

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

FEBRUARY WEEK 1



**ONE NATION
ONE RATION
CARD**

By Government Of India



February (Week 1)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

The Matuas

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Matua community in West Bengal are upset about the cancellation of a rally Union Home Minister Amit Shah was scheduled to address. The two-day visit to Bengal was called off in view of a blast outside the Israel Embassy in Delhi.*

The Matuas

- The Matua community has members on either side of the Bengal border. It is associated with a religious movement begun in the 1870s by Harichand Thakur of a Namasudra (SC) family, who hailed from Safaldanga in East Bengal.
- In the early 20th century, his son Guruchand organised the movement socially and politically. In 1915, the Matua Federation was established; Guruchand's grandson barrister Pramath Ranjan Thakur led it in the 1930s.
- Peasant members of the community started migrating from East Bengal in droves after 1950, which continued after the formation of Bangladesh. Today, Matuas constitute the second largest SC population of West Bengal.
- Mostly concentrated in North and South 24-Parganas, they also have a presence in other border districts such as Nadia, Howrah, Cooch Behar, and Malda. Government sources put their number at around 17% of the state's electorate; Matua leaders estimate themselves at around 20% and say they can directly influence the results in 40-45 of the 294 Assembly seats, and indirectly in another 30.
- Just before Partition, P R Thakur joined the Congress, but left in 1984 and worked to reorganise the Matua Federation, primarily as a religious-social organisation outside of institutional politics.

Chauri Chaura

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context *Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Chauri Chaura Centenary Celebrations by video link, and will release a postage stamp to mark the centenary of the event. The UP government has planned a year of celebrations through February 4, 2022 in all 75 districts of the state. Chauri Chaura — whose name derives from that of two villages — is a town in Gorakhpur district, about halfway between Gorakhpur and Deoria. It has a small railway station, which initially put Chauri Chaura on the map. The town was the scene of a violent incident with far-reaching consequences during the freedom struggle a century ago.*

The incident

- On February 4, 1922, a large crowd of peasants set on fire the police station in Chauri Chaura, killing 22 policemen. According to Shahid Amin's *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, the best known historical reconstruction of the incident and its aftermath, this is what happened:



- On August 1, 1920, Gandhi had launched the Non-Cooperation (Asahayog) Movement against the government, which involved a boycott of foreign goods, especially machine-made cloth, and legal, educational and administrative institutions, “refusing to assist a ruler who misrules”. As the movement gathered momentum over the next year and a half, large numbers of volunteers became active across the country.
- In the winter of 1921-22, volunteers of the Congress and the Khilafat movement were organised into a national volunteer corps. In mid-January 1922, after a meeting addressed by a functionary of the Gorakhpur Congress and Khilafat Committees, peasant “officers” were appointed to fill out pledges of non-cooperation, collect subscriptions, and lead the picketing of shops selling foreign items.
- A few days before the February 4 incident, police cracked down on volunteers who were trying to stop trade in foreign cloth, and enforce a just price for meat and fish, and severely beat up one Bhagwan Ahir, a demobilised soldier from the British Indian Army.
- On February 4, volunteers congregated in the town, and after a meeting, proceeded in a procession to the local police station, and to picket the nearby Mundera bazaar. They ignored warning shots fired in the air by police — “‘bullets have turned into water by the grace of Gandhiji’ was the construction put by the crowd”, Amin wrote — and pelted the police with stones. The police fired into the crowd, killing three people and injuring many others. A volcano of anger then erupted, there was heavy brickbattling, and the policemen were forced to flee inside the thana. The crowd proceeded to douse the building with kerosene and to set it on fire.
- Some of the policemen who tried to escape were caught and battered to death, some others managed to escape by throwing away their conspicuous red turbans, which the angry crowd tore to shreds. A lot of police property, including weapons, was destroyed. The volunteers saw the “abolition of the thana” as a sign of the arrival of “Gandhi raj”.

The fallout

- The severely rattled establishment of the Raj prosecuted the accused aggressively. Raids and repression followed immediately, lists of volunteers were compiled, and large numbers of suspects were rounded up.
- A sessions court quickly sentenced as many as 172 of the 225 accused to death. Ultimately, 19 of those convicted were sent to the gallows.
- Gandhi, who was deeply disturbed by the incident, condemned the “crime” of the policemen’s killing. The volunteer groups in the nearby villages were disbanded, and a Chauri Chaura Support Fund was set up to demonstrate “genuine sympathy” and seek prayashchit (atonement).
- Gandhi decided to stop the Non-Cooperation Movement, which he saw as having been tainted by unforgivable violence. He bent the Congress Working Committee to his will, and on February 12, 1922, the satyagraha was formally suspended.

Mega Investment Textiles Parks (MITRA) Scheme

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Govt. announces launch of Mega Investment Textiles Parks (MITRA) scheme in the Union Budget 2021-22 to make Indian textile industry globally competitive.

MITRA Scheme:

- The objectives behind the scheme are to enable the textile industry to become globally competitive, attract large investments, boost employment generation and exports.
- This scheme will be in addition to the PLI scheme.
- The FM announced that seven textile parks will be established over three years.



Significance:

- Such parks have already been present in nations like China and Vietnam which help give a thrust to the textile sector.
- India has been losing its competitive edge to Bangladesh and Vietnam owing to their low labour costs, wider scale of operations and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) advantage enjoyed by them.
- With the textile sector being the second largest employment generator in the country after agriculture, the Budget announcements mean a significant step forward for the industry.
- This comes after a tumultuous year for the textile and clothing industry in 2020 which saw a spate of job losses, cancelled orders and an acute crunch of financial resources.
- Exports in the textiles and apparel industry are expected to reach \$300 billion by 2024-25 resulting in a tripling of Indian market share from 5% to 15%, as per national investment promotion and facilitation agency Invest India.
- The industry size is expected to double to \$300 bn by 2025-26, for which the 7 mega textile parks have been planned.



ATMA Scheme

(Source: PIB)

About the ATMA Scheme

- A Centrally Sponsored Scheme “Support to State Extension Programs for Extension Reforms”, popularly known as ATMA Scheme, is under implementation since 2005.
- ATMA stands for Agricultural Technology Management Agency.
- It is being implemented in 691 districts of 28 states & 5 UTs in the country.
- The scheme promotes decentralized farmer-friendly extension system in the country.
- Under the scheme, grants-in-aid are released to the State Governments with an objective to support State Government’s efforts to make available the latest agricultural technologies and good agricultural practices in different thematic areas of agriculture and allied areas to farmers.
- The scheme aims at making extension system farmer driven and farmer accountable by way of new institutional arrangements for technology dissemination in the form of an Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) at district level to operationalize the extension reforms.



- ATMA has active participation of farmers/farmer-groups, NGOs, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), Panchayati Raj Institutions and other stakeholders operating at district level and below.
- Release of funds under ATMA scheme is based on State Extension Work Plans (SEWPs) prepared by the State Governments.

One Nation One Ration Card Scheme (ONORC)

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The ONORC scheme is being implemented in the country for nation-wide portability of ration cards under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA). So far, the facility has been enabled in 32 States/UTs covering nearly 69 Crore beneficiaries, almost 86% of NFSA population of the country.*

About the Scheme

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution rolled out a pilot scheme titled, One Nation One Ration Card Scheme in four states on a pilot basis in 2019. 12 states were added on 1st January 2020.
- As of August 2020, 25 states and union territories are integrated into One Nation One Ration Card plan. It will be rolled out in all the Indian states and UTs by March 2021. The aim of the scheme is to ensure hassle-free delivery of subsidized food grains to all migratory beneficiaries anywhere in the country through nation-wide portability under National Food Security Act (NFSA.)
- The scheme is one of the important government schemes for the eligible beneficiaries under NFSA. Read the significance of one nation one ration card for UPSC exam preparation.
- It is a national ration card that will enable migrant workers and their families to access the public distribution system (PDS) benefits from any fair price shops across the country.

Features:

- Existing ration cards will be turned as one nation one ration card.
- It will be a universal ration card allotted to each beneficiary registered under NFSA.
- Using the ONORC, a beneficiary who migrates from one place to another can buy subsidized food grains from the fair price shop located in the destination city regardless of the origin of the beneficiaries.
- The beneficiaries will be identified through biometric authentication on electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices. These devices will be installed at each fair price shop.
- The national portability will work using the:
 - Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) portal – It will provide the technological platform for the ration cards portability.
 - Annavitran portal – It will host the data of the food grains distribution through ePoS devices within a state. This will help a beneficiary to access subsidized food grains within a state (inter-district.)
- Aadhar Cards will be seeded with ration cards which will help beneficiaries get the ration using the same ration card.

World Wetlands Day

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *World Wetlands Day is observed on 1 February every year.*

About the World Wetlands Day:

- 2 February each year is celebrated 'World Wetlands Day' to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands for people and our planet.
- This day also marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea.
- The annual celebration of the Day started in 1997.
- The theme for World Wetlands Day 2021 is 'Wetlands and Water'.
- The 2021 campaign highlights the contribution of wetlands to the quantity and quality of freshwater on our planet. Water and wetlands are connected in an inseparable co-existence that is vital to life, our wellbeing and the health of our planet.
- 2021 also marks the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Ramsar Convention.

What are wetlands?

- Wetlands are land areas that are saturated or flooded with water either permanently or seasonally.
- Inland wetlands include marshes, ponds, lakes, fens, rivers, floodplains, and swamps. Coastal wetlands include saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons and even coral reefs.
- Fishponds, rice paddies, and saltpans are human-made wetlands.

Wetlands in India

- India has nearly 4.6% of its land as wetlands, covering an area of 15.26 million hectares.
- There are 42 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 1.08 million hectares in India.

Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM):

- On the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2021, the MoS for Environment announced the establishment of a Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM), as a part of the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai, an institution under the Ministry.
- The Centre will help in building partnership and networks with relevant national and international agencies.
- WCM would serve as a knowledge hub and enable exchange between State/UT Wetland Authorities, wetland users, managers, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

Gobardhan Scheme

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Union Ministers jointly launch Unified Portal of Gobardhan to promote Gobardhan scheme and track real time progress.

About Gobardhan Scheme:

- The Gobardhan Scheme (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources – DHAN) was launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- It is being implemented as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
- The scheme is aimed at managing cattle and biodegradable waste and also help augment farmers' incomes.
- The GOBAR-DHAN scheme, with its focus on keeping villages clean, increasing the income of rural households, and generation of energy from cattle waste, is an important element of the ODF-plus strategy of the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The scheme aims to support villages in effectively managing their cattle and biodegradable waste.



- The Gobardhan scheme was launched in early 2018 to manage the prevailing issues of bio-waste in villages including cattle waste and converting them into biogas and organic manure to improve the lives of villagers by providing economic and resource benefits to farmers and households.
- The newly launched portal will ensure close coordination with stakeholder Departments/Ministries for smooth implementation of Biogas schemes/initiatives and its real time tracking.

Nylon

(Source: [Down to Earth](#))

Context: Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech February 1, 2021 emphasised the need to rationalise customs duty on raw material input to ease the domestic production of man-made fibres.

Details:

- The aim is to give the textile industry, micro, small and medium enterprises as well as exports of textiles a boost. The minister announced a uniform deduction of the basic customs duty rates on caprolactam, nylon chips, nylon fiber and yarn to five per cent from 10 per cent.
- The Union government's push to bring nylon production on a par with that of polyester, however, may not have a good bearing on the environment and climate change at large.

Nylon and its environmental impacts

- Known for its strength, durability and elasticity, nylon was the world's first entirely synthetic polymer fibre marketed to women in 1938. Its unique selling point was the longevity of stockings as compared to that of silk and rayon.
- Nylon is not a natural fibre, unlike the traditional ones. Nylon is a polymer — a plastic with super-long, heavy molecules made of short, repetitive units of diamines and dicarboxylic acids. Contemporary nylon is made from petrochemical monomers (the chemical building blocks making up polymers), combined to form a long chain through a condensation polymerisation reaction.
- The resulting mixture can be cooled and the filaments stretched into an elastic thread. Therefore, nylon production is inevitably tied to oil and gas production (plus chemical additives) and has the same negative environmental impacts as fossil fuels. This only exacerbates the global climate crisis.
- Nylon tops the list of synthetic materials that have the highest impact on the environment, according to the Pulse of Fashion Report, 2017. Compared to other plastic-based fibres, manufacturing and processing of nylon is energy-intensive, which causes emission of greenhouse gases leading to global warming
- Moreover, the process releases nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide, and which depletes the ozone. Waste water generated during the production of nylon contains the unreacted monomer, caprolactam, which is polluting. Its untreated discharge through factory wastewater causes harm to a range of aquatic organisms.
- Hence, as far as production is concerned, nylon is not a sustainable fabric.
- Post production usage of nylon is not sustainable either. Washing of plastic-based textiles has been identified as a major contributor to the release of plastic microfibrils into oceans, which causes marine pollution. According to Ellen Macarthur Foundation, around half-a-million tonnes of plastic microfibrils resulting from the washing of textiles, equivalent to more than 50 billion plastic bottles, are released into the ocean every year.
- Improper disposal of nylon products also leads to accumulation of microplastic in the aquatic ecosystem. Even if properly disposed, microscopic pieces of fiber slowly break down and contribute to marine pollution.

- Conventional nylon is non-biodegradable; it remains on the earth for hundreds of years, either in a landfill or an ocean.

Alternatives to nylon

- Plastic-based fibres or synthetic fibres account for two-third of the material input for textiles production globally. The most common materials are polyester (55 per cent), followed by nylon (5 per cent).
- Also known as polyamide, nylon has a variety of pharmaceutical and industrial applications, with a global market of more than 6.6 million tonnes a year. Owing to the widespread use and negative environmental impacts, it is imperative to find alternatives for it.
- There is a small but perceptible shift toward broader use of sustainably sourced materials. Scientists have had promising results replacing well-established petrochemical polymers with bio-polyamides from amino acids for production of nylon.
- Researchers at National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL), the United States, have discovered a novel process of converting biomass to nylon wherein nylon can be produced renewably via the biological conversion of sugars, thereby eliminating the need for petroleum.
- Bio-based Nylon 6.6 (RENNLON), which comes from glucose and other renewable feedstock, is already in the early stages of commercialisation, according to the Pulse of Fashion Report, 2017.
- With technological innovations and efforts to move towards a new circular textile economy, recycling is the way forward. Today, chemical recycling exists for plastic-based fibres. This process can produce fibers of a quality comparable to that of virgin materials.
- Polymers such as nylon and polyester can be depolymerised to extract monomers from which they have been produced. These can then be used as building blocks for the production of new polymers.
- In 2011, leading manufacturer Aquafil created a Nylon-6 yarn, ECONYL, from 100 per cent recycled materials. The yarn is created from post-use materials from carpets and factory offcuts from the production of various textiles, including clothing.
- The recycled fibre is then used in apparel, for example for swimwear or stockings. According to Ellen Macarthur Foundation, recycling technologies are mature and proven for both polyester and nylon, but not yet widely adopted for clothing as the economics of recycling is currently unappealing.
- Merely promoting industry without any regard for the global climate crisis should not be India's way forward. Technological innovation, industry-wide collaboration and unfettered support of the government can help India lead the fight against climate change.

Sub-categorisation of OBCs

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

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

What is sub-categorisation of OBCs?

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

- To examine this, the Rohini Commission was constituted on October 2, 2017. At that time, it was given 12 weeks to submit its report, but has been given several extensions since, the latest one being the 10th. The other member in the Commission is former journalist Jitendra Bajaj, director of the Centre for Policy Studies. Before the Rohini Commission was set up, the Centre had granted constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).

What are the Commission's terms of reference?

- It was originally set up with three terms of reference:
 - To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
 - To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such OBCs;
 - To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.
- A fourth term of reference was added on January 22, 2020, when the Cabinet granted it an extension:
 - To study the various entries in the Central List of OBCs and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.
 - This was added following a letter to the government from the Commission on July 30, 2019. "In process of preparing the sub-categorised central list of OBCs, the Commission has noted several ambiguities in the list as it stands now. The Commission is of the opinion that these have to be clarified/rectified before the sub-categorised central list is prepared," the Commission wrote.

INTERNATIONAL

Square Kilometre Array

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Council held its maiden meeting and approved the establishment of the world's largest radio telescope. SKAO is a new intergovernmental organisation dedicated to radio astronomy and is headquartered in the UK. At the moment, organisations from ten countries are a part of the SKAO. These include Australia, Canada, China, India, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK.*

What are radio telescopes?

- Unlike optical telescopes, radio telescopes can detect invisible gas and, therefore, they can reveal areas of space that may be obscured by cosmic dust.
- Significantly, since the first radio signals were detected by physicist Karl Jansky in the 1930s, astronomers have used radio telescopes to detect radio waves emitted by different objects in the universe and explore it.
- According to NASA, the field of radio astronomy evolved after World War II and became one of the most important tools for making astronomical observations since.
- The Arecibo telescope in Puerto Rico, which was the second-largest single-dish radio telescope in the world, collapsed in December 2020.
- The telescope was built in 1963 and because of its powerful radar, scientists employed it to observe planets, asteroids and the ionosphere, making several discoveries over the decades, including finding prebiotic molecules in distant galaxies, the first exoplanets, and the first-millisecond pulsar.

Significance

- The telescope, proposed to be the largest radio telescope in the world, will be located in Africa and Australia whose operation, maintenance and construction will be overseen by SKAO. The completion is expected to take nearly a decade at a cost of over £1.8 billion.
- Some of the questions that scientists hope to address using this telescope include the beginning of the universe, how and when the first stars were born, the life-cycle of a galaxy, exploring the possibility of detecting technologically-active civilisations elsewhere in our galaxy and understanding where gravitational waves come from.
- As per NASA, the telescope will accomplish its scientific goals by measuring neutral hydrogen over cosmic time, accurately timing the signals from pulsars in the Milky Way, and detecting millions of galaxies out to high redshifts.
- Significantly, the development of SKA will use the results of various surveys undertaken using another powerful telescope called the Australian Square Kilometre Array Pathfinder (ASKAP), which is developed and operated by the country's science agency CSIRO.
- This telescope, which has been fully operational since February 2019 mapped over three million galaxies in a record 300 hours during its first all-sky survey conducted late last year. ASKAP surveys are designed to map the structure and evolution of the Universe, which it does by observing galaxies and the hydrogen gas that they contain.



How Burma became Myanmar

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Myanmar military grabbed power in a coup– the third time in the nation’s history since its independence from British rule in 1948. After the last such takeover in 1988, the armed forces went on to make a decision that would remain controversial for decades: changing the country’s name.*

How Burma became Myanmar

- When British imperialists annexed what is today’s Myanmar during the 19th century, they called it Burma after the dominant Burman (Bamar) ethnic group, and administered it as a province of colonial India. This arrangement continued until 1937, when Burma was separated from British India and made a separate colony.
- Even after the country became independent in 1948, it retained the same name, becoming the ‘Union of Burma’. In 1962, the military took over from a civilian government for the first time, and amended the official name in 1974 to the ‘Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma’.
- Then in 1988, Myanmar’s armed forces again took power in the country, after suppressing a popular uprising that led to the deaths of thousands, and reversed the official name to ‘Union of Burma’. But a year later, the junta adopted a law that replaced Burma with Myanmar, making the country the ‘Union of Myanmar’.
- A number of other places in the country also saw their names changed, including the then-capital city, which went from Rangoon to Yangon (since 2005, the capital is Naypyidaw, 370 km away to the north).

Why the name change was controversial

- While changing the country’s name, the military said that it was looking for a way to leave behind a name inherited from the colonial past, and adopt a new one which could unify all of its 135 officially recognised ethnic groups, and not just the Burman people.
- Critics decried the move, arguing that Myanmar and Burma mean the same thing in the Burmese language, only that the ‘Myanmar’ is a more formal way of saying ‘Burma’– a word used colloquially. The other name changes too, such as Rangoon to Yangon, only reflected greater conformity with the Burmese language, and nothing else.
- Also, the name changes took place only in English. Even in English, the adjective form remained (and continues to remain) Burmese, and not Myanmarese.
- Pro-democracy sympathisers said that the name changes were illegitimate, as they were not decided by the will of the people. As a result, many governments around the world opposed to the junta decided to ignore the name changes, and continued to call the country Burma and its capital Rangoon.

Special UK visa scheme for Hong Kong residents

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The UK is opening a special visa scheme that will allow lakhs of Hong Kong residents a chance to migrate and eventually apply for British citizenship. The move comes months after China imposed a sweeping national security law over the former British colony, taking aim at pro-democracy protests that had captured global attention since 2019.*

What is the special visa scheme for Hong Kong residents?



- The visas will be issued to those in Hong Kong who hold a British National (Overseas) passport and their immediate dependents, and will offer a fast track to UK citizenship.
- Applicants who get the visa can live and work in the UK for 5 years, after which they apply for settlement. Twelve months after this, they can apply for citizenship.
- The scheme potentially covers over two-thirds of the city's population of around 70 lakh. According to the BBC, some 29 lakh people are eligible, who along with 23 lakh dependents would be able to move to the UK. The British government, however, estimates that some three lakh will apply in the first five years.
- To avoid applying for the visa in person, the BN(O) holders would be able to apply through a smartphone app from February 23. The five-year visa application fee is 250 pounds per person, or 180 pounds for 30 months. Applicants will also have to pay an immigration health surcharge of 624 pounds per year.
- There is no minimum salary requirement for those wanting to move, and is it necessary to first secure a job in the UK before migrating.
- Since July, after the national security law was implemented, the British government has already allowed around 7,000 people from Hong Kong to move to its shores. These were allowed permission to migrate not through the visa scheme, but through government action on compassionate grounds.
- The move is considered the UK's most generous welcoming of foreign workers since the entry of new EU citizens in 2004 — when 10 countries were added to the bloc— at a time when the UK was also a member.

Antifreeze

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Eleven US soldiers fell sick after accidentally drinking ethylene glycol, a chemical found in antifreeze. According to a Reuters report, the soldiers from Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas were completing a 10-day field training exercise when the incident occurred. The soldiers who consumed it thought that they were drinking an alcoholic beverage as per reports.*

What is antifreeze?

- Ethylene glycol is an industrial compound found in consumer products including automotive antifreeze, hydraulic brake fluids, some stamp pad inks, ballpoint pens, solvents, paints, plastics, films, and cosmetics and is also used as a pharmaceutical vehicle. It is a synthetic liquid, which is odourless and is used to make antifreeze and de-icing solutions for cars, airplanes and boats.
- According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ethylene glycol has a sweet taste and is often accidentally or intentionally ingested.
- Once ingested, ethylene glycol is chemically broken down into toxic compounds. These byproducts then affect the central nervous system (CNS), the heart and then the kidneys. CDC says that the ingestion of sufficient amounts can be fatal.
- Ethylene glycol can be disseminated through indoor air, water, food, outdoor air and agricultural products.
- As per a case report of a 35-year-old man that presented with antifreeze poisoning, which was published in Experimental and Therapeutic Medicine in 2017, the patient mainly presented with nausea and agitation and did not lose consciousness. However, laboratory investigations suggested severe metabolic acidosis (a condition in which too much acid accumulates in the body), renal dysfunction and hyperkalemia (when the levels of potassium in the body are higher than normal).



- This patient had consumed a high dose of antifreeze and was admitted to the hospital at a later stage. However, he was treated successfully and was discharged from the hospital after over a month.
- Even so, depending on the quantity of ethylene glycol consumed, death can occur within the first 24 hours and permanent damage to the nervous system may also occur, which can cause blindness and decreased mental functioning.
- As per a report in The New York Times, out of the 11 soldiers who fell sick, one is a warrant officer, two are noncommissioned officers and eight are enlisted soldiers.

Stardust 1.0

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *On January 31, Stardust 1.0 was launched from Loring Commerce Centre in Maine, US, a former military base, becoming the first commercial space launch powered by biofuel, which is non-toxic for the environment as opposed to traditionally used rocket fuels.*

What is Stardust 1.0?

- Stardust 1.0 is a launch vehicle suited for student and budget payloads. The rocket is 20 feet tall and has a mass of roughly 250 kg. The rocket can carry a maximum payload mass of 8 kg and during its first launch carried three payloads.
- According to a report in Politico, the payloads included a cubesat prototype built by highschool students, a metal alloy designed to lessen vibrations, which is developed by Kellogg's Research Labs and a cubesat from software company Rocket Insights.
- The rocket is manufactured by bluShift, an aerospace company based in Maine that is developing rockets that are powered by bio-derived fuels. Stardust 1.0 is being developed by the company since 2014 when the company was founded by its CEO Sascha Deri.
- These rockets will help to launch small satellites called cubesats into space in a way that is relatively cheaper than using traditional rocket fuel and is less toxic for the environment. Other rockets being developed by the company include Stardust Gen. 2, Starless Rouge and Red Dwarf, which is a low-Earth orbit (LEO) vehicle and is designed to fly a maximum payload of 30 kg.
- There are other companies working towards making access to space easier. One of them is Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's space company called Blue Origin. Last year in October, the company tested a rocket system called New Shepard. The rocket system is meant to take tourists to space eventually and offers flights to space over 100 km above Earth and accommodation for payloads.
- Such efforts are a part of a growing number of commercial space companies that are working to provide easier and cheaper access to space to laypeople and also to make access to space cost-effective for purposes of academic research, corporate technology development and entrepreneurial ventures among others.
- Significantly, the accommodation of mini payloads provides easier access to space to not only experienced researchers but also to students who are part of educational institutions and are working to develop their own space programs "for less than the price of new football uniforms" as Blue Origin has put it.

What is biofuel?

- Broadly, biofuels are obtained from biomass, which can be converted directly into liquid fuels that can be used as transportation fuels.



- According to the US government's office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, the two most common kinds of biofuels in use today are ethanol and biodiesel and they both represent the first generation of biofuel technology.
- Ethanol, for instance, is renewable and made from different kinds of plant materials. Biodiesel on the other hand is produced by combining alcohol with new and used vegetable oils, animal fats or recycled cooking grease.

The 'Walking While Trans'

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a bill repealing a controversial law known as the "Walking While Trans" ban, which has been widely criticised for disproportionately discriminating against transgender people of colour. The move was welcomed by LGBTQI+ activists, advocates and legislators who have been pushing for the ban to be revoked for years now.*

What is the controversial 'Walking While Trans' law?

- 'Walking While Trans' ban is the colloquial name for a law, which was originally passed in 1976 with the intention of prohibiting loitering for the purpose of prostitution. The law is widely criticised for how notoriously vague it is — it allows New York police to arrest or apprehend someone walking on the street if they suspect that they are sex workers.
- While the law is mostly used against women, several men, too, have been arrested or detained merely because police suspected that they were "loitering for the purpose of prostitution". But the law is known for disproportionately impacting trans women, especially trans women of colour.
- According to Manhattan Senator Brad Hoylman, one of the lead sponsors of the bill to revoke the archaic law, the ban "led to arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement by targeting women from marginalised groups that are at high risk for sex trafficking and other exploitation and abuse".
- Between 2012 and 2015, at least 85 per cent of those arrested under the law were Black or Latinx, according to data included in the sponsor memo.
- In 2019 alone, 91 per cent of people arrested under the law belonged to these two groups, and around 80 per cent identified as women, according to data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.
- The law permits the police to "stop-and-frisk trans women of colour and other marginalised groups for simply walking down the street," Hoylman said. In fact a sponsor memo, authored by Hoylman, states that police officers were known to warn transgender women that "girls like them" would be arrested if they loitered outside post midnight.



Mains

GS II

Building a robust healthcare system

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been vociferous demands to strengthen the country's public health system. Many erudite articles have stressed the need to revamp the system quickly so that we are better prepared to handle such emergencies in the future. Once the present crisis is over, however, public health will go into oblivion, as usual. Governments are already behaving as if things are fine and enough has been done on the health front.*

Poor health indicators

- Not surprisingly, the efficacy of the public health system varies widely across the country since it is a State subject. How good a public health system is can easily be judged just by looking at certain health parameters such as Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Ratio and Total Fertility Rate for which annual surveys are conducted through the Sample Registration System.
- With the numbers given in the chart, it is doubtful whether India will be able to achieve Goal 3 (good health and well-being) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.
- India failed to achieve the earlier Millennium Development Goals because of the poor performance of the northern States. It is surprising that the Government of India does not hold them responsible and accountable for poor performance but is satisfied with the average. Equally surprising and disappointing is that these State governments themselves are indifferent to their poor performance.
- Since health is a State subject, the primary onus lies with the State governments. Each State government must focus on public health and aim to improve the health indicators mentioned above. It is disappointing that some of the States have skewed priorities such as cow protection and 'love jihad'.
- More mothers are perhaps dying for want of care than cows. Are these governments not concerned? Unless they give health the highest priority, rapid improvement is not possible. Instead of talking in generalities, they must start looking at numbers. To start with, the above parameters are good enough. Their close monitoring at the highest level may improve things.
- These data are revealing. The northern States are performing very poorly in these vital health parameters. In Madhya Pradesh, the number of infant deaths for every 1,000 live births is as high as 48 compared to seven in Kerala. In U.P. the Maternal Mortality Ratio is 197 compared to Kerala's 42 and Tamil Nadu's 63. The percentage of deliveries by untrained personnel is very high in Bihar, 190 times that of Kerala.
- Another vital parameter that has an impact on poverty, Total Fertility Rate, is very high in Bihar (3.2) against the stabilisation rate of 2.1. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have done so well that their population will decline over the years. This has been made possible thanks to the effective Maternal and Child Health and Family Welfare services provided by these States.
- Some of these States are performing so poorly that they are comparable to the poorest countries in the world, pulling down the average for India. The Government of India is just looking at the averages which are somewhat reasonable thanks to the excellent performance of well-governed States. Unless all the States perform well, there will be no dramatic improvement in the health system .
- It is sad this is the outcome despite Finance Commissions pouring non-Plan funds into these States in addition to substantial Plan allocation from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the

Empowered Action Group States. More money does not and cannot produce results. Only clear focus and better governance can.

Tamil Nadu's example

- How did the southern States achieve this? It is because of enlightened political leadership which was interested in the health and well-being of the people. It is to be vividly remembered that the family planning drives and innumerable camps organised to eradicate cataract in the 1970s. The district administration was spearheading these health initiatives because of the government's focus and drive.
- The government encouraged a healthy competition among the districts by giving prizes to the well-performing ones. By the 1990s, family planning drives were no more necessary, and all that was needed was some fine-tuning of the Maternal and Child Health programme. The result is that the Total Fertility Rate of Tamil Nadu is among the lowest in the country (1.6) comparable to that of Germany (1.57) and Japan (1.43).
- In addition to a clear focus by the political executive, Tamil Nadu has the advantage of a public and preventive health structure. A good administrative structure could therefore deliver to the demands of the political executive, benefiting the people of the State.
- The governments — both at the Centre and the Empowered Action Group States — should realise that public health and preventive care is a priority and take steps to bring these States on a par with the southern States. The Government of India has a vital role to play. With his huge mandate and popularity, the Prime Minister should get involved in this fundamental task of improving the health of the people.
- Public and preventive health should be his focus by holding the Empowered Action Group States accountable to the SDGs. They must be asked to reach the levels of the southern States within three to five years.
- Volumes have been written and hundreds of studies have been conducted on what needs to be done in each of these States. One wonders whether they are even read. Instead of slogans and promises, hard work is needed. Perhaps what was started in Tamil Nadu as early as the 1970s needs to be done in these States now. When Chief Ministers are focused on health and the district health administrations are held accountable, performance is bound to improve.
- An important measure that can make a difference is a public health set-up in these States that addresses primary and preventive health. Many studies have stressed its importance to deliver better with the given resources. Tamil Nadu manages its public health set-up with just about 150 public health professionals. Therefore, it cannot be difficult for other States to build a public health cadre quickly.

Giving health importance

- Unless we invest in human capital, FDI will not help. It will only increase the wealth of the already wealthy and accentuate income disparity. Investing in health and education is the primary responsibility of any government. It is time the governments — both at the Centre and States — gave health its due importance.
- Announcing piecemeal schemes may help to get publicity but will not make a lasting improvement. Improving health of such a large population requires concerted efforts over years.
- The southern States started early and are enjoying the benefits, but they can still do more to reach the level of developed countries.
- The Empowered Action Group States must start in earnest at least now. There are no short cuts; only persistent and focused efforts at the highest level of government will improve preventive care and primary healthcare.

What the Budget Missed

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Budget, at its simplest, is the government's tentative income and expenditure statement. Like all financial statements, the devil lies in the fine print. At its broadest, the Budget is a pious statement of the government's policy and ideological intentions. It is also the government's statement of how it seeks to tackle the immediate political (electoral) and economic challenges. Hence, any quick assessment of the Budget has to be preliminary. So how is the Budget likely to affect the lives of citizens immediately, and economic aggregates such as investment, output, employment and income distribution in the medium term?*

India's meagre response

- Domestic output or GDP, net of inflation, is expected to decline by 7.7% in the current financial year (FY2020-21), compared to the previous year (FY2019-20). The decline in per capita income is by 8.7%. The contraction is one of the worst among the world's major countries.
- The novel coronavirus pandemic and the resultant lockdown led to massive job and livelihood losses. Unlike most advanced countries and emerging market economies, India's response to address the distress of the masses has been meagre. The government's additional public spending to cope with the unprecedented crisis has been a little over 1% of GDP.
- As is widely known, the output (GDP) contraction in 2020-21 has come on top of a slowdown in GDP growth over much of the previous decade (the 2010s), fall in employment, the decline in real wages, rise in the number of people in poverty, and, hence, an expected rise in the proportion of undernourished children.
- Much of the decline in the growth rate is on account of an unprecedented fall in fixed investment rate as a ratio of GDP, especially in infrastructure sectors.

Capital expenditure proposal

- **Given the context, the present Budget's focus on stepping up public investment by 34.5% in the coming fiscal year (compared to the current year) is a welcome sign. The Finance Minister's speech said the government will borrow an additional ₹80,000 crore for the purpose in the next two months. The estimated fiscal deficit for FY2021-22 is 6.8% of GDP for the central government. And States are allowed a higher fiscal deficit, if the expenditure is on capital investment.**
- These figures certainly look impressive. Realisation of these investments would crucially depend on tax revenue realisations, disinvestment proceeds, sale of rail and road assets and the government's ability to raise resources from the market, without raising interest rates for the private sector. There is no mention of the government's recourse to debt monetisation. While the investment intentions are evident, its financing efforts seem to have too many loose ends.
- The proposed Development Finance Institution (DFI) is also welcome. One of the reasons for poor industrial and infrastructure investment during the last decade was a lack of long-term credit for infrastructure, which by definition yields low rates of return spread over a long period of time.
- Commercial banks, whose deposits are for short to medium term, find it difficult to lend for long term (more than five years) for the fear of maturity mismatch. Moreover, as banks were laden with rising non-performing assets on account of poor corporate sector performance during the last decade, their ability to make fresh loans was adversely affected. Further, contemporary experience shows that most successful industrialising economies have relied on DFIs for providing long-term credit (<https://bit.ly/3j5cqVs>).
- While the renewal of the idea of DFI is welcome, many caveats are in order. Its Achilles heel is in securing stable long-term, low cost sources of finance. The Finance Minister's speech mentioned that the proposed DFI will be financed by foreign portfolio investments (FPI), which is a cause for concern.
- By definition, FPI represents short term inflows with exchange rate risks, while infrastructure investment is for long term whose revenues will be mostly in rupees. Such an investment will inevitably lead to

currency and maturity miss-match, raising cost of capital. Hence, there is a need to consider alternative long-term sources, preferably from domestic sources, or international development agencies.

Health and employment

- The first of the “6 pillars” that the Finance Minister described in her speech deals with health infrastructure — rightly so. If the announcement made represents a substantial annual fixed investment in improving urban sanitation, drinking water and sewage facilities, it is indeed a welcome step.
- There are lessons to be learnt from rural Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, however. As the recent National Family Health Survey data for 2019-20 for select States showed, just constructing toilets in household premises is of little use without adequate access to water and sewage facilities, which are public goods in nature (best provided by local governments). Unless these complementary facilities are constructed in a coordinated manner, the effectiveness of such investments would be minimal.
- The Budget has very little to say about employment. Surely, the proposed step-up in infrastructure would create labour demand. It bears repetition that the 2010s were a decade of job loss growth, as in official National Sample survey estimates.
- The pandemic has rubbed salt into the country’s wound, leading to the migration crisis, which is still with us (as the report cited above shows). Unfortunately, there is very little acknowledgement and response to the crisis in the Budget.

Inequality glossed over

- There is no mention of the stupendous rise in economic inequality during just the last year. While the poor lost their jobs and livelihoods in 2020, corporate India’s profits zoomed. The rank of the richest Indian is at the 12th spot on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Why could not the Budget consider a special tax on the super-rich — as many countries are now mooting? The Budget does not seem to reckon with such a rise in inequality, let alone seek to redress it.
- In summary, if the capital expenditure plan outlined in the Budget speech is credible, and implemented with assured financial backing, it could revive the investment cycle. The proposed development bank for term lending for infrastructure is welcome, provided its sources of finance are cheap, long term and mostly domestic. Investments in urban public health infrastructure — sanitation, water supply and sewage — are in the right direction if implemented in a coordinated manner.
- That there is no targeted employment programme to alleviate the immediate crisis is a matter of concern. Government apathy towards those who lost jobs and livelihoods due to the health and economic shocks last year seems galling.

Critique of the Budget

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com))

Context: Besides impacting the disposable incomes of the people, the Union Budget is significant for three reasons. First, it delivers the balance sheet of the government and informs us about what happened in the past year and what is proposed to be done in the next year. Second, it shapes the macroeconomic environment of the country in terms of its proposed impact on macro economy due to decisions on raising resources and spending. Finally, it provides reform signals on which economic agents place their expectations.

Details:

- The Union Finance Minister has presented the 2021-22 Budget which, if effectively implemented, promises to revive the economy faster and take it on a higher growth trajectory.



- It not only addresses the immediate requirements to augment aggregate demand by increasing infrastructure spending, but also initiates reforms in critical areas to take the economy on a higher growth trajectory in the medium term.
- With people having navigated 2020 with considerable pain, there were expectations that the Budget would help revive the economy. Unlike in normal times, when the concern is on deficit and debt, the focus this year is on how the Budget helps in increasing aggregate demand, particularly by increasing investment expenditure, and more importantly, how it addresses several structural weaknesses which had reduced the growth potential.

Reviving the economy

- In some ways, the Economic Survey had prepared the intellectual background for the Budget. It had reiterated the need to have counter-cyclical fiscal policy, focused on accelerating growth for ensuring debt sustainability, and emphasised the importance of public investment expenditure which have higher fiscal multipliers to 'crowd in' private investments.
- It had also argued that the rating agencies are biased and advocated increased borrowing for public investment spending by quoting Rabindranath Tagore. The market too hoped that the Finance Minister would keep the agenda for fiscal consolidation in abeyance and increase public investment expenditure to revive the economy.
- It was clear that the pandemic badly impacted the balance sheet, but it was important to know how bad the impact was. The estimated contraction in revenues in 2020-21 was almost 23% from the Budget estimates.
- The tax revenue shows a decline of 17.8% and non-tax revenues are lower by 45% from the Budget estimates. Despite this, contrary to expectations, the government has not compressed expenditure.
- Although until October, the expenditure incurred was lower than the corresponding period in the previous year, the revised estimate of public expenditure is higher than the Budget estimate by 13.4%.
- Both revenue and capital expenditure have gathered pace since October and the revised estimate for 2020-21 is higher than the Budget estimate by 14.5% and 6.1%, respectively. It is thus not surprising that the ratio of fiscal deficit to GDP for 2020-21 is estimated at 9.5%.
- The implication of this is that besides favourably impacting other sectors' income generation, the GDP estimate for the third and fourth quarter from public administration, defence and other services is likely to turn positive from -14.9% witnessed in the first half of the year.
- The Budget shows a higher growth of revenue at 15%. The tax revenue is expected to be higher by 14.9% over the revised estimates of 2020-21 and non-tax revenue is expected to increase by 15.4%. The disinvestment proceeds are placed at ₹1,75,000 crore as against the estimate of ₹32,000 crore for the year.
- However, the budgeted increase in expenditure for the next year is just 0.95%. As a ratio of GDP, next year is likely to see lower expenditure by two percentage points. Interestingly, the revenue expenditure is expected to be compressed by 2.7% whereas capital expenditure budgeted is 26.2%.
- The increased revenues and disinvestment proceeds have helped to finance higher public expenditure and the fiscal deficit for 2021-22 remains elevated at 6.8% which is lower than the current year, but higher than the expectations. The decision to continue with higher spending to allow full economic recovery is on expected lines.

Sectoral allocations

- In terms of sectoral allocations, it was expected that the health and defence sectors would get larger allocation this year. Health is a State subject and much of the increase has to come from the States. The Union Budget provides for a new centrally sponsored scheme, PM AtmaNirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, and announces that ₹64,180 crore will be spent in six years (the allocation for 2021-22 is not available).
- On defence, the declining trend in allocation continues. The Budget estimate of total expenditure (revenue plus capital excluding pensions) on defence services for 2021-22 is estimated at ₹4.05 lakh crore as against ₹4.01 lakh crore in 2020-21 and it works out to just 1.8% of the GDP.



- The most important part of the Budget is the reform signals it gives. Besides providing ₹20,000 crore for recapitalisation of public sector banks (PSB), an Asset Reconstruction Company and an Asset Management Company are to be set up to purchase the bad assets of banks.
- The decision to privatise two PSBs and a host of other companies such as Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Pawan Hans and Containment Corporation of India, and the statement on disinvestment in strategic sectors, provides a clear signal. Increasing FDI in insurance, too, is on similar lines.
- Similarly, the creation of Alternate Investment Funds is important to avoid asset-liability mismatch in the banking sector. These are important announcements. However, there will be questions about the funding and governance of the new institutions.
- The disappointing thing about the Budget, however, is the continuation of the protectionist trend. In the name of self-reliance, we seem to be returning to the pre-1991 days. The Budget seeks to remove exemptions on a number of items and increases rates on some others, including some agricultural products such as cotton, raw silk and silk yarn. There is a broad-based infrastructure cess as well. This is surely retrograde in an otherwise promising Budget.

Fails to address the hunger pandemic

- While the country continues to grapple with the health and economic crisis as a result of COVID-19, widespread hunger and food insecurity is a silent emergency that has not been getting sufficient attention. Unfortunately, the Union Budget also does not include any significant measures to address this.
- The partial National Family Health Survey-5 results released recently showed that child malnutrition levels in 2019 were higher than in 2016 in most States. The fall in incomes witnessed by most poor and working-class households in the last one year would have made this situation even worse.
- Recent field surveys conducted by Hunger Watch and the Azim Premji University between October 2020 and December 2020 found that for two-thirds of the respondents, food intake was still not back to pre-lockdown levels. Malnutrition has multiple determinants with access to food, health and care being the immediate.
- A global pandemic and an economic slowdown, which has come on the back of years of jobless growth and stagnant rural wages, has hit household food security hard. Data show that even before COVID-19, nutritious diets for most Indians were unaffordable.

No greater allocation

- In this context, direct nutrition programmes such as the anganwadi programme and school mid-day meals make a crucial contribution to the diets of children and pregnant and lactating women. The 2020-21 revised estimates for anganwadi services is ₹17,252.3 crore, compared to a Budget estimate of ₹20,532.4 crore, which was itself less than the projected demand of ₹24,810 crore.
- This shows that the anganwadi services have been badly affected by the closure of anganwadi centres. There are large gaps in delivery of supplementary nutrition. It is not clear whether the revised estimates reflect a true picture, because data of the Controller General of Accounts show that the expenditure of the entire Ministry of Women and Child Development (which implements anganwadi services among other things) up to December 2020 was only ₹14,607.1 crore (49% of Budget estimates).
- In the current Budget, different schemes have been clubbed together and anganwadi services are now part of something called 'Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0' which has an allocated budget of ₹20,105 crore. The total budget allocation of the schemes that were included in Saksham in 2020 was higher at ₹24,557.4 crore.
- Two other important nutrition-related interventions of the Ministry of Women and Child Development also saw major underspending with the revised estimates for the national nutrition mission (Poshan) for 2020-21 being only ₹600 crore compared to a Budget estimate of ₹3,700 crore.
- For maternity benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (a cash transfer of ₹5,000 for pregnant women), the revised estimate is ₹1,300 crore compared to the Budget estimate of ₹2,500 crore.



This scheme is now part of Samarthya, along with other schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila Shakti Kendra.

- These schemes have also seen a reduced allocation compared to last year (₹2,522 crore vis-à-vis ₹2,828 crore). The allocation for the mid-day meal scheme for 2021-22 is ₹11,500 crore which is lower than the revised estimate of ₹12,900 crore for 2020-21. Nutrition schemes, which have been suffering from poor budgetary support for many years now, therefore do not see greater allocations despite the increasing prevalence of malnutrition.
- Other social protection programmes such as old age, widow and disability pensions, which could also contribute to better nutrition, also do not see any increase compared to last year. Even for migrant workers, other than setting up a portal, there is no announcement of any special measures. The One Nation, One Ration scheme has not taken off and is mired in complications.

Food subsidy

- While the food subsidy seems to have increased by more than three times, it must be understood that this does not reflect higher distribution of subsidised grains. This only reflects a correction in the Budget books, where the government is paying back Food Corporation of India (FCI) arrears rather than forcing the FCI to take loans.
- The total FCI debt as on December 31, 2020 was ₹3.7 lakh crore (accumulated over the last few years because adequate amounts were not allocated for food subsidy), and the additional amount being shown in the revised estimate over last year's Budget estimate is ₹3.1 lakh crore which matches the debt that FCI has with the National Social Security Fund.
- The food subsidy allocation for 2021-22 (₹2.4 lakh crore), while much higher than last year's Budget estimate, is more realistic in terms of what is required to meet the National Food Security Act entitlements. But it is clear that there is no provision for an expanded or universal PDS which many have been recommending.
- In fact, it is shocking that even the health budget has not been increased, with the allocation for health this year being lower than the revised estimate for 2020-21 (₹74,602 crore versus ₹82,445 crore). The only increase here seems to be in the allocation for the COVID-19 vaccine which is a one-time expenditure and does not contribute to strengthening the health system.

Missing the mark

- Overall, from the point of view of addressing hunger or providing a demand stimulus, this Budget misses the mark. The total expenditure of ₹34,83,236 crore is only ₹32,931 crore above last year's revised estimates.
- While it is ₹4,00,000 crore more than previous year's budgetary allocation, much of this difference is because of the correction in the food subsidy numbers.
- What we have been presented with in a year of economic slowdown and growing inequality is a stingy budget that fails to ensure the 'bare necessities' for all.

Vaccine Nationalism vs Global Cooperation

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3641441.ece))

Context: *Since the worldwide inoculation process is going strong, vaccine diplomacy has become a hot topic. As this pandemic has spared no country and everyone needs access to vaccines, how is vaccine production and distribution being managed? While the leading and advanced countries have been mindlessly selfish in amassing approved vaccines, it is the Global South countries, India and China, which have provided a ray of hope to most countries.*

Advance purchase contracts

- In their quest for ensuring vaccine security, a report by The New York Times, based on the data on vaccine contracts compiled by Duke University, shows that the advance purchase contracts made by some advanced countries for potential vaccines would vaccinate their population many times: the European Union, two times, the United States and the United Kingdom, four times, and Canada, six times. And, 82% of Pfizer's production in 2021 and 78% of Moderna's have already been advance purchased by rich countries.
- The expectation that an early vaccination will bring back normalcy and a required push to economic growth fuelled many advanced countries to engage in vaccine battles. The arguments of public good and global cooperation have gone out of the window now.
- While advanced countries have turned their back on the need of poor countries to access COVID-19 vaccines, India has displayed empathy to their needs. India has taken a position that a significant percentage of the approved doses will be permitted for exports.
- While its exports to neighbouring countries will be under grant mode, initial shipment of vaccines to least developed countries will be free of cost. And, shipments of vaccines from India have already started reaching different parts of the developing world.
- Brazil has received 2 million doses of vaccine from India (as of January 23). While India is in its first phase of vaccination to cover health-care workers, exports from India are helping other countries also in initiating phase one of their vaccination programme — a gesture well-appreciated globally. In a democracy, one can expect the backlash of sending vaccines abroad without vaccinating its population.
- Nevertheless, India's approach only reinforces the need of having coordinated global efforts in bringing COVID-19 under control. This response manifests India's unstinted commitment to global development and has consolidated its name as the world's pharmacy. Although China has also been enthusiastic in promising vaccines and their delivery, the lukewarm response by countries such as Nepal has slowed down the ambition of China. The release of efficacy data in Brazil raises concerns about the effectiveness of the Sinovac vaccine.

Keep track of SDGs

- The attitude of India towards vaccinating the populations in the poorer countries has generated discussion in the richer countries about the necessity for more proactive measures to roll out vaccines to the developing nations.
- The reversal of progress on many Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, such as SDG 3 ("Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) could affect the health of the world population, and global growth itself.
- Even before COVID-19, projections have shown that 6% of the global population would be in extreme poverty, which has gone up by 71 million, thereby causing enormous challenges to SDG 1 ("End poverty in all its forms everywhere").
- According to estimates by the International Monetary Fund, over 50% of emerging markets and developing economies that were converging toward advanced economies per capita income over the last decade are expected to diverge over the 2020-22 period.

COVAX as a pathway

- The COVAX project is a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, an ambitious programme based on funding from high and middle-income countries.
- Although the funding was not enough for the project, U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to join the project has now raised expectations significantly. However, since high and middle-income countries are buying up large amounts of the vaccine directly from suppliers, the promise by COVAX to deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021 seems to face new challenges. COVAX is a unique case of global cooperation and a strategic shift to enhance global development outcomes.
- Furthermore, since most of the vaccines are purchased from the global south for developing nations, the COVAX project can draw new pathways for global development.



- Most of these vaccines are cost-effective and affordable to the global south. For instance, Covishield, the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine produced in India costs only \$3 per dose; Covaxin is priced at \$4.2.
- A recent study by The Lancet based on Covaxin's Phase 1 data shows tolerable safety outcomes like any other vaccine. The intranasal version of Covaxin, which has been approved for phase I could further facilitate vaccinating the global population. The lower price of the vaccines is what has attracted many commercial buyers globally, including emerging economies such Brazil and South Africa.
- The ability to produce large volumes of vaccine at an affordable cost underlines India's importance to developing countries when it comes to drug access. The development of vaccines is a classic story of global cooperation between the North and the South. Unfortunately, the increasing nationalist tendencies of the democratic World during the pandemic have challenged the positive narrative on global cooperation.



GS III

Towards sustainable growth

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many lessons. It made us realise that we are a part of nature and emphasised the urgent need to protect the ecological functions of the biosphere we live in. It has unequivocally highlighted how vital the health of the planet is for our individual and collective well-being as well as the growth of our economies.*

Details:

- The pandemic has resulted in huge economic losses. Globally, the GDP is expected to contract 2.4% to 8% in 2020. The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that the global cost of dealing with the pandemic could be from \$8.1 trillion to \$15.8 trillion.
- Preventing such pandemics will cost only a fraction of this amount, estimated at \$22.2 billion to \$30.7 billion a year, and this is without factoring in the human suffering.
- We have to recognise that there would not be an economy without the natural environment. Global studies documenting human ecological footprint, the decline in wildlife populations, and the conversion rates of natural ecosystems for other uses, place India among countries experiencing the highest rates of negative change.
- This increases our vulnerability towards catastrophes, including pandemics. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between human density, richness of biodiversity, and the emergence of zoonotic pathogens of wild origin, which renders India particularly vulnerable.
- With high human densities — among the highest diversity of mammals in the world — and a saturated interface between humans and wildlife, India is considered to be among the hotspots for zoonotic emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.
- The WEF's Global Risks report for 2021 states that environmental risks continue to threaten the global economy. The top five risks are extreme weather, climate action failure, human environmental damage, infectious diseases and biodiversity loss. In terms of impact, infectious diseases top the list, followed by climate action failure. The top two risk response blind spots are climate action failure and biodiversity loss.
- Our models of development and our notions about them have to change. Destruction of environment should no longer be justified in the name of development. Like all pandemics, COVID-19's emergence has been entirely driven by unchecked activities in the name of development.
- Rampant destruction of natural habitats, especially due to mining and infrastructure development, continued expansion and intensification of agriculture and animal husbandry as well as unrestrained consumption have disrupted nature, increased contact between wildlife, livestock, pathogens and people, setting the stage for the pandemic to take hold of our lives.
- Pandemic risk can be significantly lowered by reducing human activities that drive the loss of biodiversity as it will help prevent the spillover of new diseases.
- A study by Swiss Re Institute published in 2020 introduces a new biodiversity and ecosystem services index. It found that globally, 20% of countries, including India, have fragile ecosystems. It also states that 55% of the global GDP depends on high-functioning biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- It is evident that policymakers should factor biodiversity and ecosystems into their economic decision-making. This will accelerate the transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to sustainable, equitable, inclusive and just development models.
- The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review, commissioned by HM Treasury and released on February 2, 2021, highlights the grave risks faced by the world because of the failure of economics to

take into account the rapid degradation of nature. The review stresses the need to find new measures for growth and development to avoid a catastrophic breakdown. The world's governments need to come up with a form of national accounting that is different from the GDP model, and the new system has to account for the depletion of nature and natural resources.

New models

- The evidence is overwhelming. All budgets need to reduce investments, including subsidies, in activities that will further degrade our natural habitats. By orders of magnitude, we should enhance investment in research in sustainability science.
- A National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being has been approved by the Prime Minister's Science Technology and Innovation Advisory Council. The overarching objectives are to restore and enhance biodiversity, strengthen its sustainable use, generate thousands of green jobs and encourage the Indian public to appreciate the natural and associated cultural treasures that we have collectively inherited.
- This initiative has the potential to enable India to play a global leadership role in linking conservation with tangible human well-being outcomes.

Green tax vehicle owners

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has announced his Ministry's approval of a 'green tax' on vehicles of specified vintage, as a means of dissuading people from using polluting vehicles.

Details:

- Among the major features of the measure is a 10%-25% additional green tax on the road tax payable by commercial transport vehicles that are older than eight years at the time of fitness certification renewal, and for personal vehicles after 15 years.
- The policy provides exemptions for tractors, harvesters and tillers used in farms, hybrid, electric, ethanol, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered vehicles, and a lower green tax for public transport vehicles such as buses; conversely, a higher additional 50% of road tax is proposed for vehicles in highly polluted cities, as well as differential tax based on fuel and vehicle type, such as diesel.
- Vehicles of government departments and public sector units that are older than 15 years are to be deregistered and scrapped. Green tax funds are to be kept in a separate account to help States measure pollution and tackle it.
- State governments must now comment on the proposal. The policy is scheduled to come into force on April 1, 2022.

Does scrapping old vehicles carry big benefits?

- India has been working on a scrappage policy for years that could, on the one hand, give a boost to the automobile industry and related businesses by stimulating demand, and lead to recovery of steel, aluminium, plastic and so on for recycling, on the other.
- Newer vehicles conforming to stricter emissions and fuel efficiency standards are more environment-friendly, and have modern safety features. In 2016, India notified the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) Standard for passenger vehicles to boost efficiency.
- Those with not more than nine seats and weighing less than 3,500 kg were covered from April 1, 2017. The average fuel consumption standard is given by the Power Ministry's Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) as less than 5.49 litres per 100 km.



- A second round of tighter efficiency norms is scheduled for 2022. Separate standards for light, medium and heavy commercial vehicles exist. CAFE also regulates CO₂ emissions, while other pollutants such as carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur are covered by Bharat Stage fuel standards. The benefits from vehicle replacements can be gauged from Transport Ministry data: commercial vehicles making up 5% of the vehicle fleet but contribute an estimated 65-70% of total vehicular pollution.
- The Centre provided funds under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) to State governments to augment bus fleets, and help the recession-hit bus industry in 2009. Globally, accelerated vehicle replacement schemes have been used in several countries.
- The most notable were those in Europe, besides the high-profile, \$3 billion “Cash for Clunkers” or CARS (or Car Allowance Rebate System) programme in the U.S. after the 2008 recession. The official evaluation of the U.S. scheme was that it led to an average mileage efficiency increase of 58%, and upgraded vehicles generally were high on environmental benefits such as lower air pollution.
- Some critics say the U.S. scheme was not carefully targeted to primarily help those who could not afford a replacement. The BEE estimates that higher efficiency norms could result in a fuel use reduction of 22.97 million tons by 2025 in India.

Is the proposed policy for scrappage workable?

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

What are the options available to tweak the policy?

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

Google exit threat

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Australia is working on a law that seeks to make Internet platforms Google and Facebook pay news media companies for displaying their content as well as linking to their content. Following the publication of its draft, last year, Facebook said such a law could force it to block Australian news content on its feed. Last week, just over a month after Australia introduced the legislation in Parliament, Google

said it will shut down its search engine there if the law becomes a reality, prompting Prime Minister Scott Morrison to say, “We don’t respond to threats.”

What is the basis for this law?

- The broad idea has been around for a few years now. In its 2019 report, Digital Platforms Inquiry, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the country’s competition regulator, noted that there was a fundamental imbalance in the power between news media and internet platforms. Specifically mentioning Google and Facebook, the report said these platforms had “substantial bargaining power in relation to many news media businesses.”
- Very few platforms have the billion-plus-user base or the financial strength of a Google or Facebook. On the other side are millions of individual publishers, none close to being any match for the scale of the top tech platforms.
- It also highlighted that media regulation hardly applied to platforms, though they have been increasingly playing much the same role as the media. The last two decades have also seen the tremendous rise of the platforms and sharp decline of the traditional news media, which forms the context in the report.
- The Australian government, reportedly sensing how important it was to have a strong and independent media environment in a democracy, asked the ACCC to come up with a draft code, which it did last July.
- After some changes, the Treasury Laws Amendment (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code) Bill was introduced in December last year (<https://bit.ly/2MiDkgD>). The biggest players in Australia’s news media business, including Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp and Nine Network, have battled for such a law.

How does the Bill seek to correct the imbalance?

- What is being proposed is a mandatory mechanism, under which news media companies will get to negotiate with Facebook and Google regarding payment for their content. If parties – digital platforms and news media – cannot arrive at a negotiated agreement about remuneration, an arbitral panel “will select between two final offers made by the bargaining parties.”
- Further, the Bill provides for a 14-day notice that platforms need to give publishers regarding any change in their algorithms. This is important because changes in platform algorithms have a significant impact on the referral traffic that publishers receive, and consequently affects their business.

Isn’t this a drastic departure from how platforms have worked with publishers?

- Yes. This is one of those rare interventions by a government in publisher-platform relationships. Platforms perform an important function in a digital world that is filled with an unimaginably huge amount of content and information, and into which there is an unceasing flow of new content every second.
- They help users discover content in this vast information heap, either by way of search or via a friend’s feed, for instance. This is also why publishers need platforms. For many news publications, even well-established ones, Google and Facebook are the source of much of their traffic.
- Publications often worry about faring well on Google and Facebook. They also worry about keeping pace with algorithmic changes. But the publisher-platform relationship has rarely ever been about money. It has almost always been about tools and strategies for publishers to fare well on the platforms.

What is Google’s stand?

- Google is not just against the idea of paying for the links but is also critical of the proposals on arbitration and algorithmic changes. In its blog, Google has said: “Right now, no website or search engine in Australia pays to connect people to other sites through links... The Code undermines one of the key principles of the open internet people use every day.” Further, it does not agree to the allegation that it is responsible for the decline in newspaper revenue.
- Shutting down its search engine in Australia is a real option because Google has taken such a step in the past. In 2014, Google shut its News Service in Spain, when the government introduced a law to make it



pay a licence fee to use news content. Google shut down its Chinese search engine in 2010. In France, it has been forced by law to strike deals with publishers. The EU copyright rules, which France has given force to, “allow publishers to demand a fee from online platforms showing extracts of their news,” says a Reuters report. It isn’t clear on what basis the remuneration has been calculated.

- Google has proposed a different solution. It goes by the name, Google News Showcase, a licensing arrangement with publishers across the world, toward which it plans to spend \$1 billion globally in the next three years.



Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements with respect to Economic Survey of India:

1. India's first Economic Survey was presented in the year 1950-51.
2. The economic survey has been delinked from the Budget in the year 1964 and thereafter released separately.
3. It will be prepared by the Economics Division of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : c

- It will be prepared by the Economic Division of the Department of Economic Affairs in the Finance Ministry under the overall guidance of the Chief Economic Adviser (CEA).

2) Consider the following statements with respect to COVID-19 lockdown and recovery in India,

1. Service sector have seen larger contractions than manufacturing sector.
2. The economic activity was disrupted initially by demand shock followed by a supply shock.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- The pandemic induced lockdowns led to local, regional, and global supply disruptions hitting economic activity – rendering a '*first order*' supply shock.
- This, in turn, has led to a demand shock both through disruptions in the labour market.

3) Which of the statements given below is/are correct in respect to demographic dividend of India?

1. The average age of India is lower than most other countries.
2. Elderly Population is much higher in India than other countries.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

4) Consider the following statements with respect to India's Growth:

1. The primary sector in India contributes around 16% of Gross Value Added (GVA), while it employs around 43 per cent of the workforce.
2. After the gradual unlock procedure after the lockdown, India experienced a N-shaped recovery.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- The economy was gradually unlocked since June, 2020 and has experienced a ***V-shaped recovery*** since then.

5) Consider the following statements with respect to Basic Reproduction Number (R_0) in the context of COVID – 19:

1. It refers to the expected number of new infections caused by a typical infected individual.
2. If $R_0 > 1$, each existing infection causes more than one new infection and there may be an outbreak or epidemic.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

6) Consider the following statements with respect to Micro, small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs):

1. For an enterprise to come under the category of MSME, it has to fulfil both investment and turn over conditions.
2. Under the new definition of MSMEs, the differentiation between the manufacturing and service based MSMEs are being removed.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

7) Which of the following statement(s) is/ are correct with respect to Star Dust 1.0?

1. It is first commercial space launch vehicle powered by biofuel.
2. It is launched by NASA for carrying payloads to moon.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- It is manufactured by bluShift, an aerospace company that is developing rockets that are powered by bio-derived fuels.

8) Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct with respect to Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM)?

1. It will be established as a part of the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM).
2. India's first CWCM has been established in Kolkata.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- India's first Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management will be established in Chennai.

9) Consider the following statements with respect to Chauri Chaura incident:

1. During the incident a large group of protesters participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) clashed with police who opened fire.
2. It took place in Punjab province of British India, where the protesters torched the homes of British police.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : d

Both are correct

10) Which of the following is the first Indian city to adopt the Metro Neo mass transport system?

- a. Guwahati, Assam
- b. Gandhinagar, Gujarat
- c. Bangalore, Karnataka
- d. Nashik, Maharashtra

Answer : d

- The central government recently urged all state governments to consider using Metro Neo technology in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.
- The Metro Neo service consists of
 1. **Electric bus coaches** their lengths varying from 18 to 25 metres with a carrying capacity of 200 to 300 passengers at a time.
 2. **Feeder Bus Service** - A Feeder Bus of 12-metre length will be battery-powered and run on the existing road on the two feeder routes.
 3. **Frequency of Service** - The capacity of main corridors will be 15,000 PHPDT (peak hour peak direction traffic).

11) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Interest Rate Growth Rate Differential (IRGD)

1. It is the difference between the interest rate and the growth rate in an economy.
2. In advanced economies, the negative IRGD is due to much higher growth rates whereas in India, it is due to lower interest rates.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- According to Economic Survey 2020-21, the extremely low interest rates in advanced economies have led to negative IRGD.
- In India, the negative IRGD is not due to lower interest rates but much higher growth rates.

12) Consider the following statements:

1. Counter-Cyclical Fiscal Policy stabilizes the business cycle by being contractionary in good times and expansionary in bad times.
2. Pro-cyclical fiscal policy reinforces the business cycle by being expansionary during good times and contractionary during recessions.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only



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

Answer : c

13) Which if the statement(s) given below is/are incorrect?

- 1. India's public debt-to-GDP has been significantly low compared to high global debt levels.
- 2. The public debt and overall debt level for India has declined since 2003 and has been stable since 2011.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

14) Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct with respect to National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)

- 1. It aims to improve project preparation and attract investments into infrastructure in identified sectors for FY 2019-2025.
- 2. It is a whole-of-government exercise funded jointly by the Centre, states and the private sector.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

15) Consider the following statements with respect to Credit Rating:

- 1. A sovereign credit rating is an independent assessment of a country's ability to repay its debt obligations.
- 2. India, being the fifth largest economy of the world, has been rated as the lowest rung of the investment grade BBB-.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

16. Consider the following statements regarding Biofuels.

- 1. The most common kinds of biofuels in use today are ethanol and biodiesel that represent the first generation of biofuel technology.
- 2. Ethanol is renewable and made from different kinds of plant materials.
- 3. Biodiesel is produced by combining alcohol with new and used vegetable oils and animal fats.
- 4. Biofuels cannot be used as rocket fuels since they have high viscosity.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) All of the above

Answer: a)

On January 31, Stardust 1.0 was launched from Loring Commerce Centre in Maine, US, becoming the first commercial space launch powered by biofuel, which is non-toxic for the environment as opposed to traditionally used rocket fuels.

17. Third generation biofuels are biofuel derived from

1. Algae
2. Food crops
3. Methane

Select the correct answer code:

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a)

3rd generation biofuels are biofuel derived from algae.

18. Which of the following countries are the members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)?

1. Afghanistan
2. Bhutan
3. Myanmar
4. Bangladesh
5. Sri Lanka

Select the correct answer code:

- a) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- d) All of the above

Answer: c)

SAARC comprises of eight Member States: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

19. Which of the following are the Bacterial diseases in cattle and buffaloes?

1. Anthrax
2. Influenza
3. Tetanus
4. Tuberculosis

Select the correct answer code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: c)

20. Moyar River Valley, is located in

- a) Meghalaya
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Kerala

Answer: c)