiked compressed natural gas (H-CNG) in a six-month pilot project. The buses will run on a new technology patented by IOCL for producing H-CNG — 18 per cent hydrogen in CNG — directly from natural gas.

- Power major NTPC Ltd is operating a pilot to run 10 hydrogen fuel cell-based electric buses and fuel cell electric cars in Leh and Delhi, and is considering setting up a green hydrogen production facility in Andhra Pradesh.

Hydrogen Fuel

- Hydrogen **does not occur freely** in nature in useful quantities.
- It can be **made from natural gas** or it can be made **by passing electric current** through water.
- When hydrogen is burned, it only emits water vapour and **carbon dioxide (CO₂) is not produced**.
- It is more efficient than internal combustion engine.
- Although hydrogen is a clean molecule, the process of extracting it is energy-intensive. Also, manufacturing hydrogen fuel based vehicle is expensive.

The sources and processes by which hydrogen is derived, are categorised by colour tabs.

- Hydrogen produced from fossil fuels is called **grey hydrogen**; this constitutes the bulk of the hydrogen produced today.
- Hydrogen generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options is called **blue hydrogen**;
- Hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called **green hydrogen**. In the last process, electricity generated from renewable energy is used to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

The case for green hydrogen

Green hydrogen has specific advantages.

- **Environment Friendly:** Green Hydrogen as energy source is seen as the next big thing as its usage would lead to zero emissions
- **Potential to Decarbonise various sectors:** It is a clean burning molecule, which can decarbonise a range of sectors including iron and steel, chemicals, and transportation.
- **Efficient utilization of Renewable Energy:** Renewable energy that cannot be stored or used by the grid can be channelled to produce hydrogen.
- **Reduced Dependence on Rare Minerals:** Green Hydrogen also holds the key to clean electric mobility that doesn't depend on rare minerals. Green Hydrogen helps achieve long-term vision of reduced dependency on minerals and rare-earth element-based battery as energy storage.
- **Helps Achieve Paris Goal:** Green hydrogen energy is vital for India to meet its Nationally Determined Contributions and ensure regional and national energy security, access and availability
- **Energy Security:** Green energy helps reduce import dependency on fossil fuels

How Hydrogen based vehicles are better than Battery based Electric Vehicles?

- **EV still has dependence on Coal:** India's electricity grid is predominantly coal-based and will continue to be so, thus negating collateral benefits from a large-scale EV push — as coal will have to be burnt to generate the electricity that will power these vehicles
- In several countries that have gone in for an EV push, much of the electricity is generated from renewables — in Norway for example, it is 99 per cent from hydroelectric power.
- **Applicable to multiple sectors:** Experts believe hydrogen vehicles can be especially effective in long-haul trucking and other hard-to-electrify sectors such as shipping and long-haul air travel.

Using heavy batteries in these applications would be counterproductive, especially for countries such as India, where the electricity grid is predominantly coal-fired.

- **Efficiency:** Hydrogen based vehicles enables a refuelling time of just five minutes, compared to 30-45 minutes charging for a Battery based EV. Also, consumers get about five times better energy storage per unit volume and weight

Challenges with regard to Hydrogen Fuel

- **Fuelling Infrastructure:** A big barrier to the adoption of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles has been a lack of fuelling station infrastructure — fuel cell cars refuel in a similar way to conventional cars, but can't use the same station (only 500 in the world & that too in Europe, Japan, South Korea)
- **Safety is seen as a concern:** Hydrogen is pressurised and stored in a cryogenic tank, from there it is fed to a lower-pressure cell and put through an electro-chemical reaction to generate electricity.
- **Scaling up the technology** and achieving critical mass remains the big challenge. More vehicles on the road and more supporting infrastructure can lower costs.

Connecting the dots

- Hydrogen Fuel Cell for Vehicles: Click [here](#)

[UK to conduct first Human Challenge Trials for COVID-19](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II Health & GS - III – Biotechnology

In news

- The UK is set to conduct the first COVID-19 human challenge trials (HCT) within a month from now.
- **Conducted by:** UK government's Vaccines Taskforce, Imperial College London, the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust and the clinical company called hVIVO.

Key takeaways

- The trial was first announced in October 2020.
- In this study, over 90 healthy volunteers between the ages of 18-30 will be deliberately exposed to small amounts of the virus in controlled settings,
- **Objective:** To test treatments and vaccines.
- In this way, the participants are "challenged" by the virus.
- This is not the same as standard vaccine clinical trials.
- **Significance:** HCTs are able to give more precise information about the disease and its effects on humans, and also give results about the efficacy of vaccines on infected humans.

[New Lead \(Pb\) free material discovered](#)

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

In news

- Scientists have found a new Lead (Pb) free material.

- **Identified by:** Scientists at Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru.
- It is called Cadmium (Cd) doped Silver Antimony Telluride (AgSbTe₂).

Key takeaways

- It can efficiently convert waste heat to power our small home equipment and automobiles.
- Most efficient thermoelectric materials developed so far use Lead (Pb) as a major constituent element, restricting their use for mass-market applications.
- This work is supported by Swarna-Jayanti fellowship.

Do you know?

- The Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme was launched by the Indian Government to commemorate India's 50th Independence.
- It provides special assistance and support to a selected number of young scientists with a proven track record to enable them to pursue basic research in frontier areas of science and technology.
- The award consists of a Fellowship of Rs. 25000 per month along with the salary drawn from the parent Institute and a Research Grant of Rs. 5 lakh per annum by Department of Science and Technology (DST) for a period of 5 years.

Devasthal Telescope assumes global importance

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Sci & tech

In news

- The optical telescope set up at Devasthal has assumed global importance for observing important cosmic explosive events such as Gamma-Ray Bursts and [Supernovae](#).



Important value additions

- Devasthal is a mountain peak in Uttarakhand.
- It is a world-class 3.6 m optical telescope.
- It is Asia's largest fully steerable optical telescope.
- **Set up by:** Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), an autonomous research institute of DST, with support from the Belgian government in 2016.
- It will also be helpful for future optical facilities such as the Thirty Meter Telescope.

Related articles:

- [SN 2010kd: a super-luminous supernova](#)
-

[Launch of India Urban Data Exchange \(IUDX\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Governance & GS - III – Information Technology

In news

- India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX) was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** [Housing and Urban Affairs](#)

Key takeaways

- IUDX has been developed in partnership between the Smart Cities Mission and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- IUDX serves as an interface for data providers and data users.
- **Objective:** To share, request, and access datasets related to cities, urban governance, and urban service delivery.
- It is an open-source software platform.
- It will ensure secured and authenticated exchange of data amongst various data platforms.

Related articles:

[Enrolment module for TECHNOGRAHIS launched](#)

[Launch of National Urban Digital Mission \(NUDM\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- II – Governance & GS - III – Information Technology

In news

- The National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) has been launched recently.
- **Ministry:** [Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs](#) and the [Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology](#).

Key takeaways

- NUDM will create a shared digital infrastructure for urban India.
 - It shall work across the three pillars of people, process, and platform to provide complete support to cities and towns.
 - It will institutionalise a citizen-centric and ecosystem-driven approach to urban governance and service delivery.
 - It will be functional across all cities and towns in India by 2024.
-

New Social Media Code

Context: Citing instructions from the Supreme Court (Prajawala case) and the concerns raised in Parliament about social media abuse, the government has released guidelines that aim to regulate social media, digital news media, and over-the-top (OTT) content providers

The government had been working on these guidelines for over three years but the big push came from the recent [Twitter controversy](#)

Key features of guidelines

1. Ensuring Online Safety and Dignity of Users, Specially Women Users:

- Intermediaries shall remove or disable access within 24 hours of receipt of complaints of contents related to nudity including morphed images etc.
- Such a complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf.

2. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

- Social media intermediaries have to appoint grievance officer, who shall register complaints in 24 hours and resolve it within 15 days of receipt
- The grievance redressal official **must be resident in India**.

3. Two Categories of Social Media Intermediaries:

- To encourage innovations and enable growth of new social media intermediaries without subjecting smaller platforms to significant compliance requirement, the Rules make a distinction between social media intermediaries and significant social media intermediaries.
- This distinction is based on the number of users on the social media platform (which will be notified by Government)
- The Rules require the significant social media intermediaries to follow certain additional due diligence.

4. Additional Due Diligence to be followed by Significant Social Media Intermediary

- Significant Social media Intermediaries will now be required to appoint a **chief compliance officer** resident in India, who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the rules.
- They will be required also to appoint a **nodal contact person** for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- Further, the platforms will need to publish a **monthly compliance report** mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints, as well as details of contents removed proactively by the significant social media intermediary.
- Significant social media intermediary shall have a **physical contact address** in India published on its website or mobile app or both.
- In case, due diligence is not followed by the intermediary, safe harbour provisions (section 79 of IT Act, 2000) will not apply to them.

5. Traceability

- Significant social media platforms will be required to disclose the first originator of the mischievous content as may be required by an court order or an order passed under Section 69 of the IT Act by the Competent Authority.
- The order would only be passed for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or of incitement to

an offence relating in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material punishable with imprisonment for a term of not less than five years.

- **Intermediary shall not be required to disclose the contents of any message** or any other information to the first originator.

6. Removal of Unlawful Information:

- The rules lay down 10 categories of content that the social media platform should not host. These include content that
 - threatens the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of India, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or
 - causes incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or prevents investigation of any offence or is insulting any foreign States”;
 - is defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another’s privacy, including bodily privacy;
 - insulting or harassing on the basis of gender;
 - libellous, racially or ethnically objectionable;
 - relating or encouraging money laundering or gambling, or
 - otherwise inconsistent with or contrary to the laws of India
- The rules stipulate that upon receipt of information about the platform hosting prohibited content from a court or the appropriate government agency, it should remove the said content within 36 hours

7. Voluntary User Verification Mechanism:

- Users who wish to verify their accounts voluntarily shall be provided an appropriate mechanism to verify their accounts and provided with demonstrable and visible mark of verification.

8. Giving Users an Opportunity to Be Heard:

- In cases where significant social media intermediaries removes or disables access to any information on their own accord, then a prior intimation for the same shall be communicated to the user.
- Users must be provided an adequate and reasonable opportunity to dispute the action taken by the intermediary.

9. Rules for [OTT services](#)

- **Brought under ambit of IT Act, 2000:** Issues relating to digital media and OTT and other creative programmes on Internet shall be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting but the overall architecture shall be under the Information Technology Act, which governs digital platforms.
- **Code of Ethics for online news, OTT platforms and digital media:** This Code of Ethics prescribe the guidelines to be followed by OTT platforms and online news and digital media entities.
- **Self-Classification of Content:** The OTT platforms, called as the publishers of online curated content in the rules, would self-classify the content into five age based categories- U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult).
- Platforms would be required to implement **parental locks** for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and **reliable age verification mechanisms** for content classified as “A”.
- **Level Playing Field between Digital & Offline Media:** Publishers of news on digital media would be required to observe Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India and the

Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act thereby providing a level playing field between the offline (Print, TV) and digital media.

- **A three-level grievance redressal mechanism** has been established under the rules with different levels of self-regulation.
 - Level-I: Self-regulation by the publishers;
 - Level-II: Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the publishers;
 - Level-III: Oversight mechanism: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting shall formulate an oversight mechanism. It shall publish a charter for self-regulating bodies, including Codes of Practices. It shall establish an Inter-Departmental Committee for hearing grievances

Connecting the dots

- [Dominance of Big tech](#)
- Australia's [News Media Bargaining Code](#)

Global Bio-India 2021

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

In news

- The 2nd edition of Global Bio-India will be organised from 1-3 March 2021 on digital platform.
- **Objective:** To showcase the strength and opportunities of the India's biotechnology sector at national level and to the global community
- **Co-organised by:** Department of Biotechnology along with its Public Sector Undertaking, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) in partnership with [Invest India](#).

Key takeaways

- **Theme:** "Transforming lives"
- **Tag line:** "Biosciences to Bioeconomy"
- Representatives from 50+ countries shall participate.
- Switzerland will be the partner country and Karnataka as India's state partner.
- The first edition of Global Bio-India 2019 was organized at New Delhi.

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Uttarakhand Glacier Disaster

Context: In a staggering collapse of part of a glacier in Uttarakhand's Nanda Devi mountain and the ensuing floods many lives have been lost.

What exactly happened?

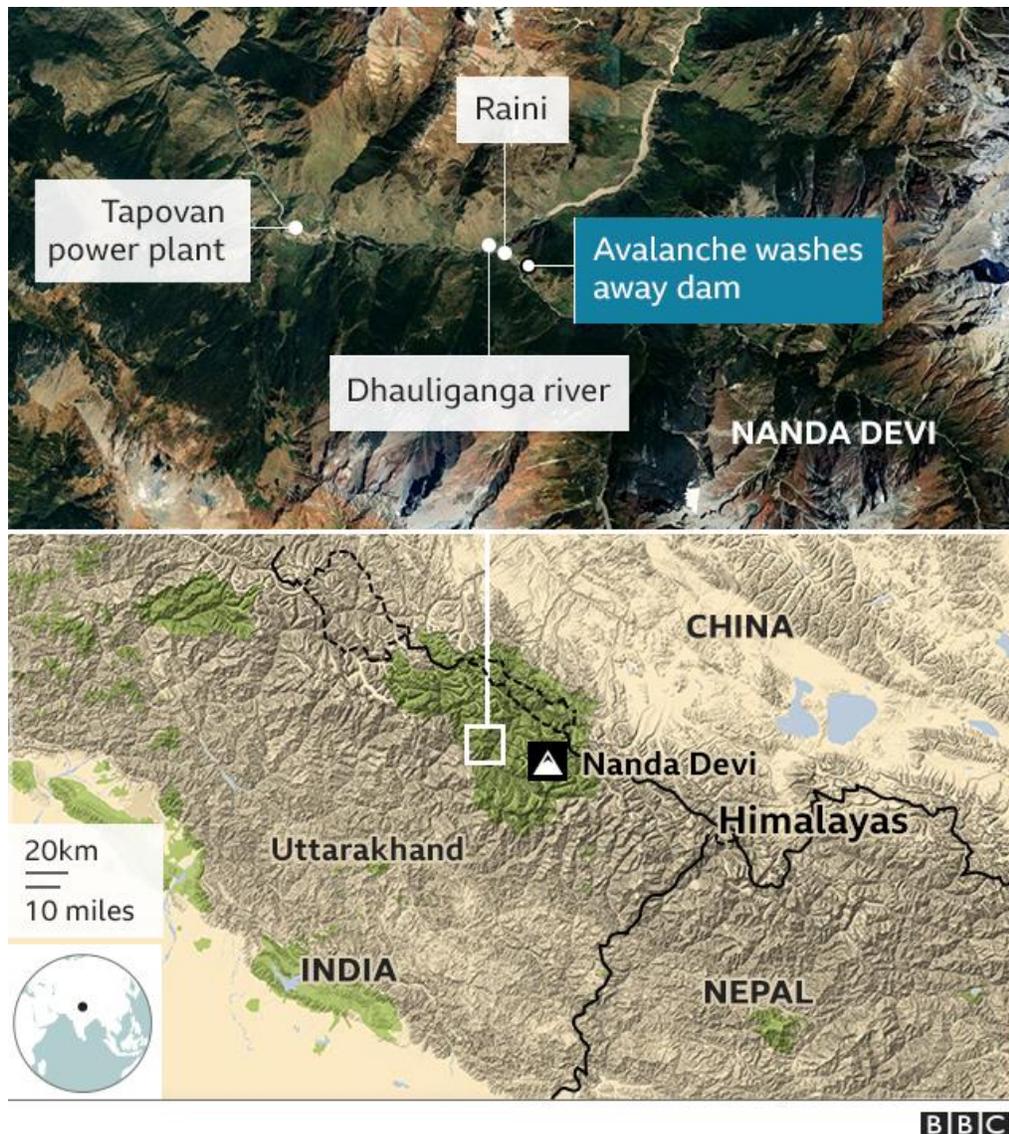
- More than 200 people went missing after **flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district**. So far, 20 bodies have been recovered.
- The flash floods were caused by a glacier burst in the upper reaches of the Himalayas.
- The resulting avalanche and deluge in the Alaknanda river system (**Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers** in Chamoli district) washed away a hydroelectric station (**Tapovan power project**) and five bridges (that connected nearby villages)
- Multi-agency rescue work is on in the state as the authorities evacuated thousands of people from the affected areas
- Apart from the terrain and the low temperature, mud and debris in the tunnel is posing a major challenge for the rescuers

What caused the flood?

- The remoteness of where this happened means no-one has a definitive answer, so far.
- Experts say one possibility is that massive ice blocks broke off the glacier due to a temperature rise, releasing a huge amount of water.
- That could have caused avalanches bringing down rocks and mud. This is a strong possibility because there was a huge amount of sediment flowing down
- Another possibility is that an avalanche or landslide may have dammed the river for some time, causing it to burst out after the water level rose.
- Experts say an avalanche could also have hit a glacial lake that then burst (a term known as **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood- GLOF**)

Do You Know?

- Dhauliganga is a left tributary of the Alaknanda, the left headwater of the Ganges, in the Himalayas in Uttarakhand.
- Dhauliganga is joined by Rishiganga river at Raini, where the disaster at the power project dam took place.



Source: [BBC](#)

Critical Analysis of the Uttarakhand Tragedy

- **Developmental Challenges:** The tragedy is a failure to draw a balance between fragile ecosystems & topography and development imperatives, compounded by climate-change effects. The increased pace of development in the region has also heightened fears about fallout from deforestation and other environmental troubles.
- **Climate Change as reason for such tragedies:** Warming could have led to formation of hitherto undetected proglacial lakes > role played by climate change, which could have been worsen by development projects.
- **Earthquake prone region:** Experts have pointed out that the hundreds of power projects and widening of roads is playing havoc with the ecologically fragile region which is also earthquake-prone.
- **Grim reminder:** The tragedy come as a deadly reminder that this fragile, geologically dynamic region can never be taken for granted.

- **Losing Environmentalism of State:** Once the crucible of environmentalism, epitomised by Sunderlal Bahuguna, Gaura Devi and the Chipko movement, the State's deep gorges and canyons have attracted many hydroelectric projects and dams, with little concern for earthquake risk.
- **Not a new phenomenon:** Red flags have been raised repeatedly, particularly after the moderate quake in 1991 in the region where the Tehri dam was built and the 2013 floods that devastated Kedarnath, pointing to the threat from dam-induced microseismicity, landslides and floods from a variety of causes, including unstable glacial lakes and climate change.
- **Perils of hydropower Projects:** India is heavily invested in dam development and growth of hydropower, largely in the Himalaya region (plan to construct dams in 28 river valleys in the hills) so as to cut carbon emissions. However, the dangers of such projects include potential earthquake impacts, severe biodiversity loss and, importantly, extreme danger to communities downstream.
- **Miscalculation of life of dams:** There is also some evidence that the life of dams is often exaggerated, and siltation, which reduces it, is grossly underestimated: in the Bhakra dam in Himachal Pradesh, for instance, siltation was higher by 140% than calculated.
- **Dangers in Future:** The number and area of glacier lakes will continue to increase in most regions in the coming decades, and new lakes will develop closer to steep and potentially unstable mountain walls, where lake outbursts can be more easily triggered.

Conclusion/ Way Forward

- Centre and the Uttarakhand government cannot ignore the larger context of the State's increasing frailty in the face of environmental shocks.
- The need is to rigorously study the impact of policy on the Himalayas and confine hydro projects to those with the least impact, while relying more on low impact run-of-the-river power projects that need no destructive large dams and reservoirs.

Connecting the dots

- Institutional Structure for Disaster Management: Click [here](#)
-

Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)

About GLOFs

- Glaciers are large bodies of ice moving slowly.
- **Lake Formation:** So, when a glacier retreats, it leaves behind a large impression in the ground, filling it with water and a lake is formed. This is known as a moraine, which can be impounded by precarious pile of debris and buried ice.
- **Lake bursts:** When such a lake (moraines) breaches, it is known as glacial lake outburst flood. GLOFs occur from an unstable natural dam formed from a glacial retreat.
- **Causes for GLOFs:** The moraine dammed lakes weaken as the water level rises and the glacier retreats. They might crumble under pressure from the swelling lake, leading to massive floods. The outburst of water can also happen due to erosion, an avalanche of snow or rock, an earthquake or volcanic eruptions under the ice.
- **In the Hindu Kush Himalaya,** moraine-dammed glacial lakes are common and numerous GLOF events have been traced back to the failure of moraine dams.

- **Climate Change and GLOFs:** The glacial outbursts are also related to global warming. As the temperature soars during summers, the glaciers retreat, leaving behind water-filled, unstable moraine dammed lakes.
- **Possibility of frequent occurrence in future:** Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of the mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes, according to the latest assessment reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Thus, there is a possibility of increase in events like GLOFs

Reducing GLOFs

- **Identifying and mapping such lakes:** Potentially dangerous lakes can be identified based on field observations, records of past events, geomorphologic and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/dam and surroundings, and other physical conditions.
- **A robust early warning system,** and a broad framework for infrastructure development, construction and excavation in vulnerable zones needs to be developed by state government in collaboration with Universities & Central govt.
- **Leveraging Technology:** NDMA has recommended use of Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations, during the monsoon months. Methods and protocols could also be developed to allow remote monitoring of lake bodies from space.
- **Structural measures to prevent their sudden breach:** NDMA recommends reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.
- **Regulating Developmental activities:** Restricting constructions and development in GLOF prone areas is a very efficient means to reduce risks at no cost. Construction of any habitation should be prohibited in the high hazard zone.
- **Existing buildings are to be relocated** to a safer nearby region and all the resources for the relocation have to be managed by Central/State governments.
- **Monitoring Mechanism:** New infrastructures in the medium hazard zone have to be accompanied by specific protection measures. There should be monitoring systems prior to, during, and after construction of infrastructure and settlements in the downstream area.

Connecting the dots

- Landslides
 - Polar vortex
-

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

MoU For Composite Raw Materials signed

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

In news

- Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited (MIDHANI) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the development and production of composite raw materials during Aero India 2021 in Bengaluru

Key takeaways

- This is the first time that such an MoU has been signed for composite raw materials.
- Composites raw materials, mainly in the form of prepregs (carbon, aramid, glass types, etc) are used in platforms like Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), Light Combat Helicopter (LCH), and Light Utility Helicopter (LUH).
- These are currently imported.
- This is the major step forward in the area of composite materials.
- The HAL is not only taking care of frontline aircraft production but also raw materials.
- There is no equivalent proven Indian approved/qualified supplier for various types of prepregs for the aircraft applications.
- This creates a dependency on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).
- Aligned with the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative, these efforts shall help in developing and manufacturing such prepregs in India through collaboration.
- The usage of composites in aerospace is going to continue and increase, particularly for fighter aircraft/helicopters because of its inherent advantages over metallic raw materials.

Related articles:

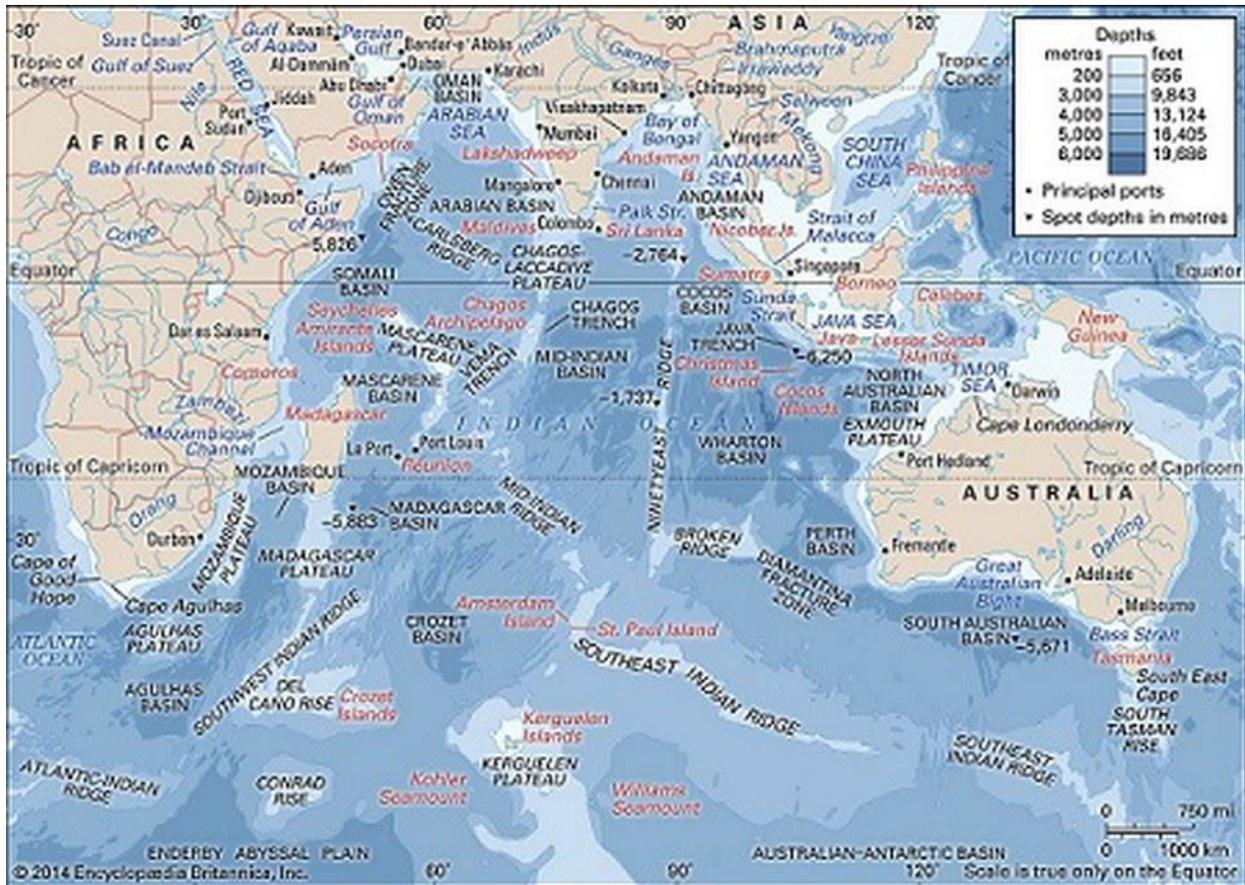
- Aero India – 2021 – [Click here](#)
-

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Defence Ministers’ Conclave

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

In news

- The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Defence Ministers’ Conclave began with a keynote address from the Union Defence minister on 4th February on the sidelines of Aero India 2021 in Bengaluru.



Key takeaways

- As the largest nation in the IOR region with a vast coastline of 7500 Kms, India has an active role to play for peaceful and prosperous co-existence of all countries.
- SAGAR - Security and Growth for All in the Region is the theme of Indian Ocean Policy as outlined by Indian Prime Minister in 2015.
- India's approach and vision to tackle global challenges was highlighted by Prime Minister's dynamic five 'S' vision - Samman (Respect), Samvaad (Dialogue), Sahyog (Cooperation), Shanti (Peace) and Samridhi (Prosperity).

Related articles:

- Aero India – 2021 – [Click here](#)

[‘Made In India’ MK-III Advanced Light Helicopters \(ALH\)](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS- III – Defence and Security; Indigenous technology

In news

- The Indian Navy received three "made in India" Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) from the state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL).
- The helicopters are customised for coastal security.



Key takeaways

- The naval version of ALH is fitted with an array of advanced sensors that can detect Mumbai terror attacks like intrusions on Indian waters.
- These helicopters have the latest-generation avionics, indigenous low-frequency dunking sonar, a full glass cockpit with an integrated architecture display system, and powerful Shakti engines.
- It also has a nose-mounted surveillance radar with 270-degree coverage that can detect and track multiple marine targets.
- Its synthetic aperture radar and inverse synthetic aperture radar can detect targets on the sea.

[Light Utility Helicopter \(LUH\) receives the Initial Operational Clearance](#)

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

In news

- The Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) received the Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) for the Indian Army from the Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC).

Important value additions

- The LUH is a three-ton class new generation single-engine helicopter.
- **Indigenously designed and developed:** Rotary Wing Research and Design Centre of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- Its features are suitable for operations in the diverse operating conditions unique to India.
- The LUH will replace the aging fleet of Cheetah/Chetak helicopters operated by the Services.
- The LUH is powered by a single turboshaft engine with adequate power margins to accomplish high altitude missions in the Himalayas with ease.

- LUH is equipped with Smart Cockpit Display System (Glass Cockpit), state-of-the-art HUMS (Health & Usage Monitoring System) and is designed for various utility and armed roles.

KA-226T Utility Helicopters

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

In news

- KA-226T Utility Helicopters were in news recently.
- The total indigenous content of the Ka-226T utility helicopters, to be jointly manufactured locally by India and Russia with Transfer of Technology (ToT), is between 27%-33%.



Key takeaways

- The Ka-226T is meant to replace the aging and obsolete Cheetah and Chetak fleet of the Army and Air Force and the total technical life of these will start finishing from 2023 onwards.
- The helicopters would be manufactured by India Russia Helicopters Limited (IRHL) — a joint venture between HAL and Russian Helicopters.

Background info:

- In 2015, India and Russia had concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for at least 200 Ka-226T twin-engine utility helicopters estimated to cost over \$1 billion with 60 helicopters to be directly imported and the remaining 140 to be manufactured locally.
- The first helicopter would be delivered within 36 months from the signing of the contract.

- As per the Russian proposal, the localization plan would be spread over four phases, beginning with 3.3% indigenisation for 35 helicopters, going up to 15% for the next 25 helicopters, 35% for 30 helicopters in Phase 3, and eventually to 62.4% indigenisation in Phase 4 for the last 50 helicopters.
-

Malware in news: Netwire

Part of: GS Prelims and GS - III – Cyber security

In news

- Activist Rona Wilson has filed a petition in the Bombay HC to seek a stay on proceedings against him.
- He is in prison in connection with the Bhima Koregaon violence case.

Key takeaways

- A digital forensics consulting company, Arsenal Consulting, was hired by Mr. Wilson's defence team.
- Its report states that for 22 months, Mr. Wilson's computer was controlled by an attacker
- His goal was to deliver incriminating documents onto Wilson's computer, which formed the basis of the case against him.

Important value additions

NetWire

- It is a well-known malware.
- It is also one of the most active ones.
- It is a remote access trojan (RAT) which gives control of the infected system to an attacker.
- Such malware can log keystrokes and compromise passwords.
- Malware essentially does two things: (1) Data exfiltration (stealing data); (2) Infiltrating a system

Related articles:

- India-Japan Cyber Security Cooperation: [Click here](#)
 - US Cyber Attack: SolarWinds hack: [Click here](#)
-

Arjun Main Battle Tank (Mk-1A)

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

In news

- India Prime Minister handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army at a ceremony in Chennai.

Key takeaways

- The army will get 118 units of the Tank.
- These are indigenously designed.
- The Arjun tanks stand out for their 'Fin Stabilised Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS)' ammunition and 120-mm calibre rifled gun.

- It also has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions.
- The secondary weapons include machine guns for anti-personnel and anti-aircraft and ground targets.
- The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version.
- However, the biggest achievement with the latest version is 54.3% indigenous content against the 41% in the earlier model.

Do you know?

- The MK-1A project was initiated by DRDO in 1972.
- Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) was its lead laboratory.
- Mass production began in 1996 at the Indian Ordnance Factory's production facility in Avadi, Tamil Nadu.

[E-Chhawani portal launched](#)

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

In news

- E-Chhawani portal and mobile app was launched recently.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Defence

Key takeaways

- **Objective:** To provide online civic services to over 20 lakh residents of 62 Cantonment Boards across India.
- Through the portal, the residents of cantonment areas will be able to avail basic services like renewal of leases, application for birth & death certificates, water & sewerage connections, etc.
- **Developed by:** eGov Foundation, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Directorate General Defence Estates (DGDE) and National Informatics Centre (NIC).

[Tirals for Helina & Dhruvastra carried out](#)

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

In news

- Joint User Trials for the 'Helina', and 'Dhruvastra' have been carried out from Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) platform in desert ranges.
- Helina is helicopter-launched version of the Nag anti-tank guided missile.
- 'Dhruvastra' is its Air Force variant.

Key takeaways

Helina

- Helina is a third-generation, Lock on Before Launch (LOBL) fire and forget class anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system.
- It has all- weather day and night operational capabilities.
- It can defeat battle tanks with conventional and explosive reactive armour (ERA).
- It can engage targets both in direct hit mode as well as top attack mode.
- Dhruvastra has similar properties as well.

- However, it is developed by the DRDO

Vertical Launch Short Range Surface To Air Missile (VL-SRSAM)

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

In news

- Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted two successful launches of Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM).
- It is developed for Indian Navy.
- **Indigenously designed and developed by:** DRDO

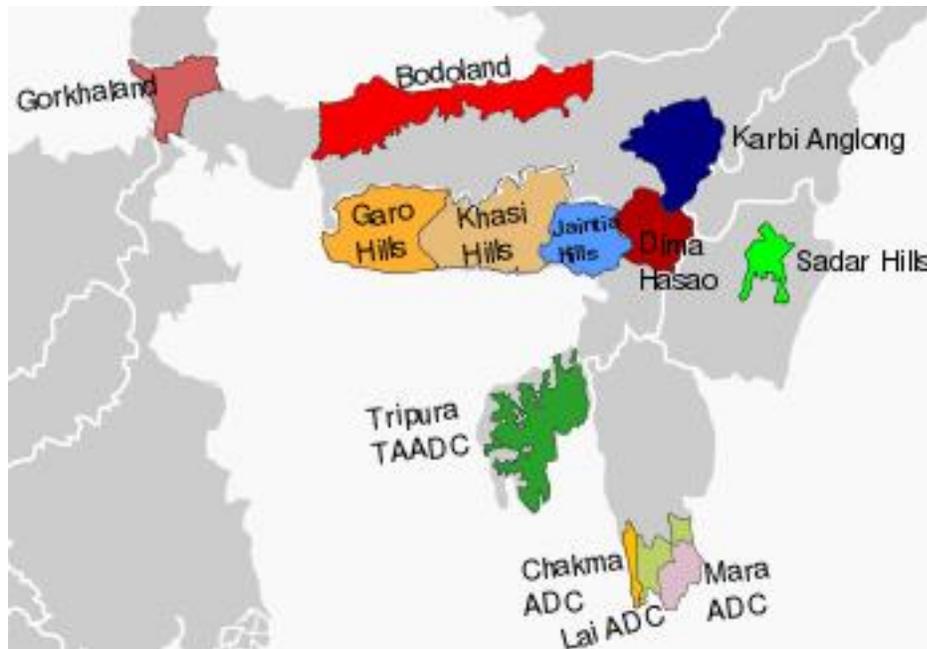


Key takeaways

- It is meant for neutralizing various aerial threats at close ranges including sea-skimming targets.
- These launches were carried out for demonstration of vertical launch capability.

Call for 'Greater Tipraland'

Context: Three months before elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), the state's royal scion and former state Congress president Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma has given a call for a 'Greater Tipraland' (through his organisation TIPRA) , covering Tripuris in and outside of the district council and even the Tripuri diaspora.



Map: showing Autonomous Administrative Councils in North East India

What is the demand for Greater Tipraland?

- Greater Tipraland' has been a political demand on the lines of '[Greater Nagalim'](#)
- It seeks to – in a democratic manner – cater to the aspirations of Tripuris in Mamit of **Mizoram**, Kachar and Hailakandi in **Assam**, and even in Khagrachari, Bandarban, and Chittagong of **Bangladesh**.
- Tripuris are 19 indigenous clans, most of whom live in the TTAADC areas which make up two-thirds of the state's geographical area but comprise only one-third of the state's population of 37 lakh people. 70 percent land under the TTAADC is covered by hills and forests and most inhabitants are prone to 'jhum' (slash and burn) cultivation.

What are 'Tipraland' and 'Greater Tipraland'?

- 'Tipraland' was a demand of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), which is now in power in Tripura in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party. It was a political call for the **creation of a separate state for indigenous groups**.
- Greater Tipraland demands that every indigenous area or village which is today outside the TTAADC be included
- Pradyut Kishore who is now spearheading the demand for Greater Tipraland has claimed the demand arose due to **unfulfilled demands of revising NRC in Tripura** and opposition to CAA in the past.

Critical Analysis of the issue:

- **Vote Bank Politics:** In the wake of impending elections to TTAADC, this is seen an effort by Pradyot to consolidate the tribal vote bank for his party, Tipraha Indigenous Peoples Regional Alliance (TIPRA).
- **Changed Political Scenario:** With Pradyot's new political maneuvering, TIPRA has emerged as the single-largest tribal political party of Tripura. The royal scion has announced a mega merger

and alliance with all major tribal political parties. This may alter the power balance in State (dominated by CPIM and ruling BJP-IPFT govt.)

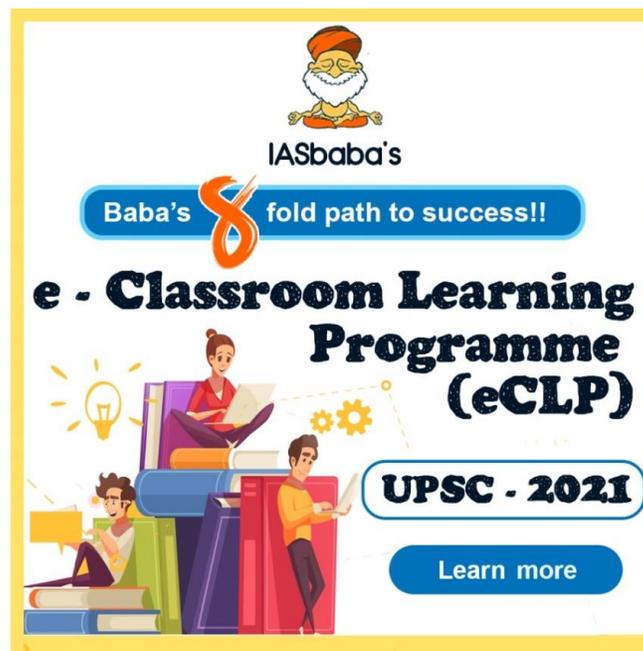
- **New-age ethnic politics:** Tripura saw turbulent violent struggles by different outlawed insurgent outfits for past three decades- all demanding self-determination and sovereignty on different community lines. This new demand is to unite people from both tribal and non-tribal behind ethnic identity.
- **Challenge to Federal Spirit:** Even though the demand for Greater Tipraland is on democratic lines, such ethnicity based redrawing of boundaries will hamper the delicate balance in North East. It may also further embolden the demand of Nagas thus putting the entire region under contestations.
- **Impacts Relations with Bangladesh:** With the passage of 100th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2015, the land boundary between India and Bangladesh has been settled. However, such demands that includes areas falling in Bangladesh will negatively impact the cooperative bilateral relationship between both countries.
- **Can create Insurgency:** This being a political sensitive issue where ethnicity, development and federalism are involved, Union government has to watch closely the developments & engage with stakeholders to address their grievances. If left unattended the pent up grievances can turn into insurgency in long run.

Way Ahead

Even though at this stage, the demand appears to be aimed at consolidating vote bank for the Council elections, Governments (both Union and State) should not take light of these developments.

Connecting the dots

- Bru Refugees Agreement and the role of Pradyut Kishore: Click [here](#)



MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Aero-India 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inaugural ceremony for Aero India 2021, is being held at Air Force Station, Yelahanka, Bengaluru between February 03-05, 2021. • It is Asia's largest Aerospace and Defence Exhibition. • Aero India is a biennial air show and aviation exhibition held in Bengaluru, India at the Yelahanka Air Force Station. • It is organized by the Defence Exhibition Organisation, Ministry of Defence. • The first edition of the air show was held in 1996. • Aero India 2021 is the 13th edition of Aero India. • This year Aero India 2021 has been organized in hybrid mode with a concurrent virtual exhibition to encourage maximum participation.
2. Bhimsen Joshi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The year-long Birth Centenary celebrations of the doyen of music Pandit Bhimsen Joshi will begin on February 4, 2021. • Pandit Bhimsen Gururaj Joshi (1922 –2011) was an Indian vocalist from Karnataka, in the Hindustani classical tradition. • He is known for the khayal form of singing, as well as for his popular renditions of devotional music (bhajans and abhangs). • Bhimsen Joshi belongs to the Kirana Gharana tradition of Hindustani Classical Music. • In 1998, he was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship, the highest honor conferred by Sangeet Natak Akademi. • He received the Bharat Ratna in 2009.
3. Joshimath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glacier broke off at Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district recently causing flash floods in the Dhauliganga River, devastating the Dhauliganga Dam and endangering people. • Joshimath is also known as Jyotirmath. • It is a gateway to several Himalayan mountain climbing expeditions, trekking trails, and pilgrim centers like Badrinath. • Jyotirmath is the uttarāmnāya matha, or northern monastery, one of the four cardinal institutions established by Adi Shankara, the others being those at Shringeri, Puri, and Dwarka.
4. Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government of Nepal has allotted the 679 MW Lower Arun Hydro Electric Project in Nepal to SJVN – the largest Indian Hydroelectric company through competitive bidding. • The Lower Arun Hydro Electric Project is located in Sankhuwasabha

	<p>and Bhojpur Districts of Nepal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Projects being developed by SJVN in Nepal would result in the overall development and boost mutual economic growth in India & Nepal.
5. International Day Of Women & Young Girls In Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Day of Women & Young Girls in Science was recently celebrated by launching an online campaign. • Ministry: Ministry of Women & Child Development in association with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Electronics and Information technology • Objective: (1) To celebrate women who have carved a niche for themselves in the field of STEM; (2) To encourage young girls who aspire to excel in STEM and contribute towards nation building; (3) To promote full and equal access to participation in science for women and girls • It is observed after the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on 22 December 2015. • The day recognises the critical role women and girls play in science and technology.
6. Tapovan Dam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rescue operations resumed at the NTPC's Tapovan hydel project tunnel where many workers are trapped after a snow avalanche triggered flash floods • It is being constructed on Dhauliganga River in Chamoli District, Uttarakhand. • The plant is expected to generate over 2.5 TWh of electricity annually.
7. TROPEX 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TROPEX-21 (Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise) is being held at Kochi. • The exercise involves all three Commands of the Indian Navy, the Tri-Services Command at Port Blair, and elements of Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard. • It is held every two years. • It is the largest exercise conducted by Indian Navy.
8. INS Pralaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Naval Ship Pralaya arrived at Abu Dhabi, UAE. • It shall participate in the NAVDEX 21 (Naval Defence Exhibition) and IDEX 21 (International Defence Exhibition), scheduled from 20 to 25 February 2021. • INS Pralaya is the second ship of the indigenously built Prabal Class Missile Vessels. • The ship was built indigenously Important Info : • Inaugural edition of Indian Navy – UAE Navy bilateral exercise GULF STAR - 1 was conducted in March 2018.
9. Laxmi Vilas Palace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lakshmi Vilas Palace is located in Vadodara, Gujarat. • It was constructed by the Gaekwad family, a prominent Maratha family, who ruled the Baroda State. • It was built by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III in 1890. • Major Charles Mant was credited to be the main architect of the

	<p>palace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is styled on the Indo-Saracenic Revival architecture.
10. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed head of the World Trade Organisation. She is the first female and first African to hold the role in its history. She will serve a four-year term as director general. WTO is an international body that deals with the rules of trade between nations.
11. Mahamrityunjaya Temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mahamrityunjaya temple is located in Naugaon, Assam. It has the world's tallest 126 feet high Shivling. The Mahamrityunjaya Mantra also known as the Rudra Mantra or Tryambakam Mantra. It is a verse of the Rigveda. The sūkta is addressed to Tryambaka, "The Three-eyed One", an epithet of Rudra who is identified with Shiva in Shaivism. The verse also recurs in the Yajurveda.
12. Borodua pilgrimage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the birthplace of Mahapurush Shrimant Shankardev. He started the new Vaishnav tradition from Assam and made the Vaishnavite tradition vibrant.



BABA'S गुरुपरम्परा

ONE-TO-ONE MENTORSHIP

CONNECT TO CONQUER

The Bond of GURU SHISHYA
Parampara Continued...

A NEVER BEFORE INITIATIVE

UPSC/IAS 2021 PREPARATION





By Mohan Sir
Founder IASbaba

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Which of the following country/countries is/are polio endemic?

1. Nigeria
2. Pakistan
3. Afghanistan
4. India

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1 only

Q.2 Consider the following statements:

1. The reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is more in states that adopted PM Jan Aarogya Yojana than the ones who did not adopt it.
2. The infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths for every 100 live births.

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 Consider the following statements regarding Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY):

1. Entire employees' and employers' contribution of 24% of wages towards EPF in respect of new employees in establishments employing more than 1000 employees.
2. Only employees' share of EPF contribution of 12% of wages in respect of new employees in establishments employing upto 1000 employees.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.4 Consider the following statements:

1. India is the largest producer of Silk.
2. India is the only country in the world that produces all four major varieties of silk.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.5 Ethylene glycol is an industrial compound found in which of the following consumer products:

1. Automotive antifreeze
2. Ballpoint pens
3. Solvents
4. Plastics

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1 only

Q.6 Pattachitra painting is based in which of the following state/states of India?

1. West Bengal
2. Odisha
3. Jharkhand
4. Maharashtra

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1 only

Q.7 Which of the following are included under the Strategic sector PSUs:

1. Arms & Ammunition of defence equipment
2. Defence aircraft & warships
3. Atomic energy
4. Applications of radiation to agriculture, medicine and non-strategic industry
5. Railways
6. Power Discoms

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- b) 2, 3 and 6 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 3, 4 and 6 only

Q.8 Consider the following statements regarding National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA):

1. Eldest man of the beneficiary household is considered as 'Head of Family' for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
2. The Act entitles 35 kg of foodgrains per Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Household per month, whereas 5 Kg of foodgrain per (Priority Households) PHH Person per month.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.9 Chauri Chaura incident occurred during which of the following movement?

- a) Satyagraha
- b) Non-Cooperation
- c) Dandi March
- d) Quit India movement

Q.10 Kritagya hackathon is launched by which of the following?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Indian Council of Agricultural Research
- c) ISRO

- d) Ministry of Education

Q.11 Where is the Asia's largest Aerospace and Defence Exhibition held?

- a) Japan
- b) China
- c) Singapore
- d) India

Q.12 Which of the following imaginary line does not pass through Africa?

- a) Tropic of Cancer
- b) Equator
- c) Tropic of Capricorn
- d) International Date line

Q.13 Metroneo, recently seen in news, shall be adopted in which of the following state of India for the first time?

- a) Kolkata
- b) Delhi
- c) Punjab
- d) Maharashtra

Q.14 KAPILA campaign is launched for which of the following?

- a) Education
- b) Agriculture
- c) IPR
- d) Outer Space

Q.15 The World Summit Against Cancer for the New Millennium where a charter was adopted and which marks Origin of World Cancer Day was held at which of the following?

- a) Paris
- b) Amsterdam
- c) South Korea
- d) India

Q.16 Consider the following statements regarding National Safety Council

1. It is an autonomous body.
2. It is set up by the Ministry of Environment

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.17 Which of the following are the sub-schemes under scheme under Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK)?

- 1. Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan
- 2. National Youth Corps
- 3. National Programme for Youth and Adolescent Development
- 4. International Cooperation
- 5. Youth Hostels

Select the correct code:

- a) 1, 4 and 5 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- d) 4 and 5 only

Q.18 Consider the following statements regarding 'Per Drop More Crop':

- 1. It is a component of 'Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana.
- 2. It focuses on enhancing water use efficiency at farm level through Micro Irrigation

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.19 Consider the following statements regarding Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) project

- 1. An array of antennas strategically designed and set up in South Africa and Greenland.
- 2. It is headquartered in the United Kingdom.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.20 North Sea borders which of the following countries?

- 1. Denmark
- 2. Norway
- 3. Germany
- 4. France

Select the correct code:

- a) 1,2 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- d) 4 only

Q.21 The First Seaplane Project is functional between which of the following?

- a) Sabarmati River and Statue of Unity
- b) Dharoi dam and Ambaji
- c) Shatrunjay dam and Tapi
- d) Gateway of India and Ajanta Caves

Q.22 Consider the following statements regarding Government securities:

- 1. These are tax free.
- 2. These are debt instruments issued by the Private companies to borrow money.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.23 Which of the following was/were the objective of the EU?

- a) Establishing an economic and a monetary union
- b) Implementing a common foreign and defence policy
- c) Developing relations in the spheres of home affairs and justice
- d) All of the above

Q.24 Which of the following contain Trans-fatty acids?

- 1. Baked
- 2. Fried
- 3. Processed foods

4. Cooking oils

Select the Correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 4 only
- c) 2 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.25 Which of the following Section of the Information Technology Act, 2000 confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions to monitor any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource?

- a) Section 67
- b) Section 87
- c) Section 69
- d) Section 70

Q.26 Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:

- 1. 2% premium is available for Kharif crops
- 2. 5% premium is available for only commercial crops.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.27 World Sustainable Development Summit 2021 is being organised in which of the following country?

- a) India
- b) Russia
- c) Japan
- d) Singapore

Q.28 The headquarter of United Nations Human Rights Council is situated at which of the following?

- a) Switzerland
- b) France
- c) Geneva
- d) Netherlands

Q.29 Nai Roshni is a scheme under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Agriculture
- b) Ministry of Aviation
- c) Ministry of Finance
- d) Ministry of Minority Affairs

Q.30 Consider the following statements regarding 'Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)':

- 1. It targets small and marginal farmers (SMFs).
- 2. Subsidized agricultural equipment and machines shall also be distributed under the scheme.

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 World's smallest adult reptile was recently discovered in which of the following country?

- a) Israel
- b) Madagascar
- c) Mozambique
- d) Bhutan

Q.32 Consider the following statements regarding the 99th Element which was recently seen in the news :

- 1. It is named after Issac Newton
- 2. It is not found naturally.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.33 Which of the following are the uses of Lithium?

- 1. Ceramics
- 2. Glass
- 3. Telecommunication

4. Aerospace industries

Select the correct code:

- a) 1,2 and 3 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.34 Pre And Post Matric Scholarship Schemes for SC and OBC students come under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
- b) Ministry of Education
- c) Ministry of Minority affairs
- d) Ministry of Women and Child development

Q.35 Consider the following statements regarding Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code):

1. The Code caters to all categories of organised workers only.
2. It applies to every establishment in which 10 or more inter-state migrant workers are employed.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q. 36 Which of the following scheme/schemes promote organic farming?

- a) National Mission on Soil Health Card
- b) Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)
- c) PM-Fasal Bima Yojana
- d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.37 Tapovan Dam is being constructed on which of the following river?

- a) Dhauliganga
- b) Rishiganga
- c) Ganga
- d) Yamuna

Q.38 Tholpavakoothu, a form of shadow puppetry, is practiced in:

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Andhra pradesh
- d) Telangana

Q.39 Which of the following is incorrect?

- a) Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons includes education of children engaged in begging
- b) Institutional care is provided through Child Care Institutions (CCIs) under Child Protection Services (CPS) of Integrated Child Development Services scheme.
- c) As per Section 2 of the JJ Act, 2015, a child who is found begging is included as a "child in need of care and protection".
- d) As per Section 76, whoever employs any child for the purpose of begging shall be punishable with imprisonment up to 10 years and fine of one lakh rupees.

Q.40 SANKALP comes under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Power
- b) Ministry of Environment
- c) Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
- d) Ministry of Education

Q.41 Consider the following statements:

1. Feeding supermassive black holes emit jets of charged particles traveling twice at the speed of light.
2. They are one of the most luminous and energetic objects in the Universe.

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 Consider the following statements regarding Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF):

1. MGNF shall be launched in all districts of India.
2. Academic partnership shall be sought from IIMs and IITs.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.43 Consider the following statements:

1. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) imparts short duration skill development training to youth across all States/UTs.
2. Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) gives Long term training programme in 137 trades are provided through ITIs 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.44 Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme is launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
- b) Ministry of Education
- c) Ministry of MSMEs
- d) Ministry of Textiles

Q.45 Sagarika, the International Cruise Terminal, which is India's first full-fledged international cruise terminal, was inaugurated in which of the following State?

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Gujarat

Q.46 Dibru Saikhowa National Park is situated in:

- a) Meghalaya
- b) Manipur
- c) Tripura
- d) Assam

Q.47 Sandes, an instant messaging platform, was launched recently by which of the following?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Ministry of Electronics and IT
- c) Ministry of Sci & Tech
- d) Reliance Industried

Q.48 Which of the following does not nest along the Indian Coast?

- a) Olive Ridley turtle
- b) Hawksbill turtle
- c) Loggerhead turtle
- d) Leatherback turtle

Q.49 In a case, if the same person is appointed as the governor of two or more states, the emoluments and allowances payable to him will be born by:

- a) One of the two states decided by the President
- b) The first state in which he was appointed
- c) Both the states shared by in such proportion as determined by the President of India.
- d) The second state in which he has been appointed

Q.50 Consider the following states:

1. Mumbai
2. Goa
3. Chhattisgarh
4. Telangana

Arrange the above states chronologically in order of their formation:

- a) 1-3-2-4
- b) 1-2-3-4
- c) 2-1-3-4
- d) 2-1-4-3

Q.51 E-Chhawani portal and mobile app was launched recently by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Power
- b) Ministry of Environment
- c) Ministry of Defence
- d) Ministry of Education

Q.52 Consider the following statements:

1. Tianwen-1 is the first mission to Mars from Japan.
2. NASA's Perseverance Rover will land at Jezero Crater, which was likely filled with water in the past.

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 Which of the following statements is/are correct about AMRUT scheme?

1. AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission are interlinked.
2. AMRUT will lay the foundation for smart cities to grow and develop.

Select the correct code:

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

Q.54 What is the purpose of AMRUT?

- a) Providing basic infrastructure
- b) Provide affordable housing loans
- c) Ensuring quality infrastructure
- d) Ensuring clean and sustainable environment

Q.55 National Solar Mission envisages installed solar energy generation capacity of about:

- a) 100 GW
- b) 150 GW
- c) 1000 GW
- d) 10 GW

Q.56 Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) was recently signed by India with which of the following African country?

- a) Nigeria
- b) Ghana
- c) Mauritius
- d) Morocco

Q.57 Which of the following city has been awarded the 'Tree Cities of the World'?

- a) Hyderabad
- b) Surat
- c) Indore
- d) Mumbai

Q.58 Consider the following statements regarding Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB):

1. It is a statutory body.
2. Wildlife Crime Database Management System analyses trends in wildlife crimes.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.59 Which is the largest exercise conducted by Indian Navy?

- a) TROPEX
- b) NAVDEX
- c) AMPHEX
- d) IDEX

Q.60 "Go Electric" Campaign had been launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Power
- b) Ministry of Environment
- c) Ministry of Road Transport & Highways
- d) Ministry of Agriculture

Q.61 Consider the following statements regarding Guru Ravidas:

1. He belonged to the Bhakti movement era.

2. Hymns of Guru Ravidas have been included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.62 Which of the following is a constitutional body?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) National Commission on SCs
- c) National Human Rights Commission
- d) Central Bureau of Investigation

Q.63 What is gig economy?

- a) Agricultural economy
- b) Public sector economy
- c) Services sector economy
- d) A labour market characterized by the prevalence of short term contract and freelance work.

Q.64 Which of the following Ministry launched Smartcode Platform?

- a) Ministry of Science and technology
- b) Ministry of Electronics and IT
- c) Ministry of Housing and urban Affairs
- d) Ministry of MSME

Q.65 What is the objective of Smartcode platform?

- a) To enable citizens to register complaints directly through the platform.
- b) TO enable citizens to learn coding virtually
- c) To enable Urban local bodies to monitor criminal activities
- d) To enable Urban local bodies to use existing codes and customise them to suit local needs.

Q.66 Consider the following statements regarding Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme:

1. It is launched by Ministry of Education.
2. It provides special assistance to a selected number of scientists to enable

them to pursue basic research in areas of science and technology.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.67 Consider the following difference between Banks & NBFCs:

1. Banks are the government authorized financial intermediary aiming at providing banking services. Whereas NBFC provides banking services without carrying a bank license.
2. NBFC is incorporated under the Companies Act whereas a bank is registered under Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.68 Cirrhosis is a disease of which of the following organ of the human body?

- a) Liver
- b) Kidney
- c) Heart
- d) Skin

Q.69 Consider the following statements:

1. National Bamboo Mission was launched by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME).
2. Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) was launched by the Ministry of Finance.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.70 DIWALI partnership was recently signed between India and Netherlands. It is related to which of the following?

- a) Student exchange program
- b) Solutions for water related challenges
- c) Natural gas pipeline
- d) Waste management

Q.71 Which of the following is/are covered under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme?

- 1. Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery
- 2. Electronic/Technology Products
- 3. Automobiles & Auto Components
- 4. Pharmaceuticals drugs

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 4 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.72 Which of the following bird, assumed to be extinct, was recently rediscovered after 170 years in the rainforests of Borneo, Indonesia?

- a) Red Headed Vulture
- b) Forest Owlet
- c) Jerdon's Courser
- d) Black-browed Babbler

Q.73 Consider the following statements regarding India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX):

- 1. Sharing data related to urban governance between Urban Local Bodies will be smooth.
- 2. It is a closed-source software platform.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.74 Which of the following is/are associated with recently launched National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM)?

- a) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- b) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

- c) NITI Aayog
- d) Both (a) and (b)

Q.75 Mahamrityunjaya temple, recently in news, is situated in which of the following state?

- a) Madhya Pradesh
- b) Uttar Pradesh
- c) Assam
- d) Karnataka

Q.76 Which is the new status accorded to the Caracal species by National Board for Wildlife?

- a) Critically endangered
- b) Extinct
- c) Vulnerable
- d) Endangered

Q.77 Consider the following statements regarding UJJWALA Scheme:

- 1. Under the scheme, families below the poverty line are to be provided with LPG connections with a support of Rs. 1,600 per connection in the next three years.
- 2. The LPG connections will be issued in the name of the women of the households.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.78 Which of the following were recently added in the Phase IV of Swachh Iconic Places (SIP)?

- 1. Jaisalmer Fort, Rajasthan
- 2. Ramdevra, Jaisalmer, Rajasthan
- 3. Golconda Fort, Hyderabad, Telangana
- 4. Sun Temple, Konark, Odisha
- 5. Ajmer sharif, Ajmer, Rajasthan

Select the correct code:

- a) 1,2, 3 and 5 only
- b) 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- c) 1, 2,3, and 4 only
- d) 1 and 2 only

2021 FEBRUARY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1 B	21 A	41 B	61 C
2 D	22 D	42 A	62 B
3 D	23 D	43 C	63 D
4 B	24 D	44 A	64 C
5 A	25 C	45 A	65 D
6 C	26 A	46 D	66 B
7 A	27 A	47 B	67 C
8 B	28 C	48 C	68 A
9 B	29 D	49 C	69 D
10 B	30 C	50 B	70 B
11 D	31 B	51 C	71 D
12 D	32 B	52 B	72 D
13 D	33 D	53 C	73 A
14 C	34 A	54 A	74 D
15 A	35 B	55 A	75 C
16 A	36 B	56 C	76 A
17 C	37 A	57 A	77 C
18 C	38 A	58 C	78 C
19 B	39 D	59 A	
20 C	40 C	60 C	



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