

March 2022

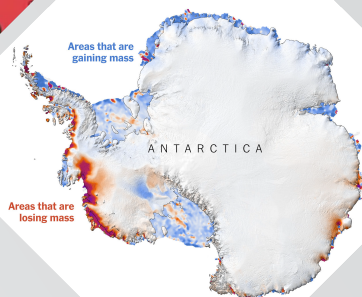
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<p>Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)</p>	<p>Context: The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has informed the Supreme Court that it was willing to issue Aadhaar card to sex workers without insisting on proof of residence/identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But, they should get a certificate from a gazetted officer of the health departments of the States or from an official with the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO). • The court has been hearing arguments about how authorities and community-based organisations could reach out to sex workers and provide them with ration card, voter card and Aadhaar card without disclosing their identities. • Sex workers battle social stigma even at the cost of food security. <p>About UIDAI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UIDAI was created with the objective to issue Unique Identification numbers (UID), named as “Aadhaar”, to all residents of India that is (a) robust enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities, and (b) can be verified and authenticated in an easy, cost-effective way. • UIDAI is a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016. • Prior to its establishment as a statutory authority, UIDAI was functioning as an attached office of the then Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog) • Under the Aadhaar Act 2016, UIDAI is responsible for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aadhaar enrolment and authentication, including operation and management of all stages of Aadhaar life cycle, ○ Developing the policy, procedure and system for issuing Aadhaar numbers to individuals and ○ Perform authentication and ○ To ensure the security of identity information and authentication records of individuals. • It comes under the Electronics & IT ministry
<p>Quami Waqf Boards Taraqqiati Scheme</p>	<p>Context: The deadline for “Quami Waqf Boards Taraqqiati Scheme” has been revised from March 2022 to November 2023.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the scheme, all Waqf properties are to be geotagged. • It began in 2017. • Ministry: Union Ministry of Minority Affairs • The scheme was envisaged on the basis of recommendations made by the Parliamentary Standing Committee. • The government wanted to map the immovable assets under the Waqf boards, to ensure its proper utilisation and monetisation. • The exercise is also aimed at ensuring that these properties are not lost to encroachments and counter ownership claims. • According to estimates, there are over six lakh Waqf properties, out of which, in the last five years, 2 lakh properties have been geotagged. <p>Important value additions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A waqf (also known as wakf or hubous) is an inalienable charitable endowment under Islamic law. • It typically involves donating a building, plot of land or other assets for Muslim religious or charitable purposes with no intention of reclaiming the assets. • The state waqf boards were established by the state governments in view of the provisions of Section 9(1) of the Wakf Act, 1954.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India also has a Central Waqf Council to advise the government “on matters concerning the working of boards and the due administration of waqfs.”
Jal Jeevan Mission	<p>Context: Nine hundred and eighteen habitations, spread over five districts, are going to have combined water supply schemes at a cost of about Rs. 1,473 crore under the Jal Jeevan Mission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The work on all the schemes is expected to be completed in two years. The Central government’s share of the cost will be about Rs. 581.5 crore; the State government’s Rs. 884.3 crore; and the community contribution Rs. 7.4 crore. <p>What is Jal Jeevan Mission?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India. It envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024. It also includes functional tap connection to Schools, Anganwadi centres, GP buildings, Health centres, wellness centres and community buildings The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting. JJM focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level. The Mission is based on a community approach to water. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It looks to create a jan andolan for water, thereby making it everyone’s priority. It promotes and ensures voluntary ownership among local communities by way of contribution in cash, kind and/ or labour and voluntary labour. Parent Ministry: Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti Funding Pattern: The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories. Four-tier implementation & monitoring of the scheme at National, State, District & village level.
SAMARTH initiative for women	<p>Context: Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, (MSME) recently launched a Special Entrepreneurship Promotion Drive for Women - “SAMARTH” on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2022 which is celebrated on 8th March every year.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <p>Through this initiative, the Ministry is focusing on providing Skill Development and Market Development Assistance to women</p> <p>Under the Samarth initiative, 20% seats in free Skill Development Programs organized under skill development schemes of the Ministry will be allocated for Women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 7,500 women will be benefitted. 20% of MSME Business Delegations sent to domestic and international exhibitions under the schemes for Marketing Assistance will be dedicated to women owned MSMEs. The ministry is also continuously making efforts to develop entrepreneurship culture among women by offering several additional benefits for women in various schemes implemented by the Ministry.
National Digital Tourism Mission	<p>Context: Ministry of Tourism had constituted an inter-ministerial task force for National Digital Tourism Mission to undertake consultations with the tourism industry and domain experts, define the context, mission, vision, objectives, and overall scope of the National Digital Tourism Mission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision: To bridge the existing information gap amongst different stakeholders of tourism ecosystem through a digital highway.

	<p>The Need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Envisages to achieve the objective of harnessing the full potential of digitization in tourism sector by facilitating exchange of information and services in tourism sector Most of the tourism systems developed by Central Government, State Governments, Public sector and Private sector function in silos. As a result, the tourism ecosystem is unable to harvest the combinatorial benefits of information exchange. Data systems currently don't interact with each other using a common language, thereby curtailing data analytics and resultant policy-making. In order to overcome the same, there is need for seamless standardized data exchange amongst various stakeholders
Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)	<p>Context: The Global Pandemic is once in a life-time disruption that has created serious adverse impacts on lives and livelihood in economies all around the world. Government of India responded with a series of calibrated measures aimed at protecting the lives and livelihoods of most vulnerable and small businesses like the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) segment. India has become third largest start-up ecosystem in the world after US and China with over 60,000 start-ups. India created 42 Unicorn in the year 2021 alone.</p> <p>The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an international project which seeks to provide information on the entrepreneurial landscape of countries. GEM carries out survey-based research on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship ecosystems around the world and is being led by Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad. As per Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) India Report (21-22), India's entrepreneurial activity expanded in 2021, with its Total Entrepreneurial Activity rate (percentage of adults (aged 18–64) who are starting or running a new business) increased to 14.4% in 2021, up from 5.3% in 2020. <p>Initiatives by the Ministry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot project, 'Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs and Startups by Women (WEE)' is being implemented in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Germany to pilot incubation and acceleration programmes for women micro entrepreneurs, enabling them to start new businesses and scale up existing enterprises in Maharashtra and other States, viz. Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and North Eastern region of the country. Pilot Project on Entrepreneurship Development (PM YUVA) has been launched in November, 2019 for creating an enabling ecosystem through entrepreneurship education, training, advocacy and easy access to entrepreneurship network, for students and alumni of skill training institutes viz. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) and Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS). The scheme covers 10 States including Maharashtra and 2 Union Territories. Entrepreneurship Promotion and Mentoring of Micro and Small Businesses in Six Holy Cities: The project seeks to catalyse local entrepreneurial activities through involvement of potential and existing entrepreneurs, through entrepreneurship awareness, education and mentoring in Pandharpur, Puri, Varanasi, Haridwar, Kollur and Bodh Gaya. In order to enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes, National Skill Training Institutes, PMKVY Centers and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras.
National Commission for Scheduled Tribes	<p>Context: A parliamentary committee has said in a recent report that the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has been dysfunctional for the past four years and has not delivered a single report to Parliament.</p>

	<p>According to the commission's website, in the financial year 2021-22, it has met only four times.</p> <p>Its rate of pendency of resolution of complaints and cases that it receives is close to 50%.</p> <p>National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCST was set up with effect from 19th February, 2004 by amending Article 338 and by inserting a new article 338A in the Constitution through the 89th Constitution Amendment Act, 2003. • Hence, it is a constitutional body. • Powers: It oversees the implementation of various safeguards provided to STs under the Constitution and to evaluate the working of such safeguards. • The commission is vested with all the powers of a civil court while investigating any matter on inquiring into any complaint relating to deprivation of rights and safeguards for the Scheduled Tribes • Composition: It consists of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and 3 other Members who are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At least one member should be a woman. ○ The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson and the other Members hold office for a term of 3 years. ○ The members are not eligible for appointment for more than two terms.
Padma awards	<p>Context: India's first Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, who died in a chopper crash in Tamil Nadu last year, political leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, Tata Sons chairman N. Chandrasekaran, former Comptroller & Auditor General Rajiv Mehrishi and late Radheshyam Khemka were among 54 prominent personalities who were conferred the Padma awards by the President of India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total 128 awards were presented in the ceremony. <p>About Padma Awards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian honours of India announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. • The Awards are given in three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service). ○ Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher order) and ○ Padma Shri (distinguished service). • It was instituted in 1954. • All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. • The awards are presented by the President of India. • The Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. • The Committee is headed by the Cabinet Secretary and includes Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons as members. • The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.
New India Literacy Programme (NILP)	<p>Aim: To support the States and Union Territories in promoting literacy among non-literates in the age group of 15 and above, across the country covering 5 crore non-literates</p> <p>Components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy 2. Critical Life Skills 3. Vocational Skills Development 4. Basic Education 5. Continuing Education <p>The salient features of the NILP are</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of school students, pre-service students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), school teachers, Anganwadi and ASHA workers, NYKS, NSS, NCC volunteers • School to be unit for implementation of the scheme • Use of ICT and online implementation of the scheme through 'Online Teaching Learning and Assessment System' (OTLAS) • Material and resources through digital modes, viz, TV, radio, cell phone-based free/open-source Apps/portals, etc. • Assessment tests to be conducted in schools by State/UTs and evaluation of learners by NIOS/SIOS; assessment on demand through OTLAS and generation of e-certificates • Sample achievement survey • Online MIS
Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) as a sub-scheme of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U)	<p>Context: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has launched Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) as a sub-scheme of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U) to provide dignified living to urban migrants/ poor near their workplace. This scheme is being implemented through two models as under:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model-1: Utilizing existing Government funded vacant houses constructed under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) and Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) to convert into ARHCs through Public Private Partnership (PPP) or by Public Agencies; • Model-2: Construction, Operation & Maintenance of ARHCs by Public/ Private Entities on their own available vacant land. <p>As per scheme guidelines, affordable rent of ARHCs is fixed by the local authority based on a local survey.</p>
National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat)	<p>Aims to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary classes and to ensure that all children attain grade level competencies in reading, writing and numeracy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lays down priorities and actionable agendas for States/UTs to achieve the goal of proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy for every child by grade 3. • Detailed guidelines have been developed for implementation of the NIPUN Bharat Mission which includes the Lakshya or Targets for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy starting from the Balvatika upto age group 9.
Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi (PM-DAKSH) Yojana	<p>Context: Launched by Department of Social Justice and Empowerment during 2020-21 to impart skill development training to the youth (age between 18-45 years) belonging to Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes/Economically Backward Classes/De-notified Tribes and Safai karamcharis including Waste pickers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The training is free of cost and is implemented through three Corporations viz. National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC), National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC) and National Safai Karamcharis Finance & Development Corporation (NSKFDC) catering to the respective target groups. • The main objective of the scheme is to increase the skill levels of the targetted youth by providing for long term and short term skills, followed by settlement in employment/self-employment.
State Jurisdiction on Lottery Tax: SC	<p>In News: The Supreme Court has held that a State legislature has the right to impose tax on lotteries conducted by other States within its jurisdiction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bench of Justices M.R. Shah and B.V. Nagarathna observed that 'lotteries' is a "species of gambling activity". The court said 'betting and gambling' is part of the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. • Since, there is no dispute that lotteries, irrespective of whether it is conducted or organised by the Government of India or the Government of State or is authorised by the State or conducted by an agency or instrumentality of State government or

	<p>Central government or any private player, is 'betting and gambling', State legislatures have the power to tax lotteries under Entry 62 of the State List.</p> <p>Appeal against HC verdicts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The judgment came on appeals filed by the Karnataka and Kerala governments against the decisions of their respective High Courts to quash laws enacted by their legislatures to tax lotteries organised and promoted by the States of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur in Kerala and Karnataka. The High Courts had found the tax laws enacted by the two States invalid and unconstitutional and had even directed Kerala and Karnataka to refund the money collected as tax from lotteries to the north-eastern States.
Article 355:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 355 refers to the provision in the Constitution that states that "It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. Background: On 21st March 2022, there was a violent fight between two groups of the ruling party in Bogtui village in Birbhum district, West Bengal. The Deputy Pradhan, Shri Bhadu Sheikh was killed and in retaliation houses in the area were attacked and set on fire resulting in 12 deaths including that of women and children. All the members belong to the minority community.
Withdrawing general consent to CBI	<p>Context: Nine states have withdrawn general consent to the CBI to investigate cases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They include West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Kerala and Punjab. <p>About Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CBI is the premier investigating agency of India. Ministry: Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role: It was originally set up to investigate bribery and governmental corruption. In 1965, it received expanded jurisdiction to investigate breaches of central laws enforceable by the Government of India, multi-state organised crime, multi-agency or international cases. CBI is exempted from the provisions of the Right to Information Act. CBI is India's officially designated single point of contact for liaison with the Interpol. The CBI headquarter: New Delhi.
Deputation of DIGs: Proposed Changes	<p>Context: After its proposal to amend the All India Service Rules that would allow it to call any IAS, IPS or IFoS officer on central deputation with or without the state's consent, the Centre has issued another order on central deputation of Deputy Inspector General-level IPS officers.</p> <p>What is the order?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to existing rules, a DIG-ranked IPS officer with a minimum experience of 14 years could only be deputed to the Centre if the Police Establishment Board empanelled them as DIGs at the Centre. The board chooses the panel on the basis of officers' career and vigilance records. Only Superintendent of Police (SP) level officers do not require empanelment at the Centre. In an order issued on February 10, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has said that IPS officers coming to the Centre at DIG level would no longer be required to be empanelled at that level with the Union Government. The new order makes the entire pool of DIG-level officers in a state eligible for central deputation. <p>Why has it been issued?</p>

- Sources in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said the move is aimed at **increasing the pool** of DIG-level IPS officers for central deputation in the backdrop of **massive vacancies** in central police organisations (CPOs) and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).
- According to data sourced from various CPOs and CAPFs, out of 252 posts reserved for IPS officers at DIG level at the Centre, 118 (almost half) are vacant. IPS officers have a quota of 40% in CPOs and CAPFs.

How will the move help?

- According to MHA sources, the idea is to ease up the process of central deputation as verification of records takes a long time (sometimes as long as one year)
- Also, it increases the size of the pool of officers available to the Centre.
- However, this would not automatically allow DIGs to come to the Centre. Officers would **still have to be put on the offer list for central deputation** which is decided by the states and the Centre in consultation. Also, states would have to be willing to relieve them.

So why would states have a problem?

- If read with the recent proposal on deputation of IAS, IPS and IFoS officers, the new order may be seen by many states as the **Centre's attempt on increasing its powers over officers** serving in the states.
- Under the earlier proposals, the Centre would have powers to demand, within a stipulated time frame, a certain quota of officers from the state for central deputation, and also to call any IAS officer on central deputation in "public interest". In case the state failed to relieve the officer, he/she would be deemed relieved following the date fixed.
- Most states, including some ruled by the NDA, have opposed the move.
- Also, there is little evidence of a waiver of empanelment conditions having an impact on vacancies at the Centre. For example, there is no requirement of empanelment for SP level posts, yet the vacancies are close to 50%.

Why don't states relieve officers?

- Because there is a **serious paucity of officers in the states too**.
- In a cost-cutting move during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime, the size of IPS batches among other government staff was reduced even though sizeable vacancies existed even then.
- From 80-90 officers each, IPS batches were cut to 35-40 officers (in 1999-2002, the average was 36). The average attrition rate of IPS officers due to superannuation is 85 per year.
- While the **number of districts in some states doubled** in a decade or so, the availability of officers was one third.
- In 2009, against a sanctioned strength of over 4,000 IPS officers, there were more than 1,600 vacancies. During UPA government, the government began intake of IPS batches as large as 150.
 - The government has continued to increase the size of batches with the 2020 Civil Services Exams taking in 200 IPS officers.
- According to the MHA, as on January 1, 2020, there were 908 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 4,982.
- The strength of IAS officers too had been impacted due to low intake during the 1990s.

How has this impacted the services?

- The anomaly in IPS recruitment adversely affected cadre management over the years. At some levels, there are fewer officers than sanctioned posts, while at others there is a glut.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On one hand, states are not providing enough DIGs or SPs to the Centre, while on the other, the Centre does not have enough posts if the total cadre reserve of IPS is calculated. Uttar Pradesh has a shortage of DIGs and IGs, but too many officers at the level of ADGs. Then while states should ideally promote batches or parts of it according to the vacancies available, political bosses often promote entire batches to please a certain section, in effect slamming doors on promotional avenues for those below them. CAPF officers, themselves facing career stagnation, have been demanding removal of the DIG-level quota for IPS officers as they are unwilling to join, so that force cadre officers can instead fill these posts. It is estimated that by 2025, states may have surplus officers at DIG level to spare for the Centre and, if Centre-state relations remain normal, the issue may be resolved.
AP High Court Verdict on Amaravati	<p>Context: In a significant development, the Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the State government to construct and develop Amaravati capital city and capital region within six months as agreed in the terms and conditions under the provisions of APCRDA Act of 2014.</p> <p>Brief background of the case</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2014, the Amaravati region was chosen as the site of the capital of Andhra Pradesh, the residuary State left after the creation of Telangana. However, with the change of regime in 2019, the work was stopped where the new government proposed decentralised development by having three capitals. AP legislature passed AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act 2020 and Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development (Repeal) Act 2020 which proposed to establish three capitals in the state - Amaravati, Visakhapatnam, and Kurnool as the legislative, executive, and judicial capitals respectively. Essentially, around 33,000 families of Amravati had given up their land in 2014-15 for capital region development program. However, with the legislation for the construction of three capital cities in 2020, the families were left with no sustainable means of livelihood. Therefore, they challenged these new legislation (proposal of three capitals) in AP High Court. Petitioners argued that the abrupt halting of development in the capital region (Amrawati) had led to the crashing of the value of plots and this could mean that these families would incur a loss of over Rs 30,000 crore if the value of returnable plots is estimated at the lowest prices. But in November 2021, the State had repealed/withdrew these laws. <p>Key Features of the High Court Verdict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State's High Court has ruled that it cannot abandon the project to develop Amaravati as the capital city after over 33,000 acres had been given up by farmers and ₹15,000 crore sunk in it over development expenditure. The Court has held that the action of the state to come up with a proposal for three capitals was arbitrary and violative of Articles 21 and 300-A of the Constitution of India. State Legislature lacks competence to make any legislation for shifting, bifurcating or trifurcating the capital and Heads of Departments of the three wings of the Government including the High Court The High Court has also categorically held that the state had failed to keep up their promise to the petitioners who had surrendered their lands expecting developed, reconstituted plots as the State failed to complete the process of construction of Amrawati City by 2018. The State is directed to construct and develop Amaravati capital city and capital region within six months time.

Implications of the verdict

- The verdict, if undisturbed by the Supreme Court, may put an end to attempts to shift the capital city out of Amaravati.
- A welcome feature of the verdict is that it has invoked the doctrines of constitutional trust and *promissory estoppel* to prevent a regime from going back on its promises to citizens.
 - *Promissory estoppel* is a doctrine in contract law that stops a person from going back on a promise even if a legal contract does not exist.
- It sends out a message that governance should not be buffeted by winds of political change or be held hostage to the passing whimsy of a particular regime.

Connecting the dots

- Reorganisation of States
- Separation of Power



<p>Increase in India's trade deficit</p>	<p>Context: As per preliminary foreign trade estimates, India's merchandise exports rose 22.3% to \$33.81 billion in February, while imports shot up 35% to surpass \$55 billion, increasing the trade deficit to \$21.2 billion.</p> <p>Do you know? A trade deficit is an economic measure of international trade in which a country's imports exceeds its exports.</p> <p>(Trade Deficit = Total Value of Imports – Total Value of Exports)</p>
<p>Global additive manufacturing</p>	<p>Context: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) aims to increase India's share in global additive manufacturing to 5 per cent within the next three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is also hoped that it could likely add \$1 billion to the gross domestic product by that time. <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per the National Strategy for Additive Manufacturing, by 2025, India will aim to achieve certain targets such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 India specific technologies for material, machine and software, 100 new startups for additive manufacturing, 500 new products. In total, MeitY hopes that these new startups and opportunities will give jobs to at least 1 lakh new skilled workers over the next three years. <p>About additive manufacturing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3D printing or additive manufacturing uses computer-aided designing to make prototypes or working models of objects by laying down successive layers of materials such as plastic, resin, thermoplastic, metal, fiber or ceramic. With the help of software, the model to be printed is first developed by the computer, which then gives instructions to the 3D printer.
<p>National Stock Exchange of India Limited</p>	<p>Context: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently arrested Chitra Ramkrishna, former Managing Director of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), in a case registered in May 2018, to probe the alleged abuse of the NSE's server architecture for granting preferential access of market data to a stock broker, ahead of others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Ramkrishna was NSE's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer from April 2013 to December 2016. <p>Earlier penalty by SEBI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On February 11, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) levied penalties on Ms. Ramkrishna, Mr. Subramanian, and former NSE MD Ravi Narain on account of multiple violations, including irregularities in Mr. Subramanian's appointment as a Chief Strategic Adviser and his re-designation as the Group Operating Officer and Adviser to the then NSE MD. <p>National Stock Exchange of India</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the leading stock exchange of India, located in Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is the world's largest derivatives exchange in 2021 by number of contracts traded based on the statistics maintained by Futures Industry Association (FIA), a derivatives trade body. It is under the ownership of some leading financial institutions, banks, and insurance companies. NSE was established in 1992 as the first dematerialized electronic exchange in the country. NSE was the first exchange in the country to provide a modern, fully automated screen-based electronic trading system that offered easy trading facilities to investors of the country.

National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC)	<p>Context: Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of a new government-owned firm, National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC), for pooling and monetising sovereign and public sector land assets.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NLMC is being formed with an initial authorised share capital of Rs. 5,000 crore and paid-up capital of Rs. 150 crore. • The government will appoint a chairman to head the NLMC through a “merit-based selection process” and hire private sector professionals with expertise. • The NLMC will undertake monetisation of surplus land and building assets of Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) as well as government agencies. • The new corporation will also help carry out monetisation of assets belonging to public sector firms that have closed or are lined up for a strategic sale. • The government would be able to generate substantial revenues by monetising unused and under-used asset.
RBI’s \$5 billion dollar-rupee swap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently conducted a \$ 5 billion dollar-rupee swap auction as part of its liquidity management initiative. • The action has led to infusion of dollars and sucking out of the rupee from the financial system. • It will reduce the pressure on inflation and strengthen the rupee. <p>What happens during the swap auction?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBI sold \$5.135 billion to banks on March 8 and simultaneously agreed to buy back the dollars at the end of the swap settlement period. • When the central bank sells dollars, it sucks out an equivalent amount in rupees, thus reducing the rupee liquidity in the system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Liquidity means the availability of liquid assets in the market. • Dollar inflow into the market will strengthen the rupee which has already hit the 77 level against the US dollar. • The swap auction can be done in the reverse way also when there is shortage of liquidity in the system. • The RBI then buys dollars from the market and releases an equivalent amount in the rupees.
Microfinance institutions can now set interest rates	<p>Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed microfinance institutions the freedom to set interest rates on the loans that they lend.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidelines will take effect from 1st April 2022. • The RBI tweaked the definition of a microfinance loan to indicate a collateral-free loan given to a household having annual income of up to Rs. 3 lakh. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Earlier, the upper limits were Rs. 1.2 lakh for rural borrowers and Rs. 2 lakh for urban borrowers. • There shall be no prepayment penalty on microfinance loans. • Penalty, if any, for delayed payment shall be applied on the overdue amount and not on the entire loan amount. <p>Microfinance institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microfinance offers a solution to small business owners, who do not have access to banking and associated services. • These institutions offer services similar to that of a bank. • They do charge interest on loans but the interest rate is lower than that charged by most banks in the country. • They help small- and medium-sized businesses scale up with access to funds at the right time. • They worked as an alternative, with an aim to create financial equality. • In India, there are two channels through which microfinance operates:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SHG – Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) ○ Microfinance Institutions (MFIs)
PM-DevINE for North East	<p>Context: A new scheme has been launched in the Union Budget 2022 – Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North-East, PM-DevINE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be implemented through the North-Eastern Council • An initial allocation of Rs. 1,500 crore will be made for the new scheme. <p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will fund infrastructure, in the spirit of PM GatiShakti, and social development projects based on needs of the North-East. • Enable livelihood activities for youth and women, filling the gaps in various sectors. <p>PM GatiShakti</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Rs. 100 lakh-crore project for developing 'holistic infrastructure' – Will encompass the seven engines for multi-modal connectivity for the states with speedier implementation of development projects through technology to facilitate faster movement of people and goods through Rs 20,000 crore financed by the government to speed up this project • To reduce the logistics cost – a transformative approach, driven by roads, railways, ports, airports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure. All seven engines will pull the economy forward in unison • Unshackle bureaucratic entanglements and end inter-ministerial silos that delay infrastructure projects and drive up costs • Sets sectoral targets to be completed by 2024-25 in areas such as expanding national highways and increasing cargo capacity by the railway and shipping ministries • Significance: Currently, the logistics cost in India is about 13% of the GDP whereas in other developed countries it is to the extent of 8%. Government is committed to reduce the cost of logistics to ensure • Competitiveness of our manufacturing sector, • Better realisation of prices to farmers • Availability of goods at cheaper prices to consumers
Issues plaguing MGNREGS	<p>Context: According to a Parliamentary Standing Committee report submitted to the Lok Sabha, fake job cards, widespread corruption, late uploading of muster rolls, and huge pending payments for wages and materials are among the issues hampering the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scheme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With regard to the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin, the panel said ground-level observations exposed corruption. <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee were informed of the non-availability of actual labourers working in MGNREGA site while on-paper the number of labourers stayed intact and full. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pending wages amounted to Rs. 4,060 crore. ○ The budget estimates for the scheme for 2022-23 were reduced from the Rs. 78,000 crore sought by the Department of Rural Development, to Rs. 73,000 crore. <p>What is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was notified in 2005. • Goal – To improve the livelihood security of people in rural areas. • It is a universal scheme guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a year to every rural household that expresses a demand. • It aims to guarantee the 'Right to Work'. • Every registered household receives a Job Card (JC) to track their work completed. • The scheme is implemented by the gram panchayat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The failure of provision for employment within 15 days of the receipt of a job application will result in the payment of unemployment allowance to the job seekers. Employment is to be provided within 5 km of an applicant's residence Employment under MGNREGA is a legal entitlement. <p>About the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch: To achieve the objective of "Housing for All" by 2022, the erstwhile rural housing scheme Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was restructured to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) w.e.f 1st April, 2016. Ministry Involved: Ministry of Rural development. Aim: To provide a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural families, who are homeless or living in kutcha or dilapidated houses by the end of March 2022. Beneficiaries: People belonging to SCs/STs, freed bonded labourers and non-SC/ST categories, widows or next-of-kin of defence personnel killed in action, ex servicemen and retired members of the paramilitary forces, disabled persons and minorities. The cost of unit assistance is shared between Central and State Governments in the ratio 60:40 in plain areas and 90:10 for North Eastern and hilly states.
Minimum support price for jute	<p>Context: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Tuesday approved the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for raw jute for the 2022-2023 season.</p> <p>According to an official release, the MSP of raw jute has been fixed at Rs. 4,750 a quintal for 2022-2023 season, which is Rs. 250 higher than the previous season.</p> <p>What is Minimum Support Price (MSP)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a form of market intervention by the Government of India to insure farmers against any sharp fall in farm prices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSP is price fixed to protect the farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years. The MSPs are announced by the Government of India at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution. Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane. These are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cereals (7) - paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi Pulses (5) - gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil Oilseeds (8) - groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and nigerseed Raw cotton Raw jute Copra De-husked coconut Sugarcane (Fair and remunerative price) Virginia flu cured (VFC) tobacco
Exports cross \$400 billion annual target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's annual goods exports crossed the \$400 billion mark for the first time ever, buoyed by an increase in shipments of merchandise including engineering products, apparel and garments, gems and jewellery and petroleum products. Exports had reached \$331.02 billion in the pre-pandemic fiscal year of 2018-19. Shipments have so far increased by \$25.19 billion during the month of March and by March 31, the total figure is expected to be \$410 billion
National Smart Grid Mission	<p>Context: Established by Government of India to plan and monitor implementation of policies and programmes related to Smart Grid activities in India.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary aim of the Smart Grids is to improve reliability of the Electricity networks and make the grid amenable to renewable energy inputs through distributed generation. • Increased efficiencies with Smart Grid and Smart Meters empower the consumers to manage their electricity consumption in a better manner and help them in reducing their bills. • The NSGM also envisages capacity building initiatives for Distribution Sector personnel in the field of Smart grids.
Export Preparedness Index 2021	<p>In News: NITI Aayog, in partnership with the Institute of Competitiveness, released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive analysis of India's export achievements. • The index can be used by states and union territories (UTs) to benchmark their performance against their peers and analyse potential challenges to develop better policy mechanisms to foster export-led growth at the subnational level. • The Export Preparedness Index is a data-driven endeavour to identify the fundamental areas critical for subnational export promotion. <p>Three major challenges to India's export promotion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra- and inter-regional differences in export infrastructure • Weak trade support and growth orientation across states • Lack of R&D infrastructure to promote complex and unique exports <p>The EPI ranks states and UTs on 4 main pillars—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy: A comprehensive trade policy provides a strategic direction for exports and imports. 2. Business Ecosystem: An efficient business ecosystem can help attract investments and create an enabling infrastructure for businesses to grow. 3. Export Ecosystem: This pillar aims to assess the business environment, which is specific to exports. 4. Export Performance: This is the only output-based pillar and examines the reach of export footprints of states and union territories. <p>11 sub-pillars—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Export Promotion Policy • Institutional Framework • Business Environment • Infrastructure • Transport Connectivity • Access to Finance • Export Infrastructure • Trade Support • R&D Infrastructure • Export Diversification • Growth Orientation <p>EPI 2021 will help the states and UTs in a long way to plan and execute sound export-oriented policies for ensuring a conducive export ecosystem, to make maximum utilization of their export potential.</p>
India's Space Economy	<p>Context: A collaboration between two premier research and educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram has shed light on India's "space economy".</p> <p>In a first-of-its kind attempt at measuring the size of India's space economy, researchers from the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) and the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) arrived at a figure of Rs. 36,794 crore (approximately \$5 billion) for the financial year 2020-21.</p> <p>What is Space Economy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Space Economy is composed of all the industries (rocket and satellite manufactures, telecommunications, climate change researchers, data and finance

	<p>experts, Defence, etc.) that come together to create the trillion dollar ecosystem in space that makes modern day, digital life possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By the end of the next decade, the Space Economy will conservatively be valued at more than \$4 Trillion Dollars. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By some estimates The Space Economy may exceed \$10T by the 2040s. The Space Economy goes beyond tourism and into the areas of production, trade, and commerce for goods and services both familiar and brand new taking place between the Karman line (approximately 100 kilometers overhead) and Cislunar space (the volume between geostationary Earth orbit and the Moon's orbit) creating another world of possibilities for humanity.
Rouble currency	<p>Context: In the wake of economic sanctions imposed against Russia for attacks on Ukraine, Russia has insisted recently that it will only be accepting payment for gas deliveries to the EU in rouble.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> G7 Ministers called this arrangement “unacceptable”. European Union receives around 40% of its gas supplies from Russia. Hey do you have it you can check it out yeah <p>About Rouble</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russian ruble or rouble is the official currency of the Russian Federation. The ruble was the currency of the Russian Empire and of the Soviet Union (as the Soviet ruble). However, today only Russia, Belarus and Transnistria use currencies with the same name. The Russian ruble is also unofficially used in the four partially recognised republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donetsk and Luhansk. As of April 2019, the ruble is the seventeenth most traded currency in the world, and a free-floating currency. <p>About G7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Group of Seven (G7) is an inter-governmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Its members are the world's largest IMF advanced economies and wealthiest liberal democracies.
Sagar Parikrama	<p>By: The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying ‘Sagar Parikrama’ aims to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate interaction with fishermen, coastal communities and stakeholders so as to disseminate information of various fisheries related schemes and programs being implemented by the Government, Demonstrating solidarity with all fisher folk, fish farmers and concerned stakeholder's as a spirit of Aatmanirbhar Bharat Promote responsible fisheries with focus on sustainable balance between the utilization of marine fisheries resources for food security of nation and livelihoods of coastal fisher communities Protection of marine ecosystems. ‘Sagar Parikrama’ program envisages to cover the maritime States/UTs in a phased manner. The fishermen, fisher communities and stakeholders in the coastal areas are likely to be benefitted with awareness of various beneficiary oriented schemes and programs being implemented by the Government and showcasing them the best practices that may be adopted. Aims to resolve the issues of the fishers and other stakeholders and to facilitate their economic up-liftment through various fisheries schemes and programs being implemented by the Government of India, such as ‘Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana’ (PMMSY) a flagship scheme with highest ever estimated investment of Rs.20,050 crore in fisheries sector

	<p>About Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched to bring about Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of fisheries sector in India • Goal: To double the fish exports in the next 3 to 4 years i.e. by 2024-25. • Objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To address critical gaps in fish production and productivity; quality, technology, post-harvest infrastructure and management, modernisation and strengthening of value chain, traceability, establishing a robust fisheries management framework and fishers' welfare ○ Harnessing of fisheries potential in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner ○ Enhancing contribution to Agriculture GVA and exports ○ Social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers; ○ Robust fisheries management and regulatory framework
<p>'Tap to Pay' for UPI payments</p>	<p>Context: Google Pay in collaboration with Pine Labs announced the launch of Tap to Pay for UPI. So far, Tap to Pay was only available for cards.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To complete a payment, all a user will need to do is tap their phone on the POS terminal and authenticate the payment from their phone, using their UPI PIN. • It will make the process virtually instantaneous, as compared to scanning a QR code, or entering the UPI-linked mobile number. • The functionality will be available to any UPI user who wants to use their NFC-enabled Android smartphone to transact using any Pine Labs Android POS terminal across the country. • This was piloted with Reliance Retail and will now be available at other large merchants such as Future Retail and Starbucks. <p>What is Unified Payments Interface (UPI)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UPI is a payment system launched in April 2016 by National Payments Corporation of India(NPCI), that allows money transfer between any two bank accounts by using a smartphone. • It facilitates customers to make round-the-clock payments instantly using a virtual payment address created by the customer. • UPI allows a customer to pay directly from a bank account to different merchants, both online and offline, without the hassle of typing card or bank details. • It also caters to the "Peer to Peer" collect request which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience. • UPI is built over the IMPS infrastructure • BHIM UPI in 2020-21 has processed 22 billion transactions worth Rs 41 lakh crore.

<p>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)</p>	<p>Context: According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world faces unavoidable multiple climate hazards over the next two decades with global warming of 1.5°C.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even temporarily exceeding this warming level would mean additional, severe impacts, some of which will be irreversible. <p>Key highlights of the report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, has caused widespread adverse impacts and damage to nature and people. • Some development and adaptation efforts have reduced vulnerability. • Across sectors and regions, the most vulnerable people and systems are observed to be disproportionately affected. • The rise in weather and climate extremes have led to some irreversible impacts as natural and human systems are pushed beyond their ability to adapt. <p>Wet-bulb temperature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet bulb temperature is the lowest temperature to which air can be cooled by the evaporation of water into the air at a constant pressure. • According to the report, Lucknow and Patna are among the cities predicted to reach wet-bulb temperature of 35°C if emissions continued to rise. • Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Mumbai, Indore, and Ahmedabad are identified as at risk of reaching wet-bulb temperatures of 32-34°C with continued emissions. • Overall, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab will be the most severely affected. • But if emissions keep rising, all States will have regions that experience wet-bulb temperatures of 30°C or more by the end of the century. <p>What is Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an international body set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide policymakers with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change ○ Impacts and future risks associated with Climate Change ○ Options for adaptation and mitigation for Climate Change • Membership of the IPCC is open to all members of the WMO and the UNEP. • IPCC assessments provide a scientific basis for governments at all levels to develop climate-related policies and also underlie climate negotiation at International level. • The main objective of UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.
<p>Northern River Terrapin</p>	<p>Context: Recently, GPS transmitters on Northern River Terrapin in Indian Sundarbans were installed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objective of the initiative was to ascertain the habitat, breeding pattern and the movement of the species. • After installation, at least three of the ten individuals of the critically endangered Northern River Terrapin have travelled hundreds of kilometers and are now in Bangladesh. • Northern river terrapin • It is found in India and Bangladesh (Sundarbans), Myanmar, Malaysia (peninsular), Indonesia (Sumatra), Thailand, and Cambodia. • It lives in coastal mangrove estuaries and creeks, but ventures far upstream during the breeding season.


	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hunting and harvesting of eggs. ○ Pollution and loss of habitat ○ Drowning by illegal fishing nets. ○ Siltation and sedimentation due to watershed activities such as logging. • IUCN: Critically endangered • CITES: Appendix I
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)	<p>Context: Russia has called for a Security Council meeting on the issue of biological laboratories in Ukraine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia had requested the meeting to discuss claims it made of chemical and biological weapon labs in Ukraine supported by the U.S. • India has emphasised that any matters relating to obligations under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) should be addressed through consultation and cooperation between the parties concerned. <p>Biological Weapons Convention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), or Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), is a disarmament treaty that effectively bans biological and toxin weapons by prohibiting their development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Biological weapon is a bacterium, virus, protozoan, parasite, fungus, chemical, or toxin that can be used purposefully as a weapon in bioterrorism or biological warfare. ○ More than 1,200 different kinds of potentially weaponizable bio-agents have been described and studied to date. • It entered into force on 26 March 1975. • The BWC was the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban the production of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction • The convention is of unlimited duration. • As of January 2022, 183 states have become party to the treaty.
Chilika lake	<p>Context: The Odisha government has proposed to ban movement of mechanised fishing boats in the Mangalajodi area of the Chilika lake to provide migratory birds an undisturbed ecosystem for six months every year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Orissa High Court has also directed that the ban be strictly implemented till further orders. <p>Chilika Lake</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilika is Asia's largest and world's second largest lagoon, located in Odisha. • It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent and is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Migratory Birds such as northern pintail, gadwall, shovellers, common coot and several others have been found visiting the lake in the past. • In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. • Major attraction at Chilika is Irrawaddy dolphins which are often spotted off Satpada Island. • The large Nalabana Island (Forest of Reeds) covering about 16 sq km in the lagoon area was declared a bird sanctuary in 1987. • Kalijai Temple - Located on an island in the Chilika Lake. <p>Do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mangalajodi is recognised as globally important for the conservation of birds. • Migratory birds arrive there for roosting and nesting. • However, no statutory rules and regulations are there for protecting the 8.3-sq.km marshland with emergent vegetation.



<p>Rs. 19,000-crore afforestation plan launched</p>	<p>Context: The Centre envisages a Rs. 19,000–crore project to rejuvenate 13 major rivers by planting trees.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rivers are the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, Luni, Narmada, Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna and Cauvery funded by the National Afforestation & Eco-development Board. • Trees shall be planted on both sides of these rivers and their tributaries. <p>Significance of the project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase cumulative forest cover in the vicinity of these 13 rivers. • help achieve national goals related to climate change and sustainable development. • help recharge groundwater • reduce sedimentation • generate Rs. 449.01 crore from non-timber and other forest produce • provide employment • reduce erosion
<p>Protection of Great Indian Bustards</p>	<p>The Great Indian Bustard (GIB), is one of the heaviest flying birds, and is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent. Barely 150 of these birds are estimated to be surviving now globally Today, its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific Name: <i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i>. • Physical description: Black crown on the forehead contrasting with the pale neck and head. • They feed on grass seeds, insects like grasshoppers and beetles, and sometimes even small rodents and reptiles. • Distribution: India, effectively the only home of the bustards, today, its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small population also occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. • It is the State bird of Rajasthan. Along with chick-rearing centre for GIB in Jaisalmer, Sorsan in Rajasthan has been identified as the most conducive site for their rearing, due to availability of grasslands, access to roads and well suited climatic conditions • The GIB is a flagship species of the grassland; it determines the health of the grasslands, on which many other species of birds and animals, and even the dairy industry is dependent on. <p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhindered grazing and installing of windmills and power stations on grasslands, thereby encroaching upon the breeding and wintering ground of the GIB. • Large parcels of grassland are converted to agricultural land. • The changing agricultural pattern that is moving away from traditional crops is another reason. With the disappearance of the traditional Bajra and Jowar crops, whose by-products served as fodder, their food has been on the decline. • An increase in the use of pesticides has further depleted the population of insects like the beetle, which the GIB and other birds feed on. • Attacks by dogs & foxes • Poaching • Presence of high voltage power lines • Conservation status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, ○ Listed in Appendix I of CITES ○ Listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List
<p>Electric Vehicles (EVs)</p>	<p>Context: Recently, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways highlighted that sales of electric vehicles (EVs) were set to rise by 10 times by 2022-end in India.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union Minister has hailed hydrogen as the “fuel for the future”. • Electric Vehicles (EVs)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An electric vehicle uses one or more electric motors or traction motors for propulsion. • An electric vehicle may be powered through a self-contained battery, solar panels or an electric generator to convert fuel to electricity. • Need for EVs in India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Climate change ○ Rapid urbanization ○ Energy security ○ Innovation ○ Employment <p>The government of India has taken various measures to develop and promote the EV ecosystem in the country such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remodeled Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME II) scheme • Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) for the supplier side • The recently launched PLI scheme for Auto and Automotive Components for manufacturers of electric vehicles.
Poisoning of Himalayan griffons vultures	<p>Context: At least 100 vultures — all Himalayan griffons — died of suspected poisoning in Assam.</p> <p>Such incidents have been happening since many years.</p> <p>Himalayan griffon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Himalayan vulture (<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>) or Himalayan griffon vulture is an Old World vulture native to the Himalayas and the adjoining Tibetan Plateau. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Old World vultures are vultures that are found in the Old World, i.e. the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. ○ They belong to the family Accipitridae, which also includes eagles, buzzards, kites, and hawks • It is one of the two largest Old World vultures and true raptors. • It is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List. • A study by the Bombay Natural History Society and other organisations in the 1990s found that the population of the Gyps group in India and Nepal declined from about 40 million by 99.9% in just two decades. • Himalayan griffon, white-backed and slender-billed are among its members.
Coordination committee formed to look into elephant deaths	<p>Context: The Union Environment Ministry has constituted a “permanent” coordination committee that includes representatives of the Ministries of Railways and Environment to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 elephants were killed across the country on railway tracks in 2018-19, 14 in 2019-20 and 12 in 2020-21. <p>Steps taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several steps were taken to reduce the number of elephant deaths. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Making permanent and temporary speed restrictions in identified elephant corridors and habitats, ○ making underpasses and ramps for movement of elephants at identified locations, ○ providing fencing at selected locations, ○ erecting signs to warn train drivers about identified elephant corridors, ○ sensitising train crew and station masters to avoid train collisions with elephants and ○ clearing vegetation on the sides of track within railway land. • The Wildlife Institute of India, an autonomous body of the Environment Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, National

	<p>Highways Authority of India, National Tiger Conservation Authority and World Bank Group, has published a document named “Eco Friendly measures to mitigate impacts of linear infrastructure” to assist project agencies in designing linear infrastructure, including railway lines, to reduce human-animal conflicts.</p> <p>Asian Elephants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are three subspecies of Asian elephant which are the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan. • Global Population: Estimated 20,000 to 40,000. • More than 60% of the world’s elephant population is in India. • IUCN Red List Status: Endangered. • Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I.
Programme on Seagrasses	<p>Seagrasses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are flowering plants that grow submerged in shallow marine waters like bays and lagoons. • These have tiny flowers and strap-like or oval leaves. • Seagrasses evolved from terrestrial plants that recolonised the ocean around 70-100 million years ago. • Seagrasses also produce food by photosynthesis. • They reproduce sexually as well as asexually. • Some of the important seagrasses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sea Cow Grass (<i>Cymodocea serrulata</i>) ○ Thready Seagrass (<i>Cymodocea rotundata</i>) ○ Needle Seagrass (<i>Syringodium isoetifolium</i>) ○ Flat-tipped Seagrass (<i>Halodule uninervis</i>), etc. ○ Location: These are found in muddy and sandy substrates. These also occur along our coastline of Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay regions on the east coast, Gulf of Kachchh region on the west coast, the lagoons of islands in Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea and Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. • Significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They provide many ecosystem services ○ These are also called ‘the lungs of the sea’ because they release oxygen into the water through photosynthesis ○ Sequesters up to 11% of the organic carbon buried in the ocean ○ Absorb carbon from the atmosphere. They can capture carbon from the atmosphere up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests ○ Help maintain water quality ○ Filter nutrients released from land-based industries ○ Prevent soil erosion ○ Provide food as well as habitat for fishes, octopuses, shrimp, blue crabs, oysters, etc. ○ Seagrass beds are facing decline all over the world at the rate of 2-5% annually. • Threats: Grazing, storms, ice-scouring (abrasion and erosion of seabeds by glaciers), desiccation, eutrophication, mechanical destruction of habitat, overfishing, coastal engineering construction, etc. • Based on field surveys and satellite data, the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management has estimated the total extent of seagrass ecosystem in India to be 516.59 km². The CO₂ sequestration rate of seagrass ecosystem is estimated to be up to 434.9 tonnes/km²/year with an annual net CO₂ sink of 0.75 million tonnes for an area of 517 km². <p>The Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has also initiated a project across the States of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha on enhancing climate resilience of India’s coastal

	<p>communities at a total cost of US \$130.269 million which includes a grant of US\$ 43.419 million by Global Climate Fund (GCF) covering 24 ecosystems in these selected States which aims to strengthen the climate resilience of coastal communities by protecting and restoring India's natural ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrasses.</p>
<p>Rhino population up by 200 in Kaziranga</p>	<p>Context: The population of the greater one-horned or Indian rhinoceros in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve has increased by 200 in four years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The last rhino census conducted in 2018 had put the number at 2,413. • This year's census had a first — the use of drones for the recheck of 26 park compartments where the sample survey was done. • A similar census was conducted in two more of Assam's rhino habitats earlier in March. The Orang National Park recorded an increase of 24 rhinos over the figure of 101 in 2018 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary recorded five more rhinos than in 2018. <p>Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as Indian rhino, it is the largest of the rhino species. • India is home to the largest number of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros in the world. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ At present, there are about 2,600 Indian rhinos in India, with more than 90% of the population concentrated in Assam's Kaziranga National Park. • Habitat: The species is restricted to small habitats in Indo-Nepal terai and northern West Bengal and Assam. • In India, rhinos are mainly found in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Kaziranga NP, Pobitora WLS, Orang NP, Manas NP in Assam, ◦ Jaldapara NP and Gorumara NP in West Bengal ◦ Dudhwa TR in Uttar Pradesh. • Threats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Poaching for the horns ◦ Habitat loss ◦ Population density ◦ Decreasing Genetic diversity • Protection Status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ IUCN Red List: Vulnerable. ◦ CITES: Appendix-I ◦ Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I.

<p>Weddell Sea</p>	<p>Context: Scientists say they have found the sunken wreck of polar explorer Ernest Shackleton's ship Endurance, more than a century after it was lost to the Antarctic ice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vessel lies 3,000 meters below the surface of the Weddell Sea. <p>About Weddell Sea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weddell Sea is part of the Southern Ocean and contains the Weddell Gyre. Its land boundaries are defined by the bay formed from the coasts of Coats Land and the Antarctic Peninsula. • Various ice shelves, including the Filchner-Ronne Ice Shelf, fringe the Weddell sea. • Some of the ice shelves on the east side of the Antarctic Peninsula had completely disappeared by 2002. • The Weddell Sea has been deemed by scientists to have the clearest water of any sea. 
<p>Solomon Islands</p>	<p>Context: The Solomon Islands has signed a military deal with China and will send a proposal for a broader security agreement to its Cabinet for consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Solomon Islands switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019. • Australia has historically provided security support to the Solomon Islands. • Solomon Islands is a sovereign country consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands in Oceania, to the east of Papua New Guinea and northwest of Vanuatu. • It is located in southwestern Pacific Ocean. • Its capital, Honiara, is located on the largest island, Guadalcanal.

	
Zojila tunnel	<p>Context: With the military confrontation with China in Ladakh putting extra pressure on mobilisation of men and machinery in the past two years, around 1,000 workers continued working in snow-bound Sonamarg in central Kashmir this winter to advance the deadline by two years for Zoila tunnel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earlier, it was supposed to be completed by 2026. <p>About Zojila tunnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity between Srinagar valley and Leh on NH-1 and will bring about an all-round economic and socio-cultural integration of Jammu and Kashmir. It takes 3.5 hours to travel between Srinagar and Ladakh. The tunnel will reduce the travel time to 15 minutes. The 14.15-km tunnel will be Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel. <div data-bbox="352 1077 1503 1630">  <p>KEY FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The longest bi-directional single tube road tunnel in Asia ▪ Length: 14.15 km ▪ Open all days ▪ All-weather accessibility ▪ To be built at Zojila pass on Srinagar-Kargil-Leh NH-1 situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet </div>
Darlong community	<p>Context: The Lok Sabha on Monday passed a Bill to include the Darlong community as a sub-tribe of the Kuki tribe on the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tripura.</p> <p>Darlong community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Darlong are small tribe and represent a minority community in Tripura. Traditionally, the Darlongs adopt Jhum cultivation/shifting cultivators. Today, most of them have taken up agroforestry and horticultural plantation or orchard development as their main livelihoods in addition to wet rice cultivation and seasonal vegetables cultivation. The Darlongs have customary laws and practices to govern them and dispense their own affairs.

<p>Karakattam dance</p>	<p>Context: Recently, the Kerala Nattukala Kshema Sabha (KNKS), an outfit that works for the promotion of local artforms in the state, has demanded that Karakattam dance be recognised as the agricultural art form of Kerala.</p> <p>About the dance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karakattam is a form of folk dance performed at festivals, conferences, roadshows and primarily at Mariamman (rain goddess) festivals. • Karakattam and agriculture have a link because, in Kerala after Makarakoythu (harvest season), the Mariamman pooja is in the Medam month and Mariamman is considered as the goddess of rain. • Its performances are characterized by a lot of swaying movements and joyous banter. • The performers balance a pot on their head. • Other highlights include blowing fire, inserting needles into eyes, and keeping balance while holding a bottle parallel to the ground on the performer's back.
<p>Ahom warrior Lachit Borphukan</p>	<p>Context: President Ram Nath Kovind recently launched the 400th birth anniversary celebrations of Ahom general Lachit Borphukan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He also laid the foundations for Alaboi war memorial and a 150-foot bronze statue of the legendary commander. • Lachit Borphukan was a legendary army commander of the Ahom kingdom. • He is known for his leadership in the 1671 'Battle of Saraighat' on the Brahmaputra against Mughal forces where he defeated the Mughal army. • Earlier, The Battle of Alaboi was fought on August 5, 1669, between the Ahoms and Mughals where Mughals had won. <p>About Ahom kingdom (1228-1826)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a late medieval kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam. • The kingdom is well known for maintaining its sovereignty for nearly 600 years and successfully resisting Mughal expansion in Northeast India. • It was established by Sukaphaa, a Tai prince from Mong Mao
<p>GI tag for Narasinghapettai nagaswaram</p>	<p>Context: Nagaswaram made in Narasinghapettai in Thanjavur district has been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagaswaram is made of 'acha maram', a tree known for its sturdy features. • The front portion — 'anusu' or enhancer — is made of 'vaagai' wood. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 'Seevali', the reed, is made from a type of grass that grows on the banks of the Cauvery and the Kollidam. • It is a double reed wind instrument from South India . • It is used as a traditional classical instrument in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala. • This instrument is "among the world's loudest non-brass acoustic instruments". • It is a wind instrument partially similar to the North Indian shehnai but much longer, with a hardwood body and a large flaring bell made of wood or metal. • In South Indian culture, it is considered to be very auspicious, and it is a key musical instrument played in almost all Hindu weddings and temples of the South Indian tradition. <p>What is GI tag?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory. • It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods. • The goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. • The product must have a special quality or reputation.

- The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 provides registration and also protection of GI goods in India.
- The Geographical Indications Registry for India is located in Chennai.
- A registered GI tag prohibits a third party to use such products.
- GI is a collective intellectual property right and is thus owned by all the producers within the defined GI territory.
- Patents and trademarks are owned by an individual or a business entity.



<p>Math model to predict COVID-19 vaccine efficacy</p>	<p>Context: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science and Queensland Brain Institute in Australia have developed a mathematical model that predicts how antibodies generated by COVID-19 vaccines confer protection against symptomatic infections.</p> <p>Key findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several vaccines offer a high degree of protection, with some reducing the number of symptomatic infections by over 95% in clinical trials. • The model developed by the team was able to predict the level of protection that would be available after vaccination based on the antibody 'profile' of the individual. • The predictions were found to closely match efficacies reported in clinical trials for all the major approved vaccines. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The researchers also observed that vaccine efficacy was linked to a readily measurable metric called antibody neutralisation titre. • This opens up the possibility of using such models to test future vaccines for their efficacy before elaborate clinical trials are launched.. • This formalism is yet to be applied to the new variants, including Omicron. <p>Do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reason predicting vaccine efficacies has been hard is that the processes involved are complex and operate at many interconnected levels. • Vaccines trigger a number of different antibodies, each affecting virus growth in the body differently. • This, in turn, affects the dynamics of the infection and the severity of the associated symptoms. • Further, different individuals generate different collections of antibodies and in different amounts.
<p>Modernisation Plan-IV for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)</p>	<p>In News: The Government has approved the scheme - Modernisation Plan-IV for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in continuation of the scheme "Modernisation Plan-III for CAPFs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation by: Ministry of Home Affairs • Upgraded IT solutions will also be provided to CAPFs. • Will improve the overall operational efficiency/preparedness which will positively impact the internal security scenario in the country. • Bolster the Government's ability to address the challenges being faced on the International Border/LoC/LAC as well as in the different theatres, such as areas affected by Left Wing Extremism, Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and insurgency affected North Eastern States.
<p>Reconnaissance satellite</p>	<p>Context: North Korea performed data transmission and other key tests needed to develop a spy or Reconnaissance satellite.</p> <p>This is the second such tests in about a week, indicating the country intends to conduct a prohibited long-range rocket launch soon.</p> <p>North Korea has been carrying out a spate of ballistic missile launches.</p> <p>Experts call it an attempt to add new weapons systems to its arsenal and pressure the U.S. into making concessions amid stalled diplomacy.</p> <p>Reconnaissance satellite</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence satellite, commonly referred to as a spy satellite is an Earth observation satellite or communications satellite deployed for military or intelligence applications. • Some of its Types and their uses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Missile early warning: Provides warning of an attack by detecting ballistic missile launches. Earliest known are Missile Defense Alarm System.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nuclear explosion detection: Detects nuclear detonation from space. Vela is the earliest known. ○ Optical imaging surveillance: Earth imaging satellites. Satellite images can be a survey or close-look telephoto. Corona is the earliest known. • Reconnaissance satellites have been used to enforce human rights, through the Satellite Sentinel Project, which monitors atrocities in Sudan and South Sudan. • To operate a reconnaissance satellite, North Korea must launch a long-range rocket to put it into orbit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But the UN bans such a launch by North Korea because it considers that as a cover for testing its long-range missile technology.
India-Sri Lanka Naval Exercise SLINEX	<p>Part of: Prelims and GS-II International Relations and GS-III Defence and Security</p> <p>Context: The ninth edition of India-Sri Lanka Naval Exercise, SLINEX, has begun at Visakhapatnam from 7th March 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLINEX aims at enhancing interoperability, improving mutual understanding and exchanging best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations between both navies. • The exercise is being conducted in two phases. • The Sri Lanka Navy will be represented by SLNS Sayurala, an advanced offshore patrol vessel. • The Indian Navy will be represented by INS Kirch, a guided missile corvette.
Science behind the jets of plasma	<p>In News: Scientists have unravelled the science behind the jets of plasma - the fourth state of matter consisting of electrically charged particles that occur just about everywhere in the sun's chromosphere, which is the atmospheric layer just above the Sun's visible surface.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These jets, or spicules, appear as thin grass-like plasma structures that constantly shoot up from the surface and are then brought down by gravity. • The amount of energy and momentum that these spicules can carry is of fundamental interest in solar and plasma astrophysics. • The processes by which plasma is supplied to the solar wind, and the solar atmosphere is heated to a million degrees Celsius, still remain a puzzle. • The plasma right below the visible solar surface (photosphere) is perpetually in a state of convection, much like boiling water in a vessel heated at the bottom. This is ultimately powered by the nuclear energy released in the hot-dense core. • The convection serves almost periodic but strong kicks to the plasma in the solar chromosphere, the shallow semi-transparent layer right above the visible solar disk. The chromosphere is 500 times lighter than the plasma in the photosphere. Therefore, these strong kicks from the bottom, not unlike alligator bellowing, shoot the chromospheric plasma outward at ultrasonic speeds in the form of thin columns or spicules. • Spicules come in all sizes and speeds. The existing consensus in the solar community has been that the physics behind the short spicules is different from that of taller and faster spicules.
Chandrayaan-2 makes first observations	<p>Context: According to the ISRO, the Chandra's Atmospheric Composition Explorer-2 (CHACE-2) which is a quadrupole mass spectrometer onboard Chandrayaan-2 mission, has made the first-of-its-kind observations of the global distribution of Argon-40 in the weak lunar exosphere.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These observations provide insight on the dynamics of the lunar exosphere, and on activities of gases emerging through radioactive decay in the first few tens of metres below the lunar surface. • The CHACE-2 observations provide the diurnal and spatial variation of Ar-40 covering the equatorial and mid latitude regions of the Moon.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noble gases serve as important tracers to understand the processes of surface-exosphere interaction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argon-40 (Ar-40) is an important tracer atom to study the dynamics of the lunar exosphere species. Ar-40 originates from the radioactive disintegration of Potassium-40 (K-40) present below the lunar surface. Once formed, it diffuses through the inter-granular space and makes its way up to the lunar exosphere through seepages and faults. <p>Significant observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NASA's Apollo-17 and LADEE missions have detected the presence of Ar-40 in the lunar exosphere, confined to the near-equatorial region of the Moon. As there is a steep latitudinal temperature gradient of the lunar surface, it had remained a gap area to study the pan-lunar dynamics of Moon's exosphere, which is a temperature-driven process. The observations by CHACE-2 on Ar-40 up to the mid-latitude regions (-60° to $+60^\circ$) play a significant role to bridge the gap in the knowledge. <p>Chandrayaan-2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is India's second mission to the Moon and had failed to make a soft-landing on the lunar surface. The lander and rover malfunctioned in the final moments and crash-landed, getting destroyed in the process. Despite the failure, the mission's orbiter and other parts have been functioning normally, gathering information. <p>Do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Exosphere' is the outermost region of the upper atmosphere of a celestial body where the constituent atoms and molecules rarely collide with each other and can escape into space.
National Medical Commission (NMC)	<p>Context: National Medical Commission (NMC) recently removed the upper age limit for appearing in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) [NEET-UG].</p> <p>National Medical Commission (NMC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Medical Commission (NMC) is an Indian regulatory body of 33 members which regulates medical education and medical professionals. It replaced the Medical Council of India on 25 September 2020. The Commission grants recognition of medical qualifications, gives accreditation to medical schools, grants registration to medical practitioners, and monitors medical practice and assesses the medical infrastructure in India. <p>About National Eligibility cum Entrance Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an all-India pre-medical entrance test for students who wish to pursue undergraduate medical (MBBS), dental (BDS) and AYUSH (BAMS, BUMS, BHMS, etc.) courses in government and private institutions in India and also, for those intending to pursue primary medical qualification abroad. The exam is conducted by National Testing Agency (NTA).
Carbon capture and utilization	<p>Context: Indian Scientists have discovered a strategy to synthesize novel solid adsorbents for CO₂ capture and utilization. Prof. Banerjee's group from IISER-Kolkata, has discovered special types of nanoparticles or microparticles which can capture CO₂ in their micro and mesoporous voids.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon capture and utilization are growing fields of research focusing on reducing CO₂ emissions. Although several industrial advancements have already been demonstrated, none of the technologies can provide an economically viable and complete CO₂ capture and

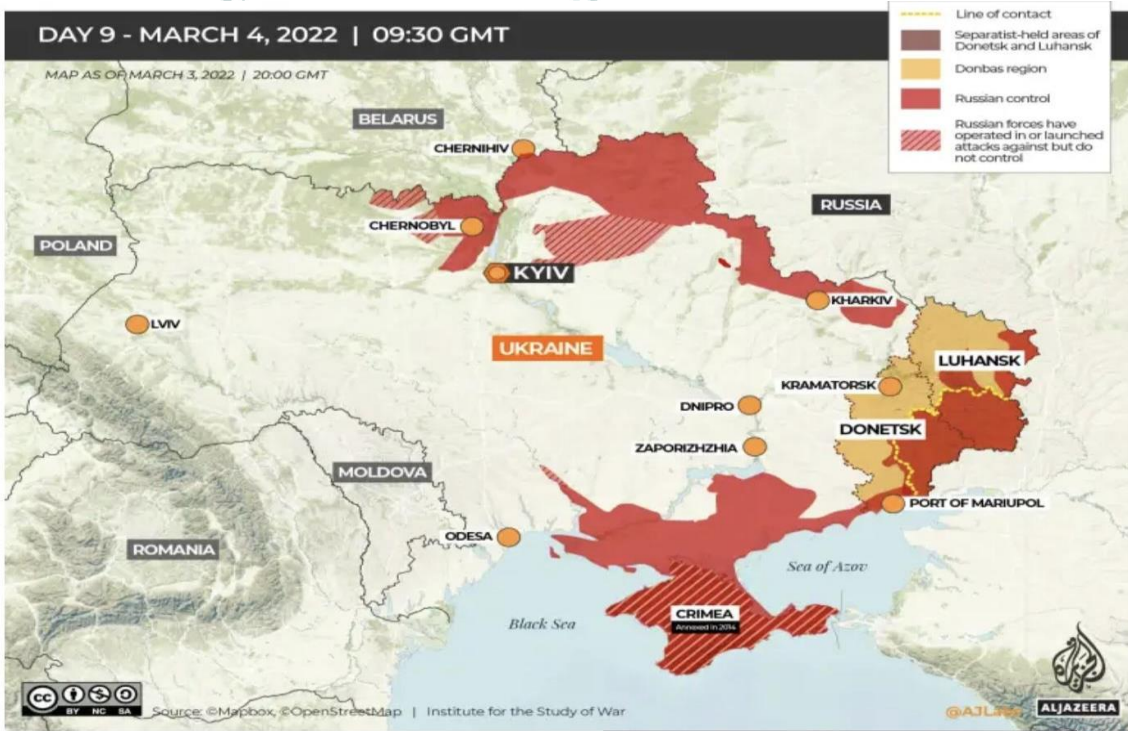
	utilization solution. Therefore, fundamental research on novel solid adsorbents might offer a critical material for CO2 capture and CO2 utilization.
Coronal Mass Ejections	<p>In News: Indian researchers have developed a simple technique of separating the constant background of the Solar Corona and revealing the dynamic corona.</p> <p>Significance of the Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve efficiency of identification of Coronal Mass Ejections (CME) -- events in which a large cloud of energetic and highly magnetized plasma erupts from the solar corona into space, causing radio and magnetic disturbances on the earth. • Give a clear picture of the characteristics of CMEs and make their study easier. <p>Coronal mass ejections (CMEs) are dynamic structures in the Solar Corona and are capable of driving the Space Weather in near-Earth space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The density of the outermost layer of the atmosphere of the Sun – Corona – decreases with distance radially outwards. • As the intensity of the corona observed in white light depends on the density of particles in the atmosphere, it decreases exponentially. • If the contrast between the constant corona and transient CMEs is not high, detection of CMEs becomes a challenge. • This method, which subtracts the constant background, brings out the transient corona, followed by dividing the result by an azimuthally uniform background to reduce the radial decrease in intensity. • A combination of these two steps allows us to identify the structures such as CMEs throughout the field of view of the coronagraph images.
PMBJP Kendras to sell nutraceuticals	<p>Context: The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) Kendras have added nutraceuticals products, including protein powder and bar, malt-based food supplements and immunity bar for its customers.</p> <p>Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is being run by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India • Vision: To bring down the healthcare budget of every citizen of India through providing “Quality generic Medicines at Affordable Prices”. • Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Kendra is a medical outlet opened under the scheme which makes quality medicines available at affordable prices for all. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Currently, PMBJP Kendras have been providing accessible, standardised and affordable generic medicines to the citizens. ○ Product basket of PMBJP Kendras presently comprises 1,451 drugs and 240 surgical instruments. ○ The government has also set a target to increase their number to 10,500 by the end of March 2025. • Janaushadhi Sugam, a mobile application for PMBJP facilitates the public by providing a digital platform at the tip of their fingers. • Under the PMBJP, a medicine is priced on the principle of a maximum of 50% of the average price of the top three brands of the said medicine. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thus, the prices of Jan Aushadhi medicines are cheaper at least by 50% and in some cases, by 80% to 90% of the market price of the branded medicines. • In India, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority under the Department of Pharmaceuticals regulates the prices of all drugs, whether branded or generic.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It fixes the ceiling price of scheduled medicines specified in the first schedule of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013. ○ In the case of non-scheduled medicines, the manufactures are free to fix the maximum retail price (MRP) of the drug. <p>What are Nutraceuticals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A nutraceutical or 'bioceutical' is a pharmaceutical alternative which claims physiological benefits. • Nutraceuticals are products derived from food sources that are purported to provide extra health benefits, in addition to the basic nutritional value found in foods. • Criticism: Because nutraceuticals and bioceuticals are largely unregulated, these supplements are the subject of more of marketing hype than actual clinical testing, and for many, it is not even yet known whether they provide more benefits than risks for consumers
Draft National Medical Devices Policy 2022	<p>Context: In line with the mandate of promoting aspects of the medical device industry, the Department of Pharmaceuticals, realising the need to have a holistic policy to accelerate growth and explore the potential of the Medical Devices Sector, has published this approach paper, after extensive stakeholder consultations, for the Sunrise Sector of Medical Devices, popularly called as MedTech Sector. The Sector is expected to grow in market size from the present 11 Bn USD to 50 Bn USD by 2025.</p> <p>Salient Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory streamlining in order to optimize regulatory processes and multiplicity of agencies for enhanced ease of doing business, along with harmonization with global standards to ensure standardization. • Quality Standards and Safety of the Devices in order to provide safe devices to the consumers, in harmony with the global standards. • Building Competitiveness through fiscal and financial support for stimulating the development of the local manufacturing ecosystem with private sector investments. • Infrastructure Development to provide best-in-class physical foundation, including medical devices parks with common facilities such as testing centres, to improve cost competitiveness and enhance attraction of domestic manufacturers. • Facilitating R&D and Innovation with a focus on enhanced collaboration in innovation and R&D projects, global partnerships, and joint ventures among key stakeholders to bridge the gap between academic curriculum and industry requirements. • Human Resource Development to ensure relevant curriculum at higher education level, skilling of various stakeholders, creation of future-ready HR with required skill sets across the innovation value chain. • Awareness Creation and Brand Positioning in creating awareness and positioning India as a hub for manufacturing of medical devices as part of the “Make in India, Make for the World” initiative. <p><i>This Policy envisions that by 2047, our Country</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be having few National Institutes of Medical Devices Education and Research (NIMERs) on the lines of NIPERs; • Will be home & originator to 25 high-end futuristic technologies in MedTech • Will have a MedTech Industry of \$100-300 Bn size with 10-12% of Global Market Share.
ExoMars mission suspended	<p>Context:The European Space Agency (ESA) has suspended its €1bn (£844m) ExoMars mission, which is a joint project with Russia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was due to launch a robotic rover in September.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member states of the ESA voted recently to cancel the launch because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. <p>About the mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mars rover, named Rosalind Franklin, was assembled in the UK for a planned launch onboard a Russian rocket. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rosalind Franklin is the second stage of the joint European-Russian mission. The first part, a satellite called the Trace Gas Orbiter, was launched in 2016 and is studying the planet's atmosphere. It was also supposed to act as a telecommunications relay for Rosalind Franklin when the rover arrived. The next available launch window, based on the alignment of the Earth and Mars, will be 2024, but the technical and political issues may take longer than this to resolve. The ESA has commissioned a feasibility study of how to get ExoMars off the ground without Roscosmos (Russian space agency) involvement. Working with NASA is one option and it had expressed a "strong willingness to support" the mission.
Deep ocean mission (DOM)	<p>Context: India will soon scour the ocean bed to unravel the mysteries of the origins of life as scientists are set to travel up to 6,000 m below the sea surface under a deep ocean mission (DOM).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry: Ministry of Earth Sciences <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially, the Rs. 4,077-crore mission will entail scientists travelling to a depth of 500 m to test various technologies being developed for the purpose before taking a deeper dive into the unknown. The DOM will also help India map the ocean bed, which is a rich source for metals and minerals. The mission will help scientists identify and demarcate resource-rich areas which could be exploited later when suitable technology is available for deep sea mining. The exploration studies of minerals will pave the way for commercial exploitation in the near future as and when such a code is evolved by the International Seabed Authority. This mission is also directed towards development in marine biology which will provide job opportunities in Indian industries.
Exploring the Arctic circle	<p>Context: According to Arctic Policy document, India aspires to have a permanent presence with more research and satellite ground stations in the Arctic region.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India now has a single station, Himadri, in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago, where research personnel are usually present for 180 days. India is in the process of procuring an ice-breaker research vessel that can navigate the region. Through its existing satellites, India aspires to capture more detailed images to "assist in the development of the Arctic region". Eight nations — Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Russia, Sweden and the United States — make up the Arctic Council. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India has the status of 'Observer' member — 12 other countries have such a status — in the Arctic Council and participates in several meetings. Arctic weather influences the Indian monsoon and hence has been of interest to Indian researchers for decades. Climate change and the melting of ice caps imply changes to the Arctic weather
World Tuberculosis Day	<p>Context: Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya will inaugurate the Step-Up to End TB-World TB Day Summit on the occasion of World TB Day on 24th of March.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two days summit will provide a forum to showcase the National TB Elimination Programme's learnings and successes. <p>About World TB Day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is observed every year on 24th March, to commemorate the anniversary discovery of the TB bacteria by Dr. Robert Koch in 1882. Objective: To build public awareness about the global epidemic of tuberculosis (TB). UN has marked 2030 as a global target to eliminate TB worldwide Initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Elimination (2017-2025) by Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare aims to eliminate the prevalence of TB by 2025 Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY) is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to TB patients rolled out in April 2018 by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Under the Yojana, financial incentive of Rs.500/month is to be provided for each notified TB patient (registered on NIKSHAY portal) for duration during which the patient is on anti-TB treatment. NPY is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under National Health Mission 'TB Harega Desh Jeetega' Campaign was launched in September 2019 consisting of three pillars – clinical approach, public health component and active community participation – as a part of strategy to eliminate TB by 2025. <p>What is TB?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TB is caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium tuberculosis, belonging to the Mycobacteriaceae family consisting of about 200 members. In humans, TB most commonly affects the lungs (pulmonary TB), but it can also affect other organs (extra-pulmonary TB). TB is a treatable and curable disease. Transmission: TB is spread from person to person through the air. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When people with lung TB cough, sneeze or spit, they propel the TB germs into the air. Common symptoms of active lung TB are cough with sputum and blood at times, chest pains, weakness, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Eight countries accounted for two thirds of the new TB cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India, Indonesia, China, Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and South Africa MultiDrug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) is a strain of TB that cannot be treated with the two most powerful first-line treatment anti-TB drugs. Extensively Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (XDR-TB) is a form of TB caused by bacteria that are resistant to several of the most effective anti-TB drugs. Vaccines used against TB: BCG Vaccine
<p>Hypersonic missiles</p>	<p>Context: The Russian Ministry of Defence announced that it had used a hypersonic missile for the first time in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine.</p> <p>What is a hypersonic missile?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A hypersonic missile is a weapon system which flies at least at the speed of Mach 5 i.e. five times the speed of sound and is manoeuvrable. The manoeuvrability of the hypersonic missile is what sets it apart from a ballistic missile as the latter follows a set course or a ballistic trajectory. Thus, unlike ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles do not follow a ballistic trajectory and can be manoeuvred to the intended target.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two types of hypersonic weapons systems are Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles. The HGV are launched from a rocket before gliding to the intended target while the hypersonic cruise missile is powered by air breathing high speed engines or 'scramjets' after acquiring their target. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The US, Russia and China are in advanced stages of hypersonic missile programmes, India, France, Germany, Japan and Australia too are developing hypersonic weapons.
INS Valsura awarded President's Colour	<p>Context: The Indian President Ram Nath Kovind presented the President's Colour to INS Valsura, the Navy's premier technological training establishment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The President's Colour is bestowed on a military unit in recognition of the exceptional service rendered to the nation, both in peace and in war. INS Valsura trains officers and men on operation and maintenance of sophisticated and technologically advanced equipment on board warships. INS Valsura, started on 30 acres of land as a torpedo school in 1942 under the British, has today grown into one of the foremost technological training institutions of the country spread over 600 acres.
eSanjeevani	<p>Context: India has crossed a landmark milestone in its eHealth journey. 2,26,72,187 served through eSanjeevani in Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres across the country.</p> <p>About eSanjeevani</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a national telemedicine service that offers tele-consultations enabling patient to doctor consultations from the confines of their home, as well as doctor to doctor consultations. This eSanjeevani platform has enabled two types of telemedicine services viz. Doctor-to-Doctor (eSanjeevani) and Patient-to-Doctor (eSanjeevani OPD) Tele-consultations The former is being implemented under the Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centre (AB-HWCs) programme. The telemedicine platform is hosting over 40 online OPDs, more than half of these are speciality OPDs which include Gynaecology, Psychiatry, Dermatology, ENT, Ophthalmology, antiretroviral therapy (ART) for the AIDS/HIV patients, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) etc. <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eSanjeevaniOPD now enables creation of Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA), which will facilitate access and shareability of health data with consent of the beneficiary, with participating healthcare providers and beneficiaries as per Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM). eSanjeevani is an exemplification of the 'Make in India' initiative as it has been developed indigenously
WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM): India (at Jamnagar, Gujarat)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Ayush and World Health Organization signs Host Country Agreement for WHO Global Centre of Traditional Medicine The first and only Global Centre (office) for traditional medicine across the globe. It will focus on building solid evidence base for policies and standards on traditional medicine practices and products and help countries integrate it as appropriate into their health systems and regulate its quality and safety for optimal and sustainable impact. The primary objective of GCTM is to harness the potential of traditional medicine from across the world through modern science and technology and improve overall health of the communities' world over.

<p>Operation Ganga</p>	<p>Context: Operation Ganga is the initiative launched by the government of India to bring back Indians stranded in Ukraine.</p> <p>Some other recent operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation All Out (2015): for flushing out militants from the Kashmir region of Jammu and Kashmir. • 2015 Indian counter-insurgency operation in Myanmar (2015) in Myanmar: Indian Army allegedly conducted hot pursuit of Naga terror outfit NSCN-Khaplang along the India-Myanmar border. • Operation Calm Down (2016) in Jammu and Kashmir • Operation Randori Behak (2020) in Jammu and Kashmir • Operation Devi Shakti (2021) in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Afghanistan: To help fleeing Hindus and Sikhs from Afghanistan.
<p>Place in news: Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant</p>	<p>Context: Russian forces have seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine, the largest in Europe, after intense fighting with Ukrainian defenders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Energy Secretary said there was no indication of elevated radiation levels at the plant, which provides more than a fifth of total electricity generated in Ukraine. <p>Key updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one Ukrainian city, the southern port of Kherson, has fallen to Russian forces since the invasion was launched on February 24, but Russian forces continue to surround and attack other cities. • Mariupol, the main port on the Sea of Azov, was surrounded and under heavy bombardment. • The northeastern city of Kharkiv has been under attack since the start of the invasion. 
<p>Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme</p>	<p>Context: The Union Labour and Employment Ministry launched the “donate a pension” scheme allowing any citizen to pay the premium amount on behalf of an unorganised worker under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Donate a pension” scheme allows a citizen to “donate the premium contribution of their immediate support staff such as domestic workers, drivers, helpers, care givers, nurses, in their household or establishment. • The donor can pay the contribution for a minimum of one year, with the amount ranging from Rs. 660 to Rs. 2,400 a year, depending on the age of the beneficiary. <p>About Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pension scheme was launched in 2019. • It allows unorganised sector workers between the age of 18 and 40, who earn up to Rs. 15,000 a month, to enroll by paying a premium amount between Rs. 55 and Rs. 200, depending on the age, that would be matched by the government. • On reaching the age of 60, the beneficiaries would get a Rs. 3,000 monthly pension.
North Atlantic Treaty Organization	<p>Context: Ukraine is no longer pressing for NATO membership. NATO has been a delicate issue that was one of Russia’s stated reasons for invading Ukraine which is pro-Western.</p> <p>What is North Atlantic Treaty Organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union. • A key provision of the treaty is called Article 5. • It states that if one member of the alliance is attacked in Europe or North America, it is to be considered an attack on all members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That effectively put Western Europe under the "nuclear umbrella" of the US. • There are 30 independent member countries.
15th round of Corps Commander talks	<p>Context: The 15th round of Corps Commander talks (talks at Commander level) between India and China began on the Indian side of the Chushul Moldo Meeting Point in eastern Ladakh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The immediate focus was on working out a disengagement agreement at Patrolling Point 15 (PP15) in the Gogra-Hot Springs area. • Since the stand-off began in May 2020, the two sides have so far held 14 rounds of talks with disengagement on both sides of Pangong Tso (lake), PP17. • The other areas yet to be resolved are PP15, Demchok and Depsang. <p>Patrolling Point 15 and 17A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, Indian Army has been given certain locations where its troops have access to patrol the area under its control. • These points are known as patrolling points, or PPs, and are decided by the China Study Group (CSG). • PP15 and PP17A are two of the 65 patrolling points in Ladakh along the LAC. • LAC is the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory • PP15 is located in an area known as the Hot Springs, while PP17A is near an area called the Gogra post. <p>Location of Hot Springs and Gogra Post</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot Springs is just north of the Chang Chenmo river and Gogra Post is east of the point where the river takes a hairpin bend coming southeast from Galwan Valley and turning southwest. <p>Value addition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pangong Tso lake: Pangong Lake is located in the Union Territory of Ladakh. one-third of the Pangong Lake lies in India and the other two-thirds in China. • Galwan Valley: The valley refers to the land that sits between steep mountains that buffet the Galwan River. The river has its source in Aksai Chin. • Chang Chenmo River: It is a tributary of the Shyok River
White phosphorus	<p>Context: Russian forces were recently accused of launching phosphorus bomb attacks in the eastern region of Lugansk.</p>

<p>shells/munitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International law prohibits the use of white phosphorus shells in heavily populated civilian areas, but allows them in open spaces to be used as cover for troops. <p>White phosphorus munitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> White phosphorus munitions are weapons that use one of the common allotropes of the chemical element phosphorus. White phosphorus is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pyrophoric (it is ignited by contact with air); burns fiercely; can ignite cloth, fuel, ammunition, and other combustibles. White phosphorus is a highly efficient smoke-producing agent, reacting with air to produce an immediate blanket of phosphorus pentoxide vapor. Smoke-producing white phosphorus munitions are very common, particularly as smoke grenades for infantry. These create smoke screens to mask friendly forces' movement, position, infrared signatures, and shooting positions. <p>Historical record of phosphorus use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phosphorus ammunitions have been used throughout history and in modern wars such as Iraq war, Arab-Israeli conflict as well. Two events are listed below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There have been White phosphorus is believed to have been first used by Fenian (Irish nationalist) arsonists in the 19th century. The British Army introduced the first factory-built white phosphorus grenades in late 1916 during the First World War.
<p>India extends \$1 billion credit to Sri Lanka</p>	<p>Context: India recently extended a \$1 billion credit facility to Sri Lanka to assist the island nation through its worst foreign exchange crisis and enable it to procure food, medicines and other essential items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An agreement to this effect was signed between the State Bank of India and the government of Sri Lanka. <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2022, so far India has extended \$1.4 billion support to Sri Lanka, through a \$400-million RBI currency swap, postponement of a \$0.5 billion loan and another half a billion as a line of credit for the country to sustain its essential fuel imports. <p>What is the situation in Sri Lanka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sri Lanka is facing its worst financial crisis, and had declared an emergency in August 2021 in the face of a crippling foreign exchange crunch. The nation is still facing significant fuel and gas shortages, and high inflation in essential goods. The situation has triggered protests by the political Opposition and citizens' groups in Sri Lanka. The root cause of the crisis was the foreign exchange shortage due to a large \$10 billion trade deficit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sri Lanka is due to repay foreign debt totalling nearly \$ 7 billion this year, amid a persisting shortage of dollars to import food, medicines and other essentials. It has already sought China's help to restructure its loans that amount to 10% of its total foreign debt. <p>What is a credit facility?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A credit facility is a type of loan. It allows the borrowing party to take out money over an extended period of time rather than reapplying for a loan each time it needs money. <p>What is Line of Credit (LOC)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A line of credit (LOC) is a preset borrowing limit that can be tapped into at any time.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The borrower can take money out as needed until the limit is reached, and as money is repaid, it can be borrowed again in the case of an open line of credit.
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	<p>Context: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has estimated that The Ukraine crisis could knock more than a percentage point off global growth this year and add two-and-a-half percentage points to inflation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has called for targeted government spending increases in response. Well-targeted increases in government spending by OECD countries of the order of 0.5% of GDP could reduce the war's economic impact by about half without significantly adding to inflation. <p>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OECD is an intergovernmental economic organisation, founded to stimulate economic progress and world trade. Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries. Founded: 1961. Headquarters: Paris, France. Members: 38 countries India is not a member, but a key economic partner. Reports and Indices by OECD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government at a Glance 2017 report. International Migration Outlook. OECD Better Life Index.
Release of India's Arctic Policy	<p>Context: India's Arctic policy titled 'India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development' lays down six pillars:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening India's scientific research and cooperation Climate and environmental protection, Economic and human development Transportation and connectivity Governance and international cooperation National capacity building in the Arctic region. <p>Implementing India's Arctic policy will involve multiple stakeholders, including academia, the research community, business, and industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India has a significant stake in the Arctic. It is one of thirteen nations holding Observer status in the Arctic Council, a high-level intergovernmental forum that addresses issues faced by the Arctic governments and the indigenous people of the Arctic. India's engagement with the Arctic region has been consistent and multidimensional. The country maintains that all human activity should be sustainable, responsible, transparent, and based on respect for international laws. <p>India's Arctic policy aims to promote the following agenda—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening national capabilities and competencies in science and exploration, climate and environmental protection, maritime and economic cooperation with the Arctic region. Institutional and human resource capacities will be strengthened within Government and academic, research and business institutions. Inter-ministerial coordination in pursuit of India's interests in the Arctic. Enhancing understanding of the impact of climate change in the Arctic on India's climate, economic, and energy security. Contributing better analysis, prediction, and coordinated policymaking on the implications of ice melting in the Arctic on India's economic, military and strategic interests related to global shipping routes, energy security, and exploitation of mineral wealth. Studying linkages between polar regions and the Himalayas.

	<p>6. Deepen cooperation between India and countries of the Arctic region under various Arctic forums, drawing expertise from scientific and traditional knowledge.</p> <p>7. Increase India's participation in the Arctic Council and improve understanding of the complex governance structures in the Arctic, relevant international laws, and geopolitics of the region.</p> <p>Nodal institution: The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) in Goa, an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences</p>
Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)	<p>Context: Japan has still not given up hope that India might reconsider joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) from which it opted out in 2019.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement (FTA) among the China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand and 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN members are: tBrunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The 15 member countries account for about 30% of the world's population (2.2 billion people) and 30% of global GDP (\$29.7 trillion) It is the largest trade bloc in history. Signed in November 2020, RCEP is the first FTA among the largest economies in Asia. It came into force in January 2022.
Finlandization	<p>Context: Despite several rounds of talks between the representatives of the Russia and Ukraine, it remains unclear when and how the war might end.</p> <p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russia invoked the threat of Ukraine joining NATO as a pretext for the invasion. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has now acknowledged that his country will not be part of the US-led military alliance in the foreseeable future. <p>Finlandization model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among the scenarios that have been seen as potentially workable is the "Finlandization" of Ukraine. It was proposed earlier in 2014, the year Russia annexed Crimea and fighting broke out in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. 'Finlandization' refers to the policy of strict neutrality between Moscow and the West that Finland followed during the decades of the Cold War. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The principle of neutrality was rooted in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance that Finland signed with the USSR in April 1948. Finland's capital Helsinki is situated just across the Gulf of Finland from St Petersburg (Leningrad). The treaty protected it from being attacked or incorporated into the USSR like the Baltic and eastern European states. It allowed the country to pursue the path of democracy and capitalism while staying out of the conflict between the great powers. It took neutral positions on matters on which the Soviet Union and the West disagreed. It stayed aloof from NATO and European military powers, and used this positioning to ward off pressure from Moscow to become part of the Soviet bloc or the Warsaw Pact. <p>Ukraine and Finlandization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If Ukraine undergoes this model, following outcomes may be relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine should have the right to freely choose its economic and political associations, including with Europe. Ukraine should not join NATO, to avoid further invasion and attacks.

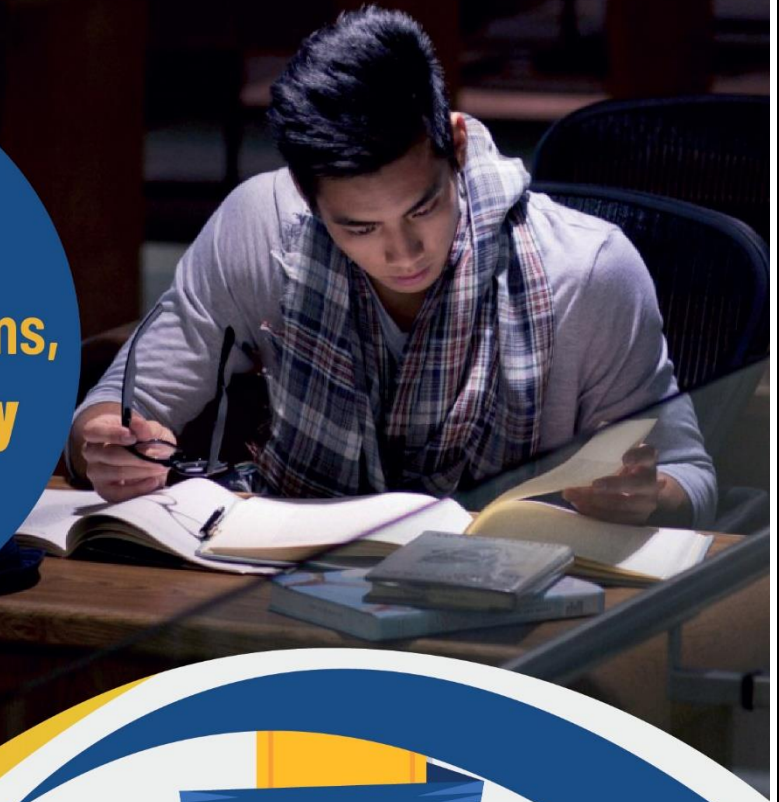
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ukraine should be free to create any government compatible with the expressed will of its people. • Wise Ukrainian leaders may then opt for a policy of reconciliation between the various parts of their country. • Internationally, they should pursue a posture comparable to that of Finland. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finland leaves no doubt about its fierce independence and cooperates with the West in most fields but carefully avoids institutional hostility toward Russia.
BIMSTEC	<p>Context: Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will host Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders at the BIMSTEC summit being held in “hybrid mode” from March 28 to 30 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myanmar Foreign Minister will also address the group virtually. • One of the main objectives of this week’s summit would be to launch the ‘BIMSTEC charter’, and hand over the leadership of the forum to Thailand, the next chair. <p>About BIMSTEC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional multilateral organisation. • Its members lie in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. • Out of the 7 members, Five are from South Asia – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bangladesh ○ Bhutan ○ India ○ Nepal ○ Sri Lanka • Two are from Southeast Asia – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Myanmar ○ Thailand • It mainly aims to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development; accelerate social progress; and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region. <div data-bbox="325 1265 1516 1951">  <p>The image displays the BIMSTEC logo, which consists of two interlocking green and yellow circles with the text 'BIMSTEC' in the center. Below the logo are the national flags of the seven member states, arranged in two rows. The top row shows the flags of Bangladesh (green with a red circle), Bhutan (yellow and orange with a white dragon), and India (saffron, white, and green with the Ashoka Chakra). The bottom row shows the flags of Myanmar (yellow, green, and red with a white star), Nepal (two red triangles with a white wheel), Sri Lanka (green, white, and orange with a lion), and Thailand (horizontal stripes of red, white, blue, and red).</p> </div>
India, UAE trade pact	<p>Context: The free trade agreement between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is likely to come into effect from May 1 this year, under which domestic exporters of as many as 6,090</p>

	<p>goods from sectors such as textiles, agriculture, dry fruits, gem and jewellery would get duty-free access to the UAE market.</p> <p>Key takeaways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed by India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in February which aims to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion in the next five years from current \$60 billion. • The two countries have agreed to set up a technical council on Investment, Trade Promotion and Facilitation, as part of the agreement signed. • UAE is offering duty elimination on over 97% of its products which account for 99% of Indian exports here in value terms. <p>India and UAE Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India and the UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972. • The greater push has been achieved in bilateral relations when the visit of India's Prime Minister to the UAE in August 2015 marked the beginning of a new strategic partnership between the two countries. • Further, during the visit of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi to India in January 2017 as the chief guest at India's Republic Day celebrations, it was agreed that bilateral relations were to be upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. • This gave momentum to launching negotiations for an India-UAE comprehensive economic partnership agreement. <p>Economic Significance of the UAE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UAE has emerged as an important economic hub not globally. • Although the UAE has diversified its economy, the hydrocarbon sector remains very important followed by services and manufacturing.
<p>Indian Ocean Naval Symposium</p>	<p>Context: The regional grouping Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) conducted its maiden edition of maritime exercise, IMEX-22, at Goa and in the Arabian Sea from March 26 to 30.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exercise witnessed participation of 16 of the 25 member nations. • The exercise is seen as a significant stepping stone for regional navies to collaborate and respond collectively to natural disasters in the region and paves way for further strengthening regional cooperation. <p>About Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IONS is a voluntary and inclusive initiative that brings together navies of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states to increase maritime co-operation and enhance regional security. • It also serves to develop an effective response mechanism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) against natural disasters. • IONS includes 24 member nations that touch or lie within the IOR, and 8 observer nations. • The members have been geographically grouped into the following four sub-regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South Asian Littorals: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and United Kingdom (British Indian Ocean Territory) ○ West Asian Littorals: Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates ○ East African Littorals: France (Reunion), Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania. ○ South East Asian and Australian Littorals: Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Timor-Leste. • Significance for India: IONS fits into India's three-fold ambitions in the region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthening and deepening the relations with the Indian Ocean littoral states, ○ Establishing its leadership potential and aspirations of being a net-security provider, and ○ Fulfilling India's vision of a rules-based and stable maritime order in the IOR.

MISCELLANEOUS

Boltzmann medal	<p>Context: Mr. Deepak Dhar, physicist, from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, has been selected for the Boltzmann medal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the first Indian to win this award. • He shares the award with American scientist John J. Hopfield who is known for his invention of an associative neural network, now named after him. • Prof. Dhar has been chosen for this award for his seminal contributions in the field of statistical physics. <p>Boltzmann medal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is awarded by the Commission on Statistical Physics (C3) of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics. • It was initiated in 1975, with Nobel laureate (1982) K.G. Wilson being the first recipient. • The medal honours outstanding achievements in the field of statistical physics. • It has been given to one or two persons, once in three years, in the last 47 years. • It is given only once to a person and on the condition that that person has not won the Nobel prize so far.
Report on Unified District Information System for Education plus (UDISE+) 2020-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UDISE+ system of online data collection from the schools was developed by Department of School Education & Literacy in the year 2018-19 to overcome the issues related to erstwhile practice of manual data filling in paper format and subsequent feeding on computer at the block or district level in the UDISE data collection system since 2012-13. • In UDISE+ system, improvements have been made particularly in the areas related to data capture, data mapping and data verification.
Exercise DHARMA GUARDIAN-2022:	An annual exercise between Indian Army and Japanese Ground Self Defence Force
Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declines by 10 points • India on verge of achieving SDG target of Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 70/ lakh live births by 2030 • Remarkable decline of more than 15% in MMR reported by Kerala, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh • States that have achieved Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target increase from 5 to 7
National eVidhan Application (NeVA): 'One Nation – One Application'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mission Mode Project for Digital Legislatures to make the functioning of all Legislative Houses in the country paperless; to enable them to transact entire Government Business on digital platform including information exchange with the State Government Departments in digital mode. • It stands for bringing far reaching transformation in the governance across the country by making the people well informed & enlighten citizens and thereby strengthening the roots of the democracy in the country.
2022 Abel Prize: American mathematician Dennis P. Sullivan	<p>One of his key breakthroughs is in developing a new way of understanding rational homotopy theory, a subfield of algebraic topology.</p> <p>Topology is a field of mathematics which was born in the nineteenth century and has to do with properties of surfaces that do not change when they are deformed. Topologically, a circle and a square are the same; similarly, surfaces of a doughnut and a coffee mug with one handle are topologically equivalent, however the surface of a sphere and a coffee mug are not equivalent.</p>
EX DUSTLIK:	Indo-Uzbekistan Joint Exercise

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

<p>Kuki Insurgency in Manipur</p>	<p>Context: Just before the first of the two phases of the Assembly Elections went underway in Manipur on February 28, all insurgent groups associated with the Kuki tribes in Manipur said they will vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This came days after Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah said at his rally that his party will end the Kuki insurgency problem in five years, if it is voted to power for the second time. • The president of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO), P.S. Haokip, cited talks with the BJP leadership, which he said has promised the speedy settlement of Kuki political aspirations. <p>Who are the Kukis?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kukis are an ethnic group including multiple tribes originally inhabiting the North-Eastern states of India such as Manipur, Mizoram and Assam; parts of Burma (now Myanmar), and Sylhet district and Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. • While Kuki is not a term coined by the ethnic group itself, the tribes associated with it came to be generically called Kuki under colonial rule. • In Manipur, the various Kuki tribes, living mainly in the hills, currently make up 30% of the total 28.5 lakh population of the State. • The rest of the population of Manipur is made up mainly of two other ethnic groups — the Meiteis or non-tribal, Vaishnavite Hindus who live in the valley region of Manipur, and the Naga tribes, historically at loggerheads with the Kukis, also living in the hilly areas of the State. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While the hills account for nine-tenths of Manipur's geographical area, they are sparsely populated, with most of the state's population concentrated in the valley. ○ The Meitei community forms a majority in Imphal valley, while the surrounding hill districts are inhabited by Nagas and Kukis. ○ Of the 60 seats in the Manipur Assembly, 40 are held by Meiteis and the rest 20 seats are held by Kukis and Nagas. <p>What led to the Kuki insurgencies in Manipur?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipur, formerly a princely state including parts of Burma, made the accession into India after Independence (made a full-fledged State only in 1972). • The resentment over the "forceful" inclusion into India and delay in granting statehood led to the rise of various insurgent movements. • Post-independence insurgent movements in Manipur, carried out by valley-based groups or Meiteis, can be traced back to around the 1960s, when various groups demand self-determination and separate statehood for Manipur, inspired by left ideology. • The roots of Kuki militancy lie in conflicts of ethnic identity. • First was the demand for self-determination solely for groups belonging to their ethnic fabric, meaning the dream to form a Kukiland which includes Kuki inhabited regions of Myanmar, Manipur, Assam and Mizoram. • The second reason for insurgency lies in the inter-community conflicts between the Kukis and the Nagas in Manipur. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Kuki-Naga conflict was started over securing identity and land as some Kuki inhabited areas coincided with Naga inhabited areas.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wanting to dominate trade and cultural activities in those areas the two communities often engaged in violent standoffs. ○ Naga groups demand for “Nagalim” (Greater Nagaland) is perceived as a “threat” to Manipur’s “territorial integrity”. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Kuki problem was intensified after Manipur was declared a ‘disturbed area’ in 1980, under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives sweeping powers to the military and has led to excesses. ● While some militant Kuki outfits demanded Kukiland, including parts which are not in India, some demanded Kukiland within India. ● At present, the demand has come to the formulation of an independent district—Kukiland Territorial Council within the purview of the Indian constitution, modelling the Bodoland Territorial Council, which was formed under the sixth schedule of the Constitution. <p>Where do the Kukis stand today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Kuki insurgent groups have been under Suspension of Operation (SoO) since 2005, when they signed an agreement for the same with the Indian Army. ● Later, in 2008, the groups entered a tripartite agreement with the State government of Manipur and Union government, to temporarily suspend their operations and give political dialogue a chance. ● The temporary SoO agreements were made in order to start political dialogue about giving some form of self-determination to the Kukis, but that has not happened, both under the UPA or NDA governments. ● The SoO has been extended by the Government almost every year since 2008, with Kuki outfits threatening to breach the agreement by taking up arms again and boycotting the Government. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In 2012, the groups held a nearly eight month long blockade of highways around their area, costing the Government a couple of crores in losses each day. ● Kukis are dissatisfied with the pace of the peace dialogue and also feel ignored, as the Government has been holding Naga Peace Talks with the main Naga insurgent outfit NSCN (IM), which demands the formation of Greater Nagaland, including parts of Manipur having Kuki inhabited regions. ● It has to be seen how the BJP plans to resolve the insurgency and settle Kuki political aspirations as the more than 50% Meitei population of the State, a significant voter base, has always been against Kuki and Naga demands for self-determination, as they fear it would undermine Manipur’s territorial integrity. <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peace Process of Naga Accord Stuck ● Concept of Asymmetrical Federalism
<p>Working women too, with a dream of good childcare</p>	<p>Context: The theme for International Women’s Day 2022 (March 8) is ‘gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow’.</p> <p>Gender equality is still a far cry for India’s female informal workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● According to a 2018 study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 95% of India’s working women are informal workers who work in labour-intensive, low-paying, highly precarious job conditions, and with no social protection. ● WHO says that “women’s informal work is central to the feminisation of poverty” ● The benefits under the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 are mostly enjoyed by formal sector women workers, constituting less than 5% of the women workforce.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The act provides for paid maternity leave for women employees to 26 weeks. ○ It made crèche facilities mandatory for establishments employing 50 or more women. ● Lack of access to quality childcare services forces women workers to leave the labour force which stops their earning and exposes them to significant economic risks. This can aggravate gender and class inequalities. <p>Here are three ways to enable women to take up more productive paid work and improve their maternal and child health outcomes:</p> <p>1. Expansion of the ICDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The primary mandate of the Anganwadi centres under the ICDS is to provide maternal and child nutritional security, a clean and safe environment, and early childhood education, thus facilitating the ability of women to re-enter work post-childbirth. ● However, ICDS has two major limitations. ● First, it does not cater to children under the age of three. ● Second, it functions only for a few hours a day, making it inconvenient to send and pick up children during work hours ● Early intake of children & extending the hours of Anganwadi centres can have dual benefits — allow mothers time for paid work and converge with the National Education Policy 2020 of providing Early Childhood Care and Education for children in the 0-6 age group ● However, these expansions would also require expanding the care worker infrastructure, especially the Anganwadi worker and helper, who are already overburdened and underpaid. <p>2. Revitalise the crèche scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The scheme has suffered diminished government funding. ● Public crèches can be operated at worksite clusters such as near industrial areas, markets, dense low-income residential areas, and labour <i>nakas</i>. ● Crèches closer to the workplace allow for timely breastfeeding and attending to emergencies ● The funds collected under the construction cess can be earmarked for running crèches at construction sites. <p>3. Improving maternity benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Women in informal employment did not have maternity benefits until the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, entitled pregnant and lactating mothers to a cash transfer of at least ₹6,000. ● However, the scheme notified for this purpose, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) limits the benefit to the first birth and has also reduced the amount to ₹5,000. ● This amount under PMMVY does not match an inflation-adjusted NFSA benchmark (nearly ₹9,400 in 2022). ● Various states have tried to bridge the coverage gap with their own scheme. Tamil Nadu has an expansive and ambitious scheme offering ₹18,000 in cash and kind for two live births. <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is imperative that we consider affordable and quality childcare infrastructure as an employment-linked benefit and as a public good.
Manual Scavenging	<p>What is manual scavenging?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Manual scavenging is the practice of removing human excreta by hand from sewers or septic tanks.

- India banned the practice under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (PEMSR).
- The Act bans the use of any individual for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta till its disposal.
- In 2013, the definition of manual scavengers was also broadened to include people employed to clean septic tanks, ditches, or railway tracks.
- The Act recognizes manual scavenging as a “dehumanizing practice,” and cites a need to “correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the manual scavengers.”

Issues with Manual Scavenging

- Manual scavengers are at risk of death from asphyxiation due to poisonous gases and are often exposed to diseases such as cholera, hepatitis, meningitis, jaundice, skin disorders and even cardiovascular diseases.
- They often lack access to proper safety gear and equipment.
- Lack of precautions, such as taking lamps down in sewers with a large concentration of methane gas, is responsible for accidents
- Manual scavengers are usually from caste groups customarily relegated to the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Their caste-designated occupation reinforces the social stigma that they are unclean or “untouchable” **and perpetuates widespread discrimination.**

Why is manual scavenging still prevalent in India?

- The **lack of enforcement of the Act** is one of the reason why the practice is still prevalent in India. While the central government enacts laws, representatives at local level too often not only fail to implement prohibitions on manual scavenging by private households, but also perpetuate the practice.
- A 2019 study by the World Health Organization (WHO) said “weak legal protection and lack of enforcement” of the laws, as well as the **poor financial status** of sanitation workers, contributes to the practice still prevailing.”
 - The Mumbai civic body charges anywhere between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000 to clean septic tanks. The unskilled labourers, meanwhile, are much cheaper to hire and contractors illegally employ them at a daily wage of Rs 300-500
- Many who refuse to work as scavengers face **coercion and threats from dominant castes**, according to a Human Rights Watch report published in 2014.
- People remain unaware of their right to refuse this role, and those who do refuse may face intense social pressure, including threats of violence and expulsion from their village, often with the complicity of local government officials.
- Some states including Delhi have launched the use of sewage cleaning machines for this purpose. However, they are **not widely used across the country**. Moreover, narrow lanes prevent access for larger machines while poorly designed septic tanks make it difficult for machines to function.

What measures are required to end this inhuman practice?

- Identify all individuals currently engaged in manual scavenging and those who have engaged in the practice since it was outlawed under the 1993 Act (so the latter are entitled to benefits under the 2013 Act).
- Ensure that rehabilitation entitlements under the 2013 Act—including financial assistance, scholarships, housing, alternative livelihood support, and other important legal and programmatic assistance—are available to manual scavenging communities.
- Take immediate steps to ensure that officials effectively intervene to stop communities from being coerced to practice manual scavenging.
- Strictly enforce the law against local government officials who themselves employ people to work as manual scavengers.

Connecting the dots

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SC/ST atrocities law ● National Commission For Safai Karamcharis
Hijab Ban: Karnataka	<p>Context: Karnataka High Court, in Resham vs State of Karnataka, upholds a ban imposed on the use of hijabs by students in classrooms across the Karnataka State.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The petitioners have moved the <i>Supreme Court</i> against Karnataka High Court's judgment in the <i>hijab</i> case. <p>What did the petitioners argue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The petitioners were a group of Muslim girls barred from wearing the hijab in class in a government college in Karnataka's Udupi district - they protested, but the college didn't relent, and the matter ended up in court. ● The girls argued that banning the hijab was not only discriminatory, but also impinged on their right to freedom of expression and religion. Their faith, they said, required them to cover their head. ● The petitioners further contended that Muslim girls are least educated and least represented in classrooms and if they are shut out in this fashion, it will be detrimental for their educational career. <p>Key Highlights of the verdict by Karnataka High Court</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The court holds that the wearing of a hijab is not essential to the practice of Islam, and, therefore, the petitioners' right to freedom of religion is not impinged; ● The court said that a uniform itself is not discriminatory and, subsequently, it held the government order "per se does not prescribe any uniform but only provides for prescription in a structured way." ● Students can't object to uniform prescribed by educational institutions. Prescription of Uniform for students in an institution falls under the category of reasonable restrictions. ● The court held that there is no discrimination inter alia under Articles 14 & 15, when the dress code is equally applicable to all the students, regardless of religion, language, gender or the like. ● Institutional discipline prevails over individual choice. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It finds that there is no substantive right to free expression and privacy that can be claimed within the confines of a classroom. ○ It stated that schools are 'qualified spaces' and by their very nature it repels the assertion of individual rights to the detriment of their general discipline & decorum ● The bench had also made it clear that this order is confined to institutions wherein the College Development Committees (CDCs) have prescribed student dress code/uniform. <p>What are the criticisms of the above judgement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some argue that the court should've considered the agency argument instead of focusing only on the essentiality test. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Constitutional experts and legal scholars have always questioned the essential religious doctrine whereby Courts are entering into theological terrain where lawyers and judges have little knowledge about. ● The court sidestepped arguments made by the petitioners on the right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to equality — dismissing them as "derivative rights" that are lesser rights. ● The court compared students in schools, which it called "qualified public spaces" with detainees in prison who cannot assert their individual fundamental rights. ● Wearing a bindi or mangalsutra or having sacred threads around their wrist are also considered by some as religious symbols. Therefore, it is argued that if government implement uniforms, then it should be across the board

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The court rejected the argument in favour of ‘reasonable accommodation’, by which a pluralist society may allow the classroom to reflect social diversity without undermining the sense of equality among students. Also, there is a fear that the hijab ban will now go national. <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of religion is important because freedoms are important, and not because religions are important.
Common University Entrance Test (CUET)	<p>Context: From the academic session 2022-23, admission to undergraduate programmes in all 45 central universities in the country will take place through a common entrance test.</p> <p>How many students are enrolled at the undergraduate level in India?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrolment has been growing over the years. At undergraduate level, it has risen from 2.74 crore in 2015-16 to 3.06 crore in 2019-20 According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20, out of 3.85 crore students enrolled in all levels of higher education in India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.06 crore, or 79.5%, were at the undergraduate level, followed by postgraduate, with 43.1 lakh students or 11.2%. Course wise break up in 2019-20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 96.56 lakh students (47.1% male and 52.9% female) were in BA 47.55 lakh students (48.7% male, 51.3% female) were in BSc 41.6 lakh (51.2% male, 48.8% female) in BCom 37.27 lakh (70.8% male, 29.2% female) in Engineering and technology 13.5 lakh (41.5% male, 59.5% female) in Medical courses Diversity/ Equity in Higher Education Institutes (2019-20 AISHE report) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14.7% belongs to SC 5.6% to the Scheduled Tribes 37% to Other Backward Classes. 5.5% were Muslims while 2.3% belonged to other minority groups. The number of class 12 candidates each year is over 1 crore. <p>Situation in Central Universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.2 lakh students are studying in 48 central universities in 2019-20 out of which 5.4 lakh were pursuing undergraduate programmes Equity in Central Universities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13.73% belonged to the SCs 4.5% to the STs 17.9% to the OBCs 8.41% were Muslims Out of 19,366 sanctioned faculty positions in the central universities, 6,558 are vacant. <p>Is CUCET new?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CUET is not new. It had been launched as the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) in 2010 under the UPA-II government However, it had failed to gather steam since only 14 central universities had adopted it until 2021. CUET is a revamped version of CUCET and it’s now compulsory for all 45 central universities to adopt it. CUCET has come after the announcement of the new National Education Policy (NEP), which advocates the need for an entrance test for university admissions. <p>Who will conduct CUET and what will be the pattern of exam?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts entrance tests such as JEE (Main) and UGC-NET, will also conduct CUET for all central universities in the first week of July.

- It is a three-and-a-half-hour **computer-based test** that will be held in two shifts and can be taken in 13 languages
- It will only have **multiple choice questions** based on the content of NCERT textbooks.
- CUET will essentially have **three parts**.
 - First part tests language which will consist reading comprehension, questions on vocabulary.
 - Second part of CUET is focused on testing a candidate's **domain-specific knowledge** (27 domains on offer, student chooses at least one and max of six)
 - The third part will be a **general test** with questions on general knowledge, current affairs, general mental ability, numerical ability, quantitative reasoning. A candidate will appear only if its desired by the University of choice.
- Even state, private and deemed-to-be universities **are free to adopt the CUET**
- For now, admissions to postgraduate courses are not mandated to be held under any common entrance.
- But unlike JEE (Main), there will be **no common counselling for admission** to central universities based on the CUET score. Each university is free to define its admission process based on the merit list prepared by the NTA.
 - However, UGC chairman did not rule out joint counselling in future.

Why a common entrance test?

- To **replace multiple entrance** tests with a single one so as to reduce the burden on higher education aspirants.
- Students can opt to write the CUET in any of 13 **languages**, which levels the field significantly
- Sky-high cut-off marks will now be history which was the case with certain reputable universities like Delhi University.
- A student's Board marks will have no role in determining her admission to a college or a programme. It will be based only on her CUET score. This **flattens out the differences in assessment practices** across various boards.
 - At best, colleges affiliated to central university can use Board marks as the minimum eligibility criteria for admission.
 - For skill-based courses that have major practical components, such as music, painting, sculpture and theatre, universities will be allowed to conduct practical exams or interviews along with CUET.
 - For professional programmes such as engineering and MBBS, central universities will admit through the entrance exams JEE (Main) and NEET respectively.

What are the concerns?

- A lot will rest on the **structure of the test**, and the goals with which it is designed.
- National Education Policy had suggested Common Entrance Test that checks conceptual understanding and the ability to apply knowledge and shall aim to eliminate the need for taking coaching for these exams. However, there are apprehensions that CUCET can be gamed by **coaching industry**.
- The unreasonable cut-off must not be replaced by another test score.
- Also, **12 years of schooling** should not be completely disregarded in the admission process. The government and the school boards must find a way to give weightage to a child's schooling career.

Finally, a single piece of reform must not obscure the larger, structural reasons for the crisis i.e. addressing the challenge of equality and quality in higher education.

Context: The report of the Supreme Court-appointed committee on the controversial farm laws was made public for the first time.

Brief Background of the Issue

- The committee was set up for the purpose of listening to the grievances of the farmers relating to the **new farm laws** and the views of the Government and to make recommendations.
- The farmers accused the government of trying to corporatise agriculture through the laws and feared that they would ring the death knell for the MPS and mandi systems.
- The repealing of the three farm legislations was one of the key demands of around 40 farmer unions (under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM)) protesting against these reforms at Delhi borders.
- On November 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the withdrawal of the three farm laws, saying the government could not convince protesting farmers about the benefits of the agriculture sector reforms.

Key Highlights of the report

- **Existing Policy unsuited for present:** The report says that the existing agricultural laws & policies were first designed to boost production during the decades of food production deficit and scarcity, and are consequently unsuited for the present times when India has made the leap into a food surplus country.
- **Objective of new laws:** The three new acts are intended to enhance access to agricultural markets and incentivize crop diversification
- **Legal issue of MSP:** The committee suggested many changes in the laws, including giving freedom to states to make the minimum support price (MSP) system legal.
- **Capping Procurement:** The committee's recommendations included capping the procurement of wheat and paddy by the Food Corporation of India (FCI). Instead of largescale purchases, the model adopted by the National Cooperative Agricultural Marketing Federation (NAFED) to procure oilseeds and pulses can be adopted.
- **Dispute settlement-** An important recommendation was an alternative mechanism for dispute settlement, through civil courts or arbitration mechanism, may be provided to the stakeholders.
- **Agriculture Marketing Council** under the chair of the Union Minister of Agriculture, with all states and UTs as members may be formed on lines of the GST Council to reinforce cooperative efforts in the implementation of these Acts.
- **Government measures-** The government should take urgent steps towards
 - strengthening agricultural infrastructure
 - enabling aggregation, assaying and quality sorting of agri produce through cooperatives and FPOs
- **Silent majority support Farm Laws:** The report stated that a "repeal or a long suspension of these laws would be unfair to the silent majority who support the farm laws."
 - The report claims that out of the 73 farmers' organisations, 61 organisations (85.7%) representing over 3.3 crore farmers fully supported the laws.

What was the concern with the silent majority argument of the committee?

- 40 unions, which had organised agitations against the laws under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), did not make any submission despite repeated requests.
- 4 Farmers Organizations, representing 51 lakh farmers (13.3 per cent), did not support the Act, 7 representing 3.6 lakh farmers (1 per cent) supported with some suggestions for modifications
- Of the total 142 representatives who participated in meetings of the committee, only 78 were from farmers' organisations, while **64 belonged to industry bodies** and other organisations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The report shows that out of the 19,207 responses, only 5,451, or 28 per cent, came from farmers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Of these, the maximum responses were from Maharashtra (2,000-2,500), followed by “Unspecified” location (a little over 2,000), and then Rajasthan, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. These states saw negligible protests over the farm laws.
Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)	<p>Context: At the NCRB Foundation Day, the Union Home Minister remarked that the second phase of the Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) project is set to be completed by 2026.</p> <p>Do You Know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Indore Police Commissioner recently unveiled a 'fingerprint-based criminal record data fetching system'. The small thumb impression machine can be added to a phone to capture fingerprints at checking points, public spaces, etc. ● If the fingerprint recorded matches with the police database, all information about a person's criminal record will be pulled up. The system is being lauded as it circumvents the long waiting period in fingerprint analysis as part of investigations. <p>What is ICJS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) is a national platform for enabling integration of the main IT system used for delivery of Criminal Justice in the country by five pillars namely:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Police (Crime and Criminal Tracking and Network Systems), ○ e-Forensics for Forensic Labs, ○ e-Courts for Courts, ○ e-Prosecution for Public Prosecutors ○ e-Prisons for Prisons. ● Invested under the CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems) project of the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs), the ICJS enables a nation wide search on police, prisons & courts databases across all States/ UTs in the country. ● It also provides for data Analytics for Forecasting/ Predictive Trends in Crimes reported region-wise, category-wise, and basis other parameters for effective management & control of crimes in future. ● The ICJS system would be made available through a dedicated and secure cloud-based infrastructure with high speed connectivity. ● National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will be responsible for the implementation of the project in association with National Informatics Center (NIC). ● The project will be implemented in collaboration with the States and Union Territories. ● In Phase-I (2018-2022) of the ICJS project, individual IT systems have been implemented and stabilized; also search of records have been enabled on these systems. ● Under Phase-II (2022-26), the system is being built on the principle of 'one data one entry' whereby data is entered only once in one pillar and the same is then available in all other pillars without the need to re-enter the data in each pillar.

Interoperable Criminal Justice System

Pan India Search

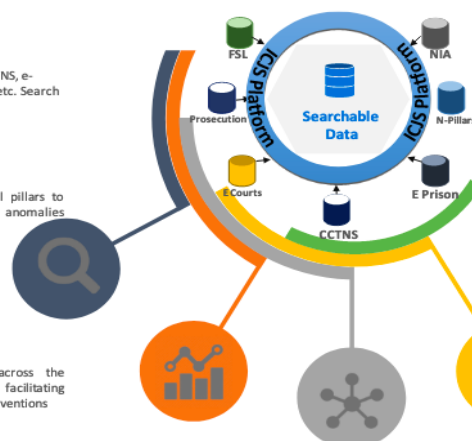
Search across the pillars data of CCTNS, e-Courts, e-Prisons, Prosecution, NIA etc. Search empowered by Phonetics and NLP

Pillar Analytics

Analyze the data of the individual pillars to understand the trends, patterns, anomalies etc. in the network

Exchange Data

Secured information exchange across the pillars through secured protocols facilitating data exchange without manual interventions



. Conceptual diagram of ICJS implementation

Merits of ICJS

- It reduces errors and time taken in sharing of necessary information between different pillars of Criminal Justice system, thereby enabling speedier delivery of justice to the common man
- It also helps in improving **investigation quality** by leveraging the analytics inbuilt in the platform.
- The ICJS platform is an effective tool for the **case and court management**, as all the relevant information of a case will be available in real-time for use by the courts.
- Compliance of judicial orders and summons can also be achieved expeditiously, ensuring effective time management.
- **Predictive Policing**: Some other critical benefits arising out of the ICJS ecosystem is usable analytics products like the National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO) to identify & track repeat and habitual sexual offenders.
 - The NDSO has become an integral part of pre-employment character & antecedent verifications, thereby reducing the opportunity for sexual crimes in several sensitive jobs.
- The ICJS is going to be a milestone to enhance the **productivity of the criminal justice** system both qualitatively and quantitatively.

What are the challenges in deploying technology in policing?

- **Privacy**- The Supreme Court in K.S Puttaswamy declared a fundamental right to informational privacy as paramount and noted that any measure that sought to collect information or surveil must be legal, necessary, and proportionate.
- **Mass surveillance**- Integrating fingerprint-based criminal record data fetching system to the list of predictive policing practices will give birth to mass surveillance.
- **Disproportionate impact on poor & vulnerable**- Mere suspicion or FIRs filed against an individual are sufficient to trigger the discretionary powers of the police that is misused against oppressed communities. Those subject to policing rarely include dominant caste persons with resources, who may have even been convicted of a crime.

A war within a war: Sexual violence as a weapon of war

Context: In any war, women and girls are the most vulnerable. The breakdown of institutions and social networks make women and girls extremely vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Sexual violence has also been used as a weapon in conflicts to humiliate, subjugate, and terrorise populations through history.

- For instance, anywhere between 200,000 and 400,000 Bengali women were systematically sexually assaulted during the Bangladeshi Liberation Movement.
- More than 60,000 women were sexually assaulted during the civil war in Sierra Leone between 1991-2002, about 40,000 in Liberia during the 14-year civil war between 1989-2003, nearly 60,000 in former Yugoslavia during 1992-95, anywhere between

	<p>100,000 and 250,000 during the Rwandan genocide, and over 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998.</p> <p>How does it perpetuate?</p> <p>Multiple forms of sexual violence—including rape, sexual slavery, gang rape, sexual mutilation, and torture—have been perpetrated against women and girls in wars. Victims include children and pregnant women, many of whom are also held captive as sexual slaves for weeks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to a report by Amnesty International, most survivors of sexual violence experience severe health issues, including mental health problems, and have almost no access to medical or psychosocial services. • Contrary to the provisions of international humanitarian law, medical facilities have been deliberately targeted, and are occupied by armed groups. Ambulances have been seized, and medical personnel have mostly fled out of fear. • In some wars, most victims report that they were being brutalised because of their identity and the need to ‘cleanse’ them. • The impacts of sexual violence during conflicts including HIV, mental health problems, and stigmatisation often persist even after the conflict has ended. For instance, in Liberia, rates of sexual violence continue to be very high many years after the conflict formally ended due to a culture of impunity and ‘hyper masculinity’ developed during the civil war years. • Most post-conflict societies do not possess the capabilities of providing medical and psychological care to survivors, let alone justice. <p>Global silence</p> <p>Unfortunately, the issue of gender-based violence in conflicts has not received adequate attention in the discourse on gender equality and sustainable development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual violence in conflict zones has often been regarded as an inevitable by-product of war and the perpetrators of violence have seldom been punished. • War raises some tough questions though, regarding the global goal of gender equality, SDG 5, which calls for “ending violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.” <p>A questions for the global community to ponder upon: Is it possible to eliminate violence against women if countries refuse to take a tough stance against sexual violence in conflict zones?</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>If respect for territorial integrity of a nation and non-interference in ‘internal’ matters override the need to condemn the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, then gender equality is a distant goal. A world that has committed to the achievement of SDGs, cannot remain silent in the face of such a massive violation of women and girls and the use of sexual violence as a weapon in conflict during any war.</p> <p>Can you answer the following question?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can we achieve gender equality when sexual violence is still a weapon of war? Discuss.
<p>Voting of Overseas Citizens: Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System</p>	<p>Context: On March 25, Union Minister for Law and Justice stated in Lok Sabha that the government was exploring the possibility of allowing online voting for non-resident Indians (NRI).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election Commission of India (ECI) in 2020 itself had proposed to extend the facility of postal ballots to eligible NRIs. The postal ballots were to be sent to NRIs electronically after which they will send the ballots back, after choosing their candidate, via post. <p>How can overseas voters currently vote in Indian elections?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to 2010, an Indian citizen who is an eligible voter and was residing abroad for more than six months , would not have been able to vote in elections.

- This was because the NRI's name was deleted from electoral rolls if he or she stayed outside the country for more than six months at a stretch.
- After the passing of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2010, eligible NRIs who had stayed abroad beyond six months have been able to vote, but only in person at the polling station where they have been enrolled as an overseas elector.
- Just as any resident Indian citizen above the age of 18 years is eligible to vote in the constituency where she/he is a resident, overseas Indian citizens are also eligible to do so.
- In the case of overseas voters, their address mentioned in the passport is taken as the place of ordinary residence and chosen as the constituency for the overseas voter to enrol in.

How has the existing facility worked so far?

- From merely 11,846 overseas voters who registered in 2014, the number went up to close to a lakh in 2019. But the bulk of these voters (nearly 90%) belonged to just one State — Kerala.
- Of the 25,606 such voters who actually turned up, 25,534 were from Kerala (mostly from Kozhikode and Malappuram districts).
- Clearly, a very low proportion of eligible overseas residents actually registered or turned up to vote.
- The proviso of having to visit the polling booth in person has discouraged eligible voters from exercising their mandate.
- In the winter session of Parliament in 2017, the government proposed to remove the restriction imposed by Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, which required them to be physically present to vote in their constituencies.
- The Bill provided for overseas voters to be **able to appoint a proxy** to cast their votes on their behalf, subject to conditions laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.
- The Bill was later passed in 2018, but lapsed with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha.
- The ECI then approached the government to permit NRIs to vote via postal ballots similar to a system that is **already used by service voters**, which is the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System or ETPBS.
 - Service voters are those who have a service qualification. Someone who is either a member of the Armed Forces of the Union, Armed Police Force of a State, or someone who is merely employed under the Government of India.
 - The ETPBS method allowed for greater turnout among service voters in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

What is ETPBS and how does it function?

- The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 was amended in 2016 to allow service voters to use the ETPBS.
- Under this system, postal ballots are sent electronically to registered service voters.
- The service voter can then download the ETPB (along with a declaration form and covers), register their mandate on the ballot and send it to the returning officer of the constituency via ordinary mail.
- The post will include an attested declaration form (after being signed by the voter in the presence of an appointed senior officer who will attest it).
- The postal ballot must reach the returning officer by 8 a.m. on the day of the counting of results.
- The ECI proposed to extend this facility to overseas voters as well.
- For this to commence, the Law Ministry has to amend the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of NRI voters, those seeking to vote through ETPBS will have to inform the returning officer at least five days after notification of the election. • The returning officer will then send the ballot electronically via the ETPBS. • The NRI voter can then register her/his mandate on the ballot printout and send it back with an attested declaration in a process similar to the service voter. Except in this case, the senior officer would be appointed by the Indian diplomatic or consular representative in the resident country of the NRI. • The ECI has not specified whether the voter should send in the ballot through ordinary post to the returning officer or drop it off at the Indian consular office/embassy, which will then send the envelopes constituency-wise to the returning officers. • ECI had asked the Law Ministry to explore the possibility of extending postal ballots to overseas electors and not restrict it to any particular country. <p>Are postal ballots a viable means of voting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2021, the Ministry of External Affairs informed ECI that the implementation could require to overcome “huge logistical challenges” and needs “a realistic assessment of requirements” • A postal ballot mechanism that allows for proper authentication of the ballot at designated consular/embassy offices and an effective postal system should ease this process for NRIs, but rules must be clearly framed for eligibility on the basis of time spent away from the country.
<p>Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022</p>	<p>Context: The government has introduced the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022 in Lok Sabha amid strong protests from the Opposition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bill replaces the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920. • Objective of the bill: The bill provides legal sanction for taking appropriate body measurements of persons who are required to give such measurements and will make the investigation of crime more efficient and expeditious and will also help in increasing the conviction rate. <p>Problems of India’s Criminal Justice System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow disposal of cases leading to huge backlogs. There are more than 4.4 crore cases pending before the judiciary. The tendency to over-criminalise conduct being one of the reason for high number of cases. • Justice mechanisms is mostly inaccessible to marginalised classes of citizens. This is because the focus has been upon institution building rather than capacity building. • Abuse of power by the police due to continuation of Colonial mindset in certain circles. • Crime prevention has remained utopian goal of our criminal justice system. This is due to ineffective community policing mechanisms and situational crime prevention • Rehabilitative form of justice has not been focused. Custodial punishments are seen by the governments as a more effective measure than non-custodial punishments (recommended by various Law Commission) • Dearth of reliable state-sponsored data collection, maintenance and analysis mechanisms. • Criminal justice system is yet to catch up with the Changing nature of crimes. • Low Conviction rate due to inefficiencies in police & judicial system – which is being addressed by the new proposed bill. <p>What is the proposed law?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details about convicts and other persons: Earlier act permitted collection of only finger impressions and footprint impressions. The Bill expands the list to include iris and retina scans, palm-print impression, signature and handwriting, biological samples such as blood, semen, hair samples, and swabs, and their analysis. • Coverage- It proposes that the law apply to three categories of individuals.

- All Convicted persons (earlier it was only for certain cases)
- Arrested Persons
- Suspected Criminals
- Persons held under any preventive detention law
- **Retention of details:** The Bill requires the details collected to be retained in digital or electronic form for 75 years from the date of collection.
- **Removal of details:** The record may be destroyed in case of persons who: (i) have not been previously convicted, and (ii) are released without trial, discharged, or acquitted by the court, after exhausting all legal remedies.
- Police personnel up to the rank of Head Constable have been authorised to record the measurements.
- **Resistance to giving details:** As per the Bill, resistance or refusal to give details will be considered an offence under the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- **Role of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):** Functions of NCRB under the Bill include:
 - Collect the details about the persons covered under the Bill from state/UT governments, or other law enforcement agencies
 - storing and destroying the details about specified persons at the national level
 - processing the details with relevant criminal records, and
 - disseminating the details to law enforcement agencies.
- **Rule-making power:** The Act vested rule-making power only in the state government. The Bill extends this power to the central government as well. The central or state government may make rules on various matters like the manner of collection, storage, preservation, destruction, dissemination, and disposal of details by NCRB.

What are the concerns expressed against the bill?

- **Lack of Clarity:** the statement of objects says it provides for collection of measurements for “convicts and other persons” but the expression “other persons” is not defined.
- **Conflict with Fundamental Rights:** The bill implied use of force in collection of biological information, that could lead to narco analysis and brain mapping, which is considered as violative of Article 20 (3) (right against self-incrimination). There are also concerns that it violates the right to privacy under Article 21.
- **Possibility of Judicial Scrutiny:** The Bill also states “increasing conviction rate” as one of its aims. The court may have to look into whether this can be a legitimate aim and if it can outweigh rights of citizens.
- **Federal Challenges:** Given that policing is still a state subject, it remains to be seen if any states refuse to share this information.
- **Fear of Mass surveillance:** The proposed Bill brings a legal framework for police surveillance using technology, experts fear that it could be expanded or misused. For ex: The bill empowers to collect samples even from protestors engaged in political protests.

ECONOMY

The Crypto Question

Context: While Bitcoin started more than a decade back in 2008, total market capitalisation of all cryptocurrencies was only \$20 billion in early 2017. This went up to \$289 billion in next three years and thereafter exploded to reach a peak of \$2.9 trillion in November 2021. In the last three months it has again witnessed a sharp decline.

- As of today the total number of cryptocurrencies is at 17,697 and the total number of crypto exchanges is 462.
- Currently, there is no regulation or any ban on the use of cryptocurrencies in India.
- The Reserve Bank of India's order banning banks from supporting crypto transactions, was reversed by the Supreme Court order of March 2020.
- While the RBI has repeatedly underlined its strong view against cryptocurrencies, saying these pose a serious threat to the macroeconomic and financial stability of the country, Govt. of India is working on a legislation for regulation of this sector.

Budget 2022

- Finance Minister in her Budget speech this year has proposed to introduce a digital currency in the coming financial year for which RBI is soon expected to carry out pilot studies.
- Removing all doubts on whether cryptocurrencies would become a legal tender or a medium of exchange in the future or not, the budget clarified that the Government of India doesn't consider cryptocurrency as a currency, but shall treat it as a virtual digital asset. In other words, the Government of India would treat cryptocurrency as an investment.
- While presenting the Union Budget 2022 government proposed a tax of **30 per cent** on virtual assets, effectively legitimizing trading of private cryptocurrencies and non-fungible tokens. This is broadly in line with the Centre's plans to have a fiat digital currency, while disallowing use of private virtual coins as legal tender.

Taxing Transactions in Cryptocurrencies

The power to levy taxes is prescribed under Article 246 which grants power to the Parliament as well as state legislatures to impose taxes. Article 265 provides that no tax can be imposed or collected without the authority of law. Today, with the rise of cryptocurrencies and its underlying technology, the world stands at the helm of another such revolution. Cryptocurrencies like bitcoin are decentralised, digital currencies relying on a peer-to-peer network which operates without the need for a third-party intermediary like the Reserve Bank of India. Coupled with lack of regulatory guidance, its unique technical aspects create huge complications in its taxation.

- These clarifications about taxation of cryptocurrencies aka virtual digital assets, as the government wants it to be addressed, come at the right time.
- It especially becomes extremely important because around 10 crore individual investors have invested around Rs 6 lakh crore in various cryptocurrencies, as per the advertisement issued by The Blockchain and Crypto Assets Council which is a part of the Internet and Mobile Association of India.
- The taxing of 'virtual digital assets' or crypto currencies will help the Income-Tax department measure the "depth" of this trade in the country.
- The income-tax department and the income-tax Act only looks at whether the transactions that you have entered into are resulting in income.
- Taxing crypto currency under the new legislation does not attach any legality.
- When an entity declares any profit or surplus on the digital trade, then they also have to say where they have got the money to invest from and, if the investment is proper and justified, then the surplus will be taxed.
- The taxation will also help us know if the investment is contaminated or illicit, if he/she is putting unaccounted income or it is a 'benami' of somebody else, then the consequences will follow.

Challenges:

- **Absence of explicit tax provisions** has led to ambiguity and uncertainty: Lack of clarity as to whether the GST on crypto transactions is applicable only on Rupee transactions alone or even on transactions through crypto currencies.
- **Difficult to impose tax due to cross-border transactions:** Usually, taxpayers may cryptocurrencies and store in online wallets, on servers outside India. In such cases, it becomes difficult to pinpoint which jurisdiction's tax laws would become applicable.
- **Anonymous transactions:** The identities of taxpayers who transact with cryptocurrencies remain anonymous and hence it becomes quite difficult to keep a tab on the individuals who are trading in cryptocurrencies. Usually, tax evaders have been using crypto transactions to park their black money abroad and fund criminal activities, terrorism, etc.
- **Difficult to track down tax evaders:** One of the most efficient enforcement tools in the hands of Income Tax Department is CASS or 'computer aided scrutiny selection' of assessments, where returns of taxpayers are selected inter alia based on information gathered from third party intermediaries such as banks.

How do Cryptocurrencies work?

- Cryptocurrencies work using a technology called blockchain. Blockchain is a decentralized technology spread across many computers that manages and records transactions.
- So, instead of relying on traditional financial institutions like RBI who verify and guarantee your transactions, cryptocurrency transactions are verified by the user's computers logged into the currency's network.
- Cryptocurrency mining is the process in which transactions between users are verified and added to the blockchain public ledger.
- The process of mining is also responsible for introducing new coins into the existing circulating supply and is one of the key elements that allow cryptocurrencies to work as a peer-to-peer decentralized network, without the need for a third party central authority.

The 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.
- Govt. should impose a 1 per cent tax deduction at source (TDS) of transactions above a monetary threshold to trace the transaction. The US government has made it mandatory for all tax payers and third party intermediaries (Exchanges, wallet providers, miners etc) to disclose all the cryptocurrency related transactions.
- Explicit and Unambiguous provisions should be incorporated in the Income tax act. The existing international legal framework for exchange of information should be strengthened to enable collecting and sharing of information on crypto transactions.

Conclusion

- The tax department is entering into the digital or virtual asset side at a time when the policy itself is being worked out so this is certainly the right time for the department to have entered the market. Only legislation will help us in knowing as to who is investing, how much is being invested, the quality of the investment, the nature of investment and whether people are making profits or losses.
- The country should regulate these transactions in a manner that permits a reasonable balance between consumer security and legitimacy. A streamlined tax regime will be essential in the formulation of a clear, constructive and adaptive regulatory environment for crypto currencies.

	<p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are your views on the recent budget announcements on taxing transactions in cryptocurrencies? Substantiate your views. 2. How have the markets for cryptocurrencies evolved in recent months? What are the regulatory concerns related to cryptocurrencies? Discuss. 																		
Rising Oil Prices and Stagflation	<p>Context: Crude oil prices soared and touched almost \$140 per barrel mark, which was around \$70 a barrel in December</p> <p>What is the main reason for increase in oil prices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most immediate trigger for the spike is the decision by USA to ban the purchase of Russian oil in response to the invasion of Ukraine. • Russia is the world's second-largest oil producer and, as such, if its oil is kept out of the market because of sanctions, it will not only lead to prices spiking, but also mean they will stay that way for long. <p>Fig 1. Impact of war on major commodity prices:</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Movement of major commodity prices since 24 Feb 2022</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Commodity</th> <th>Movement (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Gold</td> <td>1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Copper</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agri Index</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Base Metal</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Zinc</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aluminium</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Palladium</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crude</td> <td>21%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>How will India be affected due to rising Oil Prices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While India is not directly involved in the conflict, it will be badly affected if oil prices move higher and stay that way. • India imports more than 84% of its total oil demand and increase in oil prices is going to increase our import bill further widening the Current Account Deficit. • Rise in crude oil prices will lead to increase in Prices of Petrol & Diesel, if the government doesn't cut its taxes. • Higher petro & diesel prices will further increase inflation and raise the general price level (due to increase in transportation costs). A 10% increase in crude oil prices raises wholesale inflation by 0.9% and retail inflation by 0.5%. • Higher inflation would rob Indians of their purchasing power, thus bringing down their overall demand. • Private consumer demand is the biggest driver of growth in India, accounts for more than 55% of India's total GDP. • Currently, the biggest concern in India's GDP growth story is the weak consumer demand. Higher prices will further weaken the demand & hurt our economic recovery prospects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analysts have been revising their forecasts for India — down for growth (7.9% to 7.7%) and up for inflation (5.8% to 6.3%). 	Commodity	Movement (%)	Gold	1%	Copper	3%	Agri Index	4%	Base Metal	5%	Zinc	8%	Aluminium	8%	Palladium	10%	Crude	21%
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Crude	21%																		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also, fewer goods and services being demanded will then disincentivise businesses from investing in new capacities, which, in turn, will exacerbate the unemployment crisis and lead to even lower incomes. One big fear is that such a sudden and sharp spike in oil prices may push a relatively vulnerable economy like India into stagflation. <p>What is stagflation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stagflation is an economic condition of stagnant growth and persistently high inflation. Typically, rising inflation happens when an economy is booming — people are earning lots of money, demanding lots of goods and services and as a result, prices keep going up. When the demand is down by the reverse logic, prices tend to stagnate (or even fall). But stagflation is a condition where an economy experiences the worst of both worlds — the growth rate is largely stagnant (along with rising unemployment) and inflation is not only high but persistently so. The best-known case of stagflation is what happened in the early and mid-1970s. The OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries), which works like a cartel, decided to cut crude oil supply. This sent oil prices soaring across the world; they were up by almost 70%. This sudden oil price shock not only raised inflation everywhere, especially in the western economies but also constrained their ability to produce, thus hampering their economic growth. <p>Is there a threat of stagflation in India due to rising Oil Prices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It cannot be denied that if oil prices stay high and for long, the inflation situation will worsen considerably and this would be coming after two years of already raised prices and reduced incomes. The other requirement is stalling growth and one of the indicator is unemployment. India is facing the most acute unemployment crisis it has seen in the past five decades So, yes, unlikely as it may be, it can be argued that we could be looking at stagflation in the near future.
<p>Investment in care services can generate 234 million jobs for women by 2035</p>	<p>Context: The report, titled Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work provides a global overview of national laws and practices regarding care policies, namely maternity protection, paternity, parental and other care-related leave policies, as well as childcare and long-term care services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of these, 234 million (78 per cent) will go to women, according to a new report by International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations labour agency. According to the report, employment rates of women will rise by 10 percentage points overall, ranging from nine percentage points in Europe and lower-middle and low-income countries in Asia to 12 percentage points in the Arab states, far more than for men. This job creation potential by 2035 will be driven by 96 million direct jobs in childcare, 136 million direct jobs in long-term care and 67 million indirect jobs in non-care sectors and for that, an annual investment of \$5.4 trillion will be required. <p>The ILO report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent and significant gaps in care services and policies have left hundreds of millions of workers with family responsibilities without adequate protection and support. The investment in care services and care leave can also have an impact on the gap between male and female earnings, as a result of both, increased employment in care and increased maternal earnings overall.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The report found that three out of every ten women of reproductive age or 649 million women, lived in the 82 countries that did not meet the ILO Convention. The Convention mandates 14 weeks of minimum maternity leave on at least two-thirds of previous earnings, funded by social insurance or public funds. <p>Maternity Leave Facility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The proportion of potential mothers living in countries with maternity leave durations below 14 weeks is 51.9 per cent in Africa (23 countries), 55.8 per cent in the Americas (18 countries) and 17.5 per cent in Asia and the Pacific (15 countries). ● In Europe and Central Asia, all potential mothers live in countries providing at least 14 weeks of maternity leave. ● Globally, 123 countries offer fully paid maternity leave, with nine in 10 potential mothers living in these countries. ● The report warned that it will take at least 46 years to achieve minimum maternity leave rights in the 185 countries analysed for the study. <p>Long-term care services Facility</p> <p>Long-term care services are also essential to ensure the right to healthy ageing in dignity and independent living.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Globally, only 89 out of 179 countries have a statutory provision of public long-term care services for older persons. ● The report found a strong investment case for creating a transformative package of care policies based on universal access that will create a breakthrough pathway for building a better and more gender-equal world of work. <p>The Way Forward – Key Actions to be taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building knowledge, data and awareness ● Designing and implementing care policies and services ● Costing care policies and services ● Strengthening representation and social dialogues
<p>UPI123: UPI for Feature Phone</p>	<p>Context: On March 8, the RBI launched a new Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments solution for feature phone users dubbed 'UPI123Pay'. UPI, which was introduced in 2016, has become one of the most used digital payments platforms in the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The volume of UPI transactions has already reached ₹76 lakh crore in the current year, compared to ₹41 lakh crore in FY21. <p>About UPI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is a common platform through which a person can transfer money from his bank account to any other bank account in the country instantly using nothing but his/her UPI ID. ● Launched in 2016 as Mobile First digital payments platform ● Immediate money transfer through mobile device round the clock 24*7 and 365 days based on the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) platform. ● UPI is completely interoperable and as such, it is unique in the world, where you have an interoperable system on the 'send' and 'receive' side ● Developed by: National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) under the guidance from RBI <p>Significance of UPI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It created interoperability between all sources and recipients of funds (consumers, businesses, fintechs, wallets, 140 member banks), ● Settled instantly inside the central bank in fiat money – Convenience to consumers and merchants and ● Blunted data monopolies -big tech firms have strong autonomy but weak fiduciary responsibilities over customer data). <p>Challenges of UPI</p>

- Several structural and technological challenges include cyber-frauds, transaction costs, communication infrastructure, awareness and adoption.
- Also, at present, efficient access to UPI is available largely via smartphones.

How does the new solution (UPI123) work?

- The new UPI-based service is designed to bring the digital payments platform closer to a significant number of feature phone mobile subscribers in the country, which is estimated to be more than 40 crores.
- Such users could earlier access the digital transactions platform through the USSD based process, using the short code of *99#, which according to RBI is not popular.
 - USSD-based mobile banking can be used for fund transfers, checking account balance, generating bank statement, among other uses.
 - The main objective of the innovative *99# payments service is to allow financial inclusion of the underbanked and economically weaker sections of the society, and integrate them into mainstream banking.
- The USSD-based process is considered cumbersome, with users required to send multiple messages and charged for the same, and not supported by all mobile service providers.
- With the new UPI123Pay, feature phone users will be required to go through an onboarding process where they have to **link their bank account to their feature phone** and then set a UPI PIN using their debit card for authenticating transactions.
- Once they have completed this initial process, users will be able to use the new UPI facility through one of the four distinct payment options that don't require an internet connection.

How will users make payments without internet?

- The UPI123Pay service is a three-step method to initiate and execute services for users, which will work on phones which do not have an option for internet connection.
- The new UPI payments system offers users four options to make payments without internet connectivity:
 - Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
 - App-based functionality
 - Missed call facility
 - Proximity sound-based payments.
- **Using the IVR option**, users would be required to initiate a secured call from their feature phones to a predetermined IVR number and complete UPI on-boarding formalities to be able to start making financial transactions like money transfer, mobile recharge, EMI repayment, balance check, among others.
- **The missed call facility** will allow users to access their bank account and perform routine transactions such as receiving, transferring funds, regular purchases, bill payments, etc., by giving a missed call on the number displayed at the merchant outlet. The customer will receive an incoming call to authenticate the transaction by entering UPI PIN.
- **They could also install an app** on their feature phone through which several UPI functions, available on smartphones, will be available on their feature phone, except scan and pay feature which is currently not available.
- Finally, they could utilise the proximity sound-based payments option, which uses sound waves to enable contactless, offline, and proximity data communication on any device.
- Users will be able to make payments to their friends and family, pay their utility bills, recharge FASTags, pay mobile bills and also check their account balances,

Do other countries have something similar?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile payment systems that do not rely on internet connectivity like the ones based on USSD or SMS technology were introduced many years ago and are still being used in some developing countries. • In fact, one of the major mobile payment systems globally was introduced by Vodafone's Kenyan associate, Safaricom in 2007. • M-PESA, which is Africa's leading mobile money service, operates across the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique and Tanzania, with 51 million customers making over \$314 billion in transactions per year through the service, according to Vodafone. <p>Conclusion The launch of UPI123Pay makes facilities under UPI accessible to that section of society which was so far been excluded from the digital payments landscape. In that way, it is promoting great amount of financial inclusion in our economy.</p>
<p>Nuclear Energy: Misguided Policy</p>	<p>Context: On December 15, 2021, the Indian government had informed Parliament that it plans to build "10 indigenous reactors in fleet mode" and had granted "in principle approval" for 28 additional reactors, including 24 to be imported from France, the U.S. and Russia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given the post-Fukushima global and national trends in the nuclear industry, such a policy seems misguide <p>What was Fukushima Nuclear disaster?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 11th March 2011, multiple reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan suffered severe accidents after an earthquake and a tsunami. • Those reactors were quickly "shut down" following the earthquake. But their radioactive cores continued producing heat and eventually melted down because the tsunami knocked out the cooling system. <p>Why India's push towards nuclear energy is misguided?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Intensive: Nuclear power plants are capital intensive that requires billions of dollars of investment. • Cost Overruns: Recent nuclear builds have suffered major cost overruns. Ex: V.C. Summer nuclear project in South Carolina (U.S.) where costs rose so sharply that the project was abandoned — after an expenditure of over \$9 billion. • Cheaper Alternatives: The cost of alternative renewable-energy technologies has reduced drastically. Nuclear energy costs at least ₹ 15 per unit excluding transmission costs. In contrast, solar power is now made available at ₹2.14 per unit. (₹4.30 per unit with storage). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If nuclear electricity is to be sold at a competitive rate, it would have to be greatly subsidised by the Indian government, which operates all nuclear plants through the Nuclear Power Corporation of India. • Against the global trend: In 1996, 17.5% of the world's electricity came from nuclear power plants; by 2020, this figure had declined to just around 10%. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In 2008, the U.S. government projected an expansion of nuclear capacity to 114.9 gigawatts by 2030; in 2021, it predicted that capacity would contract to 83.3 gigawatts. • Failure of Indo-US Nuclear deal: The government had predicted in 2010 that nuclear capacity in India would reach 35 gigawatts by 2020 (Installed capacity today is only 6.78 GW). Such targets were based on the expectation that India would import many light-water reactors after the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal. But, the deal has not led to the establishment of a single new nuclear plant. • High Cost of Nuclear Disaster: A nuclear disaster might leave large swathes of land uninhabitable — as in Chernobyl — or require a prohibitively expensive clean-up — as in Fukushima, where the final costs may eventually exceed \$600 billion. • Liabilities of Supplier: Concerns about safety have been heightened by the insistence of nuclear suppliers that they be indemnified of liability for the consequence of any accident in India.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Climate Concerns: Nuclear power is not the right choice to “adapt” to climate change, which requires resilience in power systems. In 2020, a windstorm caused the Duane Arnold nuclear plant in the U.S. to cease operations. The frequency of such extreme weather events is likely to increase in the future. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is also not the appropriate choice for mitigating India’s carbon emissions since it cannot be deployed at the necessary scale. ● Local Protests: Safety concerns following the Fukushima accident have led to protests against each planned reactor. <p>Conclusion</p> <p>Given the inherent vulnerabilities of nuclear reactors and their high costs, it would be best for the Government to unambiguously cancel its plans for a nuclear expansion</p>
<p>Rupee-rouble trade arrangement</p>	<p>What is Rupee-Rouble trade arrangement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rupee-rouble trade is a payment mechanism which can allow Indian exporters to be paid in Indian rupees for their exports to Russia instead of standard international currencies such as dollars or euros. ● Under this arrangement, a Russian bank will need to open an account in an Indian bank while an Indian bank will open its account in Russia. ● Both sides can then mutually agree to hold currency worth a specified amount in the local currencies in their respective accounts. ● If the specified amount is say, \$100 million, then the Russian bank’s account in India will have rupees worth that amount while the Indian bank’s account in Russia will have roubles worth that amount. ● Once the payment mechanism is in place, the Indian exporter can be paid in rupee from the Russian bank’s account in India and imports from Russia can be paid for with roubles from the Indian bank’s account in Russia. <p>Has it been attempted before?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● India has attempted the rupee-rouble payment mechanism with Russia on a very small scale earlier for a few items like tea. But it has happened in normal times and never on a large commercial scale. ● A rupee-rial payment mechanism, however, had successfully worked in India’s trade with Iran when economic sanctions were imposed on Iran by West in 2012. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ India successfully used the mechanism for partly paying for its oil purchase from Iran. ○ This worked well for several years till the Trump regime placed product-specific sanction on oil trade with Iran and India stopped its purchases from the country. <p>How critical is the rupee-rouble mechanism for India?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is important for India to have an alternative payment mechanism in place with Russia as the US, the EU and the UK have blocked at least seven Russian banks from accessing the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SWIFT is a global secure interbank system that communicates payment instructions and enables transactions between banks from all the countries around the world. ● An estimated \$500 million is pending for goods already shipped by Indian exporters and it is now not possible to get the payment through the regular SWIFT channel. ● Since transaction with Russia cannot be carried out in international currencies such as the dollar or the euro, a rupee payment mechanism will determine if the trading will continue or not. <p>What are the problems that may crop up?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The fluctuation in the value of rouble could make it difficult to implement the rupee-rouble payment mechanism.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Firstly, it will be difficult to decide a fair exchange rate between the rupee and the rouble. ● Moreover, if the value of the rouble continues falling sharply, then trading may not happen as the rouble in the Indian bank's Russian account will lose value. ● This is a risk that India will have to take if it decides to go ahead and put a rupee payment mechanism in place. ● At present, there is only a sanction against the use of SWIFT. There is nothing to bar India from trading with Russia using alternatives such as a barter system or a rupee-rouble payment mechanism. ● However, if the sanctions turn product-specific, then it may be difficult for India to use this arrangement <p>What are the strategic ramifications for India?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The world would see this as an arrangement by India to by-pass the sanctions post-Russia's invasion of Ukraine ● The US and the EU are already unhappy with India for abstaining at the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Commission on all resolutions that criticise Russia for invading Ukraine ● If India helps Russia flout economic sanctions, it may then be accused of siding with Russia and this could hurt New Delhi's diplomatic relations with the Western powers.
<p>Understanding Citizens' Reluctance to Pay Taxes</p>	<p>The perception on how government spends its money impacts citizen's behaviour in regard to paying taxes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proponents of the Classical theory of benefit-based taxation have long argued that the willingness among citizens to pay taxes depends on the benefits that taxpayers expect to receive in return for paying their taxes. ● According to this theory, people may be more willing to pay taxes if they believe that the money will be spent in a way that personally benefits them. ● If, on the other hand, government spending is not likely to directly benefit them, taxpayers are less likely to pay their taxes. ● So taxes that are purely aimed at redistribution of wealth may not appeal to a lot of taxpayers. <p>US Case study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a research project, a team of four US researchers studied well over 2,000 households in Dallas County, USA, to gauge how their willingness to pay property taxes changes with new information on how the government spent its money. ● Household were not fully aware about how the property taxes that they paid went towards funding public education in their localities. ● When the households were informed that their government spent a larger share of their taxes towards funding public education, there was significant change in their behaviour. ● It was found out the citizens, whose children went to public schools, were more willing to pay their taxes & less likely to appeal their taxation in courts. However, there wasn't any noticeable changes from Citizens who didn't avail public education. ● This study concluded that people were willing to pay taxes when they realized that they were personally benefitting from it. <p>What lesson does this study hold for India?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The study's conclusions may hold lessons for countries like India where there is a significant share of tax evasion due to the fact that citizens do not feel that they receive sufficient benefits from the government for the taxes that they pay. ● One way to encourage people to pay taxes would be to make information about how tax revenues are being spent by the government more accessible to citizens. ● It is recommended that the government should offer detailed information on the various purposes (such as health, education, roads, etc) towards which tax collections will be earmarked.

<p>National Land Monetisation Corporation</p>	<p>Context: Last week, the Union cabinet approved the creation of a National Land Monetisation Corporation to monetise the surplus land holdings of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and other government agencies.</p> <p>What are the advantages by creating a land monetisation corporation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Database of Land: A detailed and comprehensive inventory of the state's land holding across the country will be created. ● Investor Friendly: Properly marked land parcels with geographical identifiers, boundaries clearly demarcated, and the legality of title well established, will provide greater clarity and certainty to private investors. This will help in creation of a database of potential investors. ● Better Utilisation of assets: Collating large swathes of unused/under used land under a single entity will lead to a more efficient monetisation drive, and better utilisation of these assets. For ex: Total vacant land available with Railways is estimated at around 1.25 lakh acres. ● Increases Government revenue: Proceeds from the monetisation of these assets will help generate additional resources, boosting government coffers. ● Helps reduce Land Prices: Auctioning off surplus land will increase the supply of land, which may address the issue of the "artificial" scarcity of land that exists in certain areas. This could reduce prices and thus have a moderating effect on costs of projects. ● Need for specialised agency: Land monetisation is a complex process that requires "specialised skills and expertise" in areas such as "market research, legal due diligence, valuation, master planning, investment banking and land management." A dedicated entity with specialised skills is better suited for this task. <p>What are the challenges that this corporation might face?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reluctance to declare: The estimation of surplus land may be a contentious issue. Ministries, departments, and public sector entities may be reluctant to demarcate land parcels as "surplus". ● Legal- administrative Challenges: The corporation will have to grapple with issues such as the absence of clear titles, ongoing litigation, and muted investor interest. There is also the issue of the encroachment of government land to contend with. <p>Conclusion</p> <p>While this monetisation drive should lead to more efficient outcomes, it does raise questions over the management of commons, and whether public purpose can be better looked after by more effective management of public land by the state.</p>
<p>Finding Unemployment Benefits</p>	<p>Context: Even before COVID-19, the unemployment rate touched a peak in 2017-18 at 6.1%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, the average urban unemployment rate remained higher at 9.04% in 2021 and above 7% in January-February 2022. ● Meanwhile, the rural unemployment rate rose to 8.35% in February 2022 after mild fluctuations around 5-7% since June 2021 (8.75%). <p>Does a satisfactory system of unemployment relief exist?</p> <p>Unlike in China, the labour laws do not expressly provide for unemployment benefits. However, India does have various initiatives that provides unemployment relief</p> <p>1. Employees' State Insurance Act (ESIA), 1948</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Under the said act, the Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojana (RGSKY) provides unemployment allowance to involuntarily unemployed insured persons who have made contributions for two years to ESI. ● The cash relief is at the rate of 50% of the last average daily wages for the first 12 months and 25% for the next 12 months. ● It covers unemployment due to retrenchment, closure or permanent invalidity. ● It provides medical care during unemployment tenure and vocational training. <p>2. Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It was introduced in 2018 under which unemployed insured persons are provided allowance at the rate of 50% of the average per day earning of the claimant. ● Allowance is provided for 90 days. ● It was launched on pilot basis for two years but was extended during the COVID-19 period. <p>3. Industrial Disputes Act (IDA), 1947</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Industrial establishments employing 100 or more workers must pay retrenchment compensation of 15 days of average pay for the completed years of service to workers in case of they lose jobs due to closure. ● Here, the burden of unemployment allowance is transferred to the employer. Employment-intensive industries like construction and services are excluded. <p>4. Social Security Code (SSC), 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Though SSC included unemployment protection in its definition of 'social security', it did not provide for a scheme for the same. ● Government reasoned that Unemployment allowance is already provided for under the ESI Act and hence no need of separate scheme. ● The SSC offers the vague promise of schemes to the unorganised workers. <p>Have the above schemes been successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESIA, despite a more inclusive coverage of 10 or more workers than the Employees' Provident Fund Act (20 or more workers), covers fewer workers due to its limited and slow expansion of districts in India. ● Under the RGSKY, 0.043% (13,341/3,09,66,930) of the employees availed of unemployment allowance during 2007-08 to 2019-20 ● Further, unemployment allowance's share in total cash expenditure of ESIC ranged from 0.25% to 0.99%. The incredibly low off-take means that RGSKY is not successful. ● Under ABVKY, from July 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020, 120 claims were made, which means a meagre average daily cash relief of ₹73.33. <p>What alternative measures can be taken?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The SSC must be amended to provide for a universal unemployment allowance scheme with tripartite contributions by employers, workers and the government. ● An urban employment guarantee scheme should be framed to alleviate the sufferings of workers in the urban labour market. <p>Laws and welfare schemes must offer relief to marginalised workers who are reeling under multiple blows.</p>
<p>Global Uncertainties, India's Growth Prospects</p>	<p>Context: On February 28, 2022, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released India's GDP data for Q3 of 2021-22 along with Second Advance Estimates (SAE) for 2021-22.</p> <p>What has been the growth performance of Indian economy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the COVID-19 year of 2020-21, both real GDP and GVA contracted by minus 6.6% and minus 4.8%, respectively. ● The NSO's SAE show that real GDP and GVA growth are estimated to recover to 8.9% and 8.3%, respectively, in 2021-22. ● Despite this improvement, the magnitude of real GDP at ₹147.7 lakh crore in 2021-22 is only marginally higher than the corresponding level of ₹145.2 lakh crore in 2019-20. ● Revival of demand has been slow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The growth of consumption demand measured by private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) in 2021-22 over 2019-20 is only 1.2% ○ The growth of investment demand measured by gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in 2021-22 over 2019-20 is only 2.6% ○ Growth in the construction sector in 2021-22 was at only 1.9% over 2019-20.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assuming some base effects to continue in the first two quarters, the annual growth in 2022-23 may not be more than 7%. <p>What are the challenges for Indian Economy in coming days?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rise in crude oil prices due to geopolitical conflict in Ukraine. It is estimated that an increase of U.S.\$10/ barrel there is reduction in real GDP growth by 0.27% and an increase in CPI inflation by 0.40%. As a result the growth estimates will be brought down to 6.3% for 2022-23 (with CPI inflation of 6%) Alongside, there would be increase in government expenditures related to petroleum and fertilizer subsidies as rising prices will put pressure on government to offer reliefs in forms of reduced tax or increased subsidy. Other economic challenges emanating from global uncertainties may include a worsening of the current account balance due to higher import bills with a depreciating rupee. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A study by the RBI in 2019 had estimated an increase in the current account deficit (CAD) following a U.S.\$10/bbl. increase in global crude price, to be nearly 0.4% points of GDP. As a result, the estimate of CAD at 1.9% of GDP for 2022-23 may have to be revised upwards to 2.9%. Sectors that draw heavily on petroleum products, such as fertilizers, iron and steel foundries, transportation, construction and coal, would be adversely affected. Due to the discontinuation of transactions through SWIFT, there would be some disruption in trade to and from Russia and Ukraine. There would also be some adverse effects with regard to financial flows. Net foreign portfolio investment (FPI) outflows during October to December 2021 increased to U.S.\$6.3 billion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows have also been falling during this period although they have remained positive. As developed countries are being forced to raise their interest rates (to contain their own inflationary pressures) there is increased outflow of U.S. dollars thus putting pressures on RBI to raise its policy rate. <p>Way Ahead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policymakers may have to exercise a critical choice regarding who bears the burden of higher prices of petroleum products in India among <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers (increased cost of fuel & inflation) industrial users (increased input cost) oil marketing companies (reduced profits) Government (reduced revenues & increased subsidy burden) If growth is to be revived, maximum attention should be paid to supporting consumption growth and reducing the cost of industrial inputs with a view to improving capacity utilisation.
<p>National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC)</p>	<p>Context: The Union Cabinet on March 9 approved the creation of the National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC), the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that Finance Minister had announced in the Union Budget 2021-22.</p> <p>What does monetisation mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the government monetises its assets, it essentially means that it is transferring the revenue rights of the asset (could be idle land, infrastructure, PSU) to a private player for a specified period of time. In such a transaction, the government gets in return <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an upfront payment from the private entity Regular share of the revenue generated from the asset A promise of steady investment into the asset Retaining the title rights to the monetised asset.

- There are multiple ways to monetise government assets; in the case of land monetisation of certain spaces like offices, it can be done through a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) — a company that owns and operates a land asset and sometimes, funds income-producing real estate. Assets of the government can also be monetised through the Public Private Partnerships (PPP) model.
- Government monetises its assets for the following reasons
 - Creates new sources of revenue for government
 - Unlocks the potential of unused or underused assets by involving institutional investors or private players.
 - Generate resources or capital for future asset creation, such as using the money generated from monetisation to create new infrastructure projects.

What is the NLMC and what will it do?

- The National Land Monetisation Corporation will be a firm, fully owned by the government, to carry out the monetisation of government and public sector assets in the form of surplus, unused or underused land assets.
- It will fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the **Ministry of Finance** and will be set up with an initial authorised share capital of ₹5,000 crore and a paid-up capital of ₹150 crore.
- The Corporation will also facilitate the monetisation of assets belonging to PSUs that have ceased operations or are in line for a strategic disinvestment, with the aim of unlocking the value of these land holdings.
- The surplus land and building assets of such enterprises are expected to be transferred to the NLMC, which will then hold, manage and monetise them.
- Besides managing and monetising, the NLMC will act as an **advisory body** and support other government entities and CPSEs in identifying their surplus non-core assets and monetising them.

What are the merits of having NLMC?

- The setting of the NLMC will speed up the closure process of the CPSEs and smoothen the strategic disinvestment process.
- It will also enable productive utilisation of these under-utilised assets by setting in motion
 - private sector investments
 - new economic activities such as industrialisation
 - boosting the local economy by generating employment
 - generating financial resources for potential economic and social infrastructure.

How will the NLMC function?

- The firm will hire professionals from the private sector with a merit based approach, similar to other specialised government companies like the National investment and infrastructure Fund (NIIF) and Invest India.
- This is because asset monetisation of real estate requires expertise in valuation of property, market research, investment banking, land management, legal diligence and other related skill sets.
- The NLMC will undertake monetisation as an agency function and is expected to act as a directory of best practices in land monetisation.

How much land is currently available for monetisation?

- According to the Economic Survey 2021-2022, as of now, **CPSEs have put nearly 3,400 acres of land** on the table for potential monetisation. They have referred this land to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM).
- As per the survey, monetisation of non-core assets of PSUs such as MTNL, BSNL, BPCL, B&R, BEML, HMT Ltd, Instrumentation Ltd etc are at different stages.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2020, for instance, BSNL had identified a total of ₹24,980 crore worth of properties for monetisation. • The Railways have over 11 lakh acres of land available out of which 1.25 lakh acres is vacant. • The Defence Ministry has in its possession 17.95 lakh acres of land. Out of this, around 1.6 lakh acres fall inside the 62 military cantonments while over 16 lakh acres are outside the cantonment boundaries. <p>What are the possible challenges for NLMC?</p> <p>1. Depends on Government Disinvestment Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The performance and productivity of the NLMC will also depend on the government's performance on its disinvestment targets. • In FY 2021-22, the government has just been able to raise ₹12,423.67 crore so far through various forms of disinvestment. • In the budget 2021-22, the government had initially set a disinvestment target of ₹1.75 lakh crore which was later brought down to ₹78,000 crore. • The Life Insurance Corporation IPO, which was supposed to raise ₹60,000 crore is now shrouded in uncertainty owing to the Russia-Ukraine crisis making stock markets volatile. • The procedure to find a bidder for state-owned carrier Air India also took a considerable amount of time and negotiations before the Tata Group came in. <p>2. Operational Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying profitable revenue streams for the monetised land assets, ensuring adequate investment by the private player and setting up a dispute-resolution mechanism are also important tasks. • Posing as another potential challenge would be the use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a monetisation model. • For instance, the results of the Centre's PPP initiative launched in 2020 for the Railways were not encouraging. • It had invited private parties to run 150 trains of the Indian Railways but when bids were thrown open, nine clusters of trains saw no bidders while there were only two interested bidders for three clusters. <p>4. Lack of Competition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of just a few serious bidders would also give rise to the possibility of a less competitive space, meaning a few private entities might create a monopoly or duopoly in operating surplus government land. • For instance, questions were raised when the government removed the cap on the number of airports a single entity could bid for, resulting in the Adani Group taking possession of six city airports for ₹2,440 crore from the Airports Authority of India.
<p>\$400 billion exports</p>	<p>Context: On March 21, the value of India's outbound shipments in the financial year 2021-22 hit \$400 billion, the highest ever.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the time the year closes on March 31st, another \$10 billion worth of goods is expected to be shipped out. • This would translate into a growth of about 41% from the pandemic-hit year of 2020-21, making it India's fastest exports growth rate since 2009-10. <p>How significant is the attainment of India's \$400 billion exports target?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to data from the RBI, outbound merchandise trade had clocked <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$303.5 billion in 2017-18 ○ \$330.1 billion in 2018-19 ○ \$313.4 billion in 2019-20 • 2021-22 reflects the first time in several years that the country has met its exports target despite challenges of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supply disruptions due to the pandemic,

- challenging shortages of shipping containers
- surging freight rates.
- **Higher prices of commodities** and oil helped drive up the value of exports.
- Engineering exports have jumped 46.5% to cross \$100 billion for the first time, even as chemicals, cotton yarn, handloom products, and the apparel industry have done well.
- Increase in trade can be explained by the world shifting its global procurement preferences to **diversify their dependence on China** following the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

explained.

Dated: 27/3/2022
Values in US\$ Millions
(P) Provisional

Commodity	Apr-Jan 2021	Apr-Jan 2022(P)	%Growth	%Share
1. PLANTATION	1,207.11	1,447.09	19.88	0.43
2. AGRI & ALLIED PRODUCTS	25,211.91	30,438.54	20.73	8.95
3. MARINE PRODUCTS	4,968.28	6,668.06	34.21	1.96
4. ORES & MINERALS	4,982.80	4,928.30	-1.09	1.45
5. LEATHER & LEATHER MANUFACTURES	2,831.79	3,806.63	34.43	1.12
6. GEMS & JEWELLERY	19,727.74	32,153.04	62.98	9.45
7. SPORTS GOODS	223.99	314.44	40.38	0.09
8. CHEMICALS & RELATED PRODUCTS	39,382.10	46,226.28	17.38	13.59
9. PLASTIC & RUBBER ARTICLES	6,553.04	8,800.43	34.30	2.59
10. ARTICLES OF STONE, PLASTER, CEMENT, ASBESTOS, MICA OR SIMILAR MATERIALS; CERAMIC PRODUCTS; GLASS AND GLASSWARE	4,529.61	5,287.59	16.73	1.55
11. PAPER & RELATED PRODUCTS	2,625.55	4,312.78	64.26	1.27
12. BASE METALS	21,645.88	38,653.57	78.57	11.36
13. OPTICAL, MEDICAL & SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS	1,775.03	2,356.25	32.74	0.69
14. ELECTRONICS ITEMS	8,235.12	11,788.28	43.15	3.46
15. MACHINERY	20,882.79	29,175.68	39.71	8.58
16. OFFICE EQUIPMENTS	113.35	167.83	48.07	0.05
17. TRANSPORT EQUIPMENTS	15,971.60	21,423.89	34.14	6.30
18. PROJECT GOODS	1.70	3.44	102.59	0.00
19. TEXTILES & ALLIED PRODUCTS	23,486.73	34,918.08	48.67	10.26
20. PETROLEUM CRUDE & PRODUCTS	19,723.84	50,849.29	157.81	14.95
21. OTHERS	4,838.65	6,519.11	34.73	1.92
Total	228,918.63	340,238.61	48.63	100.00

What does the \$400 billion number hide?

- **Low levels of exports as a percentage of GDP:** The \$400 billion merchandise exports constitute approx. 13% of India's GDP (It was \$305 billion in 2011-12 itself accounting for 17% of GDP). The target of \$400 billion would have been achieved long back had India's export kept pace with its GDP growth.
- **Not a broad-based recovery:** Of the 20 commodity groups, only six (highlighted by red circles in the chart) had a growth rate higher than the overall average (49%).
 - Chemicals and products, which is the second-biggest export item grew by only 17%. Similarly, agriculture, with a share of 9%, grew at just 20% — less than half the overall growth rate.
- **The growth was primarily due to growth of value:** India's exports could go up either due to increase in prices or increases in volume or combination of both. India's export growth was largely due to price rise. for ex: The value of petroleum and petroleum products — accounting for 15% of total exports — grew by a whopping 158%.
- **Increasing Trade Deficit:** The trade deficit for the year could be around \$190 billion, sharply higher than the \$102 billion recorded in the pandemic year. This is because imports have also increased rapidly this year (estimated to increase by \$200 billion compared to 2020-21's import figure of \$393.6 billion)

What are the risk factors for Indian exports in the coming year?

- Although India's direct trade with Russia is not significant at about 1% of its trade basket, the **Ukraine-Russia conflict** may create challenges & opportunities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opportunities for Indian farm produce exports, especially for crops like wheat and maize. But this would be offset by a sharp rise in India's energy import bill as well as an uptick in costs of importing edible oils ● High shipping rates, container shortages and re-alignment of trade routes around the Black Sea will also pose a challenge. ● Exports increased also due to economic recovery (& pent up demand) in the developed world that was fuelled by Government spending & loose monetary Policy. The coming year might see moderation in global growth prospects thus impacting India's trade prospects also. <p>Conclusion India would hope to consolidate these gains and establish its credentials as a credible alternative to China, even as it could face stiff competition in some sectors from Asian peers such as Vietnam and Bangladesh.</p>
Cryptotaxation	<p>Context: The Union Budget contained a rude shock for users and traders of crypto and other virtual digital assets. All transfer or sale of these assets was brought into the tax net.</p> <p>What was the intention behind this move?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Centre is worried about the increase in activity on unregulated crypto-trading platforms such as WazirX, CoinDCX, Zebpay, etc. ● Gullible investors have been lured by the drastic rise in the prices of these assets in 2020 and 2021 without fully aware of the risks of the assets (do not by itself have any underlying worth) ● The extremely volatile and speculative nature of these assets puts investor money at great risk. ● Further, with no regulatory supervision on any of the trading platforms, investors face the risk of losing all their money if any of these platforms default or shut down. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Centre is still deliberating on whether to regulate these trades or to ban them all together, the way China has done. <p>What is the taxation that has been proposed? There are five aspects to the crypto taxation in the Budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One, any income from transfer of any virtual digital asset shall be taxed at the rate of 30 per cent. When surcharge and cess are added, the tax rate goes up between 33 and 42 per cent. ● Two, no deduction is provided while calculating the income, only cost of acquisition is allowed, if any. So cost of mining or any other cost cannot be shown as expense to reduce the profit. ● Three, loss from transfer of virtual digital asset cannot be set off against any profit from any other source. Profit made in one cryptocurrency cannot be set off against loss made in another cryptocurrency, either. ● Four, gift of virtual digital asset is also proposed to be taxed in the hands of the recipient. ● Finally, TDS is to be levied on transfer of such assets at the rate of 1 per cent. <p>Why are experts calling it a punitive taxation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Centre is clear that it is viewing trading in cryptocurrencies on a par with other speculative activity such as lottery or gambling. ● That is the reason why the tax on income is much higher than the capital gains tax charged on other capital assets. ● The amendment to the Finance Bill further clarified that cryptocurrencies cannot be construed as capital assets. ● Disallowing setting-off of losses, not allowing deduction of any expenses and taxing gifts are punitive and another way of telling investors to stay away from these assets. <p>How have the crypto players reacted to this?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The stakeholders in the cryptocurrency space including trading platforms and wallet providers are clearly unhappy at this move. ● Initially, they tried to give the spin that the government's move to tax them makes these assets legal. ● But various government officials have denied this interpretation stating that taxing cryptocurrencies does not amount to legitimising them. ● The crypto industry then lobbied with the Centre to roll back the taxes. But now that the Finance Bill has been passed, these players need to get ready to face the changed circumstances. <p>What next for crypto exchanges, investors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crypto trading platforms will now be constantly under the radar of the Income Tax Department which will now require these platforms to maintain records of all transaction done on them, collect TDS of 1 per cent on the sale and deposit the money to the IT authority. ● The compliance burden is going to be onerous and many exchanges are likely to shut shop. ● Investors may not want to buy and sell on Indian cryptocurrency platforms due to the requirement to pay high income tax. ● They could shift their activity to other unregulated overseas trading platforms. In other words, the trading activity could shift underground once again. <p>What is the recourse, how will all this end?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Governments across the globe, including the US and EU, are working on a framework to regulate private cryptocurrency trading. ● A global framework — which allows those willing to take risk continue playing in these assets, while protecting the naïve investors — could be ready in a year or two. ● That is when clarity on the way forward in regulating these assets will emerge. ● Unilateral ban or regulation of these trades by one country is unlikely to work because the ecosystem is virtual. <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blockchain Technology ● RBI's Digital Currency
<p>Towards affordable healthcare in India: 'Jan Aushadhi' to 'Jan Upyogi'</p>	<p>Context: India marked the Jan Aushadhi Diwas 2022 in mid-February.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) in 2015, with a vision to provide affordable and quality medicine to the citizens of India. ● The scheme was established under the department of pharmaceuticals of the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers. ● Since its establishment in 2015, more than 8,000 janaushadhi kendras (centres) have been operationalised across India. These centres cater to a large section of our society in the nooks and crannies of our country by offering 1,451 generic drugs and 240 surgical items at an affordable price. <p><i>In the long run, PMBJP aims to make healthcare affordable, accessible and acceptable by all the citizens.</i></p> <p>Need for affordable healthcare – India and Health</p> <p>Health is one of the central pillars of a nation's human development index (HDI) that indicates its prosperity. Health is not only a basic necessity for an individual but also an integral ingredient of human-capital for the nation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given this, every nation aims to provide good healthcare to its citizens at an affordable cost through various initiatives and schemes. PMBJP is one such noble initiative in India to facilitate affordable and accessible healthcare. ● India is the biggest democratic country and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Despite this, the budget allocation to healthcare is less than 3 per cent. ● India's population is dominated by rural domiciles and mid-income groups.

- About one-third population of our country is devoid of health insurance. The prevailing diseases and pandemic outbreaks add to the perils of the situation. Considering these vital factors, it is important to make healthcare affordable to the population.

Jan Aushadhi to *jan-upyogi*

Medicines (*aushadhi*) and surgical equipment have a larger share in healthcare. Making them reach the common mass of our society solves a major issue in healthcare. This makes 'Jan Aushadhi' a *jan-upyogi* (useful for the mass).

- Patented drugs have taken over generic drugs, with the emergence of privatisation, market competition and profit hunger in the pharmaceutical industry. This resulted in burning a hole in the pockets of individuals for maintaining essential health hygiene.
- India's out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare is **more than 60 per cent**, according to NITI Aayog's latest report. This is significantly above the average for lower-middle income countries.

In short, India has a gruesome healthcare challenge to address.

- PMBJP aims for this through its increasing outreach and affordable generic drugs.
- PMBJP also serves employment opportunities to the human resources in the pharma sector. It provides financial assistance and support to the qualified personnel to open Janaushadhi Kendra and generate income.
- In addition to the direct employment opportunity, Janaushadhi Kendra generates peripheral employment in associated supply chain, transportation and maintenance sectors. PMBJP, thus, is *aushadhi* not only for health but also for the wealth of the nation. It is indeed a *jan-upyogi*.

In the last seven years, PMBJP has achieved significant milestones in terms of wider presence of Janaushadhi Kendra in the country and providing affordable drugs. However, given the increasing and ageing population and fear of pandemic, there is a vital need to support and promote this initiative for its sustainability and growth. Issues that need solving are –

- First, increasing outreach of the Janaushadhi Kendra.
- Second, promotion for increasing awareness of PMBJP.
- Third, maintaining the affordable price of the generic medicines despite increasing inflation and supply cost.

The Way forward

- First, to increase the outreach of Janaushadhi Kendra
 - Increase in the healthcare budget for infrastructure and financial support is required.
 - In addition, public-private partnership models for generic drugs should be mulled over to increase competitive participation of more private players and expand the outreach.
 - Training and development of pharmaceutical staff will also be required in expansion of Janaushadhi Kendra.
- Second, to spread awareness about PMBJP and Janaushadhi Kendra: Collaboration with local hospitals, clinics and doctors is required - this is a very effective way to build the trust of locals on the efficacy of generic drugs. Patients believe in doctor's prescription, not in ad description.
- Finally, to hedge against inflation and maintain the affordable prices of the generic drugs, supply-side intervention is required.
 - This primarily includes research and development of drugs to bring the efficacy in generic drugs at par with that of patented drugs, at less cost.
 - Efficiency in production, storage and supply chain would also help in slashing the input cost and thereby, maintain the affordable prices without compromising the stakeholders' profit interest.

Conclusion

	Affordable, accessible and acceptable drugs are every citizen's right. Health is not just a choice of individuals but necessity of the nation. PMBJP is a noble initiative towards 'healthy India'. It is important to make this initiative sustainable for future India.
CA, CWA and CS (Amendment Bill), 2021	<p>Context: The Chartered Accountants, the Cost and Works Accountants and the Company Secretaries (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was passed by the Lok Sabha that amends the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chartered Accountants Act, 1949, ● Cost and Works Accountants Act, 1959 ● Company Secretaries Act, 1980 <p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The above three Acts provide for setting up of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, the Institute of Cost Accountants of India, and the Institute of Company Secretaries of India. ● The affairs of the Institutes are managed by their respective Councils. The Councils are comprised of elected and nominated members. ● These bodies approve academic courses, conduct examinations of candidates, prescribe qualifications for entry of names in the register of members, and regulate the standards of professional qualifications of their members. ● The Acts also provide the mechanism for taking disciplinary actions against the members of the Institutes who are engaged in professional or other misconduct. ● This mechanism is broadly self-regulatory in nature wherein the members of the Institutes take part in the disciplinary proceedings along with certain external members nominated by the central government. ● In recent years, India has seen several frauds and scandals, which have brought into focus the role and effectiveness of the statutory audit by independent auditors. ● In the backdrop of a major fraud at Punjab National Bank in 2018, the central government setup the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) under the Companies Act, 2013. ● NFRA is empowered to investigate matters of professional or other misconduct by chartered accountants. This was a move away from self-regulation of the profession of chartered accountancy as was followed so far. <p>What is the objective of the new bill proposed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The CA, CWA and CS (Amendment Bill), 2021 seeks to strengthen the accountability of practitioners and firms by making the disciplinary mechanisms more independent, registering firms, and increasing penalties. <p>Key Changes Proposed in the Bill are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discipline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ICAI's disciplinary committee and board of discipline will be chaired by non-chartered accountants (CA), and its elected council members will no longer be in a majority in them. ○ It also provides for time-bound disposal of cases against members of the ● Governance and administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The term of the ICAI's Council will be raised from three to four years ○ The maximum number of consecutive terms for its elected members will be reduced to two from the current three; ○ ICAI's Secretary will replace the ICAI's president as its chief executive and perform the functions to be specified; ○ ICAI will appoint its auditor from the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India's panel of CA firms; ● Coordination Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Bill provides for setting up a Coordination Committee headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Its functions will include: (i) quality improvement of academics, (ii) coordinating and collaborating among the professions, and (iii) making recommendations on regulatory policies for the professions. ● Registration of Firms: Firms must now register with the Institutes. The Councils must maintain a register of firms containing details including pendency of any actionable complaint or imposition of penalty. ● Penalties: The Bill increases certain fines under the three Acts. If a partner or owner of a firm is repeatedly found guilty of misconduct during last five years, disciplinary action can be taken against the firm. <p>Significance of the changes brought in by the bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It will strengthen the ICAI's accountability, governance, and administration. ● The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance has endorsed these changes and has further recommended an end to the ICAI's monopoly in certification. ● There have been persistent complaints that the ICAI is lax in acting against errant members. The proposed changes will enhance speedy disposal of complaints given the increased government's role in disciplinary committee of ICAI <p>Criticisms of the bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The proposed changes in the composition of the ICAI's disciplinary arms will further limit its role. As a result, the ICAI will be effectively reduced to an examination board. ● The Bill aims at bringing discipline to these professions but the disciplinary authority will be headed by a non-Chartered Accountant who may lack domain knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For Bar Council, the chairman is a lawyer. For Medical Council, chairman is a doctor, but for ICAI committee, chairman will be a non-CA. ● The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states that it seeks to address the conflict of interest between the administrative and disciplinary arms of the Institutes. To achieve this, the Bill proposes to change the composition of the two disciplinary entities to allow for more external representation. However, these external members will be selected from a panel of persons prepared by the three Councils. ● As the three Institutes also have committees for coordinating among themselves, it is unclear as to why there is a need to setup another Coordination Council as proposed under the Bill. <p>Way Ahead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Parliamentary Committee's suggestion to set up a string of Indian Institutes of Accounting (IIAs) on the lines of IIT & IIM is innovative. ● The IIAs will offer a five-year full-time and broad-based degree in accounting, auditing and related areas and their graduates. ● At one level, they will end the ICAI's statutory monopoly over certification. More competition will result in better quality and higher standards of conduct.
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ENVIRONMENT

Release of DTE's State of India's Environment 2022

Context: In the last two years, the world has seen disruption at a scale not seen before. Both COVID-19 and climate change are the result of our 'dystopian' relationship with nature — call this the revenge of nature.

- COVID-19 happened because humans had broken the barrier between wild habitats and the way humanity produced its food. Climate change was the result of emissions needed for economic growth. Both are also linked and are being exacerbated because of our mismanagement of health systems and the environment.
- Today, there are three extremely critical issues that confronts India — climate change, desertification and the sustainability-affordability linkage.

The Down To Earth 2022 Annual State of India's Environment has stated that India is behind on at least 17 key government targets that have a deadline in 2022. The slow progress made so far means that the deadlines are unlikely to be met.

Report Card

- **Economy:** The target for the economy is to raise the gross domestic product to nearly \$4 trillion by 2022-23. But by 2020, the economy has grown only to \$2.48 trillion (Rs 18 trillion). In fact, the economy has largely shrunk during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it even more difficult to meet the deadline.
- **Employment:** The target is to increase the female labour force participation rate to at least 30 per cent by 2022-23; it stood at 17.3 per cent in January-March 2020.
- **Housing:** The targets are to construct 29.5 million housing units under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)-Rural and 12 million units under PMAY-Urban; only about 46.8 per cent and 38 per cent respectively of the targets under 'Housing for All' have been achieved.
- **Provision of drinking water:** The target is to provide safe piped drinking water to all by 2022-23; only 45 per cent of the target has been achieved.
- **Agriculture:** The target is to double farmers' income by 2022. While the average monthly income of an agricultural household has increased to Rs 10,218 from Rs 6,426, this increase is largely due to increase in wages and income from farming animals. The share of income from crop production in the average monthly income of an agricultural household has, in fact, dropped — to 37.2 per cent in 2018-19, from 48 per cent in 2012-13.
- **Digitisation of land records:** Another target is to digitise all land records by 2022. While states like Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha have made good progress, states like Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Sikkim languish at 5 per cent, 2 per cent and 8.8 per cent digitisation of land records, respectively. Overall, the target is unlikely to be met, particularly because 14 states have witnessed deterioration in the quality of land records since 2019-20.
- **Air pollution:** The target is to bring down PM2.5 levels in Indian cities to less than 50 microgramme per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). In 2020, when vehicular movement was restricted due to the pandemic, 23 of the 121 cities monitored for PM2.5 exceeded 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- **Solid waste management:** The target is to achieve 100 per cent source segregation in all households. The overall progress is 78 per cent; and while states like Kerala and Union territories like Puducherry have achieved the target, others like West Bengal and Delhi are woefully behind. Manual scavenging is targeted for eradication, but India still has 66,692 manual scavengers.
- **Increasing the forest cover:** The target is to increase it to 33.3 per cent of the geographical area, as envisaged in the National Forest Policy, 1988. By 2019, 21.67 per cent of India was under forest cover.
- **Energy:** The target is to achieve 175 GW of renewable energy generation capacity by 2022. Only 56 per cent of this target has been achieved thus far.

State of the states

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With less than a decade left to realise the SDGs (2030 is the deadline), Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are below the national average in 11 and 14 SDGs, respectively. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh fared best. • With respect to SDG 1 (poverty eradication), six of the poorest performers include Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. All these states — along with Meghalaya, Assam, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal — also feature in the list of worst performers as far as ending hunger and malnutrition is concerned (SDG 2). • In water and sanitation (SDG 6), the performance of Delhi, Rajasthan, Assam, Punjab and Arunachal Pradesh is a cause for concern. • SDG 7 — related to clean and affordable energy — has seen an above average performance, with most states achieving the target. • In climate action (SDG 13), 13 states and two Union territories score below the national average. Odisha tops the good performance chart, followed by Kerala; Jharkhand and Bihar bring up the rear. <p>Conclusion</p> <p>The gap between the targets and the achievements once more exposes the chronic problems besetting governance in our country. We set out with high hopes and may occasionally take some bold policy decisions, but when it comes to implementation and delivery, we are found wanting. This must change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of these targets are quite realistic, and while the pandemic can be blamed for some of the missed deadlines, for example, regarding the GDP growth, other deadlines, like the one on reduction in air pollution, should in fact have been achieved quicker because of the pandemic-induced lockdown. We must introspect on why we fail to achieve targets that are necessary to secure a sustainable future for this country. • India needs to act in its own self-interest. Our climate change strategy has to be based on the principle of co-benefits — we will do something for climate change because it is good for the world, but also because it is good for us. We need a low-carbon strategy for every sector; we must also ask the developed world to pay for and give us the high-cost options so that we can leapfrog. <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate change, desertification and the sustainability-affordability linkage three extremely critical issues facing India today. Share recommendations to address these issues.
<p>No Wild, No Life</p>	<p>Context: Humans rely on wildlife and biodiversity-based resources to meet all our needs from food to fuel, medicines, housing, and clothing. Millions of people are also dependent on nature as the source of their livelihoods and economic opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, over 8,400 species of wild fauna and flora are critically endangered, while close to 30,000 more are understood to be endangered or vulnerable. • As per this data 239 faunal species which are known to occur in India are classified as endangered species which includes 45 species of mammals, 23 species of birds, 18 species of reptiles, 39 species of amphibians and 114 species of fishes. • India has a network of 733 Protected Areas including 103 National Parks, 537 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 67 Conservation Reserves and 26 Community Reserves covering approximately 4.89 percent of country's geographical area. <p>Some examples of human-wildlife conflict include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predation on livestock or domestic animals by wild animals • Damage to crops and fences • Wildlife strewn about residential garbage • Vehicle/wildlife collisions, aircraft/bird collisions

- Damage caused by squirrels or bats to fruit and fruit trees
- Bird nesting in undesirable residential locations

Reasons for man-animal conflict:

- Expansion of human settlements into forests – expansion of cities, industrial areas, railway/road infrastructure, tourism etc.
- Allowing livestock to graze in forest areas
- Land use transformations such as change from protected forest patches to agricultural and horticultural lands and monoculture plantations are further destroying the habitats of wildlife.
- Unscientific structures and practices of forest management in the country
- Infestation of wildlife habitat by invasive exotic weeds leads to decreased availability of edible grasses for wild herbivores
- Decreased prey base caused by poaching of herbivores has also resulted in carnivores moving out of forests in search of prey and to indulge in cattle lifting.

India's Conservation culture

- Despite a billion people India still has most of our large wildlife species- India today has the largest population of the tiger, Asian elephant, leopard, sloth bear, gaur and many others
- **Part of Culture:** People have accepted coexistence of human & animals, and incorporated it in our culture. All our deities have animals associated with them; it shows the inclusion of these animals in our mind space.
- The **Velip community in Goa** worship the tigers and this practice is done even today.
- **Animals are viewed also as renewable resource:** Unlike activities such as mining, tigers are a renewable resource. They are always going to be there, and so will the rivers and the forests, giving the local people income and development — as long as there are tigers.

Innovative practices to minimise man-animal conflicts

- In the **Western Ghats of India**, a new conservation initiative has utilized texting as an early warning system to prevent human-elephant encounters. Elephant tracking collars embedded with SMS chips automatically text nearby residents, warning them of recent elephant movements.
- In **Canada**, authorities have constructed wildlife corridors, areas of preserved native habitat in human dominated regions, providing wildlife with a safe pathway as they travel between one to another.
- To keep elephants at a safe distance from their farms and homes, some African villagers have turned to two unlikely, all-natural solutions: bees and hot peppers. Elephants dislike the chemical capsaicin found in chili peppers, prompting farmers in **Tanzania** to smother their fences with a mixture of oil and chili peppers.

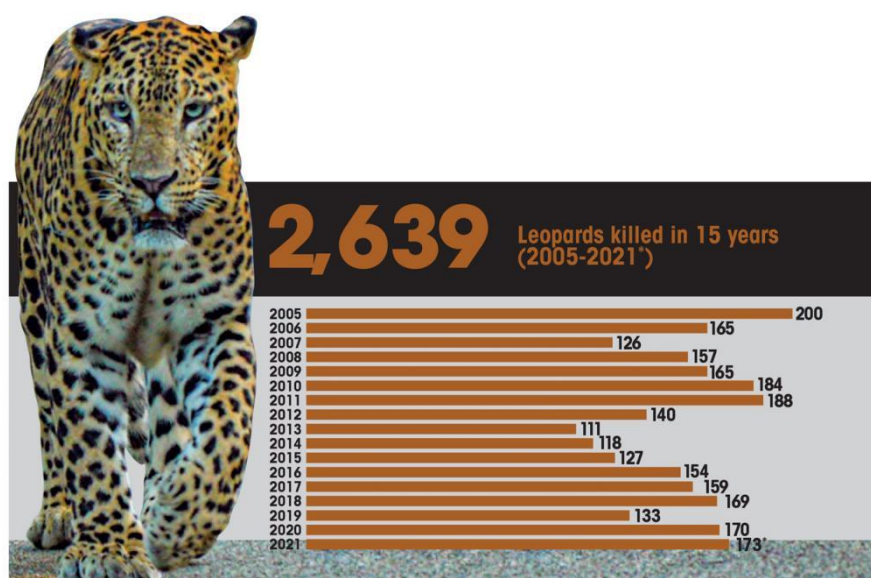
Tackling Man-Animal Conflict:

- **Discouraging Unplanned Urbanization:** Urbanization should take place in a planned way. Effort should be made to ensure that the wildlife habitats gets disrupted as little as possible,
- **Considering landscape in entirety:** Rather than protecting only the protected areas, the national sanctuaries or communities of the Biosphere Reserve we need to consider the landscape in entirety. This will help in not only reducing the man and animal conflict but the larger biodiversity will also be protected.
- **Maintaining road ecology:** Fragmented habitats should be reconnected by using over- or under passes that allow the safe movement of animals across roads. Fencing can also be used to direct animals to safer places to cross or prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions in areas of highest risk.

Wildlife Conservation- Steps required:

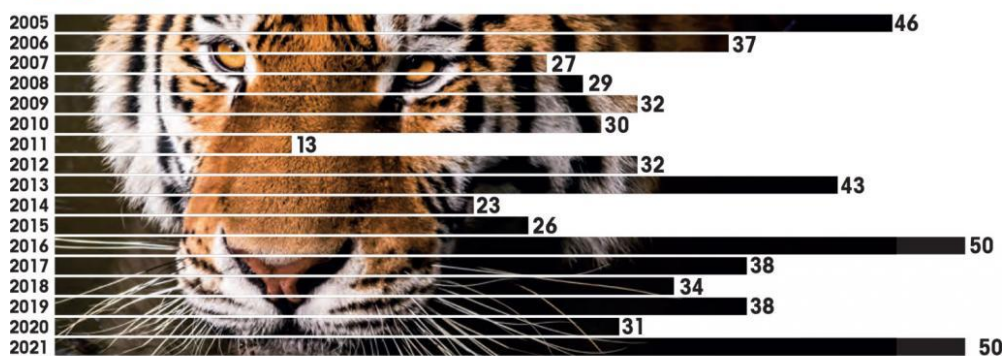
Wildlife Protection and enjoying wildlife should be made part of our ethos.

- **Increasing the level of awareness:** Running awareness campaigns at the state, district and local level. Awareness among people who are not so educated who are living in remote areas is low because they don't have access to any knowledge systems so we need to have campaigns through which they can learn, understand what is biodiversity, why do we need to protect them and about the importance of biodiversity in maintaining our agricultural ecosystems. Role of civil society in creating awareness especially in remote areas is immense.
- **Catching them young:** In the school talk about environment and wildlife should be done more seriously. We need to actually take the children to the heart of biodiversity places so as to sensitise them. The school curriculum must include lessons on importance of wildlife and biodiversity and also steps required to conserve them.
- **Amending the WPA, 1972:** The Wildlife Protection Act which is under Amendment for many years. It must be amended by incorporating provisions of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites) and enhancing the penalties for offences such as poaching.
- **Protecting the Wildlife Corridors:** It vital to protect critical wildlife corridors. Large infrastructure projects that cut across well-known wild animal passages—such as the construction of a new highway, train line or power plant—must be sanctioned after thorough scrutiny.
- **Adopting landscape protection approach:** As sixty percent of the country's wildlife exist outside these protected areas, GOI needs to have more of a landscape protection approach rather than just concentrating and focusing on the national parks and the protected areas.



**As of December 15, 2021 | Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India*

579 tigers killed in 15 years (2005-2021*)



*As of December 15, 2021

Causes for human-wildlife conflict

- Habitat loss, degradation due to invasive species
- Growth of population of wild animals
- Changing cropping patterns that attract wild animals to farmlands
- Movement of wild animals to human settlements
- Movement of human beings to forests for illegal collection of forest produce

696 elephants killed in past 7 years*



*up to December 2020

Source: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Aug 9, 2021

Conclusion

We need to marry the question of biological diversity, its preservation, the protection of wildlife and healthy wellbeing for human beings all together from the level of citizenry. Conservation is not a project, but a long-term commitment and relationship to a landscape. It's not just based on science and laws, but has a strong grounding in society. The quality of wildlife can be improved by not only protecting them but by ensuring that the citizens actually enjoy the wildlife as something that is their heritage.

India's solar capacity: Milestones and challenges

Context: India added a record 10 Gigawatt (GW) of solar energy to its cumulative installed capacity in 2021.

- India has now surpassed **50 GW of cumulative installed solar capacity**, as on 28 February 2022.
- This is a milestone in India's journey towards generating 500 GW from renewable energy by 2030, of which 300 GW is expected to come from solar power.

Do You Know?

- Of the 50 GW installed solar capacity:
 - 42 GW comes from ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) systems,
 - 6.48 GW comes from roof top solar (RTS) (far short on the Union Government's target of 40 GW of RTS by end 2022)
 - 1.48 GW from off-grid solar PV.
- India's capacity additions rank the country fifth in solar power deployment, contributing nearly 6.5% to the global cumulative capacity of 709.68 GW.

What are the challenges to India's solar power capacity addition?

- **Slow pace of growth:** Despite significant growth in the installed solar capacity, the contribution of solar energy to the country's power generation has not grown at the same pace. In 2019-20, for instance, solar power contributed only 3.6% (50 billion units) of India's total power generation of 1390 BU.
- **Inefficiencies:** The utility-scale solar PV sector continues to face challenges like land costs, high T&D losses and other inefficiencies, and grid integration challenges.
- **Environmental Concerns:** There have also been conflicts with local communities and biodiversity protection norms.
- **Neglect of Decentralised Approach:** One of the primary benefits of solar PV technology is that it can be installed at the point of consumption, significantly reducing the need for large capital-intensive transmission infrastructure. However, the policy has neglected Roof Top Solar(RTS) segment.
 - There is limited financing for residential consumers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who want to install RTS.
 - There is also lukewarm response from electricity distribution companies (DISCOMS) to supporting net metering for RTS.
- **Backward integration in solar value chain is absent:** India has no capacity for manufacturing solar wafers and polysilicon. In 2021-22, India imported nearly \$76.62 billion worth solar cells and modules from China alone, accounting for 78.6% of India's total imports that year.
- **Consumers Costs Unaltered:** Also, while India has achieved record low tariffs for solar power generation in the utility-scale segment, this has not translated into cheaper power for end-consumers.

What's the state of India's domestic solar module manufacturing capacity?

- Low manufacturing capacities, coupled with cheaper imports from China have rendered Indian products uncompetitive in the domestic market.
- This situation can, however, be corrected if India **embraces a circular economy** model for solar systems.
- This would allow solar PV waste to be recycled and reused in the solar PV supply chain.
- By the end of 2030, India will likely produce nearly 34,600 metric tonnes of solar PV waste.
- The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that the global value of recoverable materials from solar PV waste could exceed \$15 billion. Currently, only the European Union has taken decisive steps in managing solar PV waste.
- India could look at developing appropriate guidelines around Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which means holding manufacturers accountable for the entire life cycle of solar PV products and creating standards for waste recycling.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could give domestic manufacturers a competitive edge and go a long way in addressing waste management and supply side constraints. <p>Way Ahead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments, utilities, and banks will need to explore innovative financial mechanisms that bring down the cost of loans and reduce the risk of investment for lenders. • Increased awareness, and affordable finance for RTS projects could potentially ensure the spread of RTS across the scores of SMEs and homes around the country. • Aggregating roof spaces could also help reduce overall costs of RTS installations and enable developing economies of scale. • International Solar Alliance (ISA) can bring countries together to facilitate collaboration on issues such as mobilising investments, capacity building, program support and advocacy and analytics on solar energy. • Technology sharing and finance could also become important aspects of ISA in the future, allowing a meaningful cooperation between countries in the solar energy sector.
<p>Global Treaty on Pollution</p>	<p>Context: On March 2, 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) voted to formulate an international legally-binding instrument by 2024 to end plastic pollution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision was taken at the fifth session of the UNEA in Nairobi, Kenya, and was agreed upon by representatives from 175 nations. <p>Impacts of Plastic Pollution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic production soared from 2 million tonnes in 1950 to 348 million tonnes in 2017, becoming a global industry valued at US\$522.6 billion, and it is expected to double in capacity by 2040. • Exposure to plastics can harm human health, potentially affecting fertility, hormonal, metabolic and neurological activity, and open burning of plastics contributes to air pollution. • By 2050 greenhouse gas emissions associated with plastic production, use and disposal would account for 15 per cent of allowed emissions, under the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C (34.7°F). • More than 800 marine and coastal species are affected by this pollution through ingestion, entanglement, and other dangers. • Some 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow annually into oceans. This may triple by 2040. <p>What is the resolution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UNEA resolution to end plastic pollution establishes an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) which is expected to submit its draft agreement by 2024. • The instrument is expected to be legally binding in nature and would contain alternatives to the full life cycle of plastics, as well as the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials. • The resolution also recognises the role of the private sector and stakeholders in the implementation of the treaty and promotes actions at local, regional and global levels while keeping in mind the importance of plastics for society. <p>What are the considerations behind the new treaty?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The treaty to end global plastics pollution will focus on elements like worldwide obligations and measures throughout the lifecycle of plastics, right from product design to waste management. • The plastics pollution treaty will also include mechanisms for providing scientific information relevant to the policies of the resolution, and for helping with financial support for its implementation.

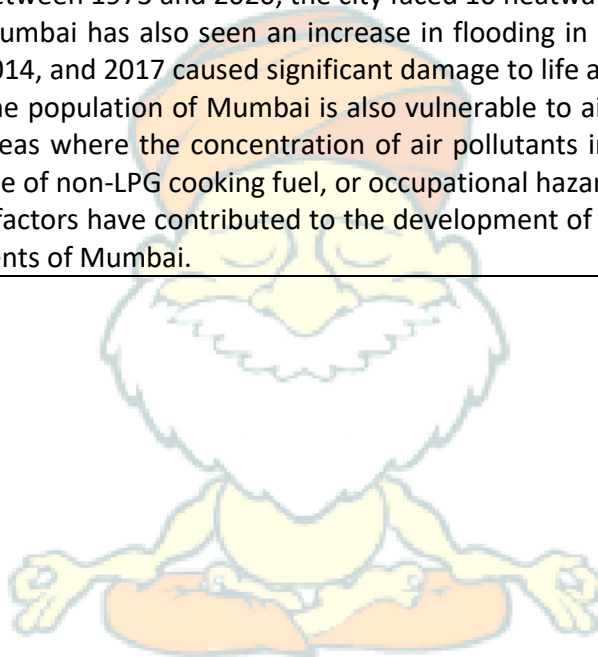
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It also identifies the importance of indigenous communities and their age-old practices to keep the environments pollution-free and calls for the knowledge of these communities to be taken into account by the INC. The treaty will keep in mind national action plans and national and international cooperative measures towards achieving the goal of eliminating plastic pollution. Apart from these considerations, most of which are in the pre-implementation stages, the resolution will also consider including progress assessment for member states. <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A shift to a circular economy can <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce the volume of plastics entering oceans by over 80 per cent by 2040; reduce virgin plastic production by 55 per cent; save governments US\$70 billion by 2040; reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent; create 700,000 additional jobs – mainly in the global south.
Mumbai Climate Action Plan (MCAP)	<p>Context: Maharashtra Chief Minister launched the Mumbai Climate Action Plan (MCAP) at an event in the state capital on Sunday.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan is essentially designed to reduce emissions and meet the climate goals outlined in the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 °C. The plan has been drafted by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) with support from World Resources Institute (WRI) India. Other organisations that partnered with the Government of Maharashtra in the initiative are the C40 Cities Network, Climate Voices Maharashtra, and Waatavaran. Mumbai had joined the C40 Cities Network in 2020. <p>What is the C40 Cities network?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group is an association of 97 cities from around the world, aimed at fighting climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, thus mitigating climate risks. The group represents one-twelfth of the world population and a quarter of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The goal of the C40's initiative is to reduce the emissions of its member cities to half within a decade. Membership to the group comes from performance-based requirements. Five Indian cities are currently a part of the C40 network. These are Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. <p>What are the key action areas of the MCAP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable waste management: The MCAP aims to decentralise municipal waste management by implementing actions such as segregation at source, organic waste composting, and so on. It lays emphasis on the 4R approach: reduce, reuse, recover, recycle, and also calls for treatment of wastewater. Urban greening and biodiversity: Mumbai has some of the lowest per capita green space ratios in the country. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The restoration and enhancement of biodiversity are some of the primary concerns of the MCAP. This includes increasing vegetation cover to minimise the rise in temperature, reduce the effect of heatwaves and arrest urban flooding. The policy also calls for green space access for all citizens. Urban flooding and water resource management: The MCAP focuses on reducing problems caused due to waterlogging and floods while also dealing with the lack of safe and affordable drinking water. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The climate action plan aims at building flood-resilient infrastructure in the city by improving drainage networks and by improving early warning systems and sensitising vulnerable and coastal communities.

- It also promotes framing policies that promote the reuse of water through measures like increased percolation and rainwater harvesting.
- **Energy and buildings:** Strategies to make Mumbai emission-free include minimising the role of carbon in electricity grids and promoting a transition to clean fuel resources.
 - The MCAP aims to achieve this target by improving energy efficiency in both new and existing infrastructure and promoting green buildings.
- **Air quality:** According to the action plan, the primary step in ensuring the improvement of air quality is curbing pollution concentration levels. Mumbai is ranked among the most polluted cities of India.
- **Sustainable mobility:** According to the action plan, Mumbai will transition to using electric vehicles as opposed to fuel-powered ones. The policy also encourages the use of public transport systems that will, in turn, lead to cleaner air, reduced travel time and less congestion on the roads.

Why does Mumbai need a climate plan?

- Since 1973, Mumbai has witnessed a constant warming trend with an average temperature increase of 0.25°C per decade.
- Between 1973 and 2020, the city faced 10 heatwaves and two extreme heatwaves.
- Mumbai has also seen an increase in flooding in recent years. The floods of 2005, 2014, and 2017 caused significant damage to life and property in the city.
- The population of Mumbai is also vulnerable to air pollution, especially in high-risk areas where the concentration of air pollutants increases due to poor ventilation, use of non-LPG cooking fuel, or occupational hazards.

All these factors have contributed to the development of MCAP to mitigate climate risks to the residents of Mumbai.



GEOGRAPHY

Water Management needs a Hydro-Social approach

Context: The freshwater resources are under stress, the principal driver being human activities in their various forms.

What approach is required for water management?

- It is globally estimated that the gap between demand for and supply of fresh water may reach up to 40% by 2030 if present practices continue.
- The latest UN World Water Development Report, 2021, titled 'Valuing Water', has called for proper valuation of water by considering five interrelated perspectives:
 - water sources
 - water infrastructure
 - water services
 - water as an input to production and socio-economic development
 - sociocultural values of water

What are the anthropogenic factors that influence a freshwater system?

The anthropogenic factors directly influencing a freshwater system are

- engineering of river channels
- irrigation and other consumptive use of water
- widespread land use/land cover change
- change in an aquatic habitat
- point and non-point source pollution affecting water quality
- Inefficient use of water resources in all sectors
- reduction in natural storage capacity
- deterioration in catchment efficiency

What approach can be taken to rectify the water imbalance?

- The intra- and inter-basin transfer (IBT) of water is a major hydrological intervention to rectify the imbalance in water availability due to naturally prevailing unequal distribution of water resources within a given territory.
- There has been nearly 110 water transfer mega projects that have either been executed (34 projects) or being planned/under construction (76 projects) across the world.
- The National River Linking Project of India (mooted in 1970 and revived in 1999) is one of those under construction.

What are some of the issues with IBT of water approach?

- **Contestation of Surplus & Deficit basin:** The basic premise of IBT is to export water from the surplus basin to a deficit basin. However, there is contestation on the concept of the surplus and deficit basin itself as the exercise is substantially hydrological. Population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and declining rainfall are raising concerns on the surplus character of a basin.
- **Lack of Grey water usage:** It is estimated that 55% to 75% of domestic water use turns into grey water. This can be treated and used efficiently given the huge quantity involved.
- **Capacity utilisation of water infrastructure:** By 2016, India created an irrigation potential for 112 million hectares, but the gross irrigated area was 93 million hectares. There is a 19% gap, which is more in the case of canal irrigation.
 - In 1950-51, canal irrigation used to contribute 40% of net irrigated area, but by 2014-15, the net irrigated area under canal irrigation came down to less than 24%.
 - Ground water irrigation now covers 62.8% of net irrigated area.
 - The average water use efficiency of irrigation projects in India is only 38% against 50%-60% in the case of developed countries.
 - Rice and wheat, accounting for more than 75% of agricultural production use 2,850 m³/tonnes and 1,654 m³/tonnes of water, respectively. Global average is 2,291m³/tonnes & 1,334m³/tonnes in the same order.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The agriculture sector uses a little over 90% of total water use in India. ○ In industrial plants, consumption is 2 times to 3.5 times higher per unit of production of similar plants in other countries. ○ Similarly, the domestic sector experiences a 30% to 40% loss of water due to leakage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sensitive Nature of the issue: Water projects are politically charged and manifest an interplay of social relations, social power, and technology. <p>Way Ahead</p> <p>The need of the hour is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Source sustainability ● Renovation and maintenance of traditional water harvesting structures ● Strengthening grey water management infrastructure ● Groundwater recharge ● Increasing water use efficiency and reuse of water. ● Involve non-state actors in decision-making processes <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A hybrid water management system is necessary, where (along with professionals and policy makers) the individual, a community and society have definite roles in the value chain. The challenge is not to be techno-centric but anthropogenic. <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think river interlinking is the most suitable way forward for water management in India? Critically examine. 2. The idea of interlinking the rivers to fight droughts and floods in various parts of the country might be economically prudent but its ecological fallouts outweigh the other benefits. Critically comment
<p>More than 75% of Amazon rainforest near tipping point, may transform into dry savanna: Study</p>	<p>In News: More than 75 per cent of the Amazon rainforest has been likely heading towards a tipping point since the early 2000s, according to a new study published in Nature Climate Change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It may be losing its ability to bounce back from extreme events such as drought or fire, threatening to become a dry savanna-like ecosystem. This transition might not bode well for the Amazon's rich biodiversity, carbon-storing potential and global climate change. ● The researchers used satellite data and statistical tools to arrive at these findings. <p>The Amazon's rainforest is home to 30 per cent of the world's species, comprising 40,000 plant species, 16,000 tree species, 1,300 birds and more than 430 species of mammals.</p> <p>The Amazon basin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Covering over 6 million square kilometres, it is nearly twice the size of India. ● The Amazon rainforests cover about 80 per cent of the basin ● Also, it is home to nearly a fifth of the world's land species and about 30 million people including hundreds of indigenous groups and several isolated tribes. ● The basin produces about 20% of the world's flow of freshwater into the oceans <p>This is not the first time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A previous study predicted that a tipping point would occur when the rainforest witnesses roughly 20-25 per cent of deforestation. ● Deforestation is on the rise. According to reports, it totalled 430 square kilometres in January 2022, five times higher than the same month last year. <p>What will happen if this continues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This loss will affect the amount of rainfall. Trees take up water through the roots, releasing it into the atmosphere, influencing precipitation over South America, Boers explained. ● The rainforest is also a carbon sink — a place that absorbs more carbon dioxide than it releases. It plays an essential role in combating climate change. But increasing temperatures due to human-induced climate change and deforestation are pushing

	<p>the rainforest to transform into a carbon source: Places that release more CO₂ than they absorb.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researchers warn that the forests could release vast amounts of CO₂ if they partially transform into dry habitats. • The analysis showed that the indicators of tipping points go up faster in areas with less rainfall and closer to human land use. • This suggests that drier conditions might drive resilience loss. • Human land-use activities — direct removal of trees, construction of roads, and fires — could be another contributor, according to the researchers. It has been on the rise since 2010. <p>Conclusion</p> <p>It's not too late to act. Priority should be placed on –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing deforestation will protect the forest's threatened parts and boost Amazon rainforest resilience. • Limiting global greenhouse gas emissions is also necessary to safeguard the Amazon.
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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

<p>Postpartum haemorrhage remains leading cause of maternal deaths in Kerala: Report</p>	<p>In News: Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) has been a leading cause of maternal deaths in Kerala for the better part of the last decade, according to a report prepared by the Kerala Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The report titled Confidential Review of Maternal deaths was released last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seventeen of the 133 maternal deaths recorded in 2019-2020 were due to PPH and 19 were due to suicide. • According the National Health Portal of India, PPH accounts for 35 per cent of all maternal deaths. <p>Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH)</p> <p>PPH is defined as a “blood loss of 500 ml or more within 24 hours after birth, while severe PPH is defined as a blood loss of 1,000 ml or more within the same timeframe,” by the World Health Organization. The incidences of postpartum haemorrhage are 1-5 percent only. It most often happens after the placenta is delivered, but it can also happen later.</p> <p>What causes postpartum haemorrhage?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once a baby is delivered, the uterus normally contracts and pushes out the placenta. • After the placenta is delivered, these contractions help put pressure on the bleeding vessels in the area where the placenta was attached. • If the uterus does not contract strongly enough, these blood vessels bleed freely and as a result the proper constriction of the vessels does not happen and they keep bleeding profusely. This is the most common cause of PPH. • If small pieces of the placenta stay attached, bleeding is also likely. <p>Postpartum hemorrhage may also be caused by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tear in the cervix or tissues of the vagina • Tear in a blood vessel in the uterus • Hematoma formation • Inversion of uterus • Blood clotting disorders • Placenta problems <p>PPH in Kerala</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In spite of near total hospital deliveries, very good antenatal coverage, improvement in blood transfusion facilities and many developments in technology to arrest the bleeding,” deaths due to PPH have remained a persistent concern. • PPH deaths were highest in the 20-29 age group. This is also the age group that has the highest number of deliveries.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At 46 per cent, atonic PPH — “failure of the uterus to contract following delivery” leading to excessive bleeding — is the most common type of obstetric haemorrhage. ● Moreover, a third of PPH deaths were recorded in caesarean births, highlighting “the importance of practicing safe caesarean section technique and postoperative monitoring.” <p>The report said: In interpreting the cause of death, the primary cause is taken into consideration even though the final cause also may be relevant. For instance, a patient who had atonic PPH and later obstetric hysterectomy, recovered but died after a few days due to pulmonary embolism; we have taken the stand that it should be included under PPH as it was the primary cause which set the ball rolling.</p> <p>The Way Forward</p> <p>PPH being a leading cause of maternal death is not only a country-wide trend but has also been seen in other low-income countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The incidences of PPH can be prevented by proper management, correcting anaemia, involving a trained doctor for delivery and sensitising pregnant women regarding regular checkups during pregnancy. ● A combination of quality antenatal care, skilled care at birth by active management of third stage of labour, the availability of high-quality emergency obstetric care (with trained medical personnel and adequate infrastructure) and improved access to these services are essential to save many maternal lives. ● Government needs to create a wide array of support network for pregnant women – right from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to good quality nutrition - Lots of protein, iron, calcium rich food builds their stamina to deal with complications. ○ Reducing cases of Anaemia ○ Provision of access to good antenatal care ○ Counselling for both parents to have 2-3 years gap between babies ○ Tertiary care provision at all government hospitals ○ Pregnant women should be motivated for monthly check up and have their delivery at nearby hospitals. ○ Grassroots level workers should be appointed at village level to educate women about this. <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One Indian woman dies every 5 minutes from postpartum hemorrhage. Suggest ways to prevent this country-wide trend.
<p>Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS)</p>	<p>Context: On March 13, United States President Joe Biden approved a \$200-million arms package for Ukraine, which would include U.S. made Stinger Missiles, which are a type of shoulder-fired Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More than 17,000 anti-tank weapons and 2,000 Stinger missiles have already been sent by the U.S. and NATO in the first week of March itself.



What are MANPADS?

- Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems are short-range, lightweight and portable surface-to-air missiles that can be fired by individuals or small groups to destroy aircraft or helicopters.
- They help shield troops from aerial attacks and are most effective in targeting low-flying aircrafts.
- MANPATs or Man-Portable Anti-Tank Systems work in a similar manner but are used to destroy or incapacitate military tanks.
- MANPADS can be shoulder-fired, launched from atop a ground-vehicle, fired from a tripod or stand, and from a helicopter or boat.
- Weighing anywhere between 10 to 20 kilograms and not being longer than 1.8 metres, they are **fairly lightweight** as compared to other elaborate weapon systems, making them easy to operate by individual soldiers.
- Operating MANPADS requires substantially **less training**.
- MANPADS have a **maximum range of 8 kilometres** and can engage targets at altitudes of 4.5 km.
- Most MANPADS have passive or 'fire and forget' guidance systems, meaning that the operator is **not required to guide** the missile to its target, enabling them to run and relocate immediately after firing.
- The missile stays **locked-on to the targeted object**, not requiring active guidance from the soldier.
- The missiles are fitted with **infrared (IR) seekers** that identify and target the airborne vehicle through heat radiation being emitted by the latter.

When were MANPADS used in the past?

- The first MANPADS were introduced by the United States and Soviet Union in the 1960s. Russian and U.S. MANPADS were also used during the **Vietnam war**.
- The U.S. supplied MANPADS to the **Mujahideen in Afghanistan** in the 1980s, which the latter used against the Soviet forces.
- Countries such as India, Pakistan, Germany, U.K., Turkey and Israel have also used MANPADS in their defence efforts.
- As of 2019, 20 countries had developed the wherewithal to manufacture MANPADS and have together made 1 million such systems for defence and export purposes.
- Over time, non-state actors such as rebel and terrorist groups have also illicitly acquired MANPADS, using them during civil wars and other high-intensity conflicts.

- MANPADs have been used in the Syrian war and in Libya. Non-state groups in African countries like Sudan, South Sudan, Angola, Somalia and Congo have also acquired and used MANPADs.

- Russia is by far the biggest exporter of MANPADs, having sold over 10,000 such systems between 2010 and 2018 to various countries including Iraq, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, and Libya.

What are the common variants of MANPADs?

- The most common make of MANPADs is the U.S.-made Stinger missiles. These weigh about 15 kg, have a range of 4,800 metres or 4.8 km, and can engage low-flying aircrafts at an altitude of 3,800 metres. They have a passive guidance system, which uses infrared technology.
- Stinger's Russian or Soviet-made counterparts are the **Igla** MANPADs, which also employ infrared technology. They were used in Iraq when it was invaded by the U.S. in 2003. They have also been used by India, for instance, as part of **Operation Trishul Shakti of 1992, during the Siachen conflict.**
- **Starstreak**, the British army's equivalent of the Stinger missiles and U.K. is formulating a plan to provide Ukraine with a shipment of Starstreaks.
- Sweden makes the RBS-70 MANPADs series while China's version, FN-6, is akin to the Stinger.

How effective are MANPADs in the Ukraine crisis?

- Ukraine still has some of Soviet era longer-range air-defence systems that can target Russian aircraft, which is why Russia is flying them at low altitudes, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to short-range systems like MANPADs.
- Reports show that at least 20 Russian aircraft — both helicopters and jets — being downed in Ukraine since the current conflict started. Ukraine's Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, has said that it has shot down 48 Russian planes and 80 helicopters.
- Kyiv-based National Institute for Strategic Studies, an institute advising the Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy on security issues, said that anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems are "precisely" what Ukraine needs right now.

What are the concerns around MANPADs?

- Many observers have pointed out that sending MANPADs to Ukraine may have its share of not so positive effects. The U.S. has also mentioned the 'risks' involved in sending such weapons to Ukraine.
- Ukraine is believed to have one of the largest arms trafficking markets in Europe.
- After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, weapons supplied by other countries to aid Ukraine ended up in the wrong hands in multiple cases.
- Reports indicate that weapons in the state arsenal were illicitly acquired and smuggled by criminal and non-state rebel groups.
- Meanwhile, the Small Arms Survey of 2017 pointed out that Ukraine has 1.2 million legal firearms and around 4 million illegal weapons, a lot of them fully-automatic military weapons.
- Thus, observers fear that sending lightweight ground-based MANPADs to Ukraine may contribute to **intensifying the network of illegal weapon trade.**
- In other conflict-hit states as well, there is widespread evidence of MANPADs ending up with non-state and terrorist groups; the most prominent cases being Syria, Libya and Afghanistan.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Another concern around MANPADS is civilian attacks. As per studies, more than 60 civilian aircraft have been hit by MANPADS since the 1970s, claiming the lives of more than 1,000 civilians.
India's draft medical devices policy	<p>Context: The government is proposing a new policy to reduce India's dependence on import of high-end medical devices.</p> <p>Do You Know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2047, India is expected to be home to 25 billion-dollar medical technology companies and will achieve a 10-12 per cent global market share in the medical devices sector to arrive at a \$100-300 billion industry. Globally, the market is expected to reach \$433 billion by 2025 and is currently dominated by the US with 40 per cent market share (Europe has 25% and Japan 15% share). In China, the sector is valued at around \$96 billion and has been growing at a pace of over 20 per cent for several years. <p>What is the need for such a policy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 80 per cent of the medical devices currently sold in the country are imported, particularly high-end devices. Indian players in the space have so far typically focussed on low-cost and low-tech products, like consumables and disposables, leading to a higher value share going to foreign companies. With the new policy, the government aims to reduce India's import dependence from 80 per cent to nearly 30 per cent in the next 10 years, and become one of the top five global manufacturing hubs for medical devices by 2047. India's medical devices sector has so far been regulated as per provisions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940, and a specific policy on medical devices has been a long standing demand from the industry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The revelations about faulty hip implants marketed by Johnson & Johnson, exposed the lack of regulatory teeth when it came to medical devices The policy also aims to increase India's per capita spend on medical devices. India has one of the lowest per capita spend on medical devices at \$3, compared to the global average of per capita consumption of \$47. India suffers from a considerable cost of manufacturing disability vis-à-vis competing economies, which needs to be rectified so as to achieve self-reliance in the sector. <p>What are the factors that has led to domestic disability in medical devices sector?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of adequate infrastructure Inefficient domestic supply chain and logistics High cost of finance Inadequate availability of power Limited design capabilities Low focus on research and development (R&D) and skill development Cheap imports available from other countries <p>What are the key focus areas of the draft policy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The key focus areas of the draft policy include incentivising core technology projects and exports through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tax refunds and rebates creating a single-window clearance system for licensing medical devices identifying critical suppliers de-risking and de-carbonising the supply chain promoting local sourcing encouraging cross-industry collaboration creating a central pool of vendors and workers International collaboration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increasing share of medical technology companies in research and development to around 50 per cent, among other things. ● It also proposes to allot a dedicated fund for encouraging joint research involving existing industry players, reputed academic institutions and startups. ● It will also incorporate a framework for a coherent pricing regulation, to make available quality and effective medical devices to all citizens at affordable prices. The NPPA (National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority) will be empowered for this purpose. ● The Pharmaceuticals Department will also work with industry to implement a Uniform Code for Medical Device Marketing Practices (UCMDMP). <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The medical devices sector in India is an essential and integral constituent of the Indian healthcare sector, particularly for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of all medical conditions, diseases, illnesses, and disabilities <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Production-linked incentive scheme (PLI scheme) for medical devices industry <p>Government Price control on stents</p>
<p>Solar Storms</p>	<p>What are solar storms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Just as the sun keeps sending us light and heat, it also throws out a lot of other material in all directions, including towards Earth. ● In fact, there is a constant stream of charged particles — electrons and protons — that escape from the sun's atmosphere (corona) and spread across space. This stream is called 'solar wind'. ● We are protected from the solar wind by our magnetic field, which deflects the particles away. <p>What is Coronal Mass Ejection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sometimes, a bubble of gas gets burped out of the sun. Imagine it like a bubble escaping from a bucket of soap water. ● This bubble, typically containing billions of tonnes of matter, ploughs through the solar wind and travels in a random direction at a speed of several million kilometers per hour. ● Such a bubble that has cut loose from the sun's corona is called 'coronal mass ejection' (CME) or 'solar storm'. ● If a CME happens to be coming in the direction of the earth, it is a cause for concern. ● Scientists says that it has been known for some time that the sun undergoes cycles of high (maxima) and low (minima) CME activity. Right now, there is an upswing and it will reach a maximum in a few years. <p>Why do they happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Just as sparks flying out of a bonfire, matter getting ejected from the sun is a common phenomenon. ● It is as natural as water particles getting flung out of a spinning, wet tennis ball. ● The sun is spinning fast and this spin creates complex swirls and eddies. Sometimes matter gets engulfed in loops of the magnetic field, which gets ejected violently. <p>What will be the impact of solar storms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It all depends upon the individual solar storm. ● Usually, the earth's magnetic field — magnetosphere — will ward off the dangerous incursions; the CME could pose danger only if the magnetic field is overwhelmed. ● The magnetic field, on the sun-facing side of the earth, extends to about 65,000 km, well within the range of earth's satellites. (Actually, the magnetic field on the day side gets compressed to 65,000 km by the solar winds; on the night side, the magnetosphere is much bigger). ● If a big CME occurs, some satellites could be lost; there is nothing we can do about it.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As for the earth-based systems, such as power grids and telecom networks, even if a big CME hits the earth, only countries in the upper and lower latitudes are in danger of getting affected. Being near the equator, India is relatively safe. <p>How big a problem is it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It depends upon the individual CME. Occasionally, a large solar storm might cut loose and hurl towards the earth; and we can do nothing about it. If we can predict it, we can reschedule satellite launches, but the CMEs are difficult to predict sufficiently ahead of their occurrence. A large solar storm hitting the earth might happen once in a century. The last big one was in 1859. The 'Carrington Event' shut down telegraph and electrical systems for many days. If an 1859-type of solar storm were to hit the earth today, the US alone could suffer damage of \$2.6 trillion.
<p>Like COVID, TB is a pandemic and must be treated as an emergency</p>	<p>Context: In 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared tuberculosis (TB) a global public health emergency. It urged nations to coordinate efforts to avert millions of deaths. In January 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19, another airborne infectious disease, a public health emergency of international concern.</p> <p>The similarity between the global responses to these two pandemics ends there.</p> <p>The scientific, public health, medical, and pharmaceutical communities' responses to COVID-19 in the past two years has been spectacular.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within two weeks of declaring COVID-19 a global emergency, the WHO had convened a meeting of experts and issued a research roadmap. National governments rapidly committed vast sums of money into research at all levels, from basic virology and immunology to clinical care and prevention. Pharmaceutical companies launched development programmes for new products to diagnose, treat and prevent COVID-19. As a result, diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines were developed at a dizzying pace, delivering an array of tools to control and end the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. <p>The effective and equitable deployment of those tools is a challenge. But no one can say that science has been found wanting in responding to the global crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TB, on the other hand, has not been treated as a true emergency. Yet its worldwide distribution, impact on health, and mortality burden was just as dire. TB incidence remains plateaued at 10 million cases per year. In 2020 case detection fell by almost 20 per cent and mortality rose for the first time in a decade to 1.5 million deaths. These setbacks are directly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. <p>The COVID-19 pandemic is different from the TB pandemic in many ways, with its sudden appearance, rapid worldwide spread and broad impact on individuals and communities. Nevertheless, TB remains a major killer and the pace of TB clinical research can best be described as glacial.</p> <p>Triumphs despite long timelines</p> <p>Even with limited funding, there have been some triumphs in TB research in the past decade:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Molecular assays make diagnosis possible in less than 2 hours Treatment of multidrug resistant TB has been shortened and made easier Treatment of drug-susceptible TB has been shortened Treatment of TB infection has been cut, with safer and better tolerated regimens. <p>But all of these transformative advances took far longer than they should have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding opportunities for TB biomedical research are fewer and the reviews of TB applications are slow. The overall timeline for conducting critically important TB research is scandalously long. Most studies are unnecessarily prolonged by long administrative and regulatory review processes.

The broader problem, however, is much larger than the mechanics of individual funding agencies or regulatory bodies.

- First, nobody is treating TB as an actual emergency. As we have seen with COVID-19, when everyone thinks it is an emergency, people act differently, and things move rapidly.
- Second, the clinical and public health research infrastructure is vastly underfunded and under-supported. COVID-19 has demonstrated what is possible when researchers, funders, and regulatory agencies unite to confront a crisis. Game-changing trials can be conducted in record time without cutting corners and compromising participant safety and scientific integrity, if everyone behaves like it is an emergency. But to do so requires a radical change in mindset in addition to substantially greater human and financial resources.

How to accelerate progress – The Way Forward

Operating in crisis mode for COVID-19, TB, or any other health catastrophe, is difficult to sustain. But the COVID-19 pandemic has shown what works to accelerate progress against a global threat.

- First, **substantial funding for priority research multiplies innovation and progress.** As a starting point, governments, pharma / biotech companies, and foundations must increase investment in TB research, at least to the levels laid out in the UN High Level Meeting Report and make TB a central element in global pandemic response strategies. Governments and other funders must commit more to end TB by 2030.
- Second, the **funding timeline can be greatly reduced.** If the rationale for faster review of biomedical research in HIV and COVID-19 was that these infections would rapidly spread and kill, then TB grants should likewise be reviewed rapidly.
- Third, the **regulatory bottleneck must be cleared.** There must be more investment in the regulatory and ethics infrastructure (including training and international coordination) so that these vital requirements do not suffocate innovative research.
- Finally, governments **must treat TB as a central element in global pandemic response strategies.** The new focus on pandemic preparedness — most notably the beginning of negotiations at WHO to create a legally binding pandemic treaty or similar mechanism — must include a commitment to end ongoing pandemics such as TB. If an annual 1.5 million deaths due to TB is not a pandemic, then what is?
- **Ending social stigma:** TB is not a health issue alone. It is a broader societal challenge. Patients often hesitate to seek treatment or deny their condition altogether for fear of losing social standing. The consequence is that TB becomes a death sentence for many even though it is a fully curable illness. Women are disproportionately affected with estimates suggesting that 100,000 Indian women are asked to leave their homes every year after being diagnosed with TB.

Conclusion

Advances in TB diagnostics, treatments and prevention need to be pursued and scaled up with the urgency they deserve. If we do not behave like TB is a global health emergency, we will continue to experience unacceptable suffering from a disease that has killed more than 20 million people in this century alone.

Value Addition:

A. India's contribution towards eliminating TB

- **Eliminating TB by 2025:** India is committed to eliminating tuberculosis by 2025, five years ahead of the global target of 2030.
- **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme:** To align with the ambitious goal, the programme has been renamed from the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) to National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing all co-morbidities and goes beyond medical interventions to tackle the social determinants of TB while minimizing access barriers to diagnosis and treatment. ▪ Through the Nikshay Poshan Yojana, nutritional support is extended to all TB patients for the entire duration of their treatment. ▪ Rigorously working towards Airborne Infection Control in hospital wards and outpatient waiting areas. ▪ Has the provision of chemoprophylaxis against TB disease in pediatric contacts of TB patients and PLHIV patients. ▪ The process is ongoing for expanding TB preventive treatment for the adult contacts too. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ‘TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan’ has been launched as a people’s movement for TB elimination in India. ● India remains committed to supporting countries in its neighbourhood with possible technical support and assistance. <p>B. Tuberculosis is a social disease -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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. <p>Can you answer the following question?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If we do not behave like TB is a global health emergency, we will continue to experience unacceptable suffering from a disease that has killed more than 20 million people in this century alone. Comment.
<p>Microplastics detected in human blood for the very first time</p>	<p>Context: Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing environmental problems of our time. Plastic litter is a common sight in urban areas but it has also found its way into the wild. It is in every natural habitat imaginable: forests, deserts, rivers, soil.</p> <p>Even our highest mountains and deepest oceans haven’t been spared. Trekkers have left behind plastic waste on Mt. Everest, the world’s tallest peak. In 2019, a submersible dove into the Mariana trench, the world’s deepest point in the ocean, and found a plastic grocery bag and sweets wrappers on the seafloor. We are launching thousands of satellites into space; debris from these spacecraft – including plastic – are drifting around there.</p> <p><i>Name any ecosystem you can think of. If humans have been there (or nearby), so has plastic.</i></p> <p>Microplastic Pollution</p> <p>Microplastic pollution has been detected in human blood for the first time. The study, published in the journal Environment International, tested 22 anonymous blood samples. Scientists found tiny particles of microplastics in almost 80 per cent of the people tested. The discovery shows the particles can travel around the body and may lodge in organs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Half the samples contained Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic, commonly used in drinks bottles. ● While a third contained polystyrene, used for packaging food and other products. ● Some of the blood samples contained two or three types of plastic. <p>Microplastics were also observed to cause damage to human cells in the laboratory. People were already known to consume the tiny particles via food and water. Researchers have earlier found microplastics in the faeces of babies and adults.</p>

What is Microplastic?

- Microplastics are microscopic pieces of plastic. Usually, they are fragments smaller than 5 mm wide.
- Microplastics arise from both primary and secondary sources.
 - Primary sources are those where plastic has been crafted in tiny pieces – like plastic pellets or tiny beads that are 2-5 mm wide. They are made from polyester (which in turn is made from petroleum and coal). Pellets are a common raw material in the plastic industry because they can be melted down to manufacture many other larger plastic products, like plastic bags and containers. Other primary sources of microplastic include microbeads, which are found in several personal care products including face scrubs, and paint.
 - Secondary sources of microplastics include plastic bags, bottles and almost every other plastic object that breaks down into smaller pieces over time.
- Such pieces are often invisible to the human eye. In the new study, the sizes of microplastics were around 700 nm in diameter. That is around 140 times smaller than the width of a single human hair.

Because microplastics are so small, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which they have invaded our planet and the bodies of its living things.

The Way Forward

Environmentalists, policymakers and governments appear to be taking note of the dangers of microplastics in the environment. At the UN Environment Assembly, more than 170 countries pledged to develop an international, legally-binding treaty to tackle plastic pollution by 2024. This draft resolution includes microplastics as a type of pollutant.

- While we have found microplastics everywhere, we don't exactly know how they can harm humans, although some of its components are likely to be bad news. For example, **styrene** – one of the microplastics that scientists recently discovered in human blood – could be a human carcinogen.
- But as we wait for more studies, one thing is certain: we need to act fast. This is why the international treaty on plastic pollution could be crucial. Some curbs on plastic pollution could go a long way to stem the invasion of microplastics.

The authors write that **more research is needed** to determine the human health risks involved with plastic in the bloodstream.

- "Where is it going in your body? Can it be eliminated? Excreted? Or is it retained in certain organs, accumulating maybe, or is it even able to pass the blood-brain barrier?"
- An international treaty on plastic pollution is on the cards – it could be crucial to microplastic, and plastic, menace.

Can you answer the following question?

1. There is no Plan B because we do not have a Planet B. Discuss.
2. Do you think a complete ban on single-use plastic can address the problem of pollution in a sustainable manner? Isn't sustainable management of plastic use through the 'reduce, reuse and recycle' approach a better way to handle pollution? Critically examine.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC): Nepal, USA and Indo-Pacific

Context: On February 27, the Nepal parliament approved the Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact — a \$500-million grant from the USA, after five years of keeping it on hold.

- The grant was ratified with an imperative declaration attached to it.
- The declaration states that the U.S. grant is not part of the Indo-Pacific strategy and Nepal's Constitution would be above the provisions of the grant agreement.
- It also mentions that the grant will solely be perceived as an economic assistance.
- Political parties and civil society have been divided on the U.S. grant for various reasons.
- The grant agreement, which was tabled in the Parliament in Kathmandu on February 20, faced demonstrations against it, which turned violent, with riot police firing tear gas shells and using water cannons to disperse the protesters outside the parliament. Protestors also hurled stones at the police and several people reported injuries on both sides.

What is the Millennium Challenge Corporation?

- **USA's Foreign Aid Agency:** The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an independent U.S. foreign aid agency, which was established in 2004 by the country's Congress to offer "time-limited grants promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and strengthening institutions," to low and lower-middle income countries through a selection process (based on performance on 20 policy indicators)
- **Terrorism and Poverty:** While this is the current official definition of the aid body, MCC was proposed by the George Bush administration post the 9/11 terrorist attack, as a tool to counter global poverty and international terrorism, citing the rationale that poverty and terrorism are linked.
- **MCC offers assistance in three forms.** In the form of compacts,
 - Large, five-year grants;
 - concurrent compacts or "grants that promote cross-border economic integration",
 - Threshold programs, which are smaller grants aimed at policy reform.
- MCC has so far approved about 37 compacts for 29 countries, worth a total of over \$13 billion.

What is the MCC Nepal Compact?

- In 2014, after meeting 16 of the 20 policy indicators on which MCC selects countries, Nepal had qualified for a compact, the agreement for which it later signed in 2017.
- Under the compact, the U.S. government, through MCC, would provide a grant of \$500 million to Nepal for **energy transmission and road development projects**, with Nepal also chipping in \$130 million.
- The power project proposed in the compact is a 300-400 km long energy transmission line with a capacity of 400 kilovolt, along a power corridor starting from the northeast of Kathmandu and ending near Nepal's border with India.
- The project also involves building three power substations along the line.
- Besides, the grant money is also intended for a 'road maintenance project' which will upgrade roads on the east-west highway, spread across 300 kms.
- While the compact says the energy project is meant to augment power generation and economic growth for Nepal, it also states that it will **facilitate cross-border electricity trade with India**.
- Before the work on the projects can begin however, the bill has to be formally accepted or ratified in the Nepal's parliament.
- Both the U.S. and Nepal governments have said that it is a 'no strings attached' grant, which would not have any conditions, or require repayment and interest payment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, section 7.1 of the agreement says it will “prevail” over the domestic laws of Nepal and section 6.8 grants immunity to MCC staff in “all courts and tribunals of Nepal.” <p>What is the dispute around the MCC grant?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per the initial agreement, the compact should have come into effect by 2019, but skepticism, politics and now protests, made its course rocky. • The U.S. had been increasing its pressure on Nepal to ratify the agreement giving deadlines, or the U.S. would have to “review its ties with Nepal.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ There have been instances in the past where the U.S. has terminated such compacts with countries for different reasons. • Nepali political parties have been divided on the MCC agreement over fears it would undermine Nepal’s sovereignty by pulling it into the US’s Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), which focuses on countering China-- a country Nepal has close ties with. • The compact is also seen by some observers as America’s answer to China’s Belt and Road initiative, a road development program that the Nepal government signed in 2016. • There also concerns that the compact would go against its constitution, which binds the country to a strong principle of non-alignment. • The people of Nepal are also afraid that the MCC would make profits from the power project by exporting energy to India. • After Nepal received the call from the White House about the deadline, China said it opposes “coercive diplomacy and actions that pursue selfish agendas at the expense of Nepal’s sovereignty and interests.” • In this political backdrop of instability amongst coalition partners, the MCC compact became politicised by parties as a device to strengthen their positions in the upcoming elections. <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India-Nepal relations needs a reset • What are the major irritants in Indo-Nepal relations? What are their fallouts? Examine.
<p>Balakot Airstrike</p>	<p>Context: February 26th marks the third anniversary of the Balakot airstrike which was conducted by Indian Air Force targeting the terrorist camps operating in Balakot town in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Forty CRPF Jawans lost their lives in the attack when an ED-laden SUV rammed into their convoy. The terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammad claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing. The Balakot airstrikes were seen as a direct response to the Pulwama bombing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On February 26, 2019, in the wee hours, India carried out airstrikes 12 days after a convoy of vehicles carrying CRPF personnel was attacked by a suicide bomber – plotted by Jaish-e-Mohammed in Pulwama district of Jammu. • On 14 February last year, 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in the attack. In retaliation, Indian Air Force destroyed the biggest terror training camp of JeM at Balakot on February 26, 2019. • A dozen IAF Mirage 2000 fighter jets crossed the India-Pakistan border to attack terror camp. • According to media reports, the terrorist camps at Balakot have undergone a revamp ahead of the first anniversary of the IAF bombings. <p>Operation Bandar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IAF’s mission to bomb the terrorist hideout in Balakot, Pakistan, was given the codename ‘Operation Bandar’. It was a rare operation in which the IAF crossed the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir and dropped bombs on targets in Pakistani territory. Balakot is a small town located in Pakistan’s Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

- On February 26, 2019, Indian Air Force's Mirage-2000 fighter jets took off from airbases across India. The Indian Air Force jets crossed the LoC in J&K and bombed Jaish terror camps in Balakot with precision-guided missiles.
- Pakistan retaliated a day after. The Pakistan Air Force attempted an airstrike on Indian soil. The Indian Air Force launched its fighter jets in response, leading to a rare dogfight between the Indian and Pakistani jets. In the skirmish, an IAF MiG-21 Bison fighter jet shot down a Pakistani F-16 during the conflict. Indian Mig-21, which was being flown by Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, was also shot down and he was captured by the Pakistani forces. After much deliberation, Wing Commander Abhinandan was released two days later from Pakistan's hold. This development calmed the tensions between the two nations after two weeks of heightened conflict.

Reflections and Message to the World

Balakot reflected India's approach against the employment of terrorism as a low-cost option against India.

- Indicated that terrorists, terrorist infrastructure and terrorist training facilities in areas beyond LoC and International Border when employed against India, will no longer be safe haven
- Terrorism will not remain a low-cost option that can proliferate under veiled threats and bogeys that have repeatedly been voiced by irresponsible and ill-informed leaders from across the border
- Balakot will continue to reiterate India's intent to employ the most appropriate resources for the intended impact, with an element of unpredictability and innovation as an integral part of the endeavour. It is this factor that must remain uppermost in our minds.

India has joined the list of countries along with the United States and Israel who can strike in enemy territory and avenge the death of its soldiers. It sent out a signal to adversaries that India's response to provocation will no longer be 'soft' and only diplomatic. All options were on the table.

The Way Ahead

- Requests placed before the government by the NSG needs to be met. NSG should be made into a complete commando force be it training, modern weapons, facilities of family members among others. The idea is to keep NSG at least two steps ahead of other forces in the world.
- Indian Army has to forge ahead with restructuring the army to allow for faster ground mobilisation and greater flexibility in limited land-based military operations.
- Work on the naval power as well: In the short-term, India is likely to position its naval forces aggressively during a confrontation with Pakistan, as it reportedly did during this crisis and in previous crises. In the long-term, it may explore a naval blockade or land attack options, though India's ability to execute decisive missions in its adversary's territorial waters will be limited and potentially escalatory given Pakistan's naval nuclear ambitions. Thus, Indian pressure in the Arabian Sea will remain the optimal choice for now.
- There is a need to continue the restrained approach it has adopted after the operation, and avoid the triumphalism that clouded the 'surgical strikes' of September 2016.

In the long term, building strong counter-terror defences, partnering with its own citizens to gather intelligence, and creating deterrents will be key.

Can you answer the following questions?

1. Balakot airstrikes compelled Pakistan to change its rulebook. Comment.
2. India's longstanding doctrine of restraint has ended, opening up space for more risky Indian retaliation moves against terror attacks like Pulwama. Discuss.

India and UNSC Vote over Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Context: India has abstained on a US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution that deplores Russia's aggression against Ukraine, with New Delhi saying dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes.

What is the resolution about?

- The UN Security Council voted on the draft resolution 8979 presented by the US and Albania, and co-sponsored by several other nations.
- The resolution deplores **Russia's aggression against Ukraine** and decides that
 - Russia shall immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine
 - Russia shall refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any UN member state.
 - Russia immediately withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
 - Russia immediately reverse the decision related to the status of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.
- The Council's resolution reaffirmed its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
- India abstained on the vote on draft resolution.
- Russia — which chaired the meeting of the UNSC since it holds the presidency for the month of February — vetoed the resolution
- **China** shifted from its support for Russia in the previous vote to abstention after the U.S. and Albania, the two "penholders" of the resolution, agreed to drop the reference to Chapter VII (the authorisation of the use of force against Russian troops).
- Despite the remaining 11 members of UNSC, including US, UK, France, voting in favour of the resolution, it did not pass since Russia vetoed it.
 - Russia has vetoed UNSC resolutions earlier that were critical of its decision to send troops into Georgia (2008), and Crimea (2014),

Why did India abstain?

- There are four potential options India can/could choose from:
 - Condemn Russian aggression- this will pit India against Russia
 - support Russian aggression — this will pit it against the U.S. and its allies
 - stay silent on Russian aggression — this will be read as pro-Russia
 - express displeasure (short of condemning) and call for diplomacy — which it has taken — is the least harmful.
- Also, India wants to maintain a balance between the Western bloc led by the US, and Russia, since it has strategic relationship with both.
- Apart from the India-Russia defence and strategic partnership, Russia is India's most trusted P-5 ally when it comes to blocking intrusive resolutions on Kashmir.
- Russia may or may not be able to moderate Chinese antagonism towards India, but an India-Russia strategic partnership may be able to temper India's growing isolation in a rather friendless region.
- New Delhi needs Moscow's assistance to manage its continental difficulties through defence supplies, helping it return to central Asia, working together at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or exploring opportunities for collaboration in Afghanistan.
- On the other hand, India's relationship with US is at its best with forming informal grouping like QUAD that is having a strategic interest in containing China. Therefore, New Delhi could not actively support Russia.
 - On moral grounds also, the invasion is considered as against international law & violation of Sovereignty & territorial integrity of Ukraine.
- India's problem is China, and it needs both the U.S./the West and Russia to deal with the "China problem".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An aggressive Russia is a problem for the U.S. and the West, not for India. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion is Russia's problem, not India's. ● By abstaining, India retained the option of reaching out to relevant sides in an effort to bridge the gap and find a middle ground with an aim to foster dialogue and diplomacy <p>India's Stand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● India said that it is deeply disturbed by the recent turn of developments in Ukraine. ● India reiterated its appeal for cessation of violence and advocated diplomacy, urging the parties concerned to return to the negotiating table. ● It flagged its core concern about Indian nationals in Ukraine who are stuck, most of whom are students. ● India touched upon "territorial integrity and sovereignty" which was the contemporary global order built on the UN Charter, international law, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. <p>How does the war on Ukraine have major implications for India's strategic calculus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For one, Russian action in Ukraine will no doubt embolden China and its territorial ambitions. ● Second, the new sanctions regime may have implications for India's defence cooperation with Moscow. ● Third, the longer the standoff lasts, the closer China and Russia could become, which certainly does not help India. ● Finally, the more severe the U.S.-Russia rivalry becomes, the less focus there would be on the Indo-Pacific and China, which is where India's interests lie. <p>Conclusion New Delhi must now consider whether its aspirations to be a "leading power" can be achieved without having a clear position on a conflict that threatens global security,</p> <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● International Court of Justice ● US invasion of Afghanistan and withdrawal in 2021.
<p>Australia-India scripting a 'new chapter' in bilateral relations</p>	<p>Context: The engagement on both sides has amplified across multiple platforms and sectors, clearly focused on building tangible commitments and actions, to embrace a win-win partnership. If 2020 was the year of elevation of Australia-India bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), 2021 was about bringing pace, energy, and solidifying the bilateral economic engagement, 2022 is surely about a focused head start to script a new and committed engagement narrative, and the month of February had been a busy and promising month for bilateral ties.</p> <p>The Global Geostrategic and Geoeconomic Landscape</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Quad (this time at Australia) agreed to "accelerate the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines across the region, address regional challenges including humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), maritime security, counterterrorism, countering disinformation and cyber security." ● Australia has also proposed to host an Indo-Pacific Clean Energy Supply Chain Forum in mid-2022. ● Indo-Pacific economic integration: Australia will provide AUD\$36.5 million over five years, including AUD \$11.4 million to improve regional cooperation on maritime shipping, disaster resilience, and information sharing. It will invest AUD\$10.2 million to increase engagement on regional economic challenges and explore new opportunities in the digital sector in Bangladesh. ● In addition, the Australian government will invest AUD\$5.8 million to promote infrastructure investment opportunities in the region to Australian business, invest AUD\$4.8 million to improve Australian resources and mining equipment, technology and services (METS), and understanding of South Asian markets.

- A further AUD\$4.3 million will support relationships across the LNG supply chain between Australia, India, and Bangladesh.

Together, these measures will support opportunities for trade, investment, and connectivity in the Northeast Indian Ocean. The evolving narrative on the Indo-Pacific region reflects the emerging structural shift in geostrategic and geoeconomic imagination and environment.

India and Australia

- A. **With the advent of industry 4.0**, cyber security, innovation, digital economy, and cyber & critical technology cooperation have become a key part of Australia's relationship with India, enabling an ecosystem of collaboration between industry, academia, and subject matter experts through the New Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy to build security standards, best practices, and ethical framework.
- B. **The inaugural Australia–India Foreign minister's Cyber Dialogue** focused on further promoting stronger investment opportunities and cutting-edge innovation in cyber, critical, and emerging technologies.
- C. **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**: There is a likely possibility of a full-fledged CECA becoming a reality sooner than later, considering the Australian federal elections are just around the corner. The economic context within which the CECA is being negotiated has changed, it is a completely different world to two years ago, and the ways in which crisis of supply, people and resourcing has manifested itself in business needs to be examined thoroughly. The CECA is likely to
 - Lower tariffs
 - Provide greater access to Australian and Indian exporters in areas such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, footwear, dairy products, milk, premium wines and many more, focused on post-COVID economic recovery, along with the importance of an early resolution of ongoing issue of taxation of offshore income of Indian firms in Australia.
- D. **MoU on Tourism Cooperation**: Promote travel between the two markets and advance cooperation on tourism policy, data sharing, training, and industry engagement. Pre-pandemic, India was Australia's fastest-growing source of international visitors. A large Australian Indian diaspora population and international student cohort with accessible connectivity will continue to open up international travel to a larger proportion of India's population, also a strong enabler in building 'Brand Australia' in India.
- E. **Australia–India Infrastructure Forum**: Will serve as a hub to promote two-way investment in infrastructure and support broader trade and investment bilateral objectives. Opportunities in urban infrastructure, transport, and water remain key focus sub-sectors for Australia in India. With large sovereign funds, pension funds, private equity investing in India, and with infrastructure spend slated to be US\$ 1.4 trillion by 2025 as part of the Govt. of India national infrastructure pipeline, opportunities are tremendous within the infrastructure sector to align mutual capabilities.
- F. **To foster the Australia-India community cooperation, creativity, understanding and exchange**, Australia has also launched three Maitri (friendship) initiatives with a total investment worth AUD\$20.8 million.
 - a. The AUD\$11.2 million Maitri Scholarships Programme aims to attract and support high achieving Indian students to study in Australian universities particularly in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health.
 - b. The AUD\$3.5 million Maitri Grants and Fellowships Programme will build links between future leaders, supporting mid-career Australian and Indian professionals to collaborate on strategic research and shared priorities.

	<p>c. The AUD\$6.1 million Australia-India Maitri Cultural Partnership will boost the role of creative industries in economic and people-to-people ties to promote artistic talent and cultural exchanges in visual and performing arts, literature, film, television, and music industries.</p> <p>G. 4th India – Australia Energy Dialogue: Both countries have decided to drive down the costs of technologies that will help reduce global emissions, with focus on tangible actions and projects including the manufacture and deployment of ultra-low-cost solar and green hydrogen.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Pave the way for working towards reducing the cost of new and renewable energy technologies Scaling up deployment in order to accelerate global emissions reduction. Focus of this LoI: Scaling up manufacture and deployment of ultra-low-cost solar and clean hydrogen Other areas of cooperation: There is an urgent need to focus on advancing technology and clean energy transition. Energy efficiency technologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grid management R&D collaboration on flue gas desulphurisation, biomass or hydrogen co-firing Water cycle optimization Renewables integration Batteries Electric mobility Apart from the power sector, there are many desirable areas of cooperation agreed under <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing costs of Green Hydrogen Cooperation in sphere of coal-based energy security and resource deployment Investment opportunities in the minerals sector Exploring potential for an LNG Partnership <p>Conclusion</p> <p>The partnership between Australia and India is no longer one-dimensional or single layered, what we are witnessing today is a truly comprehensive bilateral growth story that is driven by consistency, commitment, and action. The key is to keep the Australia story thriving in India, and India story thriving in Australia on a consistent basis in public memory; this involves a holistic multi-stakeholder strategy and approach which deepens understanding and appreciation of each other.</p> <p>Can you answer the following question?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration between India and Australia can limit the dangers of the growing geopolitical imbalance in the Indo-Pacific. Comment.
<p>Humanitarian Corridors</p>	<p>What are humanitarian corridors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are demilitarized zones, in a specific area and for a specific time — and both sides of an armed conflict agree to them. The United Nations considers humanitarian corridors to be one of several possible forms of a temporary pause of armed conflict. <p>What are these for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Via these corridors, either food and medical aid can be brought to areas of conflict, or civilians can be evacuated. The corridors are necessary when cities are under siege and the population is cut off from basic food supplies, electricity and water. In cases where a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds because the international law of war is being violated — for example through large-scale bombing of civilian targets — humanitarian corridors can provide crucial relief. <p>Who sets them up?</p>

- In most cases, humanitarian corridors are **negotiated by the United Nations**.
- Sometimes they're also set up by local groups.
- Since all sides need to agree to set up the corridors, there is a risk of military or political abuse. For example, the corridors can be used to smuggle weapons and fuel into besieged cities.
- On the other hand, they can also be used by UN observers, NGOs and journalists to gain access to contested areas where war crimes are being committed.



What corridors have been established in Ukraine?

- In eastern Ukraine, a five-hour cease-fire was to be in place on March 5, to allow around 200,000 to leave Mariupol and Volnovakha.
- But the initiative failed after a few hours where the administration said the evacuation had been “postponed for security reasons” because Russian troops continued to bomb the surroundings.
- Russia however said the corridors set up near Mariupol and Volnovakha had not been used.
- Ukraine said that Russia had not fulfilled the promise of a corridor and that 19 vehicles with humanitarian aid had not been allowed through.

Who gets access?

- Access to humanitarian corridors is determined by the parties to the conflict.
- It's usually limited to neutral actors, the UN or aid organizations such as the Red Cross.
- They also determine the length of time, the area and which means of transport — trucks, buses or planes — are allowed to use the corridor.
- In rare cases, humanitarian corridors are only organized by one of the parties to the conflict. This happened with the American airlift after the Berlin blockade by the Soviet Union in 1948-1949.

Where else have they been used?

- Humanitarian corridors have been put in place since the mid-20th century. For example, during the so-called Kindertransport from 1938 to 1939, Jewish children were evacuated to the United Kingdom from areas under Nazi control.
- Humanitarian corridors were also created during the 1992-1995 siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and the 2018 evacuation of Ghouta, Syria.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, there are many wars and conflicts where calls for civilian corridors or a pause in fighting have been made in vain. In the ongoing war in Yemen, for instance, the UN has so far failed in its negotiations.
Clear signals: On India-China ties and the new global currents	<p>Key takeaway: India and China must take on board global currents that could reshape ties.</p> <p>China's Claim China's claim that the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is aiming to create "an Indo-Pacific version of NATO" is not new.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indeed, even as long as 15 years ago, during the first iteration of the now revived India, Australia, Japan, U.S. Quad, Beijing warned of an impending "Asian NATO", which, of course, never materialised. The latest statement does, however, assume significance in the current global context and amid the crisis in Ukraine. • China accused the U.S. of "stoking geopolitical rivalry" by "forming exclusive clubs". By "strengthening the Five Eyes" intelligence alliance and "peddling the Quad, piecing together AUKUS and tightening bilateral military alliances", the U.S. is leading a "five-four-three-two" formation in the region. • The broader goal, China thinks is "to establish an Indo-Pacific version of NATO". <p>China's current relations with Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beijing has repeatedly blamed NATO for the crisis in Ukraine. • While claiming to stay neutral, it has moved to reaffirm ties with Russia, which Beijing described as "rock solid". • When the two countries' leaders met for a summit on February 4, China backed Russia on its concerns on NATO's eastward expansion in Europe, and Russia returned the favour with both criticising the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. • Beyond their already deep political and economic linkages, these mirrored concerns on U.S. alliances are emerging as a powerful binding glue in the China-Russia axis. <p>India's Stand <i>On relations with Russia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Delhi will need to consider how this will impact its close relations with Russia. • India has abstained on a US-sponsored UN Security Council resolution that deplores Russia's aggression against Ukraine, with New Delhi saying dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes. <p><i>On relations with USA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By explicitly equating the Quad, which is not a military pact, with other security agreements, China now also appears to be clearly situating India as a part of the U.S. "exclusive club". New Delhi has rejected that notion. Only last month, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said "interested parties" were making a "lazy analogy of an Asian NATO" and India was not a U.S. treaty ally. • Indeed, some in New Delhi have come to view Beijing's aggressive moves along the LAC in 2020 as a warning sign to deter India-U.S. relations. India's firm, and correct, response has been to hold the line, and continue deepening ties not only with the U.S. and the Quad but also other Indo-Pacific partners to underline it will not be swayed. <p><i>On relations with China</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The other message from India has been that sensitivity to concerns has to be mutual, and cannot be demanded from one side when ignored by the other; China's relations with Pakistan being a case in point. • China has acknowledged that recent "setbacks" in ties suited neither India nor China — a view New Delhi shares. • The two sides will meet on March 11 for the next round of military talks to take forward LAC disengagement. <p>Conclusion</p>

	<p>As India and China continue to seek a much-needed <i>modus vivendi</i> to restore ties from the lowest point in decades and ensure peace on the border, they will also need to have a broader conversation about global currents that are reshaping their bilateral relations.</p>
Turkey's Stakes in Ukraine War	<p>Context: The foreign ministers of Ukraine and Russia are to meet for talks on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomatic Forum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The talks will be held in “trilateral format”: that is, with Turkey present in the room as a mediator. • Ukraine has not yet confirmed that it will attend. Irrespective of whether the meeting takes place and its outcome, Turkey's interest in the crisis, particularly in playing the role of mediator, is of significance <p>How is the relationship between Turkey and Russia?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey, as the gateway between Europe and Asia, is a country of many parts. It is a member of NATO, and was at one time thought to be a natural fit for membership in the EU. • Turkey is also increasingly a religious conservative state, whose authoritarian leader wants to turn the clock back to Islamism. <p>Tensions between Turkey & Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is a friend of Turkey but also an age-old geopolitical rival, going back to the Russo-Ottoman wars. • For Turkey, Moscow's annexation of Crimea has been a nagging concern. Turkey's President has said Turkey will never recognise this “illegal” action. • Russia's proximity to the PKK, the Turkish Kurdish rebel group, from the Soviet Union days is a major irritant for Turkey. • In Syria, Russia and Turkey fought on opposite sides, Russia to preserve the Bashar al-Assad presidency, and Turkey on the side of groups fighting him. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Russia-Turkey battle for supremacy in the region was played out in the small territory of Idlib in north-western Syria on the border with Turkey. <p>Growing Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is now among Turkey's main trade partners. Turkey's economy depends heavily on imports from Russia. In 2019, their bilateral trade was about \$ 16.4 billion, and the biggest item imported from Russia was refined petroleum. • There is a gas pipeline now under the Black Sea from Russia to Turkey. • In 2020, Turkey bought the S 400 Triumf surface-to-air missile defence system from Russia, and was sanctioned by the United States under its CAATSA law. • Russia is building a nuclear power plant in Ayukku in southern Turkey. <p>How is the relationship between Turkey & Ukraine?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey is also a close trading and strategic partner of Ukraine. • Their bilateral trade in 2019 was about \$ 2.15 billion, with Turkey a major exporter to Ukraine. The biggest export in 2019 was refined petroleum. • Turkey also supplies Ukraine with a lethal missile carrier drone, which Ukraine has been using against Russian tanks during the current conflict. • In February 2022, when matters were reaching a boiling point between Ukraine and Russia, Turkey's President made a visit to Ukraine, and signed a Free Trade Agreement and an agreement to co-manufacture the armed long-range Bayraktar drone in Ukraine. • Russia has been angry with Turkey for arming Ukraine. <p>What is Turkey's position in the conflict between Russia & Ukraine?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey has described the Russian invasion of Ukraine as unacceptable and a blow to regional peace. • Turkey has rejected Russia's recognition of the “republics” of Luhansk and Donetsk. • Turkey was one of the 80 sponsors of the General Assembly resolution titled “Russian Aggression in Ukraine”.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turkey also invoked clauses of the 1936 Montreux Convention, a convention that put Turkey in charge of the Bosphorous and Dardanelles Straits, to bar the passage of warships through the Bosphorous Straits. ● But Turkey has also said that under the terms of the convention, it cannot stop warships of the Black Sea littoral countries – Russia is one of them – from returning to their home base. ● Turkey has not joined the sanctions against Russia ● Further, Turkish President has said Turkey cannot abandon ties with either Ukraine or Russia. <p>Why is Turkey keen to mediate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In its efforts to mediate, Turkey is seeking to take on the role of the regional leader. ● It may also help Erdogan shed his bad boy image in the West, where he is ranked alongside the authoritarian leaders of the world. ● It is also seeking to protect its considerable economic interests in the region, the stability of the Black Sea and the Turkish straits, its defence relations with both countries, and its oil and gas supplies from Russia.
<p>Russia-Ukraine conflict can spark a global food crisis</p>	<p>Context: The food economy remains at the heart of geopolitical conflict sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Importance of Russia and Ukraine in global food economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Russia (18%) and Ukraine's (8%) contribute about a quarter of the global wheat exports. ● Russia and Ukraine are important players in corn production and had a 14 per cent share of global maize exports in 2020. ● Also, these two countries lead in sunflower oil production and have a 40 per cent share in exports, with Russia accounting for 18 per cent of global sunflower oil exports. <p>How will the global food economy be impacted by the Ukraine crisis?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rise in global commodity prices: Disruption in production and international trade in commodity and agricultural products caused by war leads to increase in prices. The spikes in the international prices of maize (21 per cent), wheat (35 per cent), soybeans (20 per cent), and sunflower oil (11 per cent) have been reported. ● Food Security: Food security has six dimensions: availability, access, utilisation, stability, agency, and sustainability, which are expected to be affected by this crisis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For ex: It has already raised concerns over food security Africa. In 2020, African countries imported \$4 billion worth agriculture produce from Russia (\$2.9 billion worth from Ukraine). 90% of Russian imports consisted of wheat and 6% sunflower oil (Ukraine imports consisted of 48% of Wheat, 31% maize and rest as Sunflower oil) ● Food Inflation: The crisis would spur food inflation which might further constrain government's capabilities to take measures (reducing interest rate) to revive economy in the aftermath of COVID-19 induced slowdown. ● Other factor can worsen the situation: Poor harvest due to dry spells in South America and Indonesia and rising demand for wheat and oilseeds in China and India can worsen the situation. ● Opportunity for other countries: Wheat exporting countries such as Canada, Australia, and the US are likely to benefit from any potential near-term surge in cereals demand. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Also, oilseeds growing countries such as China, EU nations, Canada, and India can step into a market dominated so far by Russia and Ukraine. ● Increase in Fertilizer price: Armed conflict can have a ripple effect on rising oil and fertiliser prices, affecting farmers in developing and least-developed countries and straining government finances. <p>Way Ahead</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grain bank and edible oil supply could help meet the starvation of the impoverished in the near term. ● Agencies such as State Trading corporations, Food Corporation of India, and multinational oilseeds trading firms can help tide over the crisis by updating their food supply chain and public distribution system to make it resilient and efficient. ● Also, export promotion of fortified foods can help the poor of those nations which are severely impacted by the crisis (ex: African countries)
India's growing defence diplomacy footprint	<p>Context: The Indian Navy has just concluded its multilateral naval exercise, 'Milan' in Vishakhapatnam, where for the first time, more than 40 navies from around the world, including the US Navy participated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convened since 1995, the exercise this year was conducted in two phases—harbour phase (25-28 February) and sea phase (1-4 March). This flagship exercise has not only enabled the navy to develop professional relationships but also has become an important tool to project India's soft military power. ● The Milan exercise's expanding size of participants and complexity of drills is symbolic of India's expanding defence diplomacy imprint from West to Southeast Asia. ● This diplomacy includes a more advanced naval engagement, greater military exercises, and enhanced efforts for defence exports. ● As a result, they have improved interoperability with partner militaries, built partnerships, and earned diplomatic heft for India. <p>Engagement with Southeast Asia</p> <p>A key driver for India's defence diplomacy has been China's persistent aggressiveness in the region, particularly in the South China Sea. In recent years, India has intensified collaboration with many Southeast Asian states. They, too, are keen to expand their security ties with India to balance China and bolster their maritime security.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most Southeast Asian states—Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, participated in this year's Milan exercise. ● India is utilising this collaborative approach to stimulate defence exports and counter China, which has leveraged its defence supplies to entrench itself in the region. <p>Defence exports</p> <p>The recent US \$375 million Brahmos missiles deal with the Philippines—the first such export order for the missile—has come as a shot in the arm for India's defence industry. Under the contract, India will provide three missile batteries to the Philippine Navy and potentially a follow-up order.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With a target of US \$5 billion for defence exports by 2024, India has intensified its efforts to sell weapons to Southeast Asia and Africa, where Chinese defence companies dominate. ● Government has strengthened the role of defence attaches located in Indian embassies abroad. The government has allocated them an annual budget of up to US\$50,000 to promote Indian defence equipment in their respective markets. Moreover, to reinforce their sales pitch, the government has cleared multiple 'Made-in-India' equipment, including the Tejas combat aircraft and Astra missile for export to friendly countries. ● Beyond exports, India (a 'net security provider' for the region) has also helped its immediate neighbours to build their naval capability by donating and transferring equipment. This includes off-shore patrol vessels to Mauritius (2015), Sri Lanka (2018), Maldives (2019), and Seychelles (2021), as well as two Dornier aircraft to Seychelles (2013 & 2018). ● Due to such efforts, the exports have soared to INR 10,745 crores in 2018-19, from just INR 1,940.64 in 2014-15, although there is a long way to go. <p>Table 1: India's defence exports</p>

Year	Defence exports (Rs. in crores)
2014-15	1,940.64
2015-16	2,059.18
2016-17	1,521.91
2017-18	4,682.36
2018-19	10,745.77
2019-20	9,115.55
2020-21	8,434.84

Source: Ministry of Defence, Lok Sabha

Humanitarian Assistance

A key element of being a 'net security provider' is the ability to launch Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations in the region.

- For long, India has been leading on the HADR operations front, as seen during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 2015 Nepal earthquake, and 2020 floods in Madagascar. Moreover, the acquisition of equipment like the INS Jalashwa transport dock and C17 transport aircraft in the last decade has empowered the Indian military to execute such operations.
- India is coordinating with partner countries to enhance its response mechanism to the natural disasters, particularly in the Bay of Bengal region.
- HADR remains an important focus area within the Quad, but India has also undertaken initiatives like the PANEX-21 exercise with the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) countries to envisage contingencies for such operations in the backdrop of the pandemic.

Building relationships on India's West

India has now crafted a distinct partnership with the West Asian monarchies and defence diplomacy has constituted a critical part of this relationship. When the region is witnessing epochal shifts with the Abraham Accords and a growing profile of China, India has advanced its security cooperation by focusing on naval engagement.

- In August 2021, India conducted back-to-back joint naval exercises with the United Arab Emirates (Zayed Talwar exercise), Bahrain (Maritime Partnership Exercise), and Saudi Arabia (Al-Mohed Al-Hindi exercise).
- Notably, the India-Saudi Arabia exercise was the first joint exercise between the two. Both countries have also had high-level military exchanges with respective army chiefs undertaking maiden visits.
- Oman has served as an important anchor for India's military engagement in the region. Besides the regular military exchanges between the two militaries, Oman has granted the Indian Navy access to the Duqm port for logistics and support. This has facilitated the navy's sustained long-term presence in the western Indian Ocean, which for years has served as a hotspot for piracy.
- Though piracy incidents have declined lately, other challenges have emerged, like drug trafficking and illegal fishing that demand maritime vigilance.
- **Tackling Afghan Challenge:** The inaugural India-Central Asia summit of January 2022 and the Regional Security Dialogue of November 2021 underlined India's approach towards the Afghan challenge, focusing on preventing the spread of terrorism and drug trafficking. Towards this, India is exploring holding joint counter-terrorism exercises with interested Central Asian states, which will equip their respective security forces to deal with potential terrorist violence.

	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>With a focus on containing the adverse regional fallout of the unfolding security situation in Afghanistan while simultaneously tackling the growing Chinese maritime assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, India has increasingly leveraged its defence forces to shape regional diplomacy. These initiatives are helping India build a sustained cooperative engagement and create a web of partnerships throughout the region. Sustaining these partnerships will require India to invest more in its naval, expeditionary, and logistic capabilities.</p> <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India's growing defence diplomacy
<p>The new US Indo-Pacific Strategy: Balancing continuity with new and evolving environment</p>	<p>Context: The new US Indo-Pacific Strategy released on 22 February 2022 has evoked limited interest for a variety of reasons. Key amongst these are—the Russia-Ukraine crisis that turned into an invasion and war on 24 February 2022. However, the US has continued to signal that its engagement and strategy for this region will be enduring, and conflicts or crises in other parts of the world will not have any significant impact on it. The new strategy maintains continuity in the broad direction outlined in the last US Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, which was released on 1 June 2019. However, there are subtle changes in some areas, which may be seen as adaptation to the evolving geostrategic environment.</p> <p>The New Strategy</p> <p>Geographic expanse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The previous strategy had indicated the key objective to be “sustaining the US influence to achieve regional objectives”. The new strategy too highlights its objective as “building a balance of influence” in the region. • However, it adds additional text that stresses on managing competition with the PRC responsibly. This lesser provocative stance is likely intended to allay concerns, particularly within the region, about the trajectory of the great power rivalry and competition, and to enable building and strengthening partnerships. • The new strategy considers it to be “from our Pacific coastline to the Indian Ocean”, with focus on North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, and Oceania—including the Pacific islands. While the western Indian Ocean is not included in both, the limit of the west coast of India has been removed and South Asia included as a whole in the new strategy. By implication, the broader swathe of the Arabian Sea is now considered part of the region by the US. <p>Emphasises ‘alliances and partnerships’, with specific reference to the existing regional treaty alliances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It seeks to modernise and adapt these alliances (Australia, Japan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), while strengthening emerging partnerships. Amongst partnerships, the Quad finds special emphasis and repeated mention in the strategy. • It seeks to strengthen the Quad, and explore the Quad working with ASEAN. Unlike in 2019, the new strategy seeks to align approaches with the EU and NATO. This is in part due to the recognition that the EU and US strategies for the region differ in various areas. • It is also noteworthy that the new security partnership between Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) for the region, unveiled on 15 September 2021, finds only a brief mention in the last part that outlines the action plan. Downplaying AUKUS could possibly be because of the concerns expressed by some partners about its likely trajectory, and to ensure that AUKUS does not come in the way of the US developing partnerships and connections within and beyond the region. <p>Introduces economic and trade partnership agenda, with an ‘Indo-Pacific Economic Framework’ intended to launch in early 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It also includes references to areas like democratic values, technology, digital, climate, environment, and health. This makes the strategy well-rounded, though the

	<p>main focus continues to be on 'security', with special attention to the maritime domain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new plan to drive resources to the region stresses on opening of new embassies/consulates, providing security assistance to partners, and expanding the US Coastguard presence in the region. This links to the new emphasis on partnerships, and additional challenges posed by China's grey zone operations in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. <p>Supporting India's continued rise and regional leadership is indicated as a separate action agenda item, which is also linked to making the Quad more effective. Given India's neutral position so far on the Russia-Ukraine war, differing views on taking this part of the strategy forward are likely to emerge in the near term.</p> <p>China's possible response</p> <p>The environment, challenges, and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region are significantly different from those in Eastern Europe. Yet, the Russia-Ukraine war and related, ongoing developments are bound to strongly influence the narrative about the Indo-Pacific. Debates on comparisons, justified or otherwise, can be expected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China and Russia, who are opposed to the concept of the Indo-Pacific Region, started to draw parallels and criticise the US strategies for the region. • China is likely to continue to emphasise that the US and NATO approaches in Eastern Europe are likely to be replicated in the Indo-Pacific, with potential consequences similar to the devastation and suffering seen in Ukraine. • The method of war termination, the scope of post-war settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and changes in the European security architecture will influence approaches in other regions, including the Indo-Pacific. • China may also be expected to stress the common ground between the Chinese and the EU approaches to the Indo-Pacific, particularly on inclusivity, which is not part of the new US strategy. • It will also seek to limit the adverse fallout on China-Europe cooperation, since China has been seen by the vast majority in Europe to be on the side of Russia. The method of war termination, the scope of post-war settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and changes in the European security architecture will influence approaches in other regions, including the Indo-Pacific. <p>Conclusion</p> <p>The new strategy indicates bipartisan support and continuity at the policy level in the US related to the Indo-Pacific. It has been adapted to the current environment with changes from the 2019 strategy, however, it is still more like a statement of intent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since it is thin on many details related to its implementation, it leaves many aspects open to varied assessments and estimations regarding its action agenda. • It has sought to expand its scope beyond security, but once again with limited details. <p>The US prioritisation of the Indo-Pacific region and the release of this strategy have also been overshadowed by the Russia-Ukraine war, which is the largest conventional military attack since the end of World War II.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The war and the eventual settlement will impact the implementation of strategies in other regions, including the new US strategy for the Indo-Pacific. <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The United States' Indo-Pacific strategy continues to focus on bolstering its security and counterbalancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Comment.
<p>One Rank One Pension Case</p>	<p>Context: The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled there was "no constitutional infirmity" in the way the government had introduced 'one rank, one pension' (OROP) among ex-service personnel.</p>

- The scheme, notified by the Defence Ministry on November 7, 2015, was challenged by Indian Ex-Service Movement, an association of retired defence personnel.

What is One Rank One Pension?

- OROP means that any two military personnel retiring at the same rank, with the same years of service, must get an equal pension.
 - **Koshiyari Committee** in 2011 defined OROP as a uniform pension to be paid to armed forces personnel retiring in the same rank with the same length of service, irrespective of their date of retirement
- While this might appear almost obvious, there are reasons why this was not the case earlier.
- Military personnel across the three services fall under two categories, the **officers** and the **other ranks**, as they're called.
- The other ranks, which are **soldiers, usually retire at age 35**. They retire early country needs a young military.
- Unlike government employees who retire close to 60, **soldiers can thus miss out** on the benefits from subsequent pay commissions. And since pensions are based on the last drawn salary, pensions too are impacted adversely.
- Therefore, it was argued that **early retirement should not become an adverse element** for what a soldier earns as pension, compared with those who retire later.

When did the demand for OROP started?

- From 1950 to 1973, there was a concept known as the Standard Rate of Pension, which was similar to OROP.
- In 1974, when the 3rd Pay Commission came into force, certain changes were effected which was further modified in 4th Pay Commission.
- What ultimately happened was that **the benefits of the successive pay commissions were not passed** to servicemen who had retired earlier.
- Pensions differed for those who had retired at the same rank, with the same years of service, but years apart.
- Ex-servicemen demanded OROP to **correct the discrepancy**. Over the decades, several committees looked into it.
- The Brig **K P Singh Deo committee** in 1983 recommended a system similar to Standard Rate of Pension, as did the Parliamentary Committees on Defence.

What are the financial implication of OROP?

- Meeting the demand was argued to be financially unsustainable because soldiers retire early and remain eligible for pension for much longer than other employees.
- This would enlarge Defence Ministry's pension budget (more than one-fifth of the total defence budget) which will further **impact the Ministry's capital expenditure**.
- The total defence pensioners are 32.9 lakh, but that includes 6.14 lakh defence civilian pensioners.
- The actual expenditure of the Defence Ministry on pensions was Rs 1.18 lakh crore in 2019-2020, Rs 1.28 lakh crore in 2020-2021
- When the late Manohar Parrikar was Defence Minister, it was estimated that a one-time payout of Rs 83,000 crore would be needed to clear all past issues.
- However, every time a new pay commission came, it would **lead to substantial payouts to bring parity**.

What was the concern even after government implementing OROP from 2015?

- Petitioners submitted in Supreme Court that the government had altered the initial definition of OROP and, instead of an automatic revision of the rates of pension, the **revision would now take place at periodic intervals**.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the petitioners, this was arbitrary and unconstitutional under Articles 14 and 21. <p>What was the court's ruling?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The court did not agree with the argument that the government's 2015 policy contradicted the original decision to implement OROP. The court also said that while the Koshiyari Committee report furnishes the historical background of the demand, and its own view on it, it "cannot be construed as embodying a statement of governmental policy". After evaluating the government's policy, it found "no constitutional infirmity in the OROP principle as defined by the government communication dated 7 November 2015". <p>Connecting the dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Armed Police Services Atmanirbhar Bharat
<p>Russia-Ukraine conflict: Role of ICJ</p>	<p>Context: The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia has led to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in Europe since World War II.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russia has sought to justify its "special military operation" as a response to the alleged act of genocide of the Russian speaking people in the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk (eastern part of Ukraine). Ukraine on February 26 approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ), requesting it to hold that no acts of genocide (defined under Genocide Convention, 1948) as claimed by Russia have been committed by Ukraine and also requested the court to direct Russia to "immediately suspend military operations" in Ukraine. The ICJ on March 16, rendered its order directing the Russian federation inter alia to immediately suspend all military operations in Ukraine. <p>Where does the ICJ's jurisdiction lie?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 36(1) of the Statute of the ICJ provides that the ICJ shall have jurisdiction in all matters relating to the UN Charter, or other treaties or conventions in force. The Genocide Convention 1948 under Article IX provides that disputes between states relating to the Convention shall be submitted to the ICJ at the request of any of the parties to the dispute. Russia and Ukraine are both parties to the Genocide Convention. The ICJ held that there exists a prima facie dispute between Ukraine and Russia over the question of whether the acts of genocide have been committed in Ukraine, and accordingly it has the jurisdiction. <p>What do the ICJ's powers to indicate provisional measures entail?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Statute of the International Court of Justice, under Article 41 empowers the ICJ to indicate provisional measures in any case before it in order to preserve the rights of the parties involved. When the ICJ indicates such provisional measures, the parties to the dispute and the UN Security Council have to be notified. Until 2001, there was uncertainty as to whether the provisional measures indicated by the ICJ were binding. However, in the LaGrand (2001) case between Germany and the U.S. relating to the denial of consular access to a German national in the U.S., the ICJ made it clear that provisional measures are binding in character and create international legal obligations. Further, provisional measures may be indicated by the ICJ either on the request of a state party or on its own motion.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ICJ has also held in the Tehran Hostages Case (1980) that the non-appearance of one of the parties concerned cannot itself be an obstacle to indication of provisional measures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the present case, the Russian chose not appear in the oral proceedings before the court. Notwithstanding, the ICJ proceeded to decide the case. <p>Under what conditions can the ICJ's powers be exercised?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The power to indicate provisional measures is subject to certain conditions. In <i>Gambia v. Myanmar</i> (2020) case dealing with genocide of Rohingyas, ICJ held that it may exercise the power to indicate provisional measures only if it is satisfied that rights which are being asserted by the requesting party is "at least plausible". The ICJ in the present case held that Ukraine indeed has a plausible "right of not being subjected to military operations by the Russia." The ICJ expressed doubt regarding the use of unilateral military force against another state for preventing and punishing genocide, as a means under the Genocide Convention 1948. It highlighted that the Genocide Convention provides for other means such as resort to other UN organs, and for peaceful dispute settlement by ICJ. It is important to note here that the ICJ at the stage of provisional measures does not engage in a definitive analysis of whether rights which are claimed by the applicant actually exist. That analysis is for the merits phase. <p>What lies ahead?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provisional measures indicated by the ICJ are binding, and non-compliance certainly entails the breach of an international legal obligation. However, the ICJ does not have the means or mechanism to secure the enforcement of the judgment itself. Indeed, the UN Charter under Article 94(2) provides that if any state fails to perform obligations pursuant to an ICJ decision, the UN Security Council (UNSC) may take measures necessary to give effect to the judgment. However, the possibility in the present case is bleak given that Russia has veto power in the UNSC. Additionally, if there is an impasse in the Security Council, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) is empowered under Article 14 of the UN Charter to recommend measures for the peaceful adjustment of any situation. In <i>Nicaragua v U.S.</i> (1984) when the U.S. refused to comply with the ICJ decision, and the Security Council was deadlocked, the UNGA adopted several resolutions deploring the behaviour of the U.S. Further, the Uniting for Peace Resolution adopted in 1950 by the UNGA in the context of the Korean War, authorises the UNGA to consider any matter which may threaten international peace and security, and to make appropriate recommendations including the use of armed force. Russia's non-participation in the oral proceedings has already reflected its disrespect for international law and international institutions. If Russia does not comply with the provisional measures of the ICJ, the reputational harm to its regime will only be increased. Moreover, non-compliance with provisional measures will legitimise and justify counter-measures against Russia. Interestingly enough, Russia has been kicked out of the Council of Europe with immediate effect on the same day as ICJ's provisional measures were indicated.
<p>On the UN mission in Afghanistan</p>	<p>Context: The U.N. Security Council has approved a robust mandate for its political mission in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover last August.</p> <p>What is the new mandate?</p>

- The new mandate authorizes the **U.N. mission, known as UNAMA**, to promote gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, human rights of all Afghans and an **inclusive and representative government**.
- The Norwegian-drafted resolution was adopted by a vote of 14-0, with **Russia abstaining**.
 - Russia criticized the council for not consulting the host country (Afghanistan) on the U.N. presence, saying that “substantive cooperation” between UNAMA and the Taliban would help the U.N. achieve its objectives.
- The U.N. mission’s mandate also includes coordination and delivery of desperately needed aid.
- The council authorized UNAMA “to facilitate dialogue between all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, the region and the wider international community.”
- Security Council sent a clear message that the UNAMA “has a crucial role to play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and in supporting Afghan people as they face unprecedented challenges and uncertainty.”

What are the present challenges in Afghanistan?

- **Access to education for girls:** With US withdrawal after 20 years of war (2001-2021), Taliban took over the country. Taliban who is in power have denied girls and women rights to education and barred them from public life. The Taliban are now allowing girls to go to elementary school but older girls are still denied education.
- **Restriction on working women:** Barring some sectors such as health care and education, Afghanistan’s vast number of working women are not allowed to go to their workplaces.
- **Intolerance towards minorities:** There are reports of reprisals against former government officials, as well as attacks and intimidation against minority groups and civil society and detentions and enforced disappearances.
- **Fear of supporting extremist group:** The Taliban are yet to demonstrate that extremist groups are no longer able to flourish in the country
- **Power Sharing:** The new Taliban rulers promised an inclusive government. However, the Taliban-appointed Cabinet remains overwhelmingly Pashtun and without women. The Taliban shows no signs of sharing power or respecting the basic rights of Afghans.
- **Economic Crisis:** Before the Taliban takeover, two-thirds of the Afghan government’s expenditure came through donations. As no country has recognised the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan, these donations have dried up since August hampering the government functioning.
- **Mass Starvation:** Only 2% of Afghanistan’s 38 million people have enough food, according to the World Food Programme.
- **Rising Poverty:** Afghanistan’s economy is expected to contract by 30% this year and nearly every Afghan citizen could be living in poverty by mid-2022, according to the UN.
- **Reluctance of International Actors:** The international community is reluctant to step in over fears that the Taliban would use the aid to consolidate their power and resist further demands for reforms.

Way Forward

- International community cannot just look away when Afghans face mass starvation.
- With the fresh mandate, which got the support of almost all the major powers, the UN mission should start engaging the Taliban.
- This does not mean that the member countries should offer quick recognition to the Taliban regime.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They should offer humanitarian assistance to the Afghans in consultations with the Mullahs, while at the same time putting pressure on them to accept at least short-term reforms and take measures to respect basic human rights.
What Quad can learn from NATO's Blunders	<p>Context: The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russian President Putin's version is that it was a "special military operation", akin to India's police action against Hyderabad in 1948. <p>What did the West fail to recognise?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putin has had a dramatic rise in the political hierarchy of Moscow and his first two achievements were ignored by West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stabilisation and increase in oil production and export that hugely increased the Russian GDP, his successful suppression of the Chechnya revolt West was busy with civilianising and militarily downgrading NATO. As Eastern European nations clamoured to join the EU, the western leaders dismantled the military intellectual content of NATO headquarters, reducing NATO forces to a rapid reaction force under the political control of a civilian secretary-general. The West, therefore, failed to connect Putin's invasion of Georgia with his continuing vision to fight the regime change in Ukraine in 2015. <p>What can the Quad learn from NATO?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indo-Pacific is not continental Europe and war in the Indo-Pacific will be a maritime war fought in accordance with maritime strategy and space assets. To call the Quad a "diplomatic grouping" is a similar error that NATO did by civilianising and militarily downgrading post 1991. Confusing Beijing by calling it a diplomatic grouping will certainly lead to a misunderstanding of the Quad nations' resolve and possible Chinese adventurism. <p>What measures are needed to make QUAD more effective?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quad is all about maritime domain awareness, underwater domain awareness, and information sharing — all of them purely naval activities, which need continuous communication. QUAD because of significant role in maritime domain needs a command organisation and a secretariat, neither of which is there because it is a diplomatic grouping. The Quad needs to be represented by the owners of the maritime assets used to obtain domain awareness and a staff with command communications and a depth of intellectual planning. Quad meetings should be headed by naval officers, with diplomatic support, so that they don't produce irrelevant communiqués like the one in February 2022 that spoke of dealing with Covid, climate change and natural disasters.
India-Japan Ties	<p>Context: Japanese PM Fumio Kishida and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks to further strengthen the bilateral ties. Linked by universal values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which have been shared through a long history of exchange, Japan and India are special strategic and global partners, sharing strategic interests. In this milestone year i.e., 2022 (28 April 1952), it marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and India</p> <p>Background</p> <p>Formal relations between Japan and India began in 1952. After the Second World War, instead of signing the multilateral San Francisco Peace Treaty, India opted for concluding a bilateral peace treaty with Japan, considering that honour and equality should be ensured for Japan to rejoin the international community. This is the cornerstone of our long-standing friendship. But even before the establishment of diplomatic relations, the goodwill between the people of the two countries was deeply rooted through business, academic and cultural exchanges. In 1951, when India hosted the first Asian Games in New Delhi, it invited Japanese</p>

athletes. This was one of the first occasions where the Japanese flag was hoisted after WWII. This experience soothed the minds of Japanese people who were struggling to rebuild their country. After 70 years of multi-layered exchanges, the relationship between our two countries grew into a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership”.

Relations between the two countries

Strategic Components

- Convergence on free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific,
- Progress in defence and security and in regional context.
- India and Japan signed a **Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Agreement (RPSS)**.
- The inaugural **2+2 ministerial meeting** was held in November 2019.
- **Act East Forum:** A decision was taken in the 2017 Summit to establish the India-Japan Act East Forum. The objective is to coordinate developmental projects in North-East India in areas of connectivity, forest management, disaster risk reduction and capacity building.
- Several projects including upgradation of highways in Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram are underway. The PM had last year laid the foundation stone of a 20 km-long bridge over the Brahmaputra River between Assam and Meghalaya.
- **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)** – The Trade and Economy Ministers of India, Japan and Australia launched the (SCRI) on 27 April 2021. The initiative seeks to enhance the resilience of supply chains in the Indo-Pacific Region and to develop dependable sources of supply and to attract investment. As initial projects (i) sharing of best practices on supply chain resilience; and (ii) holding of a matching event have been completed.

Economic Components

The two countries have achieved the target of 3.5 trillion Japanese Yen in public and private investments in India.

- Today, there are 1,455 Japanese companies in India. Eleven Japan Industrial Townships (JIT) have been established, with Neemrana in Rajasthan and Sri City in Andhra Pradesh having the maximum number of companies.
- Japan is the 5th largest source of FDI; largest supplier of ODA (development partner of India)
- Several infrastructure projects are underway through Japanese assistance including Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail, Dedicated Freight Corridor, metro projects, DMIC etc
- Last year, PM Modi inaugurated the Varanasi Convention Centre (Rudraksh), while the then PM Yoshihide Suga sent a video message.
- The two sides had signed a Digital Partnership in October 2018. Collaboration in startups has emerged as a vibrant aspect under this Partnership. Till date Indian startups have raised more than USD 10 billion from Japanese VCs. India and Japan have also launched a private sector driven fund-of-funds to invest in technology startups in India which has raised USD 100 million so far.
- Both countries also have cooperation in the field of ICT, in areas such as 5G, under-sea cables, telecom and network security. A workshop on 5G was also held.
- Progress has also been made in the area of skill development. The total number of Japan-India Institutes of Manufacturing (JIM) now stands at 19 (it was 8 in 2018). These institutes are established by Japanese companies based in India for training skilled workers. Japanese companies have also set up 7 Japanese Endowed Courses (JEC) at various colleges.
- 220 Indian youth are placed in Japan as interns under Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP). Last year India had also signed a Specified Skilled Workers Agreement. The Japanese side has since January this year started examinations for nursing care under this programme.

	<p>During the summit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong language against Pakistan for terror attacks: On terrorism, the two leaders reiterated “condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks, and called upon Pakistan to take resolute and irreversible action against terrorist networks operating out of its territory and comply fully with international commitments, including to FATF” ● Humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan: Expressed “their intention to collaborate closely to realise peace and stability in Afghanistan, and stressed the importance of addressing the humanitarian crisis, promoting human rights and ensuring establishment of a truly representative and inclusive political system”. They also referred to the UNSC Resolution that unequivocally demands that “Afghan territory not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts”. ● Nuclear non-proliferation: Since Kishida is from Hiroshima, he “stressed the importance of early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)”. This is significant since Kishida represents the constituency in the Japanese parliament. ● Pact on cooperation in 5G, cyber security: Discussed “India-Japan Digital Partnership” with a view to enhancing the digital economy through promotion of joint projects for digital transformation and collaboration in the area of IoT, AI and other emerging technologies. ● Development in North East: Have decided to launch a “Sustainable Development Initiative for the North Eastern Region of India”, which includes both ongoing projects and possible future cooperation in connectivity, healthcare, new and renewable energy, as well as initiative for strengthening bamboo value chain. ● Import of Japanese apples and export of Indian mangoes: Flagged India’s approval to imports of Japanese apples and relaxation in procedures for Indian mango exports to Japan. <p>Announcement: A clean energy partnership was launched with an objective to encourage manufacturing in India, creation of resilient and trustworthy supply chains in these areas as well as fostering collaboration in R&D. It will be implemented through the existing mechanism of Energy Dialogue.</p> <p>The enormous possibilities that exists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plethora of fields to cooperate in, security issues including cyber security, outer space and economic security. ● Our economic relations can be further augmented: For long, Japan has been the largest ODA (Official Development Assistance) donor to India. One of the most recent and ongoing examples of our collaboration is the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project. Japan is also one of the largest investors in India. Both countries have also promoted economic cooperation in other countries to enhance social infrastructure and connectivity. Our economic partnership can further strengthen the economy of the Indo-Pacific, as well as the world economy. ● Cultural exchanges including literature, movies, music, sports and academics are essential for our relations, enabling a better understanding. <p>Can you answer the following questions?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indo-Japan relations have achieved greater strategic heights in recent years. Do you agree? Discuss. 2. Japan has not only been a trusted partner in India’s journey towards economic strength but has also emerged as a critical strategic ally. Do you agree? Critically examine.
<p>India and Israel, the maturing of a steady relationship</p>	<p>Context: Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett will visit India starting April 2 to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Israel opened its embassy in New Delhi on February 1, 1992. The Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv opened on May 15, 1992.

History of India-Israel relationship

- India had recognised Israel as far back as 1950 but normalisation took another four decades.
- India was reluctant about its ties with Israel as
 - India balanced this with its historical support for the Palestinian cause,
 - India's dependence on the Arab world for oil,
 - Pro-Palestinian sentiments of the country's Muslim citizens.
- From 1992, the relationship took a different role where there were defence deals, and co-operation in science, technology and agriculture
- The first high-level visits took place only after the NDA-1 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took office. In 2000, L K Advani became the first Indian minister to visit Israel. That year, the two countries set up a **joint anti-terror commission**.
- In 2003, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.
- PM Modi's visit to Israel in 2017 was the first by an Indian Prime Minister, and with that, he took **full ownership of a relationship** that had mostly grown under the radar for over a quarter century.
- With the **2020 Abrahamic Accords** that saw the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco normalising relations with Israel, and India's own newly strengthened ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, India is now more confident about its key relationships in West Asia than at any other time.

How has India's relationship with Palestine evolved over the years?

- Earlier, the relationship with Palestine was almost an **article of faith** in Indian foreign policy for over four decades.
- India **backed the Palestinian right to self-determination** and rallied behind the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its leader Yasser Arafat
- In 1975, India invited PLO to open an office in Delhi, giving it diplomatic status five years later.
- In 1988, when the PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, **India granted recognition** immediately.
- During the UPA's 10 years in office, Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority that administers the West Bank, visited four times — in 2005, 2008, 2010, and 2012.
- India voted for Palestine to become a **full member of UNESCO** in 2011.
- In 2012, India co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a **"non-member" observer state at the UN** without voting rights.
- India also supported the **installation of the Palestinian flag** on the UN premises in September 2015, a year after Modi became Prime Minister.
- In 2021 UN Security Council discussion on the **Israel-Palestine violence** India's statement virtually held Israel responsible for the violence, and expressed India's "strong" support to the "just Palestinian cause" and "unwavering" support for the two-state solution.
- At the UNHRC's 46th session in Geneva earlier in 2021, India voted against Israel in three resolutions –
 - on the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people;
 - on Israeli settlement policy; and
 - on the human rights situation in the Golan Heights.

Has there been any shift in India-Palestine relationship?

- The growing relationship between India and Israel has **eroded** what once used to be New Delhi's unequivocal support for the Palestinian cause
- The first big shift in India's policy came during the visit of Mahmoud Abbas in 2017 when India in a statement dropped the customary line in support of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When Modi visited Israel, his itinerary did not include Ramallah, as had been the practice by other visiting dignitaries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> But the balancing act continued. Modi made a separate visit to Ramallah in February 2018, and called for an independent Palestinian state. <p>Conclusion India continues to walk a tightrope between its historical ties with Palestine and its more recent affection for Israel.</p>
<p>Sri Lanka's aggravating Economic Crisis</p>	<p>Context: Sri Lanka is in the grips of one of its worst economic meltdowns in history.</p> <p>Why factors have led to the crisis?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pandemic led to job losses and reduced incomes. All key foreign exchange earning sectors, such as exports and remittances, along with tourism, were brutally hit. Declining Foreign Reserves: Fears of a sovereign default rose by the end of 2021, with the country's foreign reserves decreasing to \$1.6 billion. But Sri Lanka managed to keep its unblemished foreign debt servicing record. Government Inaction: The lack of a comprehensive strategy to respond to the crisis then, coupled with certain policy decisions— including the government's abrupt switch to organic farming —widely deemed “ill-advised”, further aggravated the problem. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In August 2021, the government declared emergency regulations for the distribution of essential food items along with import restrictions to save dollars. However, these measures led to market irregularities, and hoarding. <p>What is happening on the ground?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falling Currency: The Sri Lankan rupee, that authorities floated this month, has fallen to nearly 265 against the U.S. dollar. Consumer Price inflation is at 16.8% Spiralling Debt: Sri Lanka must repay foreign debt totalling nearly \$7 billion this year and continue importing essentials from its dwindling dollar account. Trade deficit: President Rajapaksa said Sri Lanka will incur an import bill of \$22 billion this year, resulting in a trade deficit of \$10 billion. For citizens, the life has become difficult <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are long queues to buy fuel Price of cooking gas spiked to LKR 4,199 (roughly ₹1,150) and price of the widely used milk powder shot up by LKR 600 a kg, translating to cutting down on consumption of these products. Prolonged power cuts in many localities. Struggles to find medicines for patients. Due to a shortage of paper, authorities were forced to cancel school examinations for millions of students. <p>Is there resistance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, both citizens and different segments of the political opposition are taking to the streets, demanding that President Rajapaksa resign. Many media houses are criticising the government, while social media pages are rife with sharp commentary on the government. <p>What is the government's response?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sri Lankan Government tried to deflect the criticism by pointing towards the distress caused by Pandemic hiding its own mishandling of the deteriorating situation. Government was initially reluctant to seek support of IMF to tide over the crisis but now the government is in talks with the IMF. It remains to be seen how the IMF will support Sri Lanka at this juncture, and to what extent its support might help the country cope with the crisis.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sri Lankan government has also sought support from various bilateral partners, including India, by way of loans, currency swaps, and credit lines for import of essentials. <p>How is India helping?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning January 2022, India has extended assistance totalling \$ 2.4 billion — including an <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$400 million RBI currency swap ○ \$500 million loan deferment ○ Credit lines for importing food, fuel, and medicines. Of this, a billion-dollar credit line was finalised recently. • Meanwhile, China is considering Sri Lanka's recent request for further \$2.5 billion assistance, in addition to the \$2.8 billion Beijing has extended since the outbreak of the pandemic. <p>How is India's assistance being viewed in Sri Lanka?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing scepticism: The leadership has thanked India for the timely assistance, but there is growing scepticism in Sri Lankan media and some sections, over Indian assistance “being tied” to India inking key infrastructure projects in country like — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm project ○ National Thermal Power Corporation's recent agreement with Ceylon Electricity Board to set up a solar power plant in Sampur, in Sri Lanka's eastern Trincomalee district ○ Two renewable energy projects in northern Sri Lanka, with investment from India's Adani Group. The political opposition has accused the Adani Group of entering Sri Lanka through the “back door”, avoiding competitive bids and due process. • There are also criticisms that India was resorting to “diplomatic blackmail” to increase its footprint in the island nation. Cartoonists have depicted Sri Lankan leaders trading crucial energy projects for emergency financial assistance from India.
<p>EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA)</p>	<p>Context: Negotiators from the European Parliament and EU member states have agreed on a landmark law (DMA) to curb the market dominance of Big tech giants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legislation has not passed. A finalized version is yet to be officially adopted by the European Parliament and the 27 countries that make up the EU. • The rules could come into place starting on January 1, 2023, though tech companies are asking for more time to implement the law. <p>Who are the targets of the DMA?</p> <p>The DMA's focus is on companies termed as ‘gatekeepers’, which include Apple, Facebook, Google, etc. These companies will have to comply with the new rules. Following are the metrics used to identify ‘gatekeeper’ companies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant Role in Digital Ecosystem: The reason the law refers to these companies as gatekeepers is that they often control distribution, whether it is for apps or ads on the platform, or even communication. • Revenue & Valuation: A company will be termed as a gatekeeper if it has an annual turnover of at least €7.5 billion within the EU in the past three years, or a market valuation of at least €75 billion. • User Base: Any player with over 45 million monthly end-users, and at least 10,000 business users established in the EU, also qualifies as a gatekeeper. • Exemption: Small and medium enterprises are exempt from being identified as gatekeepers. • Platform Services: The Company must also control one or more core platform services in at least three EU states. These services include marketplaces and app

stores, search engines, social networking, cloud services, advertising services, voice assistants, and web browsers.

- **A category of 'emerging gatekeeper'** has been identified, aimed at "companies whose competitive position is proven but not yet sustainable".
- Even if the list of Gatekeepers has not been released yet, the "Big Tech" - GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) - are likely to be the main subjects of the act, but not the only ones.

What are the DMA's Proposals?

- **Pre-loaded apps:** It crack down on pre-installed apps, common in Apple, Google and others. Users will have the right to choose and install their apps. So, future iPhones might not come with Safari, or even iMessage or Siri, pre-loaded.
- **Interoperability in messaging services:** This could mean that a user on WhatsApp and one on iMessage should be able to talk to each other.
 - Large internet companies are often criticized for operating "walled gardens," closed systems that make it harder for a user to ditch one provider for another.
- **Third-party app stores:** Gatekeepers must allow the installation and effective use of third party apps & app stores, even while they can take "proportionate measures" for security.
 - Companies like Apple have for long opposed third-party app stores citing security as the reason.
- **Fair access to developers:** The EU wants app developers to get fair access to supplementary functionalities of smartphones, for example the Near Field Communications chip.
 - Also, gatekeepers cannot establish unfair conditions for business users or require app developers to use certain services (e.g. payment systems or identity providers) in order to be listed in app stores.
 - App developers such as Epic Games, Spotify, etc. have long accused Google and Apple of holding them hostage to their payment systems.
- **Transparency in Ad Performance data:** Gatekeepers will have to give sellers access to their marketing or ad performance data on the platform.
- **Mergers & Acquisitions:** The gatekeepers will have to inform the European Commission of their acquisitions and mergers. This is significant because big players tend to buy out some of their upcoming competition.
- **Fairness in ranking:** The new rules also forbid the gatekeepers from ranking their own products or services higher than others, and from reusing private data collected during a service for the purposes of another service.
 - The new law will prevent these giants from using the data generated on their site by business customers to better compete with them, as Amazon has been accused of doing.
- **Penal Provision:** Violators can be fined up to 10% of the company's global annual sales for an initial breach of the law, rising to 20% for repeated infringements. In worst case scenarios, they could even be banned from any further acquisitions

What is the significance of DMA?

- The law makes the digital sector fairer and more competitive in the EU market.
- It helps prevent abusive business practices of large platforms and is compared to historic antitrust reforms to the banking, energy and telecom sectors.
- It widens consumer choices.
- It gives rivals a better chance to survive against the world's powerful tech companies
- Once implemented it sets a new precedent for tech regulation worldwide.
- It averts years of procedures and court battles needed by EU to punish Big Tech's monopolistic behaviour where cases can end with huge fines, but little change on how these giants do business.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The law will give Brussels unprecedented authority to keep an eye on decisions by the giants <p>Conclusion</p> <p>Tech companies have alleged that some of the rules can create unnecessary privacy and security vulnerabilities for their users.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the act is a step in the right direction.</p>
Sri Lanka's economic crisis	<p>Context: The Sri Lankan economy has been facing a crisis owing to a serious balance of payments (BoP) problem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Its foreign exchange reserves are depleting rapidly and is becoming increasingly difficult to import essential consumption goods. The country is also unable to repay past debts. <p>What are the causes of the current crisis?</p> <p>1. Historical imbalances in the economic structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even in the 21st century, Sri Lanka's economic fortunes continued to be tied to the export of primary commodities such as tea and rubber, and garments. It mobilised foreign exchange reserves through primary commodity exports, tourism and remittances, and used it to import essential consumption items including food. <p>2. Slowdown much before the Pandemic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly because of pent-up demand, Sri Lanka's post-war GDP growth was reasonably high at 8-9% per annum between 2009 and 2012. However, the economy was on a downward spiral after 2013 as global commodity prices fell, exports slowed down and imports rose. The average GDP growth rate almost halved after 2013. <p>3. Continuing drain of foreign exchange reserves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the period of the war, budget deficits were high. The 2008 global financial crisis of 2008 had led to flight of capital further draining Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves. It was in this context that the government obtained \$2.6 billion loan from IMF loan in 2009 with the conditionality that budget deficits would be reduced to 5% of the GDP by 2011. This commitment tied the hands of the government to go for counter-cyclical fiscal policy when economy slowed down after 2013. <p>4. IMF's loan-related conditionalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With no pick-up in growth or exports, and the continuing drain of foreign exchange reserves, the government approached the IMF in 2016 for another US\$1.5 billion loan for a three-year period between 2016 and 2019. The IMF's conditionality was that the fiscal deficit must be reduced to 3.5% by 2020. Other conditionalities included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a reform of the tax policy and tax administration; control of expenditures; commercialisation of public enterprises; flexibility in exchange rates; a free environment for foreign investment. The IMF package led to a deterioration of Sri Lanka's economic health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GDP growth rates shrank from 5% in 2015 to 2.9% in 2019. Investment rate fell from 31.2% in 2015 to 26.8% in 2019. Gross government debt rose from 78.5% of the GDP in 2015 to 86.8% of the GDP in 2019. <p>5. New Shocks to the Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First, the Easter bomb blasts of April 2019 in churches in Colombo led to the death of 253 people. Consequently, the number of tourists fell sharply leading to a decline in foreign exchange reserves.

- The new government which came to power in Nov 2019 went for **lower taxes** as was promised in their election campaign. VAT rates were reduced from 15% to 8%. The nation building tax, the PAYE tax and the economic service charges were abolished.
- As a result of this policy, close to 2% of the GDP was lost in taxes thus foregone. GST/VAT revenues were halved between 2019 and 2020.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic** in 2020 made the bad situation worse. Exports of tea, rubber, spices and garments suffered. Tourism arrivals and revenues fell further.
- The pandemic also necessitated a **rise in government expenditures**: the fiscal deficit exceeded 10% in 2020 and 2021, and the ratio of public debt to GDP rose from 94% in 2019 to 119% in 2021.

6. Misguided policies: Chemical Fertilizer ban

- Sri Lanka annually spent about \$260 million (or about 0.3% of its GDP) on fertiliser subsidies. Most of the fertilisers are imported.
- To prevent the drain of foreign exchange reserves, the government came up with a bizarre solution in 2021 to ban all fertiliser imports from May 2021, and declared that Sri Lanka would overnight become a **100% organic farming nation**.
- This policy, which was withdrawn in November 2021 after protests by farmers, literally pushed Sri Lanka to the brink of a disaster.
- However, this policy **adversely impacted the agricultural yields** leading to fall in agricultural production necessitating the import of foods.
- But increasing imports was difficult in the face of foreign exchange shortages. Thus, **inflation rose** to 17.5% in February 2022.
- Also, a fall in the productivity of tea and rubber led to lower export incomes. And thus, the organic farming policy, which aimed to soften the pressure on reserves, ended up straining them even further.

Conclusion

- The government might approach the IMF once again for a new loan with fresh conditionalities. With the global outlook appearing dim, a renewed push to such a deflationary policy would not just limit the prospects of economic revival, but also exacerbate the sufferings of the Sri Lankan people.

Connecting the dots

- India's 1991 BOP Crisis
- 2008 Global Financial Crisis

Q.1 Consider the following statements regarding Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):

1. It is an international body set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
2. Membership of the IPCC is open to all members of the WMO and the UNEP.

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.2 Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) comes under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Electronics & IT ministry
- b) Finance Ministry
- c) Defence Ministry
- d) Home Affairs Ministry

Q.3 Karakattam dance is folk dance of which of the following state?

- a) Karnataka
- b) Kerala
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Telangana

Q.4 Consider the following statements regarding waifs:

1. It typically involves donating a building, plot of land or other assets for Muslim religious or charitable purposes with no intention of reclaiming the assets.
2. India also has a Central Waqf Council to advise the government "on matters concerning the working of boards and the due administration of waqfs."

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.5 Which of the following is Covid-19 vaccine indigenously developed by India?

- a) Covishield
- b) Covaxin
- c) Sputnik-V
- d) None of the above

Q.6 Operation Ganga is associated with which of the following?

- a) To help fleeing Hindus and Sikhs from Afghanistan.
- b) For flushing out militants from specially Kashmir region of Jammu and Kashmir
- c) Hot pursuit of Naga terror outfit NSCN-Khaplang along the India-Myanmar border by the Indian Army.
- d) To rescue Indians from Ukraine

Q.7 Consider the following statements regarding:

1. India's trade deficit is decreasing over the past few years.
2. A trade deficit is an economic measure of international trade in which a country's imports exceeds its exports.

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.8 'Battle of Saraighat' was fought between Which of the following?

- a) Mughals and Rajputs
- b) Rajputs and Ahoms
- c) Mughals and Ahoms
- d) Rajputs and Marathas

Q.9 3D printing has applications in which of the following?

- a) Medical devices
- b) Industrial art and jewellery
- c) Construction
- d) All of the above

Q.10 Consider the following statements regarding Jal Jeevan Mission:

1. It is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.
2. It comes under the Ministry of Rural Development.

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.11 Semiconductors are useful in which of the following?

- a) Automobiles
- b) Mobile phones
- c) Consumer electronics.
- d) All of the above

Q.12 Where is the largest nuclear plant of Europe located?

- a) Russia
- b) France
- c) Ukraine
- d) Poland

Q.13 Consider the following statements regarding National Stock Exchange of India:

1. It is managed under the Ministry of Finance.
2. It is the leading stock exchange of India, located in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.16 Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Scheme comes under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Labour and Employment
- b) Ministry of Rural development
- c) Ministry of Social Justice
- d) Ministry of MSME

Q.17 "SAMARTH" initiative was recently launched by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Rural development
- b) Ministry of Labour and Employment
- c) Ministry of MSME
- d) Ministry of Social Justice

Q.18 SLINEX military exercise is carried out between which of the following countries?

- a) Sri Lanka and Thailand
- b) Australia and Japan
- c) Sri Lanka and India
- d) Australia and India

Q.19 Which of the following is not a member of NATO?

- a) France
- b) Italy
- c) Montenegro
- d) Russia

Q.14 Which of the following is the use of Reconnaissance satellite?

- a) Provides warning of an attack by detecting ballistic missile launches.
- b) Detects nuclear detonation from space.
- c) Optical imaging where Satellite images can be a survey or close-look telephoto.
- d) All of the above

Q.15 Which of the following is not true about HANSA-New Generation?

- a) It is the first-of-its-kind indigenous aircraft trainer of India.
- b) It is reportedly one of the most advanced flying trainers.
- c) The aircraft is designed to meet the need of flying clubs in India for trainer aircraft.
- d) It is an ideal aircraft for commercial pilot licensing due to its high cost and high fuel consumption.

Q.20 Which of the following is the IUCN status of Northern River Terrapin?

- a) Extinct
- b) Critically endangered
- c) Vulnerable
- d) Threatened

Q.21 BBIN initiative includes which of the following countries?

- a) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India
- b) Bangladesh, Brazil, Nepal and India
- c) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Netherlands and India
- d) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Indonesia

Q.22 Consider the following statements regarding National Land Monetisation Corporation (NLMC):

1. NLMC will be headed by a chairman who will be selected through a merit-based selection process.
2. The NLMC will undertake monetisation of surplus land and building assets of Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) and government agencies.

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 WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in India was recently established which is going to be the first and only global outpost Centre (office) for traditional medicine across the globe. Where was this centre established?

- a) Mumbai
- b) Jamnagar
- c) Bhopal
- d) Bhubaneswar

Q.24 Mr. Deepak Dhar is the first Indian to be selected for Boltzmann medal. Boltzmann medal is associated with which of the following?

- a) Aeronautics
- b) Gene therapy
- c) Statistical physics
- d) Biochemistry

Q.25 Consider the following statements regarding National Medical Commission (NMC):

1. National Medical Commission (NMC) is an Indian regulatory body of 33 members which regulates medical education and medical professionals.
2. It replaced the Medical Council of India on 25 September, 1995.

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.26 Exercise DHARMA GUARDIAN-2022 was conducted between which of the following?

- a) India and Nepal
- b) India and Maldives
- c) India and Japan
- d) India and Vietnam

Q.27 Weddell Sea is part of the which of the following ocean?

- a) Atlantic Ocean
- b) Indian Ocean
- c) Southern Ocean
- d) Arctic Ocean

Q.28 Consider the following statements regarding Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC):

1. It is a disarmament treaty that effectively bans biological and toxin weapons by prohibiting their development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use.

2. The BWC was the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban the production of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

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.29 Where is Pangong Tso lake located?

- a) Nepal
- b) Tibet
- c) Ladakh
- d) Jammu

Q.30 Which of the following is known as the 'lungs of the planet'?

- a) Congo rain forest
- b) Savanna grasslands
- c) Amazon rainforest
- d) Rain forests of North-East India

Q.31 Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):

1. It is being run under the Ministry of Health.
2. Janaushadhi Sugam, a mobile application for PMBJP facilitates the public by providing a digital platform at the tip of their fingers.

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.32 Which of the following is Asia's largest and world's second largest lagoon?

- a) Ashtamudi Lake
- b) Chilika Lake
- c) Wular Lake
- d) Loktak Lake

Q.33 Which of the following is not correct regarding White phosphorus?

- a) It is pyrophoric
- b) It burns fiercely
- c) It can ignite cloth, fuel, and ammunition
- d) None of the above

Q.34 Consider the following statements regarding Microfinance institutions:

1. Microfinance offers a solution to small business owners, who do not have access to banking and associated services.
2. They do charge interest on loans but the interest rate is lower than that charged by most banks in the country.

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.35 The river on which the reservoir for Indira Gandhi Canal has been built is

- a) Ravi
- b) Luni
- c) Jhelum
- d) Sutlej

Q.36 PM-DevINE scheme deals with which of the following?

- a) Development Initiative for pilgrimage sites of India
- b) Development Initiative for North-East
- c) Development Initiative for spiritual centers in India
- d) None of the above

Q.37 Consider the following statements regarding Digital Currency:

1. It is a payment method which exists only in electronic form and is not tangible.
2. It can be transferred between entities or users with the help of technology like computers, smartphones and the internet.

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.38 Which of the following is not a member of G7?

- a) Italy
- b) Canada
- c) France
- d) Russia

Q.39 India's first arbitration centre for alternative dispute resolution in which of the following city of India?

- a) Hyderabad
- b) Kochi
- c) Gorakhpur

- d) Mumbai

Q.40 Consider the following statements regarding Electric Vehicles (EVs):

1. An electric vehicle uses one or more electric motors or traction motors for propulsion.
2. An electric vehicle may be powered through a self-contained battery, solar panels or an electric generator to convert fuel to electricity.

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.41 Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G) comes under which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Rural development
- b) Ministry of Housing
- c) Ministry of social justice
- d) Ministry of Environment

Q.42 Consider the following statements regarding no-fly zone:

1. A no-fly zone is an area established by a military power over which unauthorized aircrafts are not allowed to fly.
2. No-fly zones are permitted only in the military context.

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.43 Consider the following statements :

1. A credit facility allows the borrowing party to take out money over an extended period of time rather than reapplying for a loan each time it needs money.
2. Under Line of Credit (LOC), the borrower can take money out as needed until the limit is reached, and as money is repaid, it can be borrowed again in the case of an open line of credit.

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.44 International Migration Outlook report is released by which of the following organisation?

- a) IMF
- b) WHO
- c) OECD
- d) WEF

Q.45 Consider the following statements:

1. The Mars rover, named Rosalind Franklin, was assembled in the UK for a planned launch onboard a Russian rocket.
2. Rosalind Franklin is the second stage of the joint European-Russian mission.

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.46 Consider the following statements regarding National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) :

1. It is a constitutional body.
2. It consists of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and 3 other Members who are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.47 Deep ocean mission (DOM) is being carried out by which of the following Ministry?

- a) Ministry of Earth Sciences
- b) Ministry of Science and technology
- c) Ministry of Jal shakti
- d) None of the above

Q.48 IUCN status of Himalayan griffon is

- a) Vulnerable
- b) Threatened
- c) Near Threatened
- d) Extinct

Q.49 Consider the following statements regarding Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) :

1. It is the largest trade bloc in history.
2. It includes China, Japan, South Korea, USA and New Zealand and 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as its members.

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.50 Which of the following is not true?

- a) The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 provides registration and also protection of GI goods in India.
- b) The Geographical Indications Registry for India is located in Delhi.
- c) A registered GI tag prohibits a third party to use such products.
- d) GI is a collective intellectual property right and is thus owned by all the producers within the defined GI territory.

Q.51 Which of the following is not a member of Arctic Council?

- a) Canada
- b) Denmark
- c) Finland
- d) Austria

Q.52 Consider the following statements regarding New India Literacy Programme (NILP) :

1. It includes Involvement of school students, pre-service students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), school teachers, Anganwadi and ASHA workers, NYKS, NSS, NCC volunteers
2. School will be a unit for implementation of the scheme.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.53 Which of the following is not true about Padma Awards?

- a) It was instituted in 1954.
- b) All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards.
- c) The awards are presented by the Prime Minister of India.
- d) The Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year.

Q.54 The principle of neutrality under 'Finlandization' was rooted in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance that Finland signed with which of the following in April 1948?

- a) USSR
- b) Germany
- c) USA
- d) Britain

Q.55 Consider the following statements regarding Hypersonic missile:

1. A hypersonic missile is a weapon system which flies at least at the speed of Mach 5 i.e. five times the speed of sound.
2. Unlike ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles do not follow a ballistic trajectory and can be manoeuvred to the intended target.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.56 Which of the following is not true regarding Minimum Support Price (MSP)?

- a) MSP is price fixed to protect the farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years.
- b) The MSPs are announced by the Governments of India at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- c) Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for raw Jute.
- d) Recently, MSP was increased for raw Jute.

Q.57 Tuberculosis is caused by which of the following type of microorganism?

- a) Fungus
- b) Virus
- c) Protozoa
- d) Bacteria

58. Who is the winner of 2022 Abel Prize?

- a) Dennis P. Sullivan
- b) Hillel Furstenberg
- c) Gregory Margulis
- d) Andrew Wiles

59. When was the first caste-based Census conducted in India?

- a) 2011
- b) 2021
- c) 1931
- d) 1881

60. Which article of the Constitution states that it shall be the duty of the centre to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance?

- a) Article 235
- b) Article 72
- c) Article 355
- d) Article 263

Q.61 Consider the following statements regarding Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):

1. It comes under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
2. CBI is exempted from the provisions of the Right to Information Act.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.62 Which of the following country does not have Intercontinental ballistic missile?

- a) France
- b) Russia
- c) India
- d) Pakistan

Q.63 Solomon Islands is located in which of the following ocean?

- a) Pacific Ocean
- b) Atlantic Ocean
- c) Indian Ocean
- d) Arctic Ocean

Q.64 Consider the following statements regarding Non Resident Indian:

1. According to India's Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA), NRI is an Indian citizen or Foreign National of Indian Origin residing outside India for purposes of employment, carrying on business or vocation in circumstances that would indicate an intention to stay outside India for an indefinite period.

2. Visiting NRIs whose total income in India is up to Rs. 15 lakh during the financial year will continue to remain NRIs if the stay does not exceed 181 days.

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.65 Export Preparedness Index is released by which of the following?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- d) All of the above

Q.66 President's Colour is awarded for which of the following?

- a) Excellent track record in academics
- b) For showing extraordinary bravery at the time of crisis
- c) A military unit rendering exceptional service to the nation, both in peace and in war
- d) Exemplary Social service

Q.67 Consider the following statements regarding Space Economy:

- 1. The Space Economy is composed of industries including rocket and satellite manufacturers, telecommunications, climate change researchers, etc. that create the trillion dollar ecosystem in space to make modern day, digital life possible.
- 2. By the end of the next decade, the Space Economy will be valued at more than \$4 Trillion Dollars.

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.68 Which of the following is not a member of BIMSTEC?

- a) India
- b) Pakistan
- c) Bhutan
- d) Sri Lanka

Q.69 The first and only Global Centre for traditional medicine across the globe is located in which of the following country?

- a) USA
- b) Germany
- c) Nepal
- d) India

Q.70 Consider the following statements:

- 1. More than 60% of the world's elephant population is in India.
- 2. IUCN Red List Status of Asian elephant is Endangered.

Which of the above is or are correct?

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

Q.71 Darlong community belongs to which of the following state of India?

- a) Assam
- b) Arunachal Pradesh
- c) Tripura
- d) Mizoram

Q.72 Zojila tunnel is being constructed between which of the following areas/regions?

- a) Srinagar and Leh
- b) Meerut and Chopta
- c) Jammu and Kashmir
- d) Kashmir and Leh

Q.73 Consider the following statements regarding Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros

- 1. It is the largest of the rhino species.
- 2. India is home to the largest number of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros in the world.

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.74 Which of the following state of India does not share boundary with Assam?

- a) Tripura
- b) Arunachal Pradesh
- c) Sikkim
- d) Mizoram

Q.75 Which of the following is not a part of G7 group?

- a) Canada
- b) China

- c) France
- d) Germany

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.76 Consider the following statements regarding Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS):

1. The IONS is a voluntary and inclusive initiative that brings together navies of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states to increase maritime co-operation and enhance regional security.
2. IONS includes 24 member nations that touch or lie within the IOR, and 8 observer nations.

Which of the above is or are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

Q.77 Unified Payments Interface (UPI) was launched by which of the following?

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) National Payments Corporation of India(NPCI)
- c) Ministry of Finance
- d) None of the above

Q.78 Where is Sariska Tiger Reserve located?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Assam
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Delhi

MCQs ANSWER

1 C	27 C	53 C
2 A	28 C	54 A
3 B	29 C	55 C
4 C	30 C	56 C
5 B	31 B	57 D
6 D	32 B	58 A
7 C	33 D	59 C
8 C	34 C	60 C
9 D	35 D	61 C
10 A	36 B	62 D
11 D	37 C	63 A
12 C	38 D	64 C
13 B	39 A	65 A
14 D	40 C	66 C
15 D	41 A	67 C
16 A	42 A	68 B
17 C	43 C	69 D
18 C	44 C	70 C
19 D	45 C	71 C
20 B	46 C	72 A
21 A	47 A	73 C
22 C	48 C	74 C
23 B	49 C	75 B
24 C	50 B	76 C
25 A	51 D	77 B
26 C	52 C	78 A



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