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Current Affairs

Special Issue

MCQs



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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](http://pib.gov.in))

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](#))

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)

Special Issue

February (Week 1)

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The Report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission (XVFC)'s ToR was unique and wide ranging in many ways. The Commission was asked to recommend performance incentives for States in many areas like power sector, adoption of DBT, solid waste management etc.
- Another unique ToR was to recommend funding mechanism for defence and internal security.
- The XVFC's Report is organised in four volumes.
- Volume I and II, as in the past, contain the main report and the accompanying annexes.
- Volume III is devoted to the Union Government and examines key departments in greater depth, with the medium-term challenges and the roadmap ahead.
- Volume IV is entirely devoted to the States. We have analysed the finances of each State in great depth and have come up with State-specific considerations to address the key challenges that individual States face.
- In total, main report has 117 core recommendations. Vol-III and IV has numerous suggested reforms for the Union ministries and State governments respectively.

Vertical devolution:

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

Horizontal devolution:

- Based on principles of need, equity and performance, overall devolution formula is as follows.
- On horizontal devolution, while XVFC agreed that the Census 2011 population data better represents the present need of States, to be fair to, as well as reward, the States which have done better on the demographic front, XVFC has assigned a 12.5 per cent weight to the demographic performance criterion.
- XVFC has re-introduced tax effort criterion to reward fiscal performance.

Criteria	Weight (%)
Population	15.0
Area	15.0
Forest & ecology	10.0
Income distance	45.0
Tax & fiscal efforts	2.5
Demographic performance	12.5
Total	100

Revenue deficit grants:

- Based on uniform norms of assessing revenues and expenditure of the States and the Union, XVFC has recommended total revenue deficit grants (RDG) of Rs 2,94,514 crore over the award period for seventeen States.

Local Governments:

- The total size of the grant to local governments should be Rs. 4,36,361 crore for the period 2021-26.
- Of these total grants, Rs. 8,000 crore is performance-based grants for incubation of new cities and Rs. 450 crore is for shared municipal services. A sum of Rs. 2,36,805 crore is earmarked for rural local bodies, Rs.1,21,055 crore for urban local bodies and Rs. 70,051 crore for health grants through local governments.
- Urban local bodies have been categorised into two groups, based on population, and different norms have been used for flow of grants to each, based on their specific needs and aspirations. Basic grants are proposed only for cities/towns having a population of less than a million. For Million-Plus cities, 100 per cent of the grants are performance-linked through the Million-Plus Cities Challenge Fund (MCF).

Health:

- XVFC has recommend that health spending by States should be increased to more than 8 per cent of their budget by 2022.
- Given the inter-State disparity in the availability of medical doctors, it is essential to constitute an All India Medical and Health Service as is envisaged under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 1951.
- The total grants-in-aid support to the health sector over the award period works out to Rs. 1,06,606 crore, which is 10.3 per cent of the total grants-in-aid recommended by XVFC. The grants for the health sector will be unconditional.

- XVFC has recommend health grants aggregating to Rs. 70,051 crore for urban health and wellness centres (HWCs), building-less sub centre, PHCs, CHCs, block level public health units, support for diagnostic infrastructure for the primary healthcare activities and conversion of rural sub centres and PHCs to HWCs. These grants will be released to the local governments.

- Out of the remaining grant of Rs. 31,755 crore for the health sector (total of Rs. 1,06,606 crore minus Rs. 70,051 crore through local bodies and Rs.4800 crore state-specific grants), XVFC has recommended Rs. 15,265 crore for critical care hospitals. This includes Rs. 13,367 crore for general States and Rs 1,898 crore for NEH States.

S.no.	Grant Components	2021-26
1	Revenue Deficit grants	294514
2	Local governments grants	436361
3	Disaster management grants	122601
4	Sector-specific grants	129987
i	<i>Sectoral grants for Health</i>	31755
ii	<i>School Education</i>	4800
iii	<i>Higher Education</i>	6143
iv	<i>Implementation of agricultural reforms</i>	45000
v	<i>Maintenance of PMGSY roads</i>	27539
vi	<i>Judiciary</i>	10425
vii	<i>Statistics</i>	1175
viii	<i>Aspirational districts and blocks</i>	3150
5	State-specific	49599
	Total	1033062



- XVFC has recommended Rs. 13,296 crore for training of the allied healthcare workforce. Out of this, Rs. 1,986 crore will be for NEH States and Rs. 11,310 crore for general States.
- **Performance incentives and grants:**
 - XVFC has recommended grants of Rs. 4,800 crore (Rs. 1,200 crore each year) from 2022-23 to 2025-26 for incentivising the States to enhance educational outcomes.
 - XVFC has recommended Rs. 6,143 crore for online learning and development of professional courses (medical and engineering) in regional languages (*matrihasha*) for higher education in India.
 - XVFC has recommended that Rs. 45,000 crore be kept as performance-based incentive for all the States for carrying out agricultural reforms for amending their land-related laws on the lines of NITI Aayog's model law incentive-based grants to States that maintain and augment groundwater stock.
 - Growth in agricultural exports production of oilseeds, pulses and wood and wood-based products
 - Apart from above, following is the snapshot of grants.

Defence and Internal Security

- Keeping in view the extant strategic requirements for national defence in the global context, XVFC has, in its approach, re-calibrated the relative shares of Union and States in gross revenue receipts. This will enable the Union to set aside resources for the special funding mechanism that XVFC has proposed.
- **The Union Government may constitute in the Public Account of India, a dedicated non-lapsable fund, Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS). The total indicative size of the proposed MFDIS over the period 2021-26 is Rs. 2,38,354 crore.**

Disaster Risk Management:

- Mitigation Funds should be set up at both the national and State levels, in line with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act. The Mitigation Fund should be used for those local level and community-based interventions which reduce risks and promote environment-friendly settlements and livelihood practices.
- For SDRMF, XVFC has recommended the total corpus of Rs.1,60,153 crore for States for disaster management for the duration of 2021-26, of which the Union's share is Rs. 1,22,601 crore and States' share is Rs. 37,552 crore.
- XVFC has recommended six earmarked allocations for a total amount of Rs. 11,950 crore for certain priority areas, namely, two under the NDRF (Expansion and Modernisation of Fire Services and Resettlement of Displaced People affected by Erosion) and four under the NDMF (Catalytic Assistance to Twelve Most Drought-prone States, Managing Seismic and Landslide Risks in Ten Hill States, Reducing the Risk of Urban Flooding in Seven Most Populous Cities and Mitigation Measures to Prevent Erosion).

Fiscal consolidation

- Provided range for fiscal deficit and debt path of both the Union and States.
- Additional borrowing room to States based on performance in power sector reforms.
- A threshold amount of annual appropriation should be fixed below which the funding for a CSS may be stopped. Below the stipulated threshold, the administering department should justify the need for the continuation of the scheme. As the life cycle of ongoing schemes has been made co-terminus with the cycle of Finance Commissions, the third-party evaluation of all CSSs should be completed within a stipulated timeframe. The flow of monitoring information should be regular and should include credible information on output and outcome indicators.



- In view of the uncertainty that prevails at the stage that XVFC have done its analysis, as well as the contemporary realities and challenges, we recognise that the FRBM Act needs a major restructuring and recommend that the time-table for defining and achieving debt sustainability may be examined by a **High-powered Inter-governmental Group**. This High-powered Group can craft the new FRBM framework and oversee its implementation. It is important that the Union and State Governments amend their FRBM Acts, based on the recommendations of the Group, so as to ensure that their legislations are consistent with the fiscal sustainability framework put in place. This High-powered Inter-Governmental Group could also be tasked to oversee the implementation of the 15th Finance Commission's diverse recommendations.
- State Governments may explore formation of independent public debt management cells which will chart their borrowing programme efficiently.

What has led to the coup in Myanmar?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Myanmar military grabbed power in a coup on, ahead of a scheduled meeting of the country's newly elected Parliament.*

Details:

- Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to a landslide win in the 2020 elections, and the de facto leader of the ousted government, has been detained, according to reports from Myanmar. President Win Myint has also been detained.
- In a broadcast on its own television the military declared a one-year state of Emergency.\
- The military takeover came after a week of rumours and speculation ahead of the scheduled opening of Myanmar's newly elected lower house of Parliament.
- Amid heightened civilian military tensions, and following statements of concern by the UN Secretary General and a group of Myanmar-based western embassies, the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar military, had put out a statement on Saturday declaring it would protect and abide by the Constitution.

What triggered the coup

- The military has alleged that the general elections held in November 2020 were full of "irregularities" and that therefore, the results — a sweep for NLD — are not valid. It has questioned the veracity of some 9 million votes cast in the election.
- The military had demanded that the United Elections Commission (UEC) of Myanmar which oversees elections, or the government, or outgoing parliamentarians prove at a special session before the new parliament convenes on February 1, that the elections were free and fair. The demand had been rejected.

The military's Constitution

- It was the military that drafted the 2008 Constitution, and put it to a questionable referendum in April that year. The NLD had boycotted the referendum, as well as the 2010 elections that were held under the Constitution.
- The Constitution was the military's "roadmap to democracy", which it had been forced to adopt under increasing pressure from the west, and its own realisation that opening up Myanmar to the outside world was now no longer an option but a dire economic necessity. But the military made sure to safeguard in the Constitution its own role and supremacy in national affairs.
- Under its provisions, the military reserves for itself 25 per cent of seats in both Houses of Parliament, to which it appoints serving military officials. Also, a political party which is a proxy for the military contests elections. Its share of seats fell further this time because of the NLD's sweep.



The army's allegation

- A military spokesman said earlier in the week that the Tatmadaw had found 8.6 million irregularities in 314 areas across all states and regions, and that this indicated the possibility that people had voted “more than once”, or had engaged in some other “voting malpractice”.
- The UEC has said it had found no evidence of any voting malpractice or fraud. It has said that each vote was “counted transparently and witnessed by election candidates, election staff, the media, observers and other civil society organizations”.
- The army chief called the 2008 Constitution “effective”. Each section of the law has a purpose and meaning, he said, and no one should take it upon themselves to interpret it as they pleased. “Applying the law based on one’s own ideas may cause harm rather than being effective,” he was quoted as saying by ‘The Irrawaddy’.
- He also spoke about how the military had revoked two previous constitutions in Myanmar.

Democratic transition halted

- The speech and the army’s assertion prompted the United States embassy and diplomatic missions of 15 other countries and the European Union in Yangon to issue a joint statement “oppos[ing] any attempt to alter the outcome of the elections or impede Myanmar’s democratic transition”.
- Myanmar’s democratic transition had been a work in progress. The results of the 2020 election, held during the pandemic, were being seen by the NLD as a mandate for its plan of constitutional reform, through which it aimed to do away with the military’s role in politics and governance. But this was never going to be easy, given the tight constitutional restrictions for amendments.
- But the hybrid system was a huge shift away from what it was until 2011, the year the military decided to release Suu Kyi from her nearly two-decade-long house arrest, thus inaugurating its “road map to democracy” on which there has been slow progress.
- Suu Kyi had been more reconciliatory towards the Army than was expected even by her own supporters, to the extent of defending the Tatmadaw at the International Court of Justice against accusations of atrocities on the Rohingya. The stand-off over the elections was the first serious face-off she had with the military since her release.

Text of the statement by diplomatic missions

- Following is the text of the statement jointly issued by the diplomatic missions of Australia; Canada; the Delegation of the EU and European Union Member States with presence in Myanmar: Denmark, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden; as well as Switzerland; the United Kingdom; the United States; Norway; and New Zealand.

February (Week 2)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

FSSAI caps trans fats in food products

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

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

Details:

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

What are trans-fats?

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

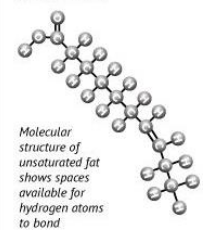
Different Kinds of Fat

Fatty acids, which are the building blocks of fat, are long chains of carbon and hydrogen atoms. Essential fatty acids are those needed by the human body that can only be obtained through food. Some fats are harmful, however.



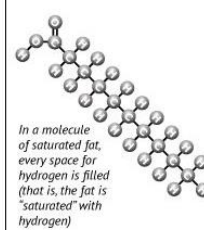
UNSATURATED FATS

The so-called "good" fats can be found in nuts, avocados and other vegetables. The molecular structure of unsaturated fat causes it to be lower in calories than other fats.



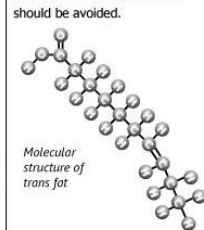
SATURATED FATS

These fats are found mostly in animal products. It is recommended that people reduce their consumption of saturated fats in order to stay healthy.



TRANS FATS

Trans fats are unsaturated (good) fats which have been partially saturated with hydrogen to extend their shelf life. Unfortunately, these trans fats are found to elevate "bad" cholesterol and should be avoided.



Ka-226T

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The total indigenous content of the Ka-226T utility helicopters, to be jointly manufactured locally by India and Russia with Transfer of Technology (ToT), is between 27%-33%

What is Ka-226T



- The Ka-226T is meant to replace the ageing and obsolete Cheetah and Chetak fleet of the Army and Air Force and the total technical life of these will start finishing from 2023 onwards.
- As per the Russian proposal, the localisation plan would be spread over four phases, beginning with 3.3% indigenisation for 35 helicopters, going up to 15% for next 25 helicopters, 35% for 30 helicopters in Phase 3 and eventually to 62.4% indigenisation in Phase 4 for the last 50 helicopters.
- The helicopters would be manufactured by India Russia Helicopters Limited (IRHL) — a joint venture between HAL and Russian Helicopters.
- In 2015, India and Russia had concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for at least 200 Ka-226T twin engine utility helicopters estimated to cost over \$1 billion with 60 helicopters to be directly imported and remaining 140 manufactured locally. The first helicopter would be delivered within 36 months from the signing of the contract.

Ka-226T

| Light multi-purpose helicopter

The model incorporates modular design and can be easily adapted for different functionalities. Ka-226T is available in a number of modifications, e.g., passenger, cargo, medical or search-and-rescue helicopter.



Kurubas

(Source: The Hindu)

Context: In a show of strength to demand Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, members of the Kuruba community, including three Ministers in Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa's Cabinet, took out a massive rally in the city.

About the Kurubas

- **Kuruba**, (also known as **Kuruba Gowda**, **Kuruma** and **Kurumbar**) is a Hindu caste native to the Indian state of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They are the third-largest caste group in Karnataka. Traditionally, they were shepherds, militiamen from the hills, armed vassals, or postmen. They practiced sheep/goat and cattle pastoralism, in that they either herded exclusively sheep, or a mixed herd of sheep and goats, or cattle.
- The term *kuruba*, meaning *shepherd*, is derived from *kuri*, meaning *sheep*. Shepherding was traditionally their primary occupation and still is for many, who lead a nomadic lifestyle.

History

- Oral traditions of the Kurubas indicate their descent from Neolithic farming villages in South India which also kept cattle.
- Oral traditions indicate some of these original cattle-keeping agriculturalists branched off into new habitats and quickly came to rely on sheep pastoralism, absorbing Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. Rituals associated with hunting presumably came from the integration of these hunter-gatherers into the Neolithic pastoralists.
- These pastoralists later became almost totally separated from their villager antecedents and interacted with them only based on initial conflict and acculturation. For pastoralists such as the Kurubas, the horse became an important pack animal after the Iron Age and an animal for fighting.



- Nanjundaiah claimed the Kurubas were the descendants of the Pallavas. Groups of soldiers from the Kuruba community became important in the armies of Deccan powers in the Medieval era.
- It is believed that Kurubas are ethnically related to the Kuruvans of Sangam literature. This is also supported by the fact that Kuruvans worshiped Murukan and his Kuruvan wife, Valli whereas Kurubas worship Mailara/Mallanna, who represents Murukan, and his Kuruba wife, Kurubattayavva.
- Traditional sources claim that the Kurumas or Kurubas founded the Sangama dynasty, the founding dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire. According to Ramchandra Chintaman Dhere, a scholar of the religious traditions of Maharashtra:
- The history of South India shows clearly that all the southern royal dynasties who arose from pastoralist, cowherd groups gained Kshatriya status by claiming to be Moon lineage Kshatriyas, by taking Yadu as their ancestor, and by continually keeping alive their pride in being 'Yadavas'. Many dynasties in South India, from the Pallavas to the Yadavarayas, were originally members of pastoralist, cowherd groups and belonged to Kuruba lineages.

Subdivisions

- They have three divisions, namely Unnikankan, Hattikankan and Hande. Those who subsist on the wool economy wear a *Unnikankan* (wool bracelet), while those in agriculture wear a *Hattikankan* (cotton bracelet). These bracelets are tied during the marriage ceremony.
- Hande Kurubas claims a higher position than the other two and prefers to be called Nayakas. They were an important part of the armies of Hyder Ali and Ankusagari Poligars. Nayakas were military leaders who often became Inamdars.
- The priestly class of Kurubas is called Oderu Kuruba. They don't eat meat and wear the lingam, and to that extent they resemble the Lingayats' Jangamas.
- In Maharashtra, they are a sub-caste of Dhangar community. Kurubas and Dhangars have the same religious ideas and practices. The Kannada speaking Dhangars of southern Maharashtra can easily be called Kurubas.
- They are divided into Unnikankan and Hattikankan Dhangars, which are subdivisions of Kurubas. Dhangars' priestly class is called Vadad, derived from Oderu, which is the priestly class of Kurubas. They differ from Kurubas only in name and language.

Culture

- Although the Kurubas are traditionally Saivites, they worship a variety of deities. Mailara, Mallanna, Mallikarjuna, Vitthal (in his original Shiva form) and Beerappa, who all are forms of Shiva, and Yellamma are some of the important gods of Kurubas.
- They consider Vitthal and Beerappa as brothers, however, Beerappa has traditionally been their exclusive deity. Other deities they worship include Batyappa, Irachikappa, Kallu Kambhadappa, Budalappa, Settippalleppa, Karakuappa and Lakshmi Devi. They worship all *gramadevatas* and sacrifice sheep and goats.
- Previously, the Kurubas celebrated *parashe* where the group of Kurubas throughout a region celebrated the festival of their gods. During this time *Goravas*, an order of saints dedicated to Mailari Devaru, are initiated.
- During the *parashe*, the idol of the temple where the *parashe* takes place is washed in a river, and decorated with *hoovu-vibhuti*. The worship is conducted by a Kuruba pujari and the Goravas sing songs dedicated to the deity.
- However, these celebrations were largely gone by the 1920s. The Kurubas also worship *Iragaru*, men who die unmarried, by building temples and setting up stones for them. They bury their dead.



Glacial Lake Outburst Floods

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

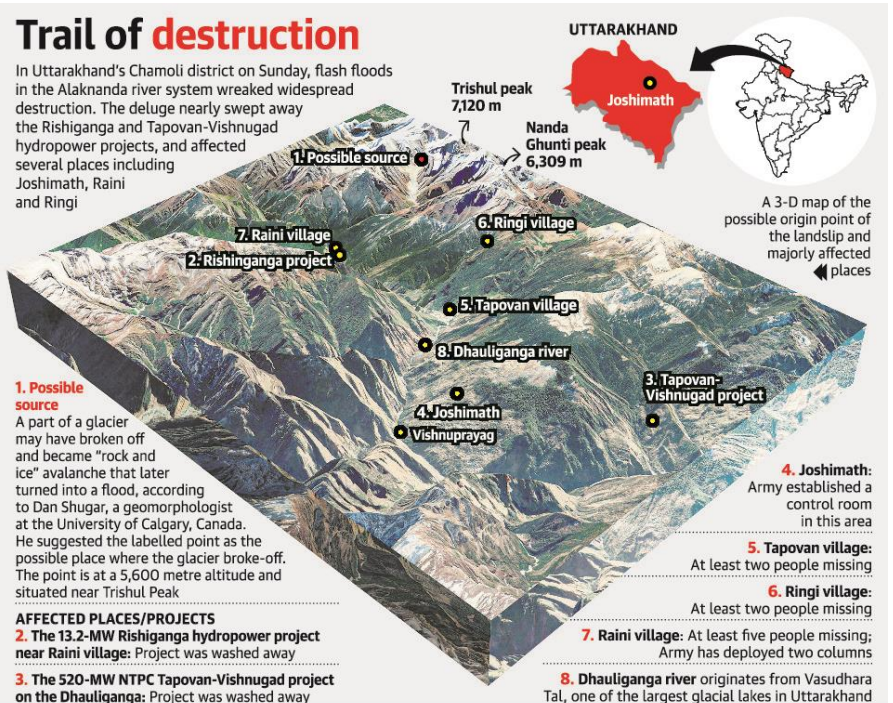
Context: A glacier break is suspected to have caused the flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli recently. Last October, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), which is headed by PM Narendra Modi, had issued detailed guidelines on how to reduce and deal with disasters caused by what is scientifically called **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**.

What are GLOFs and how vulnerable are the Himalayas?

- When glaciers melt, the water in glacial lakes accumulates behind loose, natural “glacial/moraine dams” made of ice, sand, pebbles and ice residue. A GLOF refers to the flooding that occurs when the water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released suddenly.
- Unlike earthen dams, the weak structure of the moraine dam leads to the abrupt failure of the dam on top of the glacial lake, which holds large volume of water. A failure of the dam has the potential of releasing millions of cubic metres of water in a short period, causing catastrophic flooding downstream. Peak flows as high as 15,000 cubic metre per second have been recorded in such events.
- According to NDMA, glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the Hindu Kush Himalaya has given rise to the formation of numerous new glacial lakes, which are the major cause of GLOFs.
- Since glaciers in the Himalayas are in a retreating phase, glacial lakes are growing and pose a potentially large risk to downstream infrastructure and life.
- An “Inventory and Monitoring of Glacial Lakes / Water Bodies in the Himalayan Region of Indian River Basins”, sponsored by Climate Change Directorate, Central Water Commission, and done by National Remote Sensing Centre during 2011-15, found that there are 352, 283 and 1,393 glacial lakes and water bodies in the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra basins respectively.

How can the risk be reduced?

- The NDMA guidelines say that risk reduction has to begin with identifying and mapping such lakes, taking structural measures to prevent their sudden breach, and establishing mechanism to save lives and property in times of a breach.
- According to NDMA, glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the Hindu Kush Himalaya has given rise to the formation of numerous new glacial lakes.
- Potentially dangerous lakes can be identified based on field observations, records of past events, geomorphologic and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/dam and surroundings, and other physical conditions.





- NDMA has recommended use of Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery to automatically detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations, during the monsoon months. It has said methods and protocols could also be developed to allow remote monitoring of lake bodies from space.
- To manage lakes structurally, the NDMA recommends reducing the volume of water with methods such as controlled breaching, pumping or siphoning out water, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.
- A landslide occurred along the Phuktal (tributary to Zaskar river) on December 31, 2014 in Kargil district of Ladakh, leading to a potential flood situation on May 7, 2015. The NDMA created an Expert Task Force which, along with the Army, used explosives to channel water from the river using controlled blasting and manual excavation of debris.

Are there early warning systems in place?

- The number of implemented and operational GLOF EWS is still very small, even at the global scale. In the Himalayan region, there are at three reported instances (two in Nepal and one in China) of implementation of sensor- and monitoring-based technical systems for GLOF early warning.
- India, though, has a remarkable history of successful warnings in relation to Landslide Lake Outburst Floods (LLOFs), dating back to the 19th century. In 1894, a landslide in Gohna, Uttarakhand dammed the main river. On July 5 that year, the engineer in charge estimated the lake would overflow the dam in mid-August, which eventually happened.
- Despite the devastating impact of the flood, including washing away of most buildings along the river and severe destruction in Srinagar, no victims were reported, thanks to the precise prediction and the early warning to the population. This was made possible by the installation of a telephone line between the lake and the downstream towns of Chamoli, Srinagar etc.

Lingayats

(Source: [The Indian Express](#))

Context: *Politics around the Lingayat community has once again taken centre stage in Karnataka, with a section of BJP MLAs and seers in the community demanding inclusion of a large Lingayat sub-sect in an OBC quota category that provides 15% reservation in government jobs and education in the state.*

Who are the Lingayats?

- The Lingayats are a dominant community who make up nearly 17% of Karnataka's six crore population.
- The community can determine the outcome of polls in as many as 90-100 of the state's 224 Assembly constituencies.
- The Lingayats, classified as a Hindu sub-caste called Veerashaiva Lingayats, are essentially followers of the 12th-century philosopher Saint Basavanna, who started a movement to help sections of society break away from the chains of caste.
- The Veerashaiva Lingayats are an amalgamation of the followers of Basavanna's teachings and Veerashaivas who follow more traditional Hindu practices. The Lingayat community has many sub-sects identified on the basis of the vocations they followed.

What is the current controversy?

- Veerashaiva Lingayats have been provided 5% reservation under a special category called 3B. A sub-sect called the Panchamasali Lingayats — basically agriculturists who account for nearly 70% of Lingayats — have now risen in protest seeking reservations under the category 2A, which currently provides 15% reservations to backward castes.



- The demand has been raised by BJP MLA Basavaraj Patil Yatnal and two prominent seers, Jaya Basava Mruthyunjaya Swami and Vachananda Swami. A protest march and rallies in parts in north and central Karnataka since January 14 have put pressure on Yediyurappa to take a decision.

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour act, 1971

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Police in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit district have booked the mother and brother of a farmer who had died during the farmers' agitation in Delhi, under The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, after his body was allegedly draped in the national flag.*

What Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act says

- The law, enacted on December 23, 1971, penalises the desecration of or insult to Indian national symbols, such as the National Flag, the Constitution, the National Anthem, and the Indian map, as well as contempt of the Constitution of India.
- Section 2 of the Act, "Insults to Indian National Flag and Constitution of India", says: "Whoever in any public place or in any other place within public view burns, mutilates, defaces, difiles, disfigures, destroys, tramples upon or otherwise shows disrespect to or brings into contempt (whether by words, either spoken or written, or by acts) the Indian National Flag or the Constitution of India or any part thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both."
- As per the Act, "disrespect to the Indian National Flag means and includes", among other things, "using the Indian National Flag as a drapery in any form whatsoever except in State funerals or armed forces or other para-military forces funerals". (Explanation 4(d) under Section 2) Section 3.22 of The Flag Code of India, 2002 (which deals with laws, practices and conventions that apply to the display of the national flag), reads: "The Flag shall not be used as a drapery in any form whatsoever except in State/Military/Central Paramilitary Forces funerals hereinafter provided."
- Section 3.58 says: "On occasions of State/Military/Central Paramilitary Forces funerals, the flag shall be draped over the bier or coffin with the saffron towards the head of the bier or coffin. The Flag shall not be lowered into the grave or burnt in the pyre."

Use of flag in funerals

- A senior advocate at the Allahabad High Court said that the flag can only be used during a funeral if it is accorded the status of a state funeral.
- Apart from police and armed forces, state funerals are held when people who are holding or have held office of President, Vice-President, Prime Minister, Cabinet Minister, Chief Minister pass away.
- The status of a state funeral can be accorded in case of death of people not belonging to the armed forces, police or the above-mentioned categories by the state government. Then too, the national flag can be used.
- The latest to get a state funeral from fields outside police, armed forces and government dignitaries was Roddam Narasimha, who was an aerospace scientist and fluid dynamicist from Andhra Pradesh. Others who were accorded a similar honour recently were actors Sridevi and Shashi Kapoor.

Government Securities?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that it will give small investors direct access to its government securities trading platform.*

What are government securities, or g-secs?

- These are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.
- A Government Security (G-Sec) is a tradeable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation.
- Such securities are short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year) or long term (usually called Government bonds or dated securities with original maturity of one year or more).
- In India, the Central Government issues both, treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the State Governments issue only bonds or dated securities, which are called the State Development Loans (SDLs). G-Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called risk-free gilt-edged instruments.
- The two key categories are treasury bills – short-term instruments which mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years.
- Small investors can invest indirectly in g-secs by buying mutual funds or through certain policies issued by life insurance firms.
- To encourage direct investment, the government and RBI have taken several steps in recent years. Retail investors are allowed to place non-competitive bids in auctions of government bonds through their demat accounts. Stock exchanges act as aggregators and facilitators of retail bids.

Are g-secs tax free? How do they compare with bank FDs?

- Like bank fixed deposits, g-secs are not tax-free.
- They are generally considered the safest form of investment because they are backed by the government. So, the risk of default is almost nil.
- However, they are not completely risk free, since they are subject to fluctuations in interest rates.
- Bank fixed deposits, on the other hand, are guaranteed only to the extent of Rs 5 lakh by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Project

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The PM dedicated to the nation the 348 km Dobhi – Durgapur Natural Gas Pipeline section, which is part of the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga project.*

About the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Project:

- It is a gas pipeline project that aims to provide cooking gas to people.
- It was launched in 2016 in Varanasi and later extended to people in the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand.
- The government is taking the initiative to connect the eastern states with the national gas grid.
- The total length of the pipeline under the Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Project is approximately 3,384 km, out of which 766 km of pipeline is in Odisha state and the balance 2,618 km is in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal & Assam.

- The project will not just supply CNG to automobiles and cooking gas to household kitchens in cities along the route, but also to industries to meet their feedstock or fuel requirement.
- The project is being implemented by GAIL.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana (ABRY) has been launched to incentivize employers for the creation of new employment along with social security benefits and restoration of loss of employment during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

About the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY):

- Government of India will provide subsidy for two years in respect of new employees engaged on or after 1st October, 2020 and up to 30th June, 2021.
- Government of India will pay both 12% employees' contribution and 12% employers' contribution i.e. 24% of wages towards EPF in respect of new employees in establishments employing upto 1000 employees for two years
- Government of India will pay only employees' share of EPF contribution i.e. 12% of wages in respect of new employees in establishments employing more than 1000 employee for two years.
- An employee drawing monthly wage of less than Rs. 15000/- who was not working in any establishment registered with the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) before 1st October, 2020 and did not have a Universal Account Number or EPF Member account number prior to 1st October 2020 will be eligible for the benefit.
- Any EPF member possessing Universal Account Number (UAN) drawing monthly wage of less than Rs 15000 who made exit from employment during Covid pandemic from March 1, 2020, to September 30, 2020, and did not join employment in any EPF covered establishment up to September 30 will also be eligible to avail benefit.

Spinal Muscular Atrophy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *A gene therapy costing ₹16 crore is the only shot at life for nearly 200 children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 1, a rare genetic disease, in Karnataka.*

What is it?

- Spinal muscular atrophy is a group of genetic disorders in which a person cannot control the movement of their muscles due to a loss of nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain stem. It is a neurological condition and a type of motor neuron disease.
- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) causes muscle wasting and weakness. It can be difficult for a person with SMA to stand, walk, control their head movements, and even, in some cases, breathe and swallow. Some types of SMA are present from birth, but others appear later in life. Some types affect life expectancy.
- SMA affects one in every 8,000–10,000 people around the world, according to Genetics Home Reference.
- There is no cure for SMA, but new drugs, such as nusinersen (Spinraza) and onasemnogene abeparvovec-xioi (Zolgensma), may slow its progress.



Types

- There are different types of SMA. They vary in terms of when symptoms start to appear and how they affect life expectancy and the quality of life.
- The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke describe four types:

- **SMA type I**

- SMA affects physical function but not necessarily intellectual ability.
- SMA type 1, or Werdnig-Hoffmann disease, is a serious condition that usually appears before the age of 6 months. A child may be born with breathing problems, which can be fatal within a year without treatment.
- Symptoms include muscle weakness and twitching, a lack of ability to move the limbs, difficulty feeding, and, in time, a curvature of the spine. With newer treatments, such as disease modifying therapies (DMTs), some children with SMA type 1 can now learn to sit or walk.
- A doctor may detect SMA type 1 before birth, as tests may show low levels of fetal movement during the final months of pregnancy. If not, it will become evident within the first few months of life.

- **SMA type 2**

- Symptoms of SMA type 2 usually appear at the age of 6–18 months. The infant may learn to sit, but they will never be able to stand or walk. In some cases, without treatment, the individual may lose their ability to sit.
- Life expectancy depends on whether breathing problems are present. Most people with SMA type 2 survive into adolescence or young adulthood. Treatment with DMTs can help.

- **SMA type 3**

- SMA type 3, or Kugelberg-Welander disease, appears after the age of 18 months. The individual may have scoliosis or contractures, a shortening of the muscles or tendons, which can prevent the joints from moving freely.
- Most people will continue to be able to walk, but they may have an unusual gait and experience difficulty running, climbing steps, or rising from a chair. There may also be a slight tremor of the fingers. Complications include a higher risk of respiratory infections.
- With appropriate treatment, including with DMTs, a person can have a normal life expectancy.

- **Adult SMA**

- Adult SMA, or SMA type 4, is rare.
- It begins after the age of 21 years. The person will have mild to moderate proximal weakness, which means that the condition affects the muscles closest to the center of the body.
- It will not usually affect life expectancy.

SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY - OVERVIEW



TROPEX 21

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Indian Navy's largest war game – the biennial Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX 21) - which commenced in early January, is currently underway with participation of all operational units of Indian Navy including ships, submarines, aircraft as well as units of the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard.*

About TROPEX:

- TROPEX (Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise) is Indian Navy's largest exercise.
- The exercise is being conducted over a vast geographical expanse in the Indian Ocean Region including its adjunct waters and is aimed at testing combat readiness of the Navy in a complex multi-dimensional scenario set in the context of the current geo strategic environment.
- The Theatre Level exercise also aims to validate Navy's offensive-defence capabilities, safeguard national interests in the maritime domain and promote stability and peace in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The month-long drill will witness distinct phases that will also test the Navy's transition from peace time to hostilities.
 - In the first phase, the Indian Navy had conducted coastal defence exercise 'Sea Vigil' along the entire coastline and Island territories of India.
 - Exercise Sea Vigil was followed by a large-scale Tri-Service joint amphibious exercise AMPHEX-21, which was conducted in the Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands.
 - The latest phase was the 'Weapon Workup Phase' which saw multiple 'on-target' ordnance deliveries including missiles, torpedoes and rockets from frontline warships, aircraft and submarines. It demonstrated the lethal firepower of the Indian Navy and reaffirmed the Navy's capability to carry out long range maritime strikes in the Indian Ocean Region.

Meri Saheli Initiative

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *'Meri Saheli' initiative was launched as Pilot Project by Railway Protection Force (RPF) across South Eastern Railway for security of women passengers in trains originating in that zone.*

What is the Meri Saheli Initiative?

- Indian Railways has launched 'Meri Saheli' initiative for focused action on security of women with an objective to provide safety and security to lady passengers travelling by trains.
- Under the initiative, a team of lady officer and staff have been formed. The team will visit all of the passenger coaches including ladies coaches to identify women passengers.
- Details of their journey including coach number & seat number will be noted down by the team, especially if a lady is travelling alone in the train.
- The passengers will be briefed about RPF Security Helpline No. 182, GRP Security Helpline No. 1512 and other precautions, for example, not to take food from strangers, buying food from IRCTC authorized stalls only & taking care of luggage.
- The team will also advise them to feel free to contact the train escort party and dial 182 in case of any emergency.
- The details of the passengers will be conveyed to en-route Divisions & Zones to meet the passengers at their convenience till they reach their final destination.
- At the end of the journey, a feedback will be collected from the lady passengers regarding their journey experience and safety measures taken.



- The 'Meri Saheli' initiative was started by the Railway Protection Force (RPF) as a pilot project in the South Eastern Railway in September 2020 and after getting positive response from women passengers, it was extended to all zones.
- Dedicated teams of lady RPF personnel have been formed across all zonal railways for its implementation.

Saral Pension plan

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](#))

Context: *In order to simplify insurance product choice for lay investors, the insurance regulator, IRDAI, has been introducing standard products with uniform features in both life and non-life insurance. Recently, a new product has been added to the list — the immediate annuity plan, Saral Pension, which all life insurers have to offer from April 1, 2021.*

What is it?

- An annuity plan helps an individual to receive a regular payment from an insurer for life, after making a lump-sum or regular payment for a certain period. There are usually two types of annuity plans — immediate and deferred.
- Saral Pension is an immediate annuity plan where the policyholder or the investor makes a lumpsum payment upfront and the annuity payment starts immediately. The product offers pension for lifetime.
- In industry jargon, Saral Pension is a single premium, non-linked, non-participating immediate annuity plan.
- This means that it offers a guaranteed return that does not depend on markets or the insurers' profits. Like other annuity plans, Saral Pension doesn't have any cap on the investment amount.
- Saral Pension simplifies the selection for the individual and brings uniformity across insurers.
- Saral Pension offers two annuity options to the policyholders or annuitant.
 - One, life annuity with 100 per cent return of purchase price where the pension (annuity amount) is paid for life. The initial investment (purchase price) is paid back to the nominee on the death of the investor.
 - The second option is joint life annuity where the annuity amount is first paid to the initial investor for life.
- After the death of the person, if the spouse is surviving, the spouse continues to receive same pension for life till his/her death.
- Subsequently, on death of the spouse, the purchase price is payable to the nominee. But if the spouse has pre-deceased the investor, the purchase price is payable to the nominee. While there is no cap on the maximum, the minimum annuity amount to be paid (by the insurer) is ₹1,000 per month, ₹3,000 per quarter, ₹6,000 per half-year and ₹12,000 per year.
- This product, as per IRDAI's guidelines, should be made available across all distribution channels.
- Unlike other annuity plans in the market where the minimum age is 20-30 years, under Saral Pension, the minimum age at entry is 40 years (maximum 80 years).

SAKSHAM

(Source: [PIB](#))

What is Saksham?

- It is a dynamic portal for jobs/mapping the skills of Shramiks vis-à-vis requirements of MSMEs and other industries all across the country.

- The portal with the demand and supply data uses algorithm and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, for geo-spatial information on demand and availability of Shramiks, and also provide analysis on skill training programmes of Shramiks.
- The pilot portal originally initiated with two districts is now being launched as an all India portal.

Key features of SAKSHAM:

- A dynamic job portal – opportunity for Shramiks and MSMEs.
- Facilitate creation of 10 lakh blue collar jobs
- Direct connect between Shramiks and MSMEs, no middleman in between
- Minimise migration of Shramiks – job opportunity in proximate MSMEs



INTERNATIONAL

Tianwen-1

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

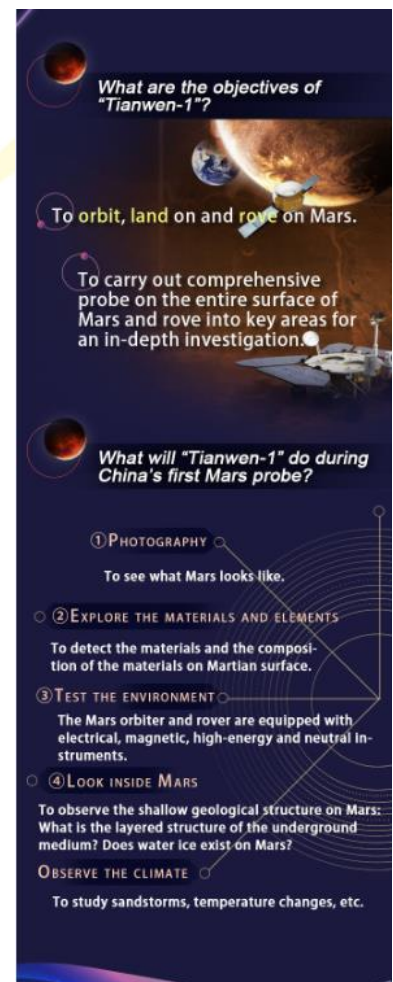
Context: China's Tianwen-1 mission successfully entered the orbit of Mars, making it the first time for a Chinese mission to be able to successfully make a journey to another planet.

Details:

- China launched Tianwen-1 along with the UAE's Hope mission and NASA's Perseverance rover mission in July.
- All three missions to Mars were launched during the brief launch window available in July.
- During this launch window, Earth and Mars were aligned at their closest points in two years, which means using less fuel to reach the planet.
- Launch windows are significant since if a spacecraft is launched too early or too late, it will arrive in the planet's orbit when the planet is not there.

About Tianwen-1

- China's first Mars probe is called Tianwen-1 (formerly Huoxing 1), which means "Questions to Heaven". The spacecraft is carrying 13 payloads (seven orbiters and six rovers) consisting of an orbiter, a lander and a rover, and the mission aims to study the thickness and sub-layer distribution of the Martian soil.
- The spacecraft, weighing five tonnes, launched on a Long March 5 rocket—a launch system developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT)—from Xichang, China. The scientific goals of the mission include studying Martian topography and geology and determining the composition of the surface material, climate and environment.
- The orbiter will use high-resolution cameras to search for a suitable landing site somewhere in the Utopia Planitia region. It weighs around 240 kg and will carry cameras, a subsurface radar, a spectrometer, a magnetometer, and atmospheric sensors.
- The rover is expected to land on Mars in May and the success of the mission will make China the third country to achieve a Mars landing after the USSR and the US.
- As per a report in the Air and Space Magazine, the Chinese mission will be the first to place a ground-penetrating radar on the Martian surface, which will be able to study local geology, as well as rock, ice, and dirt distribution. Two candidate landing sites have been identified, one of them being Utopia Planitia, according to Space News.
- China's previous 'Yinghuo-1' Mars mission, which had piggybacked on a Russian spacecraft, had failed after it could not leave the Earth's orbit and disintegrated over the Pacific Ocean in 2012.





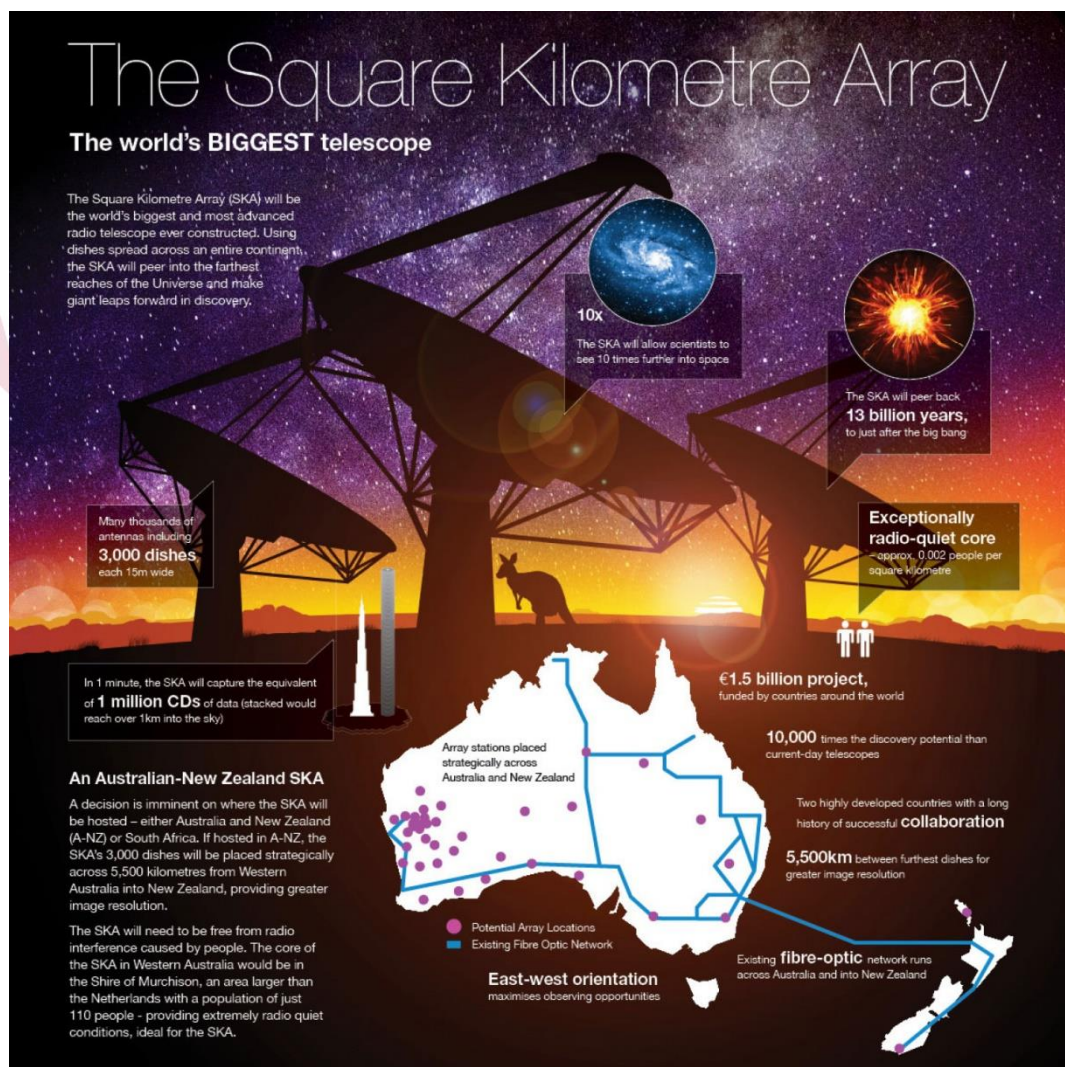
Square Km Array

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Recently, a global collaboration for the world's largest radio telescope took formal shape with the constitution of an Intergovernmental Council. The Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) project, spanning two continents and involving the participation of 20 countries, is expected to be ready for carrying out observations towards the end of this decade.

What will SKAO do?

- Headquartered and controlled from the UK, the SKA is not a single telescope but will be an array of antennas strategically designed and set up in South Africa and Australia.
- It is proposed to be built in two phases, with an estimated 1.8 billion euros required for phase-I, planned over the next ten years.
- SKA will allow astronomers to look deeper into the universe and unravel secrets about its evolution.
- Among its goals are: studying the universe and its evolution, the origin and evolution of cosmic magnetism, and dark energy and evolution of galaxies.
- Scientists are also optimistic that the SKA will be able to detect very weak extra-terrestrial signals and search for molecules that support life.

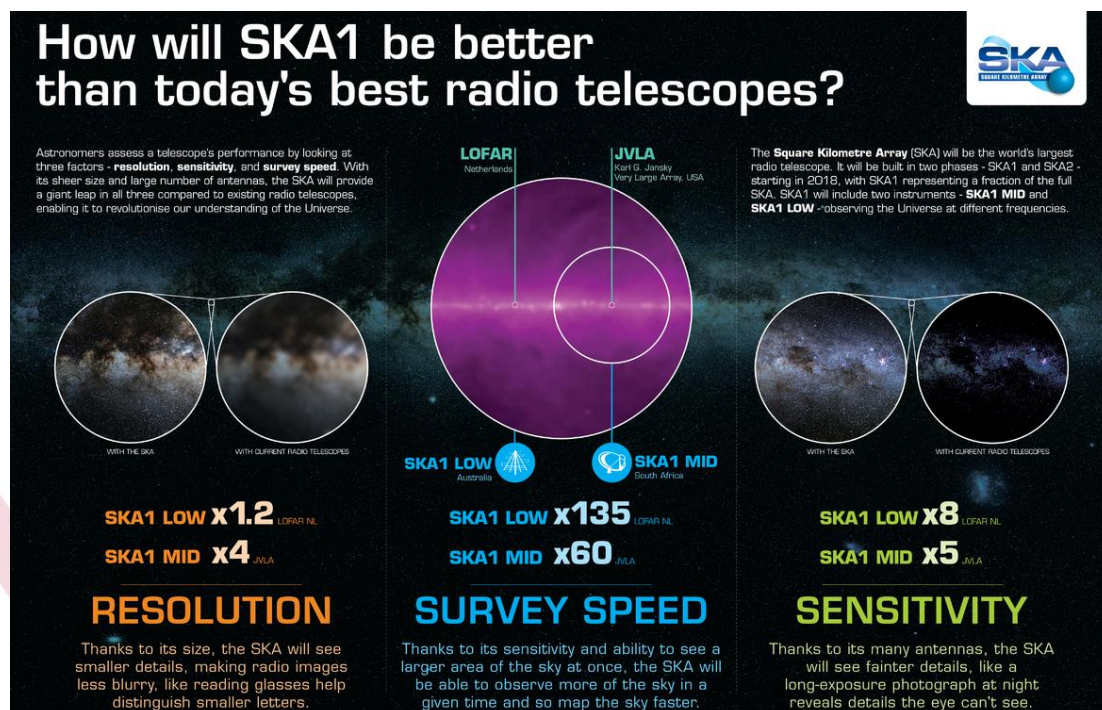


How is it designed ?

- The telescope in South Africa will have 197 dishes, each 15 metres in diameter, and will be located in the Karoo region. Of these, 64 dishes are on site and are at present operated by the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory.
- The telescope in Australia will have 1,31,072 antennas, each measuring 2 m high. They will be installed on the campus of the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory operated by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.
- Started in 2014, the design and engineering took six years to complete, with science and policy proposals coming from over 1,000 scientists, and more than 500 engineers representing 20-plus countries who deliberated over three decades.

Which are the SKAO member countries ?

- The three hosting nations are South Africa, Australia and the UK — headquarters in which will remotely monitor the telescope operations located in Australia and South Africa. Member nations include Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.
- In addition, eight African countries are taking part in coordinated actions to support the expansion of the project on the continent.
- Although there are 16 member nations, not all of them have officially attained membership as yet. India's SKA membership, for example, is currently under review with the DAE and DST, and is expected to be completed sometime this year.



Einsteinium

(Source: [Indian Express](http://www.indianexpress.com))

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

The discovery of the element

- It was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called "Ivy Mike" in the Pacific Ocean).
- Since its discovery, scientists have not been able to perform a lot of experiments with it because it is difficult to create and is highly radioactive. Therefore, very little is known about this element.
- When Ivy Mike was detonated on November 1, 1952, as part of a test at a remote island location called Elugelab on the Eniwetok Atoll in the South Pacific, it produced an explosion that was about 500 times more destructive than the explosion that occurred at Nagasaki.
- Subsequently, the fallout material from this explosion was sent to Berkeley in California for analysis, which was examined by Gregory Choppin, Stanley Thompson, Albert Ghiorso, and Bernard Harvey, who within a month had discovered and identified over 200 atoms of the new element.
- According to a podcast run by Chemistry World, the discovery of the element was not revealed for at least three years and it was first suggested that the element be named after Einstein in the Physical Review in 1955.

World's smallest reptile

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

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

Details:

- The team found one male and one female of the species, named *Brookesia nana*, during an expedition in 2012. The male has a length (snout to vent) of 13.5 mm and a total length of 21.6 mm when the tail is included. For context, a six-inch ruler (150 mm) would accommodate almost seven of these males in a row, tails outstretched. The female is slightly longer at 28.9 mm.
- Previously, the chameleon species *Brookesia micra* was thought to be the smallest. The average length of adults of this species is 16 mm (29 mm with tail), while the smallest adult male has been recorded at 15.3 mm.
- Reptiles come in a wide size range. The longest, the reticulated python, at 6.25 m is almost as long as 289 *Brookesia nanas*. The gharial is more than 200 *Brookesia nanas* long, while the king cobra can measure up to nearly 180 *Brookesia nanas*.
- On the smaller size, the gecko *Sphaerodactylus ariasae* of the Caribbean is almost as small as the *Brookesia micra*, or about 20-25% longer than the *Brookesia nana*. The gopher tortoise is equivalent to 12 *Brookesia nanas*, and the veiled chameleon to about 18 specimens of the newly reported Madagascar species.
- Madagascar is home to tiny lizards and also the smallest species of snakes. One possible reason for such small species is the so-called "island effect" that causes species on small islands to get smaller. But the study authors note that the new chameleon occurs in a rainforest.
- Scientists believe the species might be threatened by extinction because of habitat degradation.



The Nord Stream 2 pipeline

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: In a development that could ratchet up tensions between the United States and Germany, the consortium building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has said that it has resumed work on the controversial project.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline

- In 2015, Gazprom and 5 other European energy firms decided to build Nord Stream 2, valued at around \$11 billion. The 1,200 km pipeline will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany, and will carry 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year.
- The under-construction pipeline will run along the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system, and the two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic metres of gas to Germany per year.
- The pipeline falls in German and Danish territory, and all but 150 km of pipes for the project have already been laid.

Why the pipeline is controversial

- Since it was first planned, Nord Stream 2 has drawn criticism from the US, where both the Democratic and Republican parties believe that the project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas, thus boldening its President Vladimir Putin. Currently, EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.



- The project has also irked Ukraine, whose ties with Russia have seriously deteriorated in the aftermath of the Crimean conflict in 2014. There is an existing land pipeline between Russia and Europe that runs through Ukraine, which feels that once Nord Stream 2 is completed, Russia could bypass the Ukrainian pipeline, and deprive the country of lucrative transit fees.
- France has also expressed its opposition to the project, as have some others in Eastern Europe.
- Germany, however, has solidly stood behind the Nord Stream 2, despite opposition from allies, with Chancellor Angela Merkel's government insisting that it is a commercial project. Critics of the US position say that Washington is forcing Europe to buy its sea-borne liquified natural gas.

Denmark's artificial energy island project

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Danish government approved a plan to build an artificial island in the North Sea as part of its effort to switch to green energy. The project is being called the largest construction project to be undertaken in Denmark's history with an estimated cost of DKK 210 billion.*

What is an energy island?

- An energy island is based on a platform that serves as a hub for electricity generation from surrounding offshore wind farms.
- The idea is to connect and distribute power between Denmark and neighbouring countries. Denmark has already entered into agreements with the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium to begin the joint analysis of connections in the energy island.
- In June 2020, the Danish Parliament decided to initiate the construction of two energy islands, which will export power to mainland Denmark and neighbouring countries. One of these islands will be located in the North Sea and the second island, called the island of Bornholm, will be located in the Baltic Sea.
- The move has come after the EU announced its plans to transform its electricity system to rely mostly on renewables within a decade and to increase its offshore wind energy capacity by over 25-fold by the year 2050.
- The artificial island, whose construction was approved on Thursday, will be located about 80 km into the North Sea and the majority of it will be owned by the Danish government. Its primary purpose is to provide large-scale offshore wind power.
- Estimates suggest that it will be able to store and produce enough green energy to cover the electricity requirements of over 3 million households in the European Union (EU).
- According to the Danish Energy Agency, as part of the Climate Agreement for Energy and Industry, Denmark wants to become the first country in the world to begin working on such energy islands with a total capacity of about 5 GW offshore winds. The construction of both islands is expected to be complete by 2030.

UAE's Hope Mars probe

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

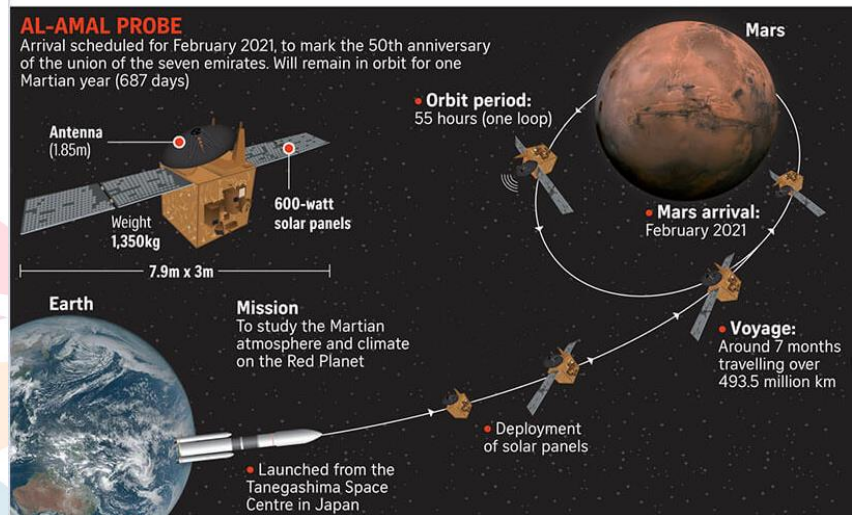
Context: *The United Arab Emirates' first mission to Mars entered the orbit of the red planet on Tuesday, seven months after the Emirati-built 'Hope Probe' was launched from Tanegashima in Japan. With this, the UAE has become the fifth country after the US, Russia, China, the EU, and India, to reach the Martian orbit.*

What is the UAE's Hope Probe?

- First announced in July 2014, the Emirates Mars Mission was developed and operated by the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in collaboration with the University California, Berkeley, Arizona State University and the University of Colorado-Boulder in the United States.
- In July 2020, it was launched from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan aboard a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' H-II A rocket and its launch became the 45th for H-II A. Carrying three instruments, including a high-resolution camera and a spectrometer, the spacecraft is on an orbital mission to collect data on Martian climate dynamics and help scientists understand why Mars's atmosphere is decaying into space.
- Hope is the UAE's fourth space mission and first interplanetary one. The previous three were all Earth-observation satellites. Once it is successfully able to reach the planet, it will start orbiting the planet. Its overall mission life is one Martian year, which is about 687 days on Earth.
- The mission is one of three launched to Mars from Earth in July. The other two — China's Tianwen-1 dual orbiter-rover and Perseverance from NASA — are expected to reach the red planet later this month.
- While Hope was the first to arrive, Tianwen-1 will reach on February 10, followed by Perseverance on February 18.
- The timing of the mission is crucial as it was launched at a time when Earth and Mars were aligned at their closest points around the Sun, the Verge reported.

The Al-Amal (Hope) probe

First Arab space mission to Mars, led by the United Arab Emirates



What is the objective of the mission?

- The primary objective of the mission is to study Martian weather dynamics. By correlating the lower atmosphere and upper atmosphere conditions, the probe will look into how weather changes the escape of hydrogen and oxygen into space.
- By measuring how much hydrogen and oxygen is spilling into space, scientists will be able to look into why Mars lost so much of its early atmosphere and liquid water. Over the next two months, the spacecraft will continue to move into its final orbital position — around 20,000-43,000 kilometres about the planet. The distance is calculated in a way that allows the craft to use all three instruments to capture a complete view of the Martian atmosphere every nine days for the next two years.
- It is expected to create the first complete portrait of the planet's atmosphere. With the information gathered during the mission, scientists will have a better understanding of the climate dynamics of different layers of Mars' atmosphere.
- Al-Amal will be the first "true weather satellite" orbiting around the planet. But the UAE also wants the mission to inspire the country's youth to take up careers in the sciences. The government also hopes that the mission will boost the UAE's science and technology sector.

Mains

GS II

India-EU Relations

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context : A key EU objective in its trade relations with India is to work towards a sound, transparent, open, non-discriminatory and predictable regulatory and business environment for European companies trading with or investing in India, including the protection of their investments and intellectual property. The aim is to contribute to unlocking the untapped potential of two-way trade between the EU and India.

EU-India trade negotiations

- Negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and India were launched in 2007 and suspended in 2013 due to a gap in the level of ambition between the EU and India. The EU remains committed to working towards an ambitious, comprehensive and balanced agreement FTA with India that responds to each side's key interests and is a win-win.
- The EU continues engaging with India to ensure that such an agreement is economically meaningful, delivering real new market openings in all sectors to both sides, contains a solid rules-based component, and includes a comprehensive trade and sustainable development chapter, notably in order to deal with social and environmental impacts.
- Meanwhile, the EU is ready to consider launching negotiations on a stand-alone investment protection agreement, which would increase legal certainty for investors on both sides.
 - The EU is India's largest trading partner, accounting for €80 billion worth of trade in goods in 2019 or 11.1% of total Indian trade, on par with the USA and ahead of China (10.7%).
 - The EU is the second-largest destination for Indian exports (over 14% of the total) after the USA.
 - India is the EU's 10th largest trading partner, accounting for 1.9% of EU total trade in goods in 2019, well behind the USA (15.2%), China (13.8%) and the UK (12.6%).
 - Trade in goods between the EU and India increased by 72% in the last decade.
 - Trade in services between the EU and India increased rapidly from €22.3 billion in 2015 to €29.6 billion in 2018.
 - The EU's share in foreign investment inflows to India more than doubled from 8% to 18% in the last decade, making the EU the first foreign investor in India.
 - EU foreign direct investment stocks in India amounted to €68 billion in 2018, which is significant but way below EU foreign investment stocks in China (€175 billion) or Brazil (€312 billion).
 - Some 6,000 European companies are present in India, providing directly 1.7 million jobs and indirectly 5 million jobs in a broad range of sectors.

India- Myanmar Relations

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The long-lingering power struggle in Naypyitaw has finally ended, and the Myanmar junta, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, has won the struggle, dashing decade-long hopes for a truly democratic Myanmar. The future of Myanmar's democracy is uncertain, but the country, sandwiched between two



powerful states competing for power and influence, is certain to be a key piece in the region's geopolitics. Given its high-stakes in Myanmar, New Delhi would need to be nimble-footed and creative in its responses with well-thought-out strategic choices taking precedence over knee-jerk reactions.

The COVID situation

- The COVID-19 Pandemic has shaken up the entire world, and in these troubling times, assistance from neighbouring nations is crucial.
- The developing nations will have to come together to support each other and ensure the safety of its citizens.
- Myanmar and India share a relation of tremendous support, and such exchange of assistance will strengthen the bilateral relations as well as provide the key to not be completely dependent on the western nations in times of crisis.

The Sittwe Port Project

- Infrastructure is indeed very significant for every country, and apart from technical assistance, often financial assistance is needed to complete such projects due to the high amount of capital involved.
- Several infrastructure projects in Myanmar like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway have attained assistance from India. A press release recently reported that India and Myanmar have also agreed to work towards the operationalization of the Sittwe port in the Rakhine state in the first quarter of 2021.
- Sittwe port is part of the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project, which is crucial to India's plans for the landlocked northeastern states to access the Bay of Bengal through Mizoram and to provide alternative connectivity to Kolkata without having to use the circuitous Siliguri corridor. Once the port is operationalized through a private operator, Indian goods can be taken via the Aizawl-Zorinpui-Palletwa axis to Kaladan river, and then transferred to Sittwe port.
- This move is beneficial not only for India and Myanmar but also for other southeastern nations. Such a project is beneficial for enhanced connectivity and economic participation amongst various nations in a convenient manner.
- Consequently, a Special Economic Zone near the Rakhine State would depict a long-standing economic relation between the two. The northeastern states of India will also receive a boost through this project.
- The easy access to the Bay of Bengal will open up new opportunities for trade and investment, especially for northeastern nations, which has the capacity to subsequently benefit the whole country. The trade between Myanmar and India is also bound to rise with this project. The Act East policy of India will receive a colossal incentive on completion of the project.

India's proactive approach towards gaining a regional outreach and building ties with Myanmar

- India shares borders with nine nations which include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The tensions and conflicts between Pakistan and India are indeed quite popular in the entire world. The deep cultural, as well as historical link between Pakistan and Afghanistan, is well known.
- Additionally, even when diplomatic ties between India and China are still "looking" strong, the pandemic has brought in new dimensions to the relations between the two. Therefore, amongst the nine neighbouring nations, only six nations remain with a potential of healthy and strong bilateral relations.
- Myanmar, being one of these six, the "shared historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties" between India and Myanmar, is significant in the development of foreign relations of India. Myanmar shares close borders with the Northeast Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland with a shared border of 1,643 kilometres and the land-locked nature of these states becomes a myth when we look at their connectivity through Myanmar to the Bay of Bengal.
- Additionally, Myanmar is a key pillar of India's Act East and Neighborhood First Policy. India's 'Act East' policy is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels. Certainly for India's Act East Policy to be successful, the betterment of connectivity with Myanmar and Thailand is vital. Being the only country that sits at the



intersection of India's "Neighborhood First" policy and its "Act East" policy, Myanmar is an essential element in India's practice of regional diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific and serves as a land bridge to connect South Asia and Southeast Asia.

- Myanmar is also India's closest defence partner in the region. Seeing that Myanmar is critical to its national security interests, India provides military training and conducts joint military exercises with the Myanmar Army like the India-Myanmar Bilateral Military Exercise (IMBAX-2017 and IMBEX 2018-19), by which India had trained the Myanmar Army to be able to participate in UN Peacekeeping Operations.
- Delhi has also agreed to train Myanmar army officers and allow them to study at military academies in India. Currently, with an energy portfolio of more than \$ 1.2 billion, Myanmar is the largest destination for India's investment in the oil and gas sector in Southeast Asia.
- Therefore, in terms of the energy sector, defence sector, the Act East Policy and the development of the northeastern nations, the relations with Myanmar will turn out to be very important in the coming future.
- Being an important country amongst the Bay of Bengal countries, Myanmar plays a strategic role in the upliftment of the economy of India. Myanmar and India even share a 725-km maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.
- Other agreements such as Project Agreement for the establishment of modern Integrated Check Post at Tamu, MoU for the construction of 50 basic schools and the Project Agreement for the upgrading of agricultural mechanization sub-station will also be signed shortly.
- The development in Rakhine State, the sharing of library material and other factors have a prime influence on the bilateral relations. The humanitarian assistance and the grants provided by India have always been a leading example for many other nations.
- In February 2020, the prime minister and President Myint later held talks at Hyderabad House and ten agreements were signed between the two countries, the focus being on development projects under India's assistance, particularly in the conflict-torn Rakhine state.
- The facts stated above reflect the complete dynamic approach adopted by India to establish strong strategic relations. It is undoubtedly true that both nations have the potential to flourish and can achieve significant heights if given the right incentive. With each other's support, both the nations may even give a competitive edge to the neighbouring nations.
- In fact, the proactive approach of India is indispensable in the prevailing circumstances so as to avoid the negative influence of China on Myanmar. Such influence could even conclude with Myanmar becoming a debt-driven nation in the clutches and control of China, completely.
- The balance of power in the Southeastern nations may even receive a drop once China acquires the control of Myanmar. This may cause a major security concern for India. But with a total bilateral trade of \$2 billion, India's economic engagement with Myanmar lags behind China, behoving Modi's government to scale up India-Myanmar economic ties. Therefore, the proactive approach being initiated by India becomes a key factor to influence the regional relations.
- If a reactive approach is adopted by India, it will be in a ditch with too many problems all occurring at once. The consequences will cost more if prevention is not done currently. It is a known fact that a spark neglected burns the house.
- Since India can predict the circumstances in the future as an outcome of these bilateral relations with reasonable certainty, a proactive approach becomes suitable. The benefits accruing to both the participants is desirable and may even achieve a higher standard, even if one of the participants plays a leading role.

The dominant powers in ties with Myanmar

- There are several dominant powers that are building ties with Myanmar, namely India, China, USA, and other Western nations. Beijing is using COVID diplomacy to push its BRI initiative in neighbouring Myanmar via CMEC.
- China has also influenced economic development and political stability in Myanmar. In January 2020, "Paukphaw", which literally means born together, implying not only a shared destiny but racial kinship, was reinforced through strong political and economic bonds between Myanmar and China. It was even



reported recently, in September 2020, that China seeks to set up military logistic facilities in Myanmar. This is a measure to maintain military control in the region. The Auditor General of Myanmar also cautioned the government officials of Myanmar about the dependence on debt being given through Chinese loans. The “client state” formula or the “satellite state” formula of China has already affected Sri Lanka, and Myanmar must take into consideration the impact of the controlling influence of China, no matter how generous China behaves.

- The influence of China on Myanmar dates back to decades of history. However, the rising influence on China on Myanmar was noticed by the US when Barack Obama came to power in 2009 and launched “Pivot to Asia” to emphasize that the US had strategic interests in Asia. Myanmar also launched political and economic reform in 2008 and adopted a “Look West” policy by re-establishing its linkages with the US. Even recently, in August 2020, US new Ambassadorial nominee to Myanmar Thomas Laszlo Vajda has emphasized that one of his goals as envoy would be “to advance US interests and values” in the Southeast Asian country and help defend the country against “malign influences” in a veiled reference to China. This shows how the US has also been observing Myanmar as a potential ally and wishes to enhance its position over Myanmar.
- The dominance of Myanmar of neighbouring nations like China and India along with powerful western nations like the US has constantly been rising. In furtherance of promoting its domestic interests, Myanmar has accepted every proposal which may benefit the nation currently, keeping aside the intent behind these proposals.

Balance of Powers and Competing Interests for India

- With Myanmar receiving aid and assistance from different time zones and diverse regions, a crucial question which arises is, how has Myanmar been balancing these powers? China and India not being in a “perfect” relation currently, Myanmar is technically attaining immense assistance from both these competing nations.
- Still, Myanmar has been effectively managing a diplomatic tie with both the nations. Similarly, Myanmar shows no stick-to-the-neighbour formula when dealing with the US. The balance of powers by Myanmar is commendable; however, very vulnerable as well. China and the US are at a constant pseudo-Cold War and with so many competing nations looking for Myanmar as a trophy prize, one day or another, Myanmar will have to choose. Although none of these nations would be quite happy with the second prize.
- With so many competing interests, it may be probable that a country starts to wonder, is it even worth it? India, as a nation, has achieved remarkable heights recently and is still very encouraged to grow. There have been instances when Myanmar has shown a disinterest towards China. One can say that quick glances of the control of China keep occurring at Myanmar and at these junctures, Myanmar has broken several contracts and reacted boldly.
- By challenging China’s monopoly, the Myanmar government is opening strategic space to create further competition between India and the United States on the one hand and China on the other, affording the Myanmar government a more comfortable degree of leverage and autonomy in the international arena.
- There is a high potential for India in Myanmar in various diverse sectors like agriculture, infrastructure and defence. With China trying to push Myanmar into a debt trap, it is the right time for India to stick with Myanmar when Myanmar realizes the intent behind practices of China.
- One can foresee Myanmar’s bias towards India in the coming future. Myanmar has even decided to expedite India-backed infrastructure projects and widen security ties with India as it seeks to balance China’s expanding presence in the country in the backdrop of Beijing’s active cross-border support for rebel groups and push for early completion of BRI projects.
- By challenging the BRI project, Myanmar shows how India is a priority over China. The potential of India and Myanmar in exploring complementary linkages in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, information technology and telecommunication infrastructure, traditional and renewable energy, among others, can present a compelling case for commodity-linked, export-oriented investment.

Cooperation, Rohingya issue



- While a friendless Myanmar junta getting closer to China is a real worry for New Delhi, there are other concerns too. For one, Myanmar's military played a helpful role in helping New Delhi contain the north-eastern insurgencies by allowing Indian military to pursue insurgents across the border into Myanmar. Coordinated action and intelligence sharing between the two forces have in the recent past been instrumental in beating back the insurgent groups in the northeast.
- Equally important is the issue of providing succour to the Rohingya in the wake of the military coup in Myanmar. Unless the military decides to engage in a peace process to gain some brownie points for itself, the Rohingya question is likely to be pushed aside with the campaign against them continuing relentlessly, perhaps with even more ferocity.
- The inability of the states in the region to address the legitimate concerns of the Rohingya or increased violations of their rights could potentially lead to a rise of extremism within the community, which in the longer run would not be in India's interests.
- New Delhi then is left with very few clear policy options. And yet, it must continue to maintain relations with the government in power in Myanmar while discreetly pushing for political reconciliation in the country. In the meantime, the focus must be on improving trade, connectivity, and security links between the two sides.

Conclusion

- Myanmar is a nation with latent qualities and abilities. Although several powers have been influencing the decisions of Myanmar, the actions of Myanmar must portray what is best for its domestic self. The interest of the nations itself must never be subsidized. India has a lot to gain from Myanmar and a lot to give to Myanmar as well.
- This give and take relationship has been the foundation of the bilateral ties between the two nations. However, the ties are in a vulnerable stage currently, but the proactive approach of India can mitigate all doubts and ensure that the struggle to support shall be worth the effort that India is putting in.
- The ties will benefit the neighbouring nations with security and infrastructure and give the Southeastern Asian region a balance of resources as well as power. India is at a stage where it will regret if it backs out now and will have to take the risk of a proactive approach to assure support to Myanmar.

Cuba's economic reforms

(Source: The Indian Express)

Context: Cuba, which has been run by an authoritarian communist regime for more than six decades, on Saturday announced that it will allow private businesses to operate in most sectors of the national economy. Cuban Labour Minister Elena Feito said that under the new reforms, the number of authorised industries has grown from 127 to over 2,000, with only a minority of industries continuing to be dominated by the state.

Cuba's economic reforms

- Considered path-breaking, the reforms will allow private involvement in most sectors of the complicated Cuban economy, long controlled by the state.
- Currently, private activity is largely confined to tourism, a sector hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. As international travel has plummeted, so have the incomes of thousands dependent on tourism, such as tradesmen and taxi drivers.
- Apart from small businesses, the private sector includes lakhs of small farms, cooperative and day labourers, and is estimated to employ around 6 lakh people or 13% of the workforce in the country of 1.1 crore population, as per official data.

Why bring in changes now

- Last year, the Spanish-speaking island nation was heavily impacted by two factors— the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, and sanctions imposed by the US under former President Donald Trump.
- This caused the country's economy to shrink by 11 per cent in 2020, its worst performance in three decades, leading to shortages of basic goods.
- Once the long-overdue reforms are implemented, small businesses which are already operating on the Caribbean island are expected to expand, allowing private players to move beyond tourism and small farms.
- The economic crisis has also forced the state to announce other reforms, such as the devaluation of Cuba's peso currency, deregulation of state businesses and foreign investment, as per a Reuters report. Last year, President Miguel Diaz-Canel said that Cuba would be initiating reforms to increase exports, reduce the dependence on imports and stimulate domestic demand, in an effort to tide over the country's economic challenges.

Relations with the US

- Cuba's decades-long isolation occurred in large part due to its hostility with the United States, despite Florida being only 150 km away from the island's northern coast.
- Things changed in 2015, when former Democratic President Barack Obama and Cuban leader Raul Castro agreed to normalise relations, allowing US citizens to visit Cuba and contribute to the local economy.
- However, many of Obama's policies were reversed by his Republican successor Trump, exacerbating Cuba's economic woes. Now that US foreign policy is again under the control of the Democrats under Joe Biden, experts believe that bilateral ties could improve in the coming future.

India must return to traditional diplomacy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The target audiences of Indian diplomacy's public articulation and responses are changing radically as shown by the statement of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), of February 3, on singer Rihanna's tweet.*

Details:

- The direction of Indian diplomacy's external publicity is no longer confined to other governments, international organisations, external and domestic political and business elites, and conference halls and negotiating tables.
- It now extends to international "celebrities", some of whose status is determined very largely by their pop star status.
- It also seeks to take into account apparent and latent sentiment on the Indian streets not only to clarify India's diplomatic positions or refute allegations and misperceptions but also to whip up sentiment on issues important to the government.
- Finally, it aims to forcefully convey to foreign audiences, India's unwillingness to accept perceived or real interference in the country's domestic affairs.

New, assertive norms

- This development is part of the government's impatience with the norms of old-fashioned diplomacy. It is in keeping with the emphasis on establishing a personal rapport with global leaders and what has been often stressed by the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar — the need to take risks to advance Indian positions and interests.
- Thus, new and assertive norms are being adopted which, at least till now, have demonstrated a disdain for international liberal opinion. It is beyond dispute that new directions for Indian diplomacy, in form as



well as in substance, should be constantly sought. But the test of innovation can only be one: is it more effective in advancing Indian objectives?

- It is on this basis that the MEA statement and the widespread social media activity that followed need to be judged. While the statement's origin will not be authoritatively known, it can be legitimately surmised that it was/could not have been through the normal processes of the MEA. Hence, it would have been on the basis of a political decision.
- The hash tags attached to the statements lend credence to this view as also the intensely orchestrated social media response from Indian personalities to tweets by Ms. Rihanna and others. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in building public opinion; all governments as well as groups do so. It is part of the global political and diplomatic processes but must be part of a careful strategy to achieve objectives. Otherwise, it can be counter-productive.
- Mr. Jaishankar tweeted after the MEA statement: "Motivated campaigns targeting India will never succeed. We have the self-confidence today to hold our own. This India will push back". These combative words require a sober analysis.
- There is little doubt that Khalistani groups in western countries would have sensed an opportunity to fish in troubled waters of the farmers' agitation in the Punjab. There should also be no doubt that the Pakistani generals, who have continuously sought to keep the embers of the Khalistan movement warm, would be looking for opportunities to create trouble. This is notwithstanding that the patriotism of Indian Sikhs and their contributions to the nation are beyond question. Thus, it would not be surprising at all if there are "motivated campaigns" against India under way on these issues.

Self-assurance, past and now

- Mr. Jaishankar's assertion that the India of today is self-confident to hold its own is of course true, but it can be argued that right from Independence, India has displayed the self-assurance not to take things lying down; only the methods may have been different.
- Again, there can be no quarrel with the External Affairs Minister's warning that India will "push back". The issue is not about should India "push back" but how and against what and whom. The answers to these questions hold the keys to the effectiveness of diplomacy whose ultimate target audience has to be not domestic sectional interests but global opinion and in the context of India's external interests.
- In this context, a look at the way the Narendra Modi government handled criticism from liberal sections abroad, of the administrative steps taken in Jammu and Kashmir after the constitutional changes of August 2019 and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the protests that followed, are instructive.
- India then refused to purposefully engage its international liberal critics though it publicly asserted security concerns for the administrative steps and laid stress on the point that the CAA did not impinge on the rights of the Indian minorities.
- Indeed, the government treated its global media critics with disdain, with Mr. Jaishankar emphasising that India's reputation was not decided by a 'newspaper in New York'. Certainly, there was no frenzied response on social media to the allegations against the government on human rights matters through all these episodes.

Ponder over direction

- On this occasion, was the severe response to Ms. Rihanna's tweet on account of her large social media following while the popular reach of global liberal opinion especially in the Trumpian era was limited? Was the object to deter foreign critics from lending their names to "manipulated campaigns"? Was it thought that if more celebrities joined, the farmers' protest would be energised? If these were the thoughts behind the decision then there is a need to check if it succeeded or gave an oxygen boost to the Rihanna tweet.
- Also, it is difficult to imagine that foreign critics like Ms. Rihanna, or for that matter of the Greta Thunberg kind, would be deterred by a concerted Indian pushback of the nature that has been undertaken. In the days of conventional diplomacy, the Rihanna tweet would have perhaps been just ignored, at least officially. But now 'the times they are a-changin'. So, is what the MEA doing headed in



the right direction? Perhaps, the erudite External Affairs Minister should ponder over this, and in doing so also take into account his earlier avatar, as a diplomat.

- The Delhi police have filed a first information report (FIR) against unknown persons who prepared a 'toolkit' which was attached to the first tweet of Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg. The FIR revealed that those undertaking "motivated campaigns" were actively undertaking efforts to embarrass and even harm India through the farmers' protest. A benign view of their objectives can be dismissed.
- India should of course press the governments concerned, especially of Canada, to take action against Khalistani elements. The fact though is that these countries, Canada in particular, have shown scant regard for Indian concerns on this account and it is unlikely that they will change course now.
- Through all this the question that still remains is whether the social storm unleashed in India after the Rihanna tweet would deter other foreign celebrities from pursuing the now amended 'toolkit'. And when have criminal cases based on this kind of an FIR ever reached fruition?

The rise of liberal opinion

- **Finally, it is not the Rihanna-like celebrities who will pose the real challenge in the coming months to the Narendra Modi government, but liberal opinion in democratic western societies. And, it will have far more traction with the advent of the Joe Biden administration in the United States.**
- **A pointer is the interaction of top U.S. Congress members in the India Caucus had, recently; asking India to ensure that "norms of democracy are maintained and peaceful protests and demonstrations be allowed", with this being conveyed to India's Ambassador to the U.S., Taranjit Singh Sandhu.**
- **The government would be now conscious of engaging international liberal opinion rather than merely dismissing it. This does not imply coming under pressure on matters of critical importance to Indian interests.**
- **But it does mean taking recourse to traditional diplomacy even if it is stodgy and unappealing to sections of nationalist Indian opinion.**

POCSO

(Source: [The Hindu](http://TheHindu.com))

Context: *The recent judgment of the Bombay High Court, in Satish Ragde v. State of Maharashtra, in which the accused was acquitted under the POCSO Act, came under massive criticism. The Bench acquitted a man found guilty of assault on the grounds that he groped his victim over her clothes and there was no skin-to-skin contact between them. As this judgment was likely to set a dangerous precedent, the apex court stayed the acquittal.*

The POCSO

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was enacted in 2012 especially to protect children (aged less than 18) from sexual assault. The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Act admitted that a number of sexual offences against children were neither specifically provided for in extant laws nor adequately penalised.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by India in 1992, also requires sexual exploitation and sexual abuse to be addressed as heinous crimes. It was therefore felt that offences against children be defined explicitly and also countered through commensurate penalties as an effective deterrence.
- Section 7 of the POCSO Act, inter alia, says that whoever with sexual intent touches the breast of the child is said to commit sexual assault. Whereas Section 8 of the Act provides minimum imprisonment of three years for sexual assault, Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) lays down a minimum of one year imprisonment for outraging the modesty of a woman.



IPC and POCSO: Differences

- The difference between POCSO and IPC, as far as the offence of sexual assault is concerned, is two-fold.
 - One, the definition of ‘assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty’ given in the IPC is generic whereas in POCSO, the acts of sexual assault are explicitly mentioned such as touching various private parts or doing any other act which involves physical contact without penetration. ‘Sexual assault’ in POCSO specifically excludes rape which requires penetration; otherwise the scope of ‘sexual assault’ under POCSO and ‘outraging modesty of a woman’ under the IPC is the same.
 - Two, whereas the IPC provides punishment for the offence irrespective of any age of the victim, POCSO is specific for the protection of children. Higher punishment is provided under POCSO not because more ‘serious allegations’ of sexual assault are required but because the legislature wanted punishment to be more deterrent if the victims are children. Therefore, once the act of ‘outraging modesty with the use of assault or criminal force’, which is nothing but ‘sexual assault’, is proved, the requisite punishment must be slapped under POCSO if the victim is a child.
- The essence of a woman’s modesty is her sex and the culpable intention of the accused is the crux of the matter in the cases of sexual assault. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court held that the offence relating to modesty of woman cannot be treated as trivial.
- In *Pappu v. State of Chhattisgarh* (2015), the High Court of Chhattisgarh, though it acquitted the accused under Section 354 of the IPC as the offence was found lacking in use of ‘criminal force or assault’, convicted him for sexual harassment under Section 354A which requires ‘physical contact’ and advances as a necessary element. This case also pertained to squeezing the limbs and breasts of a 13-year-old girl but the High Court did not venture into the area of skin-to-skin contact.
- It will not be out of place to mention here that the Sexual Offences Act 2003 of the U.K. says that touching (with sexual intent) includes touching with any part of the body, with anything else or through anything. The POCSO Act might be silent on such niceties; it is the bodily integrity of a woman that needs to be protected.
- Therefore, in the absence of any specific provision in the POCSO Act which requires skin-to-skin touch as a mandatory element of an offence, any interpretation which dilutes protection to children must be declared ultra vires.

Indo-China Relations

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In late January, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that while both India and China remained committed to a multipolar world, they should recognise that a “multipolar Asia” was one of its essential constituents. As it moves to becoming the third largest economy in the world, India needs to have a clear-eyed world view and strategy as it makes hard choices. It needs to reject the developing country regional mindset that has hobbled national aims and foreign policy.*

Details:

- The Year End Review of the Ministry of Defence pertinently refers to the “sanctity of our claims in Eastern Ladakh” instead of the term “border” used since 1954, opening space for a settlement. We are now confidently moving out of the predicament that Jawaharlal Nehru placed us in Kashmir, fully integrating it into the Indian Union and consolidating our claim line.
- The External Affairs Ministry is also now more forthright. We have a “special and privileged strategic partnership” with Russia, which provides more than three-quarter of India’s military equipment, and a “comprehensive global strategic partnership” with the U.S. despite the United States Strategic

Framework for the Indo-Pacific, 2018, wishing that India sees the U.S. as its preferred partner on security issues.

- India's relationship with the U.S.-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), where the others are military allies, has rightly been cautious, as U.S. President Joe Biden sees China as a 'strategic competitor' rather than a 'strategic rival'. Realism dictates that India does not need to compromise on its strategic autonomy.

Diplomatic challenge

- The foreign policy challenge for India is really two sides of the China conundrum: defining engagement with its neighbour which is consolidating an expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) while remaining involved with the strategic, security and technological concerns of the U.S. located across the vast Pacific Ocean.
- The U.S. 'Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China' cautions that U.S. aircraft carriers, symbols of the country's military hegemony, may not enjoy unquestioned dominance for much longer. Former President Barack Obama's military pivot to Asia failed to overawe China in the South China Sea and the costs of former President Donald Trump's trade tariffs were borne by American consumers and companies.
- In the financial sphere, there is the real possibility of the Chinese renminbi becoming a global reserve currency or e-yuan becoming the digital payments currency. China is the world's largest trading economy.
- It could soon become the world's largest economy — the Fortune Global 500 list of the world's largest companies by revenue for the first time contains more companies based in China, including Hong Kong, than in the U.S. The BRI countries are using the renminbi in financial transactions with China, and can be expected to use it in transactions with each other.
- Even the European Union, smarting under Mr. Trump's sanctions, created its own cross-border clearing mechanism for trade. China has stitched together an investment agreement with the EU and with most of Asia. Relative attractiveness will determine when the dollar goes the way of the sterling and the guilder. China, facing technological sanctions from the U.S., may well put in the hard work to make this happen soon.

Policy elements

- Some form of the EU's China policy of seeing the emerging superpower as a partner, competitor, and economic rival depending on the policy area in question is going to be the global norm. The EU's reaching out to China despite misgivings of the U.S. means the West has given up on containing the rise of China.
- This broad perspective is also reflected in India's participation in both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, led by Beijing and Moscow and designed to resist the spread of Western interests, and in the U.S.-led Quad, with its anti-China stance. Within the United Nations, India's interests have greater congruence with China's interests rather than the U.S.'s and the EU's; sharing the COVID-19 vaccine with other countries distinguishes India, and China, from the rest.
- The congruence between India and the U.S. lies in the U.S.'s declared strategic objective of promoting an integrated economic development model in the Indo-Pacific as a credible alternative to the BRI, but with a caveat.
- China opening new opportunities for countries in the Eurasian landmass means that ASEAN will not easily move out of the BRI infrastructure, digital, finance and trade linkages; Sri Lanka is a recent example. The China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has increased its membership to 100 countries.
- China is now the second-biggest financial contributor to the UN and has published more high-impact research papers than the U.S. did in 23 out of 30 "hot" research fields and enhancing its 'soft power' nearly to levels achieved by the U.S. earlier.

- Instead of an alternate development model, India should move the Quad towards supplementing the infrastructure push of the BRI in line with other strategic concerns in the region. For example, developing their scientific, technological capacity and digital economy, based on India's digital stack and financial resources of other Quad members, will resonate with Asia and Africa.

Policy evolution

- Another area where India can play a 'bridging role' is global governance whose principles, institutions and structures now have to accommodate other views for issue-based understandings. President Xi Jinping's "community with shared future for mankind", and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "climate justice" and asking how long India will be excluded from the UN Security Council, challenge the frame of the liberal order without providing specific alternatives.
- With respect to digital data, the defining issue of the 21st century, India has recently expressed that there must be reciprocity in data sharing, and this is the kind of 'big idea' for sharing prosperity that will gain traction with other countries.
- India's recent policies are gaining influence at the expense of China and the West, and both know this trend will accelerate. The steps to a \$5 trillion economy, shift to indigenous capital military equipment, and a new Science, Technology and Innovation Policy underline impact, capacity and interests.
- ASEAN remains keen India re-join its trade pact to balance China. It is being recognised that India's software development prowess could shape a sustainable post-industrial state different to the U.S. and China model.
- As in the historical past, Asia is big enough for both Asian giants to have complementary roles, share prosperity and be independent of each other and of the West.

GS III

One-Person Company - Push for entrepreneurs

(Source: [The Hindu](http://TheHindu.com))

Context: In her Budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced measures to ease norms on setting up one-person companies (OPCs). Ms. Sitharaman said the step — allowing OPCs to grow without any restrictions on paid-up capital and turnover — would directly benefit start-ups and innovators.

What is a one-person company?

- As the name suggests, a one-person company is a company that can be formed by just one person as a shareholder. These companies can be contrasted with private companies, which require a minimum of two members to get going. However, for all practical purposes, these are like private companies.
- It is not as if there was no scope for an individual with aspirations in business prior to the introduction of OPC as a concept. As an individual, a person could get into business through a sole proprietorship mode, and this is a path that is still available.

Why do we need such companies?

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

legal entities. Some see Ms. Sitharaman's proposal as a move to encourage corporatisation of small businesses. It is useful for entrepreneurs to have this option while deciding to start a business.

Is this a new idea?

- No. Such a concept already exists in many countries. In India, the concept was introduced in the Companies Act of 2013. Its introduction was based on the suggestions of the J.J. Irani Committee Report on Company Law, which submitted its recommendations in 2005.
- Pointing out that there was a need for a framework for small enterprises, it said small companies would contribute significantly to the Indian economy, but because of their size, they could not be burdened with the same level of compliance requirements as large public-listed companies.
- The report, while talking about giving entrepreneurial instincts of the people an outlet in the age of information technology, said, "It would not be reasonable to expect that every entrepreneur who is capable of developing his ideas and participating in the marketplace should do it through an association of persons."
- While making a case for one-person companies, the committee also said, "Such an entity may be provided with a simpler regime through exemptions so that the single entrepreneur is not compelled to fritter away his time, energy and resources on procedural matters."
- The law on one-person companies that took shape, as a result, exempted such companies from many procedural requirements, and, in some cases, provided relaxations. For instance, such a company does not need to conduct an annual general meeting, which is a requirement for other companies. A one-person company also does not require signatures of both its company secretary and director on its annual returns. One is enough.
- There was, however, criticism that some rules governing a one-person company were restrictive in nature. This year's Union Budget has dealt with some of these concerns.

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

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

How many OPCs does India have?

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

Government regulations and tech platforms

(Source: [The hindu](#))

Context: *The Centre has issued notice to Twitter after the micro-blogging site restored more than 250 accounts that had been suspended earlier on the government's 'legal demand'. The government wants the platform to comply with its earlier order of January 31 by which it was asked to block accounts and a controversial hashtag that spoke of an impending 'genocide' of farmers for allegedly promoting misinformation about the protests, adversely affecting public order. Twitter reinstated the accounts and tweets on its own and later refused to go back on the decision, contending that it found no violation of its policy.*

Are platforms required to comply with government requests?

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

What does the law in India cover?

- In India, the Information Technology Act, 2000, as amended from time to time, governs all activities related to the use of computer resources.
- It covers all 'intermediaries' who play a role in the use of computer resources and electronic records.
- The term 'intermediaries' includes providers of telecom service, network service, Internet service and web hosting, besides search engines, online payment and auction sites, online marketplaces and cyber cafes.
- It includes any person who, on behalf of another, "receives, stores or transmits" any electronic record. Social media platforms would fall under this definition.

What are the Centre's powers vis-à-vis intermediaries?

- Section 69 of the Act confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions "to intercept, monitor or decrypt...any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource".
- The grounds on which these powers may be exercised are: in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence relating to these, or for investigating any offence.

How does the government block websites and networks?

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

What are the obligations of intermediaries under Indian law?



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

Is the liability of the intermediary absolute?

- No. Section 79 of the Act makes it clear that “an intermediary shall not be liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him”. This protects intermediaries such as Internet and data service providers and those hosting websites from being made liable for content that users may post or generate.
- However, the exemption from liability does not apply if there is evidence that the intermediary abetted or induced the commission of the unlawful act involved. Also, the provision casts a responsibility on intermediaries to remove the offensive content or block access to it upon getting “actual knowledge” of an unlawful act being committed using their resources, or as soon as it is brought to their notice.
- In *Shreya Singhal vs U.O.I* (2015), the Supreme Court read down the provision to mean that the intermediaries ought to act only “upon receiving actual knowledge that a court order has been passed, asking [them] to expeditiously remove or disable access to certain material”. This was because the court felt that intermediaries such as Google or Facebook may receive millions of requests, and it may not be possible for them to judge which of these were legitimate.
- The role of the intermediaries has been spelt out in separate rules framed for the purpose in 2011. In 2018, the Centre favoured coming up with fresh updates to the existing rules on intermediaries' responsibilities, but the draft courted controversy. This was because one of the proposed changes was that intermediaries should help identify originators of offensive content. This led to misgivings that this could aid privacy violations and online surveillance.
- Also, tech companies that use end-to-end encryption argued that they could not open a backdoor for identifying originators, as it would be a breach of promise to their subscribers.
- Other proposed changes, which have not been acted upon, include rules that intermediaries should deploy automated tools for proactively removing or disabling public access to unlawful information, and to have a 24x7 mechanism to deal with requisitions of law enforcement.

Can a 'bad bank' solve the growing NPA crisis?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech on Monday revived the idea of a 'bad bank' by stating that the Centre proposes to set up an asset reconstruction company to acquire bad loans from banks. While the problem of bad loans has been a perennial one in the Indian banking sector, the COVID-19 pandemic-triggered lockdown last year and the moratorium subsequently extended to borrowers by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have worsened the crisis. With banks expected to report even more bad loans this year, the idea of a 'bad bank' has gained particular significance.

What is a 'bad bank'?

- A bad bank is a financial entity set up to buy non-performing assets (NPAs), or bad loans, from banks. The aim of setting up a bad bank is to help ease the burden on banks by taking bad loans off their balance sheets and get them to lend again to customers without constraints.
- After the purchase of a bad loan from a bank, the bad bank may later try to restructure and sell the NPA to investors who might be interested in purchasing it.
- A bad bank makes a profit in its operations if it manages to sell the loan at a price higher than what it paid to acquire the loan from a commercial bank.
- However, generating profits is usually not the primary purpose of a bad bank — the objective is to ease the burden on banks, holding a large pile of stressed assets, and to get them to lend more actively.

What is the extent of the crisis faced by banks?

- According to the latest figures released by the RBI, the total size of bad loans in the balance sheets of Indian banks at a gross level was just around ₹9 lakh crore as of March 31, 2020, down significantly from over ₹10 lakh crore two years ago.
- While the size of total bad loans held by banks has decreased over the last few years, analysts point out that it is mostly the result of larger write-offs rather than due to improved recovery of bad loans or a slowdown in the accumulation of fresh bad loans.
- The size of bad loan write-offs by banks has steadily increased since the RBI launched its asset quality review procedure in 2015, from around ₹70,000 crore in 2015-16 to nearly ₹2.4 lakh crore in 2019-20, while the size of fresh bad loans accumulated by banks increased last year to over ₹2 lakh crore from about ₹1.3 lakh crore in the previous year. So, the Indian banking sector's woes seem to be far from over.
- Further, due to the lockdown imposed last year, the proportion of banks' gross non-performing assets is expected to rise sharply from 7.5% of gross advances in September 2020 to at least 13.5% of gross advances in September 2021.

What are the pros and cons of setting up a bad bank?

- A supposed advantage in setting up a bad bank, it is argued, is that it can help consolidate all bad loans of banks under a single exclusive entity. The idea of a bad bank has been tried out in countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan and others in the past.
- The troubled asset relief program, also known as TARP, implemented by the U.S. Treasury in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, was modelled around the idea of a bad bank. Under the program, the U.S. Treasury bought troubled assets, such as mortgage-backed securities, from U.S. banks at the peak of the crisis, and later resold them when market conditions improved. According to reports, it is estimated that the Treasury through its operations earned nominal profits.
- Many critics, however, have pointed to several problems with the idea of a bad bank to deal with bad loans. Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan has been one of the critics, arguing that a bad bank backed by the government will merely shift bad assets from the hands of public sector banks, which are owned by the government, to the hands of a bad bank, which is again owned by the government.
- There is little reason to believe that a mere transfer of assets from one pocket of the government to another will lead to a successful resolution of these bad debts, when the set of incentives facing these entities is essentially the same.
- Other analysts believe that unlike a bad bank set up by the private sector, a bad bank backed by the government is likely to pay too much for stressed assets. While this may be good news for public sector banks, which have been reluctant to incur losses by selling off their bad loans at cheap prices, it is bad news for taxpayers, who will once again have to foot the bill for bailing out troubled banks.

Will a 'bad bank' help ease the bad loan crisis?

- A key reason behind the bad loan crisis in public sector banks, some critics point out, is the nature of their ownership. Unlike private banks, which are owned by individuals who have strong financial

incentives to manage them well, public sector banks are managed by bureaucrats who may often not have the same commitment to ensuring these lenders' profitability. To that extent, bailing out banks through a bad bank does not really address the root problem of the bad loan crisis.

- Further, there is a huge risk of moral hazard. Commercial banks that are bailed out by a bad bank are likely to have little reason to mend their ways. After all, the safety net provided by a bad bank gives these banks more reason to lend recklessly, and thus, further exacerbate the bad loan crisis.

Will it help revive credit flow in the economy?

- Some experts believe that by taking bad loans off the books of troubled banks, a bad bank can help free capital of over ₹5 lakh crore that is locked in by banks as provisions against these bad loans. This, they say, will give banks the freedom to use the freed-up capital to extend more loans to their customers.
- This gives the impression that banks have unused funds lying in their balance sheets that they could use if only they could get rid of their bad loans. It is, however, important not to mistake banks' reserve requirements for their capital position. This is because what may be stopping banks from lending more aggressively may not be the lack of sufficient reserves, which banks need to maintain against their loans.
- Instead, it may simply be the precarious capital position that many public sector banks find themselves in at the moment. In fact, many public sector banks may be considered to be technically insolvent as an accurate recognition of the true scale of their bad loans would show their liabilities as far exceeding their assets.
- So, a bad bank, in reality, could help improve bank lending not by shoring up bank reserves, but by improving banks' capital buffers.
- To the extent that a new bad bank set up by the government can improve banks' capital buffers by freeing up capital, it could help banks feel more confident to start lending again.

Internet shutdowns

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The movement led by farmers against the Central government's agricultural laws has become a part of our national and international discourse. Keeping aside the merits and demerits of the contentious legislation, the manner in which the Centre introduced the Bills and its actions towards countering the movement have raised plenty of concerns. A principal concern among these has been the recurrent shutdowns, ordered by the Ministry of Home Affairs, of Internet services around many border areas of NCR since the unruly incidents on January 26. Unfortunately, these blockages are not new.*

Details:

- India shuts down Internet services more than any other democracy in the world. The past four years have seen over 400 such shutdowns. Many parts of Jammu and Kashmir saw a partial restoration of digital services after a long period of 223 days — the longest Internet shutdown across the world — since the abrogation of Article 370 in the erstwhile State.
- Many, including UN rights groups, termed these shutdowns a form of collective punishment for people, and an overreach of governments on citizens' rights and liberties.
- Currently, Indian laws have vague provisions for suspending telecommunication services, including the Internet, during times of public emergencies, or, if required, for protecting 'public interest'. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court had declared in January 2020 that the right to access the Internet is one of our fundamental rights, alongside the freedom to carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of Internet, under Article 19 of the Constitution
- The impact of shutdowns becomes even more pronounced during a pandemic. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the ones with good connectivity and know-how of digital tools were able to carry on with their

lives with relatively fewer disruptions. Meanwhile, the ones without digital literacy or connectivity found themselves completely left out of all social and economic systems.

- Blanket bans on digital connectivity during the COVID-19 crisis may breed deep-rooted societal difficulties. The most vulnerable among us may be cut off from health and welfare alerts; there could be breaks in vital digital services, including those currently being used by hospitals to monitor the well-being of their patients at risk of infection, including the elderly, and pregnant women; students may lose access to avenues of learning as classes shift online; journalists may find it impossible to do ground-reporting from already volatile areas.

Massive losses

- Today, almost all white-collar employment sectors, including IT, financial and consulting services, are encouraging their employees to work from home. Internet shutdowns will freeze economic activity in affected areas and cause large-scale disruptions in economic output.
- India is estimated to have lost over ₹20,000 crore in 2020 because of Internet shutdowns. Despite the costs and inconveniences involved, the shutdowns, on very rare occasions, do become necessary evils. However, it is hard to classify the ones initiated by the Central government in recent years under those categories.
- Internet bans should be a last resort and must be enforced following well-formulated protocols. Emergency response and relief systems for the vulnerable have to then work in parallel. Upgrading cyber divisions of law enforcement agencies with new-age innovations may offer several alternatives. The use of some of these technologies, including mass surveillance systems and communication interceptors, also presents its own ethical dilemmas.
- As the pace of globalisation, digitisation and connectivity accelerates, balancing civil liberties with security concerns will become an increasingly difficult task.
- Governments, especially in democracies, will have to create modern, independent institutions that have the authority and expertise to create frameworks that meet these challenges, without falling back on measures that result in state overreach.

Disaster Management: Flash floods

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Recent flash flood incident in Uttarakhand is another warning of the dangers that a Himalayan state like Uttarakhand faces from natural processes like landslides, snow avalanches cloudbursts or lake bursts. As we saw in 2013 in the same state, such processes can trigger much bigger disasters and cause massive destruction. But it is possible to work towards minimising the threat of such incidents and reduce their impact.*

Increasing glacial lakes

- Glaciers are the largest source of freshwater outside of the polar regions. Glaciers and snow melt in the Himalayan ecosystem are the source of water for several rivers across the subcontinent, and are responsible for maintaining the perennial supply of water in the river systems like the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra to over a billion people.
- But these glaciers have reduced considerably in mass and surface area since the little ice age period. Global temperatures began to rise after 1850. They have climbed more rapidly in the 20th century as greenhouse gas levels soared. The rise has been even steeper since the early 1980s.
- Some models predict that an increase in global temperatures by 2°C from 1850 by 2070 would result in 45% of the medium and large glaciers (10 sq km or more) disappearing completely. Nearly 70% smaller glaciers are likely to melt away. Shrinking glaciers have led to the formation of a large number of glacial

lakes all across the Himalayas. Many of these high-altitude lakes are potentially dangerous, because of their potential to cause flash floods in the event of a breach.

- As pointed out in this newspaper as well, there has been an increase in the number of such lakes in the last few decades because of an acceleration in the glacial melt. A 2005 study by Kathmandu-based ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) had listed 127 such lakes in Uttarakhand. More recent studies put the number of such lakes in the state at around 400. To glaciologists, this does not come as a surprise, but it is certainly a cause for concern.

Monitoring

- The first step in tackling the threat from these glacial lakes is to start monitoring them and the glaciers more actively and regularly. We do not need to monitor every glacier. Glaciers in one basin do not have remarkably different properties. If we identify one or two benchmark glaciers in every basin, those that are more easily accessible, and do detailed studies, then the results can be extrapolated to the rest of the glaciers in the basin or the state.
- But relying only on satellites and remote sensing is not going to be enough. It is important to get people and measuring instruments on the ground. That is why accessibility becomes an important factor. But we need to very closely measure the bathymetric changes, the mechanisms of expansion, changes in water levels, discharge balance, mass balance, and other attributes. It requires a lot of manpower and money, but we must be able to invest these resources.
- A dataset that tracks the progressive changes is crucial for any decision making. Some amount of monitoring is already happening but it is dispersed. What is required is a consolidated state of glaciers in India, with the ability to zoom in on any of them and track the changes happening year by year.
- It is suggested that the government of Uttarakhand itself takes a lead in this effort, and not be entirely dependent on outside agencies for monitoring or data. After all, Uttarakhand is the most vulnerable to natural disasters like these, and it must build capacities to reduce the risk.



Planning

- Construction-related activities in the state might not have a direct link to Sunday's incident, but these are not entirely benign.
- The Himalayas are very young mountain systems, and extremely fragile. A minor change in orientation of the rocks can be enough to trigger landslides. It is important to include glaciers in any environment impact assessment for major projects such as construction of dams.
- The entire catchment areas should be made part of the impact assessment. In fact, project owners must be asked to invest in such studies. After all, their own assets are also at stake.

Mitigation

- If we monitor the glaciers regularly, it would enable us to identify the lakes that need mitigation solutions. Several structural and geotechnical measures can be applied, and there are successful examples where the threat from these lakes have been reduced.
- It is possible to construct channels for gradual and regulated discharge of water from these lakes, which will reduce the pressure on them, and minimise the chances of a breach. At the same time, it also reduces the volume of water that goes into the flash flood.
- Also, alarm systems can be set up at the lakes, that will warn the community downstream whenever an overflow happens. A preparatory response drill will also have to be worked out, like we have done for cyclones and tsunami.

Disinformation as a cybersecurity threat

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Cybersecurity focuses on protecting and defending computer systems, networks, and our digital lives from disruption. Nefarious actors use attacks to compromise confidentiality, the integrity and the availability of IT systems for their benefit. Disinformation is, similarly, an attack and compromise of our cognitive being. Nation-state actors, ideological believers, violent extremists, and economically motivated enterprises manipulate the information ecosystem to create social discord, increase polarisation, and in some cases, influence the outcome of an election.*

Details:

- There is a lot of similarity in the strategies, tactics and actions between cybersecurity and disinformation attacks.
- Cyberattacks are aimed at computer infrastructure while disinformation exploits our inherent cognitive biases and logical fallacies. Cybersecurity attacks are executed using malware, viruses, trojans, botnets, and social engineering.
- Disinformation attacks use manipulated, miscontextualised, misappropriated information, deep fakes, and cheap fakes. Nefarious actors use both attacks in concert to create more havoc.
- Historically, the industry has treated these attacks independently, deployed different countermeasures, and even have separate teams working in silos to protect and defend against these attacks. The lack of coordination between teams leaves a huge gap that is exploited by malicious actors.

Cognitive hacking

- Cognitive hacking is a threat from disinformation and computational propaganda. This attack exploits psychological vulnerabilities, perpetuates biases, and eventually compromises logical and critical thinking, giving rise to cognitive dissonance.
- A cognitive hacking attack attempts to change the target audience's thoughts and actions, galvanise societies and disrupt harmony using disinformation. It exploits cognitive biases and shapes people by perpetuating their prejudices. The goal is to manipulate the way people perceive reality. The storming of the U.S. Capitol by right-wing groups on January 6, 2021, is a prime example of the effects of cognitive hacking.
- The implications of cognitive hacking are more devastating than cyberattacks on critical infrastructure. The damage wrought by disinformation is challenging to repair. Revolutions throughout history have used cognitive hacking techniques to a significant effect to overthrow governments and change society. It is a key tactic to achieve major goals with limited means.
- For example, QAnon spread false information claiming that the U.S. 2020 presidential election was fraudulent, and conspiracy theorists (in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Cyprus and Belgium) burned down 5G towers because they believed it caused the novel coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 disinformation campaigns have prevented people from wearing masks, using potentially dangerous alternative cures, and not getting vaccinated, making it even more challenging to contain the virus.

Spreading disinformation

- Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) is a well-coordinated cybersecurity attack achieved by flooding IT networks with superfluous requests to connect and overload the system to prevent legitimate requests being fulfilled. Similarly, a well-coordinated disinformation campaign fills broadcast and social channels with so much false information and noise, thus taking out the system's oxygen and drowning the truth.

- The advertisement-centric business modes and attention economy incentivise malicious actors to run a sophisticated disinformation campaign and fill the information channels with noise to drown the truth with unprecedented speed and scale.
- Disinformation is used for social engineering threats on a mass scale. Like phishing attacks, to compromise IT systems for data extraction, disinformation campaigns play on emotions, giving cybercriminals another feasible method for scams.
- A report released by Neustar International Security Council (NISC) found 48% of cybersecurity professionals regard disinformation as threats, and of the remainder, 49% say that threat is very significant; 91% of the cybersecurity professionals surveyed called for stricter measures on the Internet.
- Deep fakes add a whole new level of danger to disinformation campaigns. A few quality and highly targeted disinformation campaigns using deepfakes could widen the divides between peoples in democracies even more and cause unimaginable levels of chaos, with increased levels of violence, damage to property and lives.

Lessons from cybersecurity

- Cybersecurity experts have successfully understood and managed the threats posed by viruses, malware, and hackers. IT and Internet systems builders did not think of security till the first set of malicious actors began exploiting security vulnerabilities.
- The industry learned quickly and invested profoundly in security best practices, making cybersecurity a first design principle. It developed rigorous security frameworks, guidelines, standards, and best practices such as defense-in-depth, threat modelling, secure development lifecycle, and red-team-blue-team (self-attack to find vulnerabilities to fix them) to build cybersecurity resilience.
- ISACs (Information sharing and analysis centers) and global knowledge base of security bugs, vulnerabilities, threats, adversarial tactics, and techniques are published to improve the security posture of IT systems.
- We can learn from decades of experience in the cybersecurity domain to defend, protect and respond, and find effective and practical solutions to counter and intervene in computational propaganda and infodemics.
- We can develop disinformation defence systems by studying strategy and tactics to understand the identities of malicious actors, their activities, and behaviours from the cybersecurity domain to mitigate disinformation threats. By treating disinformation as a cybersecurity threat we can find effective countermeasures to cognitive hacking.
- Defense-in-depth is an information assurance strategy that provides multiple, redundant defensive measures if a security control fails. For example, security firewalls are the first line of defence to fend off threats from external systems. Antivirus systems defend against attacks that got through the firewalls.
- Regular patching helps eliminate any vulnerabilities from the systems. Smart identity protections and education are essential so that users do not fall victim to social engineering attempts.
- We need a defense-in-depth strategy for disinformation. The defense-in-depth model identifies disinformation actors and removes them. Authenticity and provenance solutions can intervene before disinformation gets posted. If the disinformation still gets by, detection solutions using humans and artificial intelligence, internal and external fact-checking can label or remove the content.
- Today, the response to disinformation is in silos of each platform with little or no coordination. There is no consistent taxonomy, definitions, policy, norms, and response for disinformation campaigns and actors.
- This inconsistency enables perpetrators to push the boundaries and move around on platforms to achieve their nefarious goals. A mechanism like ISACs to share the identity, content, context, actions, and behaviours of actors and disinformation across platforms is needed. Information sharing will help disinformation countermeasures to scale better and respond quickly.

Education is key

- A critical component of cybersecurity is education. Technology industry, civil society and the government should coordinate to make users aware of cyber threat vectors such as phishing, viruses, and malware.
- The industry with public-private partnerships must also invest in media literacy efforts to reach out to discerning public. Intervention with media education can make a big difference in understanding context, motivations, and challenging disinformation to reduce damage.
- The freedom of speech and the freedom of expression are protected rights in most democracies. Balancing the rights of speech with the dangers of disinformation is a challenge for policymakers and regulators.
- There are laws and regulations for cybersecurity criminals. More than 1,000 entities have signed the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, for stability and security in the information space. Similarly, 52 countries and international bodies have signed the Christchurch Call to Action to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.
- The disinformation infodemic requires a concerted and coordinated effort by governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations, and other entities to create standards and implement defences.
- Taking advantage of the frameworks, norms, and tactics that we have already created for cybersecurity is the optimum way to meet this threat. We must protect our society against these threats or face the real possibility of societal breakdown, business interruption, and violence in the streets.

Current Affairs Quiz

1. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) project?

1. Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) project will be the world's largest radio telescope, once completed.
2. It aims to study the origin and evolution of cosmic magnetism, and dark energy and evolution of galaxies.
3. India is participating in SKAO through the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: d)

2. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct regarding Government securities, or G-secs?

1. Government securities are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money.
2. Treasury bills are long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years.
3. Dated securities are short-term instruments which mature in less than 365 days.
4. Like bank fixed deposits, g-secs are not tax-free.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: b)

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently said that it will give small investors direct access to its government securities trading platform.
- G-Secs are debt instruments issued by the government to borrow money. The two key categories are treasury bills – short-term instruments which mature in 91 days, 182 days, or 364 days, and dated securities – long-term instruments, which mature anywhere between 5 years and 40 years.

3. Which of the following statement(s) is/are incorrect with respect to *Flag Code of India*?

1. It states that National flag can be used as a drapery in any form only in State funerals or armed forces or other para-military forces funerals.
2. Only central government can accord the status of a state funeral in case of death of a person.

Select the correct answer

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

Answer : b

- The status of a state funeral can be accorded in case of death of people not belonging to the above-mentioned categories by state government.

4. Which of the following recently released Democracy Index 2020?

- a. World Economic Forum (WEF)
- b. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- c. Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU)
- d. Reporters without Borders

Answer : c

5. Which of the following statement(s) is/are incorrect with respect to Einsteinium?

1. It was discovered in the debris of the first atomic bomb “Little Boy” that was dropped over the city of Hiroshima, Japan.
2. It is a naturally occurring element which has radioactive properties.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

- It needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.
- The element has been produced in very small quantities and its usage is limited except for the purposes of scientific research.
- It was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called “Ivy Mike” in the Pacific Ocean).
- It produced an explosion that was about 500 times more destructive than the explosion that occurred at Nagasaki.

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Nord Stream 2 Pipeline:

1. It is a 1,200 km gas pipeline which will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany.
2. It will stretch across three different seas namely Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Mediterranean Sea.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- The pipeline will stretch across the Baltic Sea.

7. Consider the following statements with respect to GDP of India:

1. India is the third largest economy in terms of GDP.
2. India is the fifth largest in terms of GDP at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

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 : d

- India is currently the fifth largest economy in terms of GDP.
- India is the third largest in terms of GDP at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

8. Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY):

1. The scheme is being implemented all over India across all states and Union Territories (UTs).
2. The scheme places no cap on age and gender, or size of a family and is portable across the country.
3. The scheme provides for healthcare of up to 5 lakh per family per year, which can be used by one or all members of the family.

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

- a. 3 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Answer : c

- So far, 32 states and UTs have implemented the scheme and treatment worth Rs 7,490 crore has been provided.

9. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about Trans fat?

1. Trans fat are saturated fatty acids that come from either natural or industrial sources.
2. It is industrially produced by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil converting the liquid into a solid, resulting in “partially hydrogenated” oil (PHO).
3. FSSAI has notified that Trans fat in oil and fats to be limited to 3% in all fats and oils by 2021 and 2 % by January 2022.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Answer : b

- Trans fat, or trans-fatty acids, are unsaturated fatty acids that come from either natural or industrial sources.

10. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about Information Technology Act, 2000?

1. The act covers all intermediaries who play a role in the use of computer resources and electronic records.
2. It confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions to decrypt information in any computer resource based on prescribed grounds.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

11. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about UAE’s Hope Mission?

1. UAE has become the 5th country to reach Martian orbit.
2. Its primary objective is to look for signs of past microbial life, cache rock and soil samples, and prepare for future human exploration.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

- Its objective is to collect data on Martian climate dynamics and help scientists understand why Mars’s atmosphere is decaying into space.

12. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct about Vigyan Jyoti programme?

1. It is an initiative by the Department of Science and Technology.



2. It is to encourage girls to take interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

13. Consider the following statements in the context of recent Glacial Lake Outburst at Uttarakhand:

- 1. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods(GLOFs) refers to the flooding that occurs when the water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released suddenly.
- 2. The Topography of Hindu Kush Himalayas does not favour the formation of glacial lakes.
- 3. Synthetic-Aperture Radar imagery can detect changes in water bodies, including new lake formations.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c)

- According to NDMA, glacial retreat due to climate change occurring in most parts of the Hindu Kush Himalaya has given rise to the formation of numerous new glacial lakes, which are the major cause of GLOFs.

14. Consider the following missions:

- 1. China's Tianwen-1
 - 2. UAE's Hope mission
 - 3. Chang'e-4 mission
 - 4. NASA's Perseverance rover mission
- Which of the following space missions are related to the planet Mars?

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

Answer: a)

Chang'e-4 is China's first probe ever to achieve soft-landing on the far side of the Moon.

15. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct regarding Pangong Tso Lake?

- 1. Pangong Tso Lake is an endorheic lake in the Himalayas.
- 2. It is part of the Indus river basin area.
- 3. It is under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international importance.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: a)

- During winter the lake freezes completely, despite being saline water. It has a **land-locked basin separated from the Indus River basin** by a small elevated ridge, but is believed to have been part of the latter in prehistoric times.



- The lake is in the **process of being identified under the Ramsar Convention** as a wetland of international importance. This will be the first trans-boundary wetland in South Asia under the convention.

16. Which of the following committees had proposed privatisation of PSU banks in past?

1. Narasimham Committee
2. Naresh Chandra Committee
3. P J Nayak Committee

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: c)

17. Which of the following statement(s) is/are incorrect with respect to Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (GKRA)?

1. It is a 125-day programme implemented all over India, mainly focusing on 25 works.
2. It aims to provide livelihood employment to the returnee migrant workers and similarly affected rural population by Covid-19 pandemic.

Select the answer code:

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

Answer : a

- It focuses on 25 works in 116 selected districts across 6 States with a resource envelope of Rs 50,000 crore.
- There are 6 states included in this campaign: Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

18. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct with respect to Taxpayer's Charter?

1. It was introduced as a part of Vivad se Vishwas Scheme launched by the Government of India.
2. Under the Charter, the Income Tax Department shall allow every taxpayer to choose an authorized representative of his/her choice.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

- Taxpayer Charter was introduced by the Government of India as a part of the 'Honoring the Honest' platform.

19. Consider the following statements with respect to State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):

1. It is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters, constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
2. The Central Government contributes 60% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs.
3. A State Government may use up to 10% of the SDRF for disasters within the local context in the State.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer : b

- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

20. The Twin Economic Shocks mentioned in the recent Economic survey refers to which of the following?

- 1. Inflation Shock
- 2. Employment Shock
- 3. Demography Shock
- 4. Gross Value Added (GVA) Shock

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 4 only
- d. 3 and 4 only

Answer : c

- According to the Economic Survey, 2020-21, the spread and intensity of COVID-19 induced twin economic shocks. The shocks can be broadly captured through impact on ***output/Gross Value Added (GVA) and employment***.

Special Issue

February (Week 2)

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Everything you should know about Privatization in India

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The banking landscape in India is set to change with the government's decision to privatise two public sector banks. Coming after 51 years of nationalisation of government-owned banks in 1969, the move will give the private sector a key role in the banking sector.*

What Is Privatization?

- Privatization occurs when a government-owned business, operation, or property becomes owned by a private, non-government party.
- Note that privatization also describes the transition of a company from being publicly traded to becoming privately held. This is referred to as corporate privatization.

How Privatization Works

- Privatization of specific government operations happens in a number of ways, though generally, the government transfers ownership of specific facilities or business processes to a private, for-profit company. Privatization generally helps governments save money and increase efficiency.
- In general, two main sectors compose an economy: the public sector and the private sector. Government agencies generally run operations and industries within the public sector.
- There are two types of privatization: government and corporate; although the term generally applies to government-to-private transfers.
- Enterprises not run by the government comprise the private sector. Private companies include the majority of firms in the consumer discretionary, consumer staples, finance, information technology, industrial, real estate, materials, and healthcare sectors.

Public-to-Private Privatization vs. Corporate Privatization

- Corporate privatization, on the other hand, allows a company to manage its business or restructure its operations without the strict regulatory or shareholders' oversight imposed on publicly listed companies.
- This often appeals to companies if the leadership wants to make structural changes that would negatively impact shareholders. Corporate privatization sometimes takes place after a merger or following a tender offer to purchase a company's shares. In order to be considered privately owned, a company cannot get financing through public trading via a stock exchange.
- Dell Inc. is an example of a company that transitioned from being publicly traded to privately held. In 2013, with approval from its shareholders, Dell offered shareholders a fixed amount per share, plus a specified dividend as a way to buy back its stock and delist. Once the company paid off its existing shareholders, it ceased any public trading and removed its shares from the NASDAQ Stock Exchange, completing the transition to being privately held.

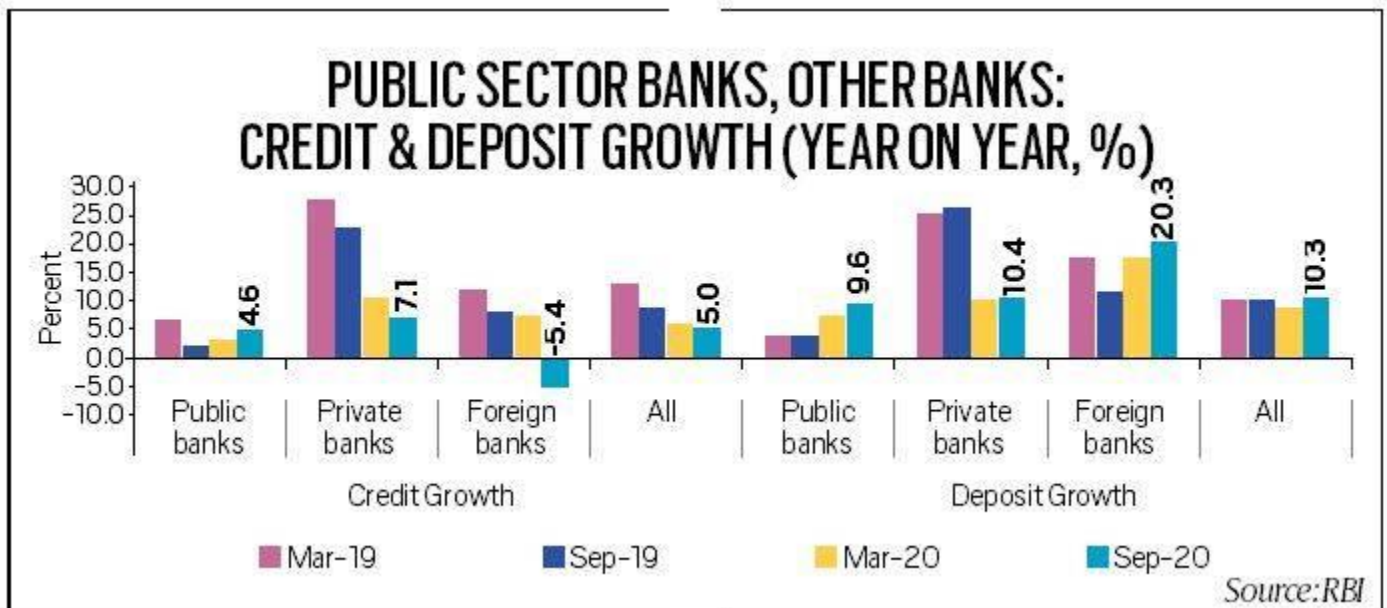
Advantages and Disadvantages of Privatization

- Proponents of privatization argue that privately-owned companies run businesses more economically and efficiently because they are profit incentivized to eliminate wasteful spending. Furthermore, private entities don't have to contend with the bureaucratic red tape that can plague government entities.
- On the other hand, privatization naysayers believe necessities like electricity, water, and schools shouldn't be vulnerable to market forces or driven by profit. In certain states and municipalities, liquor stores and other non-essential businesses are run by public sectors, as revenue-generating operations.

Why the recent proposal on privatization of PSU banks?



- The Union Budget has announced the privatisation of two public sector banks (in addition to IDBI Bank) and one general insurance company in the upcoming fiscal. It also announced a strategic sale/disinvestment policy for four strategic sectors — including banking, insurance and financial services — in which it will have a “bare minimum presence”.
- Years of capital injections and governance reforms have not been able to improve the financial position of in public sector banks significantly. Many of them have higher levels of stressed assets than private banks, and also lag the latter on profitability, market capitalisation and dividend payment record.
- The government front-loaded Rs 70,000 crore into government-run banks in September 2019, Rs 80,000 crore in in FY18, and Rs 1.06 lakh crore in FY19 through recapitalisation bonds. In 2019, the government merged ten PSU banks into four.
- Privatisation of two public sector banks will set the ball rolling for a long-term project that envisages only a handful of state-owned banks, with the rest either consolidated with strong banks or privatised. This will free up the government, the majority owner, from continuing to provide equity support to the banks year after year. Through a series of moves over the last few years, the government is now left with 12 state-owned banks, from 28 earlier.
- The two banks that will now be privatised will be selected through a process in which NITI Aayog will make recommendations, which will be considered by a core group of secretaries on disinvestment and then the Alternative Mechanism (or Group of Ministers).



What are the issues plaguing PSU banks?

- After a series of mergers and equity injections by the government, the performance of public sector banks has shown improvement over the last couple of years.
- However, compared with private banks, they continue to have high non-performing assets (NPAs) and stressed assets although this has started declining.
- After the Covid-related regulatory relaxations are lifted, banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses. As per the RBI's recent Financial Stability Report, gross NPA ratio of all commercial banks may increase from 7.5% in September 2020 to 13.5% by September 2021 under the baseline scenario (from 9.7% to 16.2% for public sector banks; from 4.6% to 7.9% for private banks).
- This would mean the government would again need to inject equity into weak public sector banks. The government is trying to strengthen the strong banks and also minimise their numbers through privatisation to reduce its burden of support.

Why were private banks nationalised in the first place?



- Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was also Finance Minister, decided to nationalise the 14 largest private banks on July 19, 1969. The idea was to align the banking sector with the socialistic approach of the then government. State Bank of India had been nationalised in 1955 itself, and the insurance sector in 1956.
- Various governments in the last 20 years were for and against privatisation of PSU banks. In 2015, the government had suggested privatisation but the then RBI Governor did not favour the idea. For over 50 years, successive governments have chosen not to bother beyond a point.
- As former RBI Governor Dr Y V Reddy once said, nationalisation was a political decision, so privatisation too will have to be one. Seen in this context, privatisation of two banks and the indication of carrying it further is a major reform signalling a changing political approach.
- These moves, along with setting up an asset reconstruction company entirely owned by banks, underline an approach of finding market-led solutions to challenges in the financial sector.

Are private banks doing better?

- Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36% in 2020 from 21.26% in 2015, while public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% from 74.28%. Competition heated up after the RBI allowed more private banks since the 1990s.
- They have expanded the market share through new products, technology, and better services, and also attracted better valuations in stock markets — HDFC Bank (set up in 1994) has a market capitalisation of Rs 8.80 lakh crore while SBI commands just Rs 3.50 lakh crore. India has 22 private banks and 10 small finance banks.
- However, in the last couple of years, some questions have arisen over the performance of private banks, especially on governance issues. ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar was sacked for allegedly extending dubious loans.
- Yes Bank CEO Rana Kapoor was not given extension by the RBI and now faces investigations by various agencies.
- Lakshmi Vilas Bank faced operational issues and was recently merged with DBS Bank of Singapore.
- Moreover, when the RBI ordered an asset quality review of banks in 2015, many private sector banks, including Yes Bank, were found under-reporting NPAs. Former Axis Bank MD Shikha Sharma too was denied an extension.

What has been the government and RBI stand on privatisation since 1969?

- The UPA government of 2004-14 refrained from taking any decision on privatisation. Many committees had proposed bringing down the government stake in public banks below 51% — the Narasimham Committee proposed 33% and the P J Nayak Committee suggested below 50%.
- An RBI Working Group recently suggested the entry of business houses into the banking sector. The NDA government, in its second term, has been pushing for privatisation and reducing the number of PSU banks to five or six.
- According to RBI's History series, the number of commercial banks was brought down sharply from 566 in 1951 to 91 in 1967 in order to consolidate commercial banking, which was very fragile. By the mid-1960s, Indian banking had become far more viable than ever before.
- However, the expansion of branches was mostly in urban areas, and rural and semi-urban areas continued to go unserved, RBI History's Volume 3 notes.
- The big question is: will private banks repeat the mistakes of 1960s. There is widespread perception that the private sector then was not sufficiently aware of its larger social responsibilities and was more concerned with profit, which made private banks unwilling to diversify their loan portfolios as this would raise transaction costs and reduce profits.

Will more PSU banks be privatised in the coming years?



- Currently, there are ten nationalised banks in addition to IDBI Bank and SBI. While the government is unlikely to touch the top three including SBI, smaller and middle-level banks are likely to be privatised.
- The Finance Minister did not disclose which two banks will be privatised this fiscal.
- The initial plan of the government was to privatise four. Depending on the success with the first two, the government is likely to go for divestment in another two or three banks in the next financial year.
- PSU banks are under dual control, with the RBI supervising the banking operations and the Finance Ministry handling ownership issues.

All about INS Viraat

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Supreme Court ordered status quo on the dismantling of the Navy's decommissioned aircraft carrier, INS Viraat.*

British origin

- The ship was commissioned into the Royal Navy as HMS (Her Majesty's Ship) Hermes in November 1959, close to one and half decades after its keel was laid.
- During her service with the Royal Navy, the ship operated three fixed-wing planes and a chopper.
- The ship belonged to the Centaur class of light fleet carriers from the Royal Navy which were in use since World War II.
- She was part of the key formation of the British forces during the Falklands War against the Argentinian forces in 1982. HMS Hermes was decommissioned within three years after the war.
- The Indian Navy, which was at the time operating 1961-commissioned INS Vikrant, zeroed down on Hermes and announced its purchase in 1985-86. The ship underwent a major refit and modernisation before being commissioned into the Indian Navy in May 1987 as INS (Indian Naval Ship) Viraat, which means enormous.

Service in Indian Navy

- The ship's Motto was the Sanskrit phrase 'Jalamev Yashya, Balamev Tasya' which means 'who controls the sea is the powerful'. The ship was capable of a maximum speed of 28 knots and underwent three major refits and some smaller ones during its 30 years long service with the Indian Navy in addition to the one prior to commissioning. The refits which are usually long processes, include complete overhaul, renovation and many upgrades of capabilities.
- The ship, during its service, operated one fixed wing aircraft British made Sea Harriers and three helicopters — Anti Submarine aircraft Sea King Mk 42B, Sea King Mk 42 C, Chetak on board. Some other helicopters including Indian made ALH Dhruv have also been operated from it during its service.
- INS Viraat proved pivotal in Operation Jupiter in 1989 during the Sri Lankan Peacekeeping operation. Subsequently, the ship was affiliated with the Garhwal Rifles and Scouts of the Indian Army in 1990. The ship was also deployed during 2001-02 operation Operation Parakram following the terror attack on the Indian Parliament.
- She has also played a major role in calibrating the flying activities from the carrier, which proved to be of great help at the time of induction of INS Vikramaditya (previously Admiral Gorshkov), which is currently the sole aircraft carrier operated by Indian Navy. Viraat's displacement, the indirectly measured weight of the ship, was 28,700 tonnes compared to Vikramaditya's 45,500 tonnes.
- At the time of its decommissioning in March 2017, the Navy had said, "Under the Indian Flag, the ship has clocked more than 22,622 flying hours by various aircraft and spent nearly 2252 days at sea sailing across 5,88,287 nautical miles or 10,94,215 kilometers. This implies that Viraat has spent seven years at sea, circumnavigating the globe 27 times. Since her inception, she has had a total of 80,715 hours of



boilers running. ‘Mother’, as she was fondly referred to in the Navy, had been commanded by 22 captains since 1987. She was the Flagship of the Navy since her inception. Around 40 Flag officers including five Chiefs of Naval Staff were raised and groomed in her lap.”

Viraat’s decommissioning and what lies ahead

- With mounting operating costs and age, the Navy announced the decision to decommission Viraat in early 2015. After the requisite pre-decommissioning processes at Kochi Shipyard, the ‘Grand Old Lady’ was decommissioned on March 6 in 2017, in a ceremony held at Mumbai.
- There were plans and even some movements by the state governments of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh governments at the time towards preserving the historic carrier and converting it into a museum. There were also crowdfunding efforts towards the same goal, which were unsuccessful. However, after not receiving any concrete bid towards preservation, the Centre decided to auction the ship to be broken and sold as scrap.
- Since 2017, India has been operating a single carrier — INS Vikramaditya — as against the minimum essential operational requirement of having two Carrier Battle Groups — which are formations of ships and submarines with Aircraft Carriers at the lead role.

INS VIRAAT- 'MOTHER SHIP'
The world's longest-serving warship to conclude its journey at Alang in Bhavnagar district of Gujarat

COMMISSIONED: 1959, British Royal Navy as HMS Hermes
PROCURED BY INDIA: 1986
DECOMMISSIONED: March 2017
LAST OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT: International Fleet Review (IFR 2016), Vishakhapatnam in February 2016

MAJOR OPERATIONS

- As HMS Hermes, she was commanded by 13 captains of the British Royal Navy. Key roles include Operation Mercy in 1974 and the Falklands War in 1982
- Operation Jupiter in 1989 during the Sri Lankan Peacekeeping operation
- Garhwal Rifles and Scouts of the Indian Army in 1990
- Op Parakram in 2001-2002, post the terrorist attack on Parliament

INTERNATIONAL JOINT EXERCISES

- Exercise Malabar (USA)
- Exercise Varuna (French)
- Naseem-al-Bahar (Oman Navy)

2,252 days at sea sailing across 5,88,287 nautical miles (10,94,215km)

Commanded by 22 captains of Indian Navy since 1987

The ship spent seven years at sea, circumnavigating the globe 27 times. Since her inception, she has had its boilers running for a total 80,715 hours

MOTORCYCLE MAKERS ALREADY IN TALKS TO PURCHASE METAL: Several two-wheeler manufacturing companies are in talks with Shree Ram Group for purchasing the metal used in INS Viraat, confirmed officials of the company. In the past also several bike companies had launched limited edition vehicles with the metal of INS Vikrant and warships of world war two. "Several bike companies approached us and we exchanged emails, we shared the details of the ship. A deal is expected to materialise once the ship arrives in the breaking yard and we will be able to provide them more specific information," said Mukesh Patel, Shree Ram Group.

TOUR OPERATORS HAD SOUGHT TO BUILD A MUSEUM FOR THE SHIP IN GUJARAT: Travel agents from Gujarat have sought that a museum be developed to house the retired naval ship INS Viraat and promote it as a tourist destination, along the coast of Gujarat. Representatives of Travel Agents' Federation of India (TAFI) - Gujarat, took to social media to raise the issue whereas a representation was also made by the Devbhoomi Dwarka Foundation to the Union government. "Instead of breaking down the Indian naval ship, INS Viraat, it may rather be brought to the coast at Kutch, Jakhau, Bet Dwarka or Somnath and a museum be developed there, which is let open for people. This can become a new attraction for the tourists," said Manish Sharma, secretary, TAFI-Gujarat.

Indigenous Aircraft Carrier on the anvil

- India’s first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-I) INS Vikrant which has a displacement comparable to Vikramaditya is under construction at Kochi Shipyard and is soon expected to undergo sea trials.
- The Navy’s Maritime Capability Perspective Plan looks at three carriers in total considering one of them requiring to be under refit.
- This requirement becomes crucial considering China’s aim to gain control over the Indian Ocean Region and sea routes which are key for world trade. PLA Navy’s present strength is of two carriers with plans to double it by the end of 2020s.

February (Week 3)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess

(Source: [TheHinduBusinessline](http://TheHinduBusinessline.com))

Context: *The Budget for 2021-22 has proposed a new levy — Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess.*

What is it?

- Cess is a kind of special-purpose tax which is levied over and above basic tax rates. The purpose of the new AIDC is to raise funds to finance spending on developing agriculture infrastructure. Considering that not much private investment is forthcoming for agriculture, the Centre now seeks to raise a dedicated fund to meet these expenses.
- The new cess will be levied on 29 products, prominent among which are gold, silver, imported apple, imported alcohol (excluding beer), imported pulses, imported palm oil, imported urea, and petrol/diesel including branded ones. While Basic Custom Duty (BCD) has been lowered on 25 of these products, Basic Excise Duty (BED) and Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) have been lowered on unbranded and branded petrol-diesel.
- The new cess will only offset the reduction in customs or excise duty and thus will not raise the tax incidence for consumers.
- Drawing power from Articles 270 and 271 of the Constitution, the Centre collects cess and deposits it in the Consolidated Fund of India. However, the money is then supposed to be transferred to a segregated fund to be used for specific purpose.

Why it is important?

- There are two aspects — usages and effect. The AIDC is proposed to be used to improve agricultural infrastructure aimed at not only boosting production but also in helping conserve and process farm output efficiently.
- Considering the debate on the new farm laws, the AIDC was perhaps meant to send out the message that the Centre is going the extra mile to improve the lot of farmers. But on the flip side, the money collected through cess and surcharge are not part of the divisible pool, from which devolution of Central taxes takes place to the States.
- When customs duty or excise is replaced by cess, the pie from which States get a share tends to shrink. Take the example of unbranded petrol. While the new AIDC will be levied at ₹2.50 per litre, the basic excise duty and special additional excise duty have been reduced by equal or lower amounts.
- While States would so far have got 41 per cent of the ₹2.50 per litre of petrol sold (₹1.02 per litre) while the balance would have remained with Centre. Now, the Centre will have the entire ₹2.50 levied as AIDC at its disposal.

Arjun Main Battle Tank MK-1A

Context: *Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the indigenously developed Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A) to the Indian Army at a ceremony in Chennai. The army will get 118 units of the Main Battle Tank,*

indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by CVRDE and DRDO along with 15 academic institutions, eight labs and several MSMEs.

What is the Arjun Main Battle Tank?

- The Arjun Main Battle Tank project was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.
- The objective was to create a “state-of-the-art tank with superior fire power, high mobility, and excellent protection”.
- During the development, the CVRDE achieved breakthroughs in the engine, transmission, hydropneumatic suspension, hull and turret as well as the gun control system. Mass production began in 1996 at the Indian Ordnance Factory’s production facility in Avadi, Tamil Nadu.

What are the features of the Arjun tank?

- The Arjun tanks stand out for their ‘Fin Stabilised Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS)’ ammunition and 120-mm calibre rifled gun.
- It also has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions. The secondary weapons include a co-axial 7.62-mm machine gun for anti-personnel and a 12.7-mm machine gun for anti-aircraft and ground targets.

How many Arjun tanks have been inducted so far?

- The Indian Army received the first batch of 16 tanks in 2004 and they were inducted as a squadron of the 43 Armoured Regiment. In 2009, the first Arjun regiment of the Indian Army had 45 tanks.
- By 2011, over 100 tanks had been delivered. In 2010, the Indian army ordered another 124 Arjuns. The Ministry of Defence ordered another 118 units of the Arjun Mk-1A. These are the units being inducted now at a revised cost of over Rs 8,400 crore.

How is the Mk-1A different?

- The Mk-1A version has 14 major upgrades on the earlier version. It is also supposed to have missile firing capability as per the design, but this feature will be added later as final testing of the capability is still on.
- However, the biggest achievement with the latest version is 54.3 per cent indigenous content against the 41 per cent in the earlier model.

Mandarin Duck

(Source: [Indian Express](http://www.indianexpress.com))

Context: *Floating in the Maguri-Motapung beel (or wetland) in Assam’s Tinsukia district for over a week is the spectacular and rare Mandarin duck.*

What is the Mandarin duck?

- Considered the most beautiful duck in the world, the Mandarin duck, or the (*Aix galericulata*) was first identified by Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758.
- The eBird website, a platform that documents birds world over, describes it as a “small-exotic looking bird” native to East Asia.
- The migratory duck breeds in Russia, Korea, Japan and northeastern parts of China, explained Gogoi. It now has



established populations in Western Europe and America too. In 2018, when a Mandarin duck was spotted in a pond in New York City's Central Park, it created a flutter among local residents.

- The duck, however, rarely visits India as it does not fall in its usual migratory route. There are only a handful of recorded sightings here.
- It was recorded in 1902 in Dibru river in the Rongagora area in Tinsukia.
- More recently, it was sighted in Manipur's Loktak Lake in 2013, and in Saatvoini Beel in Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve in Assam's Baksa district 2014.

What is the Maguri beel?

- The Maguri Motapung wetland — an Important Bird Area as declared by the Bombay Natural History Society — is located close to the Dibru Saikhowa National Park in Upper Assam.
- The wetland has a grassland adjacent to it. "The entire ecosystem (grassland and wetland) is very important as it is home to at least 304 bird species, including a number of endemic ones like Black-breasted parrotbill and Marsh babbler."
- In May 2020, the beel was adversely affected by a blowout and fire at an Oil India Limited-owned gas well. The resulting oil spill killed a number of fish, snakes as well as an endangered Gangetic dolphin, and the fire had burnt a large portion of the grassland.

Bhimbetka

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Researchers have discovered three fossils of the earliest known living animal — the 550-million-year-old 'Dickinsonia' — on the roof of the Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, about 40 km from Bhopal.*

About Bhimbetka

- The Bhimbetka rock shelters are an archaeological site in central India that spans the prehistoric paleolithic and mesolithic periods, as well as the historic period. It exhibits the earliest traces of human life on the Indian subcontinent and evidence of Stone Age starting at the site in Acheulian times.
- It is located in the Raisen District in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh about 45 kilometres (28 miles) southeast of Bhopal. It is a UNESCO world heritage site that consists of seven hills and over 750 rock shelters distributed over 10 kilometres (6.2 miles).
- At least some of the shelters were inhabited by Homo erectus more than 100,000 years ago. The rock shelters and caves provide evidence of, according to Encyclopædia Britannica, and a "rare glimpse" into human settlement and cultural evolution from hunter-gatherers, to agriculture, and expressions of spirituality.
- Some of the Bhimbetka rock shelters feature prehistoric cave paintings and the earliest are about 30,000 years old. These cave paintings show themes such as animals, early evidence of dance and hunting. The Bhimbetka site has the oldest known rock art in the Indian subcontinent, as well as is one of the largest prehistoric complexes.

Location

- The Rock Shelters of Bhimbetaka (or Bhim Baithaka) is 45 kilometers southeast of Bhopal and 9 km from Obedullaganj city in the Raisen District of Madhya Pradesh at the southern edge of the Vindhya hills. South of these rock shelters are successive ranges of the Satpura hills.
- It is inside the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary, embedded in sandstone rocks, in the foothills of the Vindhya Range.
- The site consists of seven hills: Vinayaka, Bhonrawali, Bhimbetka, Lakha Juar (east and west), Jhondra and Muni Babaki Pahari.



Rock art and paintings

- The rock shelters and caves of Bhimbetka have a large number of paintings. The oldest paintings are found to be 30,000 years old, but some of the geometric figures date to as recently as the medieval period.
- The colors used are vegetable colors which have endured through time because the drawings were generally made deep inside a niche or on inner walls. The drawings and paintings can be classified under seven different periods.
- Period I – (Upper Paleolithic): These are linear representations, in green and dark red, of huge figures of animals such as bison, tigers and rhinoceroses.
- Period II – (Mesolithic): Comparatively small in size the stylised figures in this group show linear decorations on the body. In addition to animals there are human figures and hunting scenes, giving a clear picture of the weapons they used: barbed spears, pointed sticks, bows and arrows. Some scenes are interpreted as depicting tribal war between three tribes symbolised by their animal totems. The depiction of communal dances, birds, musical instruments, mothers and children, pregnant women, men carrying dead animals, drinking and burials appear in rhythmic movement.
- Period III – (Chalcolithic) Similar to the paintings of the Mesolithic, these drawings reveal that during this period the cave dwellers of this area were in contact with the agricultural communities of the Malwa plains, exchanging goods with them.
- Period IV & V – (Early historic): The figures of this group have a schematic and decorative style and are painted mainly in red, white and yellow. The association is of riders, depiction of religious symbols, tunic-like dresses and the existence of scripts of different periods. The religious beliefs are represented by figures of yakshas, tree gods and magical sky chariots.
- Period VI & VII – (Medieval) : These paintings are geometric linear and more schematic, but they show degeneration and crudeness in their artistic style. The colors used by the cave dwellers were prepared by combining black manganese oxides, red hematite and charcoal.
- One rock, popularly referred to as “Zoo Rock”, depicts elephants, barasingha (swamp deer), bison and deer. Paintings on another rock show a peacock, a snake, a deer and the sun. On another rock, two elephants with tusks are painted. Hunting scenes with hunters carrying bows, arrows, swords and shields also find their place in the community of these pre-historic paintings. In one of the caves, a bison is shown in pursuit of a hunter while his two companions appear to stand helplessly nearby; in another, some horsemen are seen, along with archers. In one painting, a large wild boar is seen.
- The paintings are classified largely in two groups, one as depiction of hunters and food gatherers, while other one as fighters, riding on horses and elephant carrying metal weapons. the first group of paintings dates to prehistoric times while second one dates to historic times. Most of the paintings from historic period depicts battles between the rulers carrying swords, spears, bows and arrows.
- In one of the desolate rock shelters, the painting of a man holding a trident-like staff and dancing has been named "Nataraj" by archaeologist V. S. Wakankar. It is estimated that paintings in at least 100 rockshelters might have been eroded away.



Maharaja Suheldev

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: PM to lay the foundation stone of Maharaja Suheldev Memorial and development work of Chittaura Lake.

About Maharaja Suheldev:

- Maharaja Suheldev, also spelt Suhaldev, was a ruler of Shravasti (Uttar Pradesh).
- He is mentioned in the 17th-century Persian-language historical romance Mirat-i-Masudi.
 - Mirat-i-Masudi was written by Abd-ur-Rahman Chishti during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir.
 - In this chronicle, Suheldev was the son of King Mordhwaj of Shravasti.
- Suheldev is popularly known to have defeated and killed the Ghaznavid general Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud (a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni) at Bahraich in 1034 CE.
- Suheldev is alternatively known as Sakardev, Suhirdadhvaj, Sahardev, etc.
- The Maharaja Suheldev Memorial is being built in Bahraich, UP.

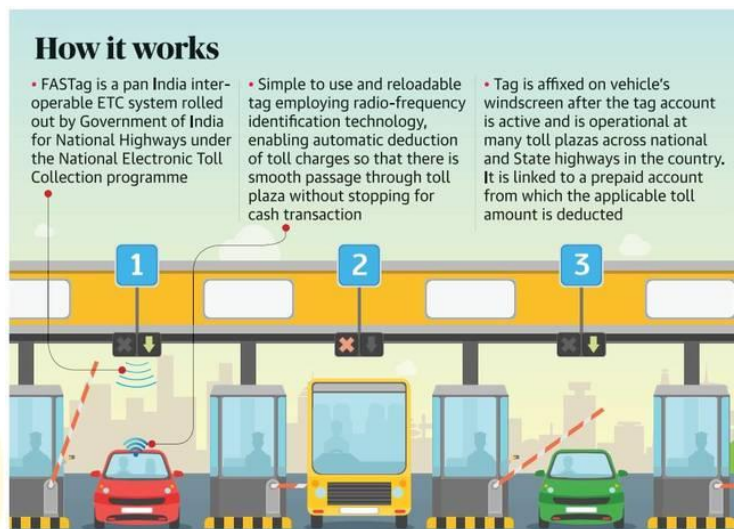
FASTag

(Source: PIB)

Context: *The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has decided that all lanes in the fee plazas on National Highways shall be declared as “FASTag lane of the fee plaza” w.e.f midnight of 15th/16th February 2021.*

What are FASTags?

- FASTags are rechargeable tags that are used in toll booths for the collection of tolls from vehicles using the national highways.
- FASTags are basically stickers enabled with RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology, that are stuck to the windowpanes of vehicles so that automatic deduction of toll can happen in toll booths, without having the vehicle to stop.
 - This is primarily meant to decrease the traffic at toll booths and also to enable more digital transactions in the country.
 - These tags are linked to bank accounts and other payment modules and are prepaid. Once the amount is exhausted (or the customer reaches the minimum amount to be kept in the tag), they can be recharged.
 - When a vehicle crosses a toll booth, the tag is detected by the sensor, and the amount is automatically deducted from the tag.
 - The barrier then opens up for the vehicle to pass through.
 - The user then gets a notification on his linked phone number about the deduction.
 - This should significantly reduce waiting time at the highway toll plazas, which generally see a lot of congestion.
 - This also reduces the need for the drivers to carry liquid cash.
 - A FASTag is valid for 5 years and after purchasing, it can be recharged as when needed.
 - Currently, in national highways, cash is not being accepted at FASTag lanes, and any vehicle entering it will be charged twice the toll amount.
 - Customers living close to toll booths (within 10 km as per a government notification) can get a concession on the toll amount which can be paid by the FASTag.





- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is trying to get all states on board so that FASTags can be applied all across India over both national and state highways.

Wholesale Price Index

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The dissonance between headline wholesale inflation and retail inflation — with WPI now trending up even as CPI is moderating, a sharp reversal of the post-pandemic trend of sluggish WPI print and scorching CPI estimates — is being seen as an indicator of the economy opening up closer to full potential.*

What is Wholesale Price Index (WPI)?

- Wholesale Price Index, or WPI, measures the changes in the prices of goods sold and traded in bulk by wholesale businesses to other businesses.
- WPI is unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which tracks the prices of goods and services purchased by consumers.
- To put it simply, the WPI tracks prices at the factory gate before the retail level.

Who publishes WPI in India and what does it show?

- Analysts use the numbers to track the supply and demand dynamics in industry, manufacturing and construction. The numbers are released by the Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- An upward surge in the WPI print indicates inflationary pressure in the economy and vice versa. The quantum of rise in the WPI month-after-month is used to measure the level of wholesale inflation in the economy.

What is the difference between WPI and CPI inflation?

- While WPI keeps track of the wholesale price of goods, the CPI measures the average price that households pay for a basket of different goods and services.
- Even as the WPI is used as a key measure of inflation in some economies, the RBI no longer uses it for policy purposes, including setting repo rates.
- The central bank currently uses CPI or retail inflation as a key measure of inflation to set the monetary and credit policy.

New series of WPI

- With an aim to align the index with the base year of other important economic indicators such as GDP and IIP, the base year was updated to 2011-12 from 2004-05 for the new series of Wholesale Price Index (WPI), effective from April 2017.

Major components of WPI

- Primary articles is a major component of WPI, further subdivided into Food Articles and Non-Food Articles.
- Food Articles include items such as Cereals, Paddy, Wheat, Pulses, Vegetables, Fruits, Milk, Eggs, Meat & Fish, etc.
- Non-Food Articles include Oil Seeds, Minerals and Crude Petroleum
- The next major basket in WPI is Fuel & Power, which tracks price movements in Petrol, Diesel and LPG
- The biggest basket is Manufactured Goods. It spans across a variety of manufactured products such as Textiles, Apparels, Paper, Chemicals, Plastic, Cement, Metals, and more.

- Manufactured Goods basket also includes manufactured food products such as Sugar, Tobacco Products, Vegetable and Animal Oils, and Fats.
- WPI has a sub-index called WPI Food Index, which is a combination of the Food Articles from the Primary Articles basket, and the food products from the Manufactured Products basket.

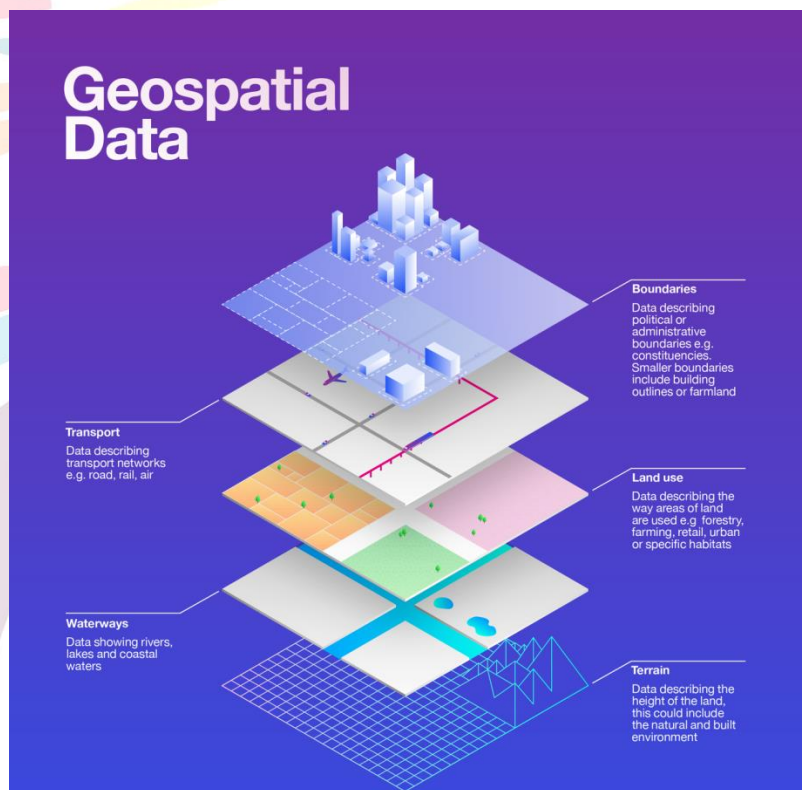
Geo-Spatial Data

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

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

What is geo-spatial data?

- Geospatial data is data about objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface of the earth.
- The location may be static in the short-term, like the location of a road, an earthquake event, malnutrition among children, or dynamic like a moving vehicle or pedestrian, the spread of an infectious disease.
- Geospatial data combines location information, attribute information (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned), and often also temporal information or the time at which the location and attributes exist.
- Geo-spatial data usually involves information of public interest such as roads, localities, rail lines, water bodies, and public amenities.
- The past decade has seen an increase in the use of geo-spatial data in daily life with various apps such as food delivery apps like Swiggy or Zomato, e-commerce like Amazon or even weather apps.



Right to Privacy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said Indians have “grave apprehensions” about privacy from Facebook and WhatsApp.*

What is Right to Privacy?

- Privacy is a constitutionally protected right which emerges primarily from the guarantee of life and personal liberty in Article 21 of the Constitution. Elements of privacy also arise in varying contexts from

the other facets of freedom and dignity recognised and guaranteed by the fundamental rights contained in Part III.

- The SC judgement recognising the existence of a constitutional right of privacy was not an exercise in the nature of amending the Constitution nor the Court had embarked on a constitutional function of that nature, which is entrusted to Parliament.
- According to SC verdict, privacy is the constitutional core of human dignity. It has both normative and descriptive function. At a normative level, privacy sub-serves those eternal values upon which the guarantees of life, liberty and freedom are founded. At a descriptive level, privacy postulates a bundle of entitlements and interests which lie at the foundation of ordered liberty.

What privacy includes

- Preservation of personal intimacies, the sanctity of family life, marriage, procreation, home and sexual orientation.
- A right to be left alone.
- Safeguards individual autonomy, recognises the ability of the individual to control vital aspects of his or her life.
- Personal choices governing a way of life are intrinsic to privacy.
- Protection of heterogeneity and recognition of plurality and diversity of our culture.
- **Privacy is not surrendered when a person is in public place**
 - By being in public place doesn't mean an individual has surrendered privacy, even as the legitimate expectation of privacy may vary from the intimate zone to the private zone and from the private to the public arena.
 - Privacy attaches to the person since it is an essential facet of the dignity of the human being
- It is not an absolute right: Like other rights which form part of the fundamental freedoms protected by Part III, including the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21, privacy is not an absolute right.



Can law/state encroach upon privacy?

- According to SC, a law which encroaches upon privacy will have to withstand the touchstone of permissible restrictions on fundamental rights.
- In the context of Article 21, an invasion of privacy must be justified on the basis of a law which stipulates a procedure which is fair, just and reasonable.
- The law must also be valid with reference to the encroachment on life and personal liberty under Article 21.
- An invasion of life or personal liberty must meet the three-fold requirement of (i) legality, which postulates the existence of law; (ii) need, defined in terms of a legitimate state aim; and (iii) proportionality which ensures a rational nexus between the objects and the means adopted to achieve them; and

Privacy has both positive and negative content.

- The negative content of privacy restrains the state from committing an intrusion upon the life and personal liberty of a citizen.
- Positive content of the right to privacy imposes an obligation on the state to take all necessary measures to protect the privacy of the individual.

For what reasons state can encroach upon individual's privacy?



- According to the judgement, the legitimate aims of the state should be “protecting national security, preventing and investigating crime, encouraging innovation and the spread of knowledge, and preventing the dissipation of social welfare benefits.”
- These matters should be considered by the Union government while designing the regime for the protection of the data.

Archaeological Survey of India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Bhagyalakshmi temple abutting the Charminar ‘came into existence’ after the merger of Hyderabad State with the Union of India, and there are no records of the chilla (a small shrine) at the monument, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has stated.*

About ASI

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is an attached office in the Ministry of Culture. It was set up in 1861 with the primary object of surveying antiquarian remains in this country and their study.
- ASI’s function is to “explore, excavate, conserve, preserve and protect the monuments and sites of National & International Importance.”
- ASI is the successor of The Asiatic Society of India. It was founded in its current form in 1861 by Sir Alexander Cunningham with the help of the then Viceroy Canning.
- It regulates all the archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and the Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.

Functions and Powers

- Archaeological Survey of India is an attached office of department of Culture with headquarters in New Delhi. It has 24 regional Circles and 5 Regional Directorates.
- Its main functions are:
 - preservation, conservation and environmental development of centrally protected monuments and sites, including World Heritage Monuments and antiquities
 - maintenance of gardens & development of new gardens surrounding centrally protected monuments and sites
 - exploration and excavation of ancient sites
 - specialized study of inscription and various phases of Indian architecture
 - maintenance of Archaeological site Museums
 - Operation of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act
 - Research and Training in different areas of Archaeology

Money Bills and other Bills

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In a pre-emptive move, the Congress has written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, urging him not to bypass the Rajya Sabha by declaring seven key Bills, including one on the privatisation of two public sector banks, as money Bills.*

What are the different types of Bills?



There are four types of Bills, namely (i) Constitution Amendment Bills; (ii) Money Bills; (iii) Financial Bills; and (iv) Ordinary Bills.

What are the features of each of these Bills?

- **Constitution Amendment Bills:** These are Bills which seek to amend the Constitution.
- **Money Bills:** A Bill is said to be a Money Bill if it *only* contains provisions related to taxation, borrowing of money by the government, expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India. Bills that only contain provisions that are incidental to these matters would also be regarded as Money Bills.
- **Financial Bills:** A Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation and expenditure, and additionally contains provisions related to any other matter is called a Financial Bill. Therefore, if a Bill merely involves expenditure by the government, and addresses other issues, it will be a financial bill.
- **Ordinary Bills:** All other Bills are called ordinary bills.



How are these bills passed?

- **Constitution Amendment Bills¹:** A Constitution Amendment Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament. It would require a simple majority of the total membership of that House, and a two thirds majority of all members present and voting. Further, if the Bill relates to matters like the election of the President and Governor, executive and legislative powers of the centre and states, the judiciary, etc., it must be ratified by at least half of the state legislatures.
- **Money Bills:** A Money Bill may only be introduced in Lok Sabha, on the recommendation of the President. It must be passed in Lok Sabha by a simple majority of all members present and voting. Following this, it may be sent to the Rajya Sabha for its recommendations, which Lok Sabha may reject if it chooses to. If such recommendations are not given within 14 days, it will be deemed to be passed by Parliament.
- **Financial Bills:** A Financial Bill may only be introduced in Lok Sabha, on the recommendation of the President. The Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament, after the President has recommended that it be taken up for consideration in each House.
- **Ordinary Bills:** An Ordinary Bill may be introduced in either House of Parliament. It must be passed by both Houses by a simple majority of all members present and voting.

Anticipatory Transit Bail

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Bombay High Court granted transit anticipatory bail to Shantanu Shivilal Muluk in the Greta Thunberg toolkit case registered by the Delhi Police in connection with the ongoing protests against the three farm laws.*

When does a person apply for anticipatory transit bail?

- When a person is apprehending arrest by the police of a state other than where they are at present, they approach the nearest competent court for a transit anticipatory or pre-arrest bail.
- The court does not have jurisdiction over the place where the case is registered or where crime has been alleged to have been committed but since the question of personal liberty is involved, the High Courts across India generally allow such prayer depending upon the merits of the case.
- The relief is sought to seek temporary protection from arrest and simultaneously get time to approach the appropriate court of that place, wherefrom the police has come or where the case is registered, for a similar pre-arrest bail.

What is transit remand and when is it required?

- Since the arrested person is required under the law to be presented before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, they are produced by the police of the other state – which has registered the case – before the nearest magistrate of the place from where the person has been arrested to get a transit remand.
- This is done to comply with the provisions of law regarding the production of the accused before a magistrate within 24 hours since it may not be otherwise possible due to travel from one state to another.
- The application is filed by the police which has come to arrest the accused, before the nearest magistrate of that area where the accused is at present or residing.
- Delhi High Court in *Gautam Navlakha vs State (NCT of Delhi)* in 2018 held that “the Magistrate examining the transit remand application is not required to go into the adequacy of the material, he should nevertheless satisfy himself about the existence of the material”. It also held that the Magistrate should ask the person arrested and brought before him whether he has been informed of the grounds of arrest and whether he was required to consult and be defended by any legal practitioner of his choice.

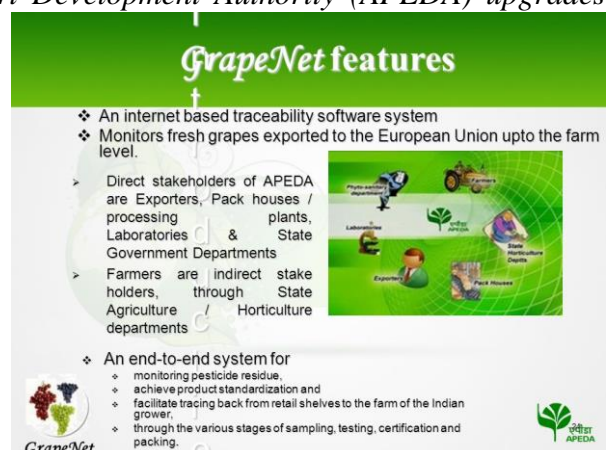
GrapeNet

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) upgrades GrapeNet.*

What is GrapeNet?

- The GrapeNet is a web-based certification and traceability software system for monitoring fresh grapes exported from India to the European Union.
- It is an internet based electronic service offered by APEDA to the stakeholders for facilitating testing and certification of Grapes for export from India in compliance with the standards identified by NRC Pune, on the basis of consultation with the exporters.





- GrapeNet collects, stores and reports forward and backward traces and quality assurance data entered by the stakeholders, ie., exporters, laboratories and PSC authorities within the grapes supply chain in India.
- GrapeNet is a first of its kind initiative in India that has put in place an end-to-end system for monitoring pesticide residue, achieve product standardization and facilitate tracing back from retail shelves to the farm of the Indian grower, through the various stages of sampling, testing, certification and packing.
- Now, in a bid to ensure cyber security protection for its traceability initiative, APEDA has adopted Blockchain and cloud migration technologies in GrapeNet.

Mahabahu-Brahmaputra

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: PM will launch 'Mahabahu-Brahmaputra'.

More on 'Mahabahu-Brahmaputra':

- The launch of 'Mahabahu-Brahmaputra' will be marked by the inauguration of Ro-Pax (roll-on/roll-off passenger service) vessel operations between Neamati-Majuli island, North Guwahati-South Guwahati and Dhubri-Hatsingimari Shilanyas of the inland water transport terminal at Jogighopa, and various tourist jetties on the Brahmaputra.
- 'Mahabahu-Brahmaputra' is aimed at providing seamless connectivity to the eastern parts of India and includes various development activities for the people living around Brahmaputra and Barak rivers.
- The Ro-Pax services will help in reducing travel time by providing connectivity between banks and thus reducing the distance to be travelled by road.
- This will generate employment and also boost tourism in these parts.

E-Chhawani

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Defence Minister launches E-Chhawani portal & mobile app.

About E-Chhawani:

- The portal has been created to provide online civic services to over 20 lakh residents of 62 Cantonment Boards across the country.
- Through the portal, the residents of cantonment areas will be able to avail basic services like renewal of leases, application for birth & death certificates, water & sewerage connections, trade licences, mobile toilet locators and payment of different types of taxes and fees, with just a click of a button.
- The portal has been jointly developed by eGov Foundation, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Directorate General Defence Estates (DGDE) and National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- The portal is expected to ensure effectiveness and transparency of the services distribution system of the Cantonment Boards and provide time-bound solutions to the residents.

Making it easy

- e-Chhawani is a unified portal for all cantonment boards
- Will offer services like public grievances redressal, trade licences
- Citizens can apply for a trade licence and keep track of the status
- Khadki and Pune cantonment boards have launched the facility

Pey Jal Survekshan

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry launches drinking water survey in 10 cities under Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban).*

About Pey Jal Survekshan:

- As part of the survey, ‘Pey Jal Survekshan’, data will also be collected on wastewater management and condition of water bodies in the cities.
- The mission will be monitored through a technology-based platform on which beneficiary response will be monitored.
- Initially, the survey is being launched as a pilot in ten cities namely, Agra, Badlapur, Bhubaneswar, Churu, Kochi, Madurai, Patiala, Rohtak, Surat and Tumkur.
- Based on the learnings of the pilot survey, this exercise will be extended to all Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) cities.
- The mission also has a reform agenda, under which City Water Potability Index, reduction in non-revenue water, municipal finance reforms, rain water harvesting, recycle water to meet at least 20% total water demand by 2025 and rejuvenating three water bodies per ULB are the key proposed reforms.

TECHNOGRAHIS

(Source: [PIB](#))

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

Details:

- TECHNOGRAHIS are students from IITs, NITs, engineering, planning and architecture colleges, faculty members, academicians, and stakeholders.
- They can register themselves to visit Live Laboratories at six Light House Project (LHP) sites for learning, consultation, generation of ideas and solutions, experimentation, innovation, and technical awareness.
- This will help them in getting a first-hand account of the technologies being used and in turn, they can adapt and adopt them as per their requirements in the construction sector for a ‘Make in India’ approach.

Hyderabad wins global ‘Tree City’ status

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Hyderabad has won a green contest among cities in India, and emerged one of the ‘Tree Cities of the World’. That title has been bestowed by the Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).*

Details:

- Hyderabad has been selected for its commitment to growing and maintaining urban forestry.
- With the recognition, the city joins 120 others from 23 countries, including the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Australia.

- The city was evaluated on five metrics: ‘Establish Responsibility’, ‘Set the Rules’, ‘Know What You Have’, ‘Allocate the Resources’, and ‘Celebrate the Achievements’.
- City leaders must delegate responsibility for the care of trees to a staff member, a city department, or a group of citizens called a Tree Board.

Amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

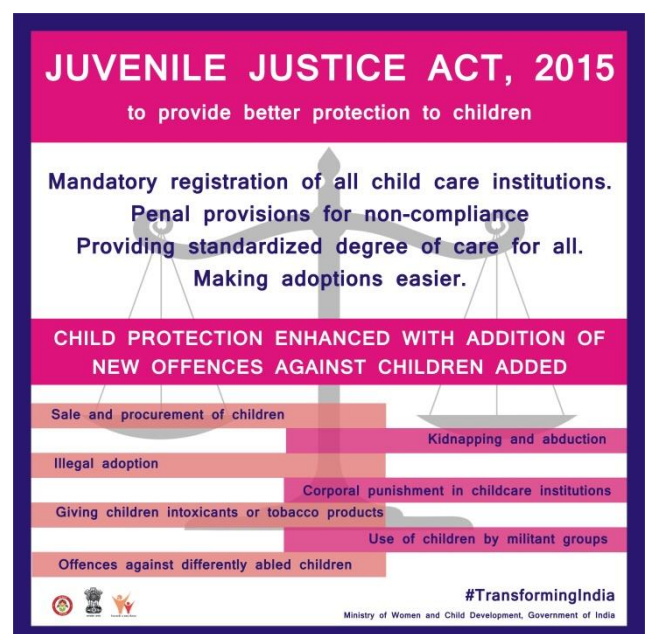
Context: *The Union Cabinet ushered in some major amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 in a bid to bring in clarity and also entrust more responsibilities on bureaucrats when it comes to implementing provisions of the law.*

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

- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act was introduced and passed in Parliament in 2015 to replace the Juvenile Delinquency Law and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act) 2000.
- One of the main provisions of the new Act was allowing the trial of juveniles in conflict with law in the age group of 16-18 years as adults, in cases where the crimes were to be determined. The nature of the crime, and whether the juvenile should be tried as a minor or a child, was to be determined by a Juvenile Justice Board. This provision received an impetus after the 2012 Delhi gangrape in which one of the accused was just short of 18 years, and was therefore tried as a juvenile.
- The second major provision was with regards to adoption, bringing a more universally acceptable adoption law instead of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956) and Guardians of the ward Act (1890) which was for Muslims, although the Act did not replace these laws. The Act streamlined adoption procedures for orphans, abandoned and surrendered children and the existing Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has been given the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.

The inclusion of serious crimes apart from heinous crimes

- Most heinous crimes have a minimum or maximum sentence of seven years. According to the Juvenile Justice Act 2015, juveniles charged with heinous crimes and who would be between the ages of 16-18 years would be tried as adults and processed through the adult justice system.
- The amendment passed by the Union Cabinet this week has included for the first time the category of “serious crimes” differentiating it from heinous crimes, while retaining heinous crimes. Both heinous and serious crimes have also been clarified for the first time, removing any ambiguity.
- What this means is that for a juvenile to be tried for a heinous crime as an adult, the punishment of the crime should not only have a maximum sentence of seven years or more, but also a minimum sentence of seven years.
- This provision has been made to ensure that children,



as much as possible, are protected and kept out of the adult justice system. Heinous crimes with a minimum imprisonment of seven years pertain mostly to sexual offences and violent sexual crimes.

- At present, with no mention of a minimum sentence, and only the maximum seven year sentence, juveniles between the ages of 16-18 years could also be tried as adults for a crime like the possession and sale of an illegal substance, such as drugs or alcohol, which will now fall under the ambit of a “serious crime”.

Expanding the purview of district and additional district magistrates

- Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani Wednesday announced that district magistrates (DMs) along with additional district magistrates (ADMs) will monitor the functioning of various agencies under the JJ Act in every district. This includes the Child Welfare Committees, the Juvenile Justice Boards, the District Child Protection Units and the Special juvenile Protection Units.
- The amendment has been brought in based on a report filed by the NCPCR in 2018-19 in which the over 7,000 Child Care Institutions (or children’s homes) were surveyed and found that 1.5 per cent do not conform to rules and regulations of the JJ Act and 29 per cent of them had major shortcomings in their management. The NCPCR report also found that not a single Child Care Institution in the country was found to be 100 per cent compliant to the provisions of the JJ Act.
- CCIs can be government-run, government-aided, privately run or run through government, private or foreign funding. These institutions, while falling under the CWC and the state child protection units had very little oversight and monitoring.
- Even to receive a license, after an application was made, if the children’s home were to not receive a reply from the government within 3 months time, it would be “deemed registered” for a period of six months, even without government permission. The new amendment ensures that this can no longer happen and that no new children’s home can be opened without the sanction of the DM.
- DM’s are also responsible now for ensuring that CCIs falling in their district are following all norms and procedures. During the NCPCR survey, for instance, it had been CCI’s with large funds, including foreign funding, had been found keeping children in unsanitary conditions in portacabins.
- Since the survey, the WCD Ministry shut down 500 illegal child welfare institutions that had not been registered under the JJ Act.
- The DM will also carry out background checks of CWC members, who are usually social welfare activists, including educational qualifications, as there is no such provision currently to check if a person has a case of girl child abuse against him.
- To hasten the process of adoption and ensure the swift rehabilitation of children into homes and foster homes, the amendment further provides that the DM will also now be in charge of sanctioning adoptions, removing the lengthy court process.

INTERNATIONAL

UN peacekeepers

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: India announced a gift of 2,00,000 doses of vaccine to the UN Peacekeeping Forces.

About UN Peacekeepers

- The United Nations Peacekeeping operations are policing and peacebuilding actions carried out by the UN to bring order and stability in wartorn nations.
- The UN Peacekeepers are known as ‘Blue Helmets’ or ‘Blue Berets’. Its personnel consist of soldiers and military officers, police officers and civilian personnel from many countries.
- The United Nations Peacekeepers ensure that peace agreements/accords are implemented in warzones. In addition, they give help through confidence-building measures, electoral support, improving law and order and bolstering social development that will bring positive economic changes.
- The United Nations Charter authorises the United Nations Security Council to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. Due to this, it falls on the UN Security Council to deploy peacekeepers in order to ensure stability and security in conflict regions.

Extinction Rebellion

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Delhi Police have named environmental activists Disha Ravi, Nikita Jacob, and Shantanu Muluk, who are volunteers of a global environment movement seeking to call attention to the climate change emergency, in the Greta Thunberg ‘toolkit’ case.

What is Extinction Rebellion?

- The global movement Extinction Rebellion, also referred to as ‘XR’, describes itself as a “decentralised, international and politically non-partisan movement using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency”.
- XR was launched in the United Kingdom on October 31, 2018, as a response to a report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which declared that “we only have 12 years to stop catastrophic climate change and our understanding that we have entered the 6th mass extinction event”.
- The logo of Extinction Rebellion is an ‘X’ with the top and bottom crossed so that it resembles, according to the movement’s website, an hourglass, which stands for a warning that time is running out for many species. The extinction (X) hourglass is placed within a circle that represents the planet Earth.
- The movement now has a presence in 75 countries, including India.
- The group has “three core demands” of governments around the world. It wants governments to “Tell the Truth”, to “Act Now”, and to “Go Beyond Politics” in order to confront the climate and ecological emergency that the world is faced with.
- It wants them to communicate the urgency to bring change, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.
- XR seeks to “rebel”, and asks groups to “self-organise”, without the need for anyone’s permission, to come up with collective action plans as long as they adhere to the group’s core principles and values.



World Trade Organisation

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The newly-appointed head of the World Trade Organisation, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala became the first female and first African to hold the role in its history. Her dual citizenship with the United States also makes her the first American to hold this position.*

Who is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala?

- Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is a Nigerian economist whose career in development and finance spans over four decades. Iweala served as the Finance Minister of Nigeria, holding the position for two consecutive terms, first from 2003 to 2006 and then from 2011 to 2015. She was also the first woman to hold this position in her country and the first female to hold it twice.
- Iweala was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria after her first tenure as the finance minister, again becoming the first female to be in this role. She held this position for two months.
- In her capacity as the Finance Minister, she was seen as a tough negotiator who played an instrumental role in reducing and tackling Nigeria's debts.
- Iweala has also spent over 20 years working with the World Bank where she rose to become the Managing Director of the organization and oversaw 181 billion dollars worth of operations.

About WTO

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world's trading nations and ratified in their parliaments.
- The WTO has 164 members (including European Union) and 23 observer governments (like Iran, Iraq, Bhutan, Libya etc).

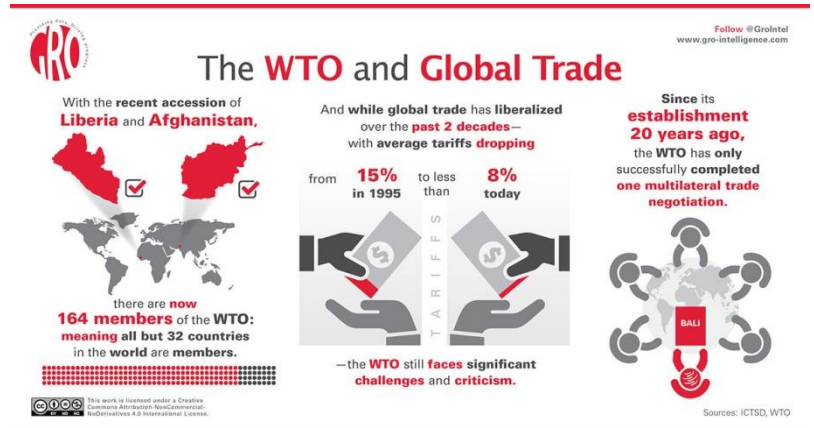
History

- From the early days of the Silk Road to the creation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the birth of the WTO, trade has played an important role in supporting economic development and promoting peaceful relations among nations.
 - The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) traces its origins to the **1944 Bretton Woods** Conference, which laid the foundations for the post-World War II financial system and established two key institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.
 - The conference delegates also recommended the establishment of a complementary institution to be known as the International Trade Organization (ITO), which they envisioned as the third leg of the system.
 - In Havana in 1948, the UN Conference on Trade and Employment concluded a draft charter for the ITO, known as the Havana Charter, which would have created extensive rules governing trade, investment, services, and business and employment practices.
 - The Havana Charter never entered into force, primarily because the U.S. Senate failed to ratify it. As a result, the ITO was stillborn.
 - Meanwhile, an agreement as the GATT signed by 23 countries in Geneva in 1947 came into force on Jan 1, 1948 with the following purposes:
 - to phase out the use of import quotas
 - and to reduce tariffs on merchandise trade,
 - The GATT became the only multilateral instrument (not an institution) governing international trade from 1948 until the WTO was established in 1995.
 - Despite its institutional deficiencies, the GATT managed to function as a de facto international organization, sponsoring eight rounds (A round is a series of multilateral negotiations) of multilateral trade negotiations.



Structure

- Ministerial Conference
 - The topmost decision-making body of the WTO is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets every two years.
 - It brings together all members of the WTO, all of which are countries or customs unions.
 - The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters under any of the multilateral trade agreements.
- General Council
 - The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body located in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO.
 - It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the ministerial conference which only meets about every two years.
 - The General Council also meets, under different rules, as
 - The General Council,
 - the Trade Policy Review Body,
 - and the Dispute Settlement Body (DSU)
 - Three councils, each handling a different broad areas of trade, report to the General Council:
 - The Council for Trade in Goods (Goods Council)
 - The Council for Trade in Services (Services Council)
 - The Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Council)
 - As their names indicate, the three are responsible for the workings of the WTO agreements dealing with their respective areas of trade.
 - Again they consist of all WTO members.



The Cairn Energy-govt dispute

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Centre is likely to file an appeal against the \$1.4 billion international arbitration award won by Cairn Energy in a tax dispute, even as the issue did not figure during two-days of talks the Finance Secretary held with the company officials to look for a resolution, sources with knowledge of the matter said.

What is the Cairn Energy-Indian government dispute all about?

- The dispute stems from the much debated retrospective taxation issue. Fifteen years ago, in 2006-2007, Cairn UK had, as part of an internal rearrangement process, transferred shares of Cairn India Holdings to Cairn India. Income-Tax authorities then decided that since Cairn UK had made capital gains, it ought to pay capital gains tax up to Rs 24,500 crore.
- The company interpreted Indian laws on capital gains differently, and refused to pay. Several rounds of litigation at the Income-Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) and the High Court followed. Cairn lost the case at ITAT; a case on the valuation of capital gains is pending before Delhi High Court.

- While Cairn Energy sold the majority of its India business, Cairn India, to mining giant Vedanta in 2011, income-tax authorities barred it from selling about 10 per cent, citing pending taxation issues. The payment of dividend by Cairn India to Cairn Energy was also frozen.

What had the Permanent Court of arbitration court say in its ruling?

- In its judgment, the PCA at The Hague said the issue was not just related to tax, but was an investment-related dispute — and was therefore under the jurisdiction of the international arbitration court.
- “Tax demand against the claimants (Cairn Energy Plc and Cairn UK Holdings Limited) in respect of AY (assessment year) 2007-08 is inconsistent with the treaty and the claimants are relieved from any obligation to pay it and orders the respondent (Indian government) to neutralise the continuing effect of the demand by permanently withdrawing the demand,” the three-member arbitration panel said in its judgment.
- The arbitration tribunal also said that India must not make any more attempts to recover “the alleged tax liability or any interest and or penalties arising from this alleged liability through any other means”.

A taxing journey

A timeline of the conflict

January 2014: Income Tax Department seeks information from Cairn Energy about group reorganisation done in 2006

March 2015: Cairn Energy receives draft assessment order from I-T Department, citing **retrospective legislation to seek ₹10,247 crore** in taxes. Cairn reacts by filing a notice of dispute

May 2018: Pending arbitration proceedings, I-T Department begins selling Cairn shares to recover tax dues

2018: Three-member international arbitration tribunal concludes hearings in tax dispute

December 23, 2020: Cairn Energy wins arbitration

Mains

GS II

Structural reforms for NEP 2020

(Education)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *With the COVID-19 pandemic easing and normal academic activity being gradually resumed, the Central government's New Education Policy (NEP) is back in focus.*

Details:

- While the policy covers a wide spectrum of issues, including reforms in school and higher education, the emphasis should also be on the need to restructure the governing bodies for universities and autonomous colleges.
- First, the system of appointments of vice-chancellors and syndicates, or governing councils, the key authorities for any university, needs to be revised. The appointments are often mired in controversies, with frequent reports in the past of aspirants for the post of vice-chancellors and membership of syndicates indulging in unethical practices to gain favour. Luckily, the NEP talks of creating new structures, such as a Board of Management, to replace the syndicate system. To implement this recommendation, State governments must bring in a slew of bold reforms, some of which are outlined below.
- For the Board of Management structure, the existing system of syndicates, consisting of government nominees and those nominated by Governors or chancellors, should be dispensed with. Often, people lacking merit but with an eye on memberships of affiliation, building, and purchase committees, among others, get nominated to these bodies.
- Further, with the vice-chancellor as chairman, the Board should consist of former vice-chancellors drawn from other universities, members drawn from industry, the alumni, eminent public intellectuals, principals of affiliated colleges on rotation and members representing the non-teaching staff. The Board's decisions should be taken by consensus or by a majority of the members present. Proceedings should be conducted in virtual mode and made available for stakeholders' viewership.
- For the appointment of vice-chancellors of universities, search committees constituted for such purposes must be thoroughly restructured. The government's and chancellors' role in such committees must be done away with. The practice of having government nominees, chancellor's nominees and university nominees should be stopped and it should be replaced by drawing an eminent former vice-chancellor or academician of proven integrity and administrative capability for the post of chairman.

Transparent procedures

- Applications for the post of vice-chancellors can be invited through advertisements on the university website and through newspapers. Biodata of candidates must also be published on the websites. The committee may then allot marks to candidates' scholarship in terms of teaching and research, administrative capabilities, and capacity for fundraising. The scores obtained by candidates should be consolidated and the names of shortlisted candidates then submitted in the order of merit to chancellors for deciding on formal appointments.
- Another important issue is accountability of faculty, and the best way to ensure that is to put in place an institutional structure of 'academic audit'. Faculty members must mandatorily upload on university websites their annual plans for research and innovative modes of teaching. Their annual self-appraisal reports can be evaluated by external peers and their recommendations should be strictly implemented.



- There is an urgent need to overcome faculty shortage by recruiting teachers in order to overcome the existing trend of higher educational institutions relying on guest faculty.
- Finally, in order to improve the higher education ecosystem, excellence in teaching, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and social contribution must be encouraged. The NEP's recommendations, like the introduction of four-year courses that have the option of re-entry and exit, one- or two-year postgraduate courses, and setting up of an Academic Bank of Credit for credit transfers, may be helpful.

The viability of two proposals- 4 capitals and a Supreme Court Bench

(Issues and Challenges Pertaining to Federal Structure)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Speaking at a roadshow in Kolkata on January 23, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asked why India should have only one capital and suggested that there be four. She directed Sudip Bandyopadhyay, MP and leader of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha, to raise the issue in Parliament. She suggested that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in a rotating manner. While Ms. Banerjee has the right to have her opinion on the issue, she doesn't seem to have given much thought to the feasibility of the proposal.

A plan the nation cannot afford

- Four capitals would obviously mean having Parliament buildings in three other regions, too. If there are four capitals, accommodation for all the MPs and the adjunct staff will have to be constructed. While those from the northern parts of the country would prefer to be comfortably ensconced in the existing residential accommodation in New Delhi, those from other parts of the country may prefer to settle in the capital of the region to which they belong.
- During Parliament sessions, MPs will descend in droves to the envisaged capitals and fly out, leaving these residential accommodations vacant for months after every session. Add to this the huge expenditure involved in all the MPs and their staff having to fly to and from these capitals every now and then.
- Providing security to all the MPs will be a huge burden for the State Police. Even the vacant accommodations where the MPs don't reside will have to be guarded round the clock. Depending on the risk factor, enhanced security will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of them, many of whom manage to get top security cover merely for their imprudent utterances.
- Calcutta (now Kolkata) was once a capital of this country until King George V announced in December 1911 that Delhi would be the new capital. Parliament House was opened in 1927 and the magnificent Viceroy's residence (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the government buildings were inaugurated in 1931. One of the factors that may have weighed in favour of New Delhi could be its proximity to the summer capital, Shimla.
- But today, even shifting a State capital would involve huge expenditure. In the 1980s, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister proposed to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli in central Tamil Nadu. The plan was ultimately shelved when the huge burden it would impose on the State exchequer became apparent. The cost to the government exchequer to have capitals in three other States will be mind-boggling and our nation can ill-afford this.

A proposal to be considered- Additional SC Bench

- A similar request was made in January 2021 when the Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India.
- This has been a long-standing demand. Unlike the proposal to establish four capitals, this one merits serious consideration given the prohibitively long distance between the southern States and Delhi. Not



many can afford to travel all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases. The exorbitant fees of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another deterrent.

- While speaking at an online event last year, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of Court of Appeal with 15 judges each be created across the country to reduce the burden of the Supreme Court. This would enable judges to go through each case thoroughly and deliver a well-thought-out verdict. Setting up these courts would call for an amendment in the Constitution.
- Though the demand is to set up a bench in the south, southern Bar Councils may later take up the issue of setting up separate appellate benches in regions in the south. Such an arrangement would leave the apex court free to deal with constitutional issues.
- With cases mounting in various courts, a viable solution needs to be worked out. Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

Social security for faster growth

(Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable sections)
(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](http://TheHinduBusinessline.com))

Context: *The Central as well as State governments have been attempting to provide welfare measures as envisaged in the Directive Principles over the decades depending on political priorities and resource constraints. Rural employment on demand for 100 days in a year under MNREGA and the Food Security Act have been landmark developments. Both were pillars in mitigating distress during Covid as millions of migrant workers went back to their village homes during the lockdown.*

Details:

- The Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution envisaged the creation of a social welfare state as resources became available. In post war Europe, the evolution of the social welfare state was reaching completion and this would have shaped the thinking in the Constituent Assembly. The working class movement gained in strength with industrialisation in Europe in the early twentieth century and the provision of social safety was a major goal
- What is not widely known and is quite interesting is that the essence of social security; relief for industrial workers for unemployment, health care and old age pension, was first introduced in Germany by Chancellor Bismarck in the late 1880s. He did it not because he was a socialist but because he saw this as being essential for the rise of Germany as a leading industrial power. He saw workers whose basic needs were taken care of as being essential for rapid industrialisation. This insight of Bismarck is still relevant.
- The government financed universal health insurance coverage for all under Ayushman Bharat is transformative. Social safety has to now be recognised as an essential prerequisite for success in industrialisation. Workers have to become partners. They are as important an asset as plant and machinery.
- The reality is that in this globalised world the same plant and machinery can be bought and installed anywhere. Human beings make all the difference for global competitiveness. Abundant supply of motivated, efficient and productive workers who take pride in quality is the key.

Unorganised, uncovered

- Only about 10 per cent of our work force is in the organised sector and gets the benefits that our progressive labour laws provide. The remaining 90 per cent are not covered. The use of outsourced contract labour in industrial plants has grown.
- The ensuing contradictions sometimes become unmanageable. In the present globalised world, products, firms and their supply chains can rise as well as decline very rapidly. Blackberry is a good illustration. Accordingly, the need for workers can also rise and fall very rapidly.



- A regulatory environment and a friendly eco system supportive of the needs of this new reality is essential if we are to succeed in manufacturing and becoming a major hub of global supply chains. Full labour market flexibility with a robust social safety net for the entire working population would be the way forward.
- The underlying premise of stable firms and life long employment behind the contributory system of social safety that emerged in Europe a century back has now become dated. At our stage of development the state needs to assume greater responsibility.
- The four new labour codes, the result of a few years of stakeholder consultations and discussions, seem to recognise the needs of contemporary reality. Fixed term employment, giving States freedom to increase the number of workers below which a firm can have flexibility in hiring and downsizing and adopting the goal of covering all workers in the informal sector in the Social Security Code are major positive new features.
- The provision of social security to the 90 per cent workers who are either in the informal sector or are self-employed needs to begin now. The ambition should be to have full social security by 2022, the 75th year of our independence.
- The first step would be the extension of MNREGA to urban areas. 100 days of guaranteed work provides a basic social safety net at the bottom of the pyramid in urban areas. If it had been in place, the distress of migrant labour at the time of the lockdown would have been substantially lower. Municipal bodies can use unskilled labour for a range of useful work. It may cost around ₹15,000-20,000 crore per year. This is affordable.
- Unemployment insurance is a product whose time has come in India. Discussion on its possible contours with stakeholders and experts needs to commence with government leadership. Designing it to cover those in the informal sector would be especially challenging. The government should ideally consider making a matching contribution for those whose incomes are below the level at which Income Tax becomes payable.
- But depending on the cost implications, the threshold could be made lower to begin with. Given the fiscal difficulties now, a social security cess on Corporate profits would be necessary. Even doing away with the 2 per cent mandatory CSR to provide for the social security cess would be worthwhile.

Skill development schemes

- Semi-skilled and skilled workers do lose their jobs and with technological modernisation this happens more rapidly. There should be well designed skill development programs for them. Their skills may be upgraded, or, they may be given new skills along with improvement in their work ethic. This may be done at no cost to them and should be fully funded by the central government.
- The upgradation of the skills of the existing work force needs greater priority and focus under the Skill Mission. Programs have to evolve on the basis of an ongoing assessment of anticipated demand for skills in the area.
- The ready and abundant availability of trained and efficient manpower with the right skills for global supply chains is a major positive in attracting investment. It may be worthwhile for us to get retired skilled workers from countries such as Germany, Japan and Korea to help us in getting training content and methodology right.
- Bringing workers, their skills and their social security, centre stage is essential to attract private investment for job creation. As better paying jobs get created, poverty would decline faster, and India could regain the growth rate of over 8 per cent that it needs.

Telehealth to the Indian Advantage

(Health)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The acceleration in the use of digital technologies has mitigated the impact of COVID-19 to some extent. Virtual consultations avoid the risk of COVID-19 transmission and are helping to bridge this socio-economic divide.*

COVID-19 impact

- In India, detection of tuberculosis cases was down by 50% in April-December of 2020 relative to the same period in 2019, and antenatal care visits were down by 56% in the first half of 2020.
- With stoppage of routine follow ups, blood sugar control for diabetics was at risk, increasing the chances of adverse events requiring hospitalisation, including worse outcomes in the case of COVID-19 infection. Cancer care has been badly affected in many countries, as well as diagnosis and treatment of other non-communicable diseases.
- Further, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities — people living in rural and remote areas were further disadvantaged by not being able to travel to cities to seek specialist care. The pre-existing shortage of specialists in many rural areas led to care being delayed or not happening at all.

Enhance technology use

- The Indian government's eSanjeevani platform offers both provider-to-patient interactions and provider-to-provider interactions, where patients visit smartphone-equipped community health officers in rural health and wellness centres; these in turn connect to general practitioners and specialist doctors through a hub-and-spoke model. Private providers and non-governmental organisations have also expanded virtual access to underserved populations.
- Yet, given the scale of unmet demand, there is an urgent need to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of every minute spent in virtual care interactions. There are lessons we can learn from the pandemic that can be applied usefully to how we deliver health care.
- Remote-shared medical appointments in which multiple patients with similar medical needs meet with a clinician at once, remotely, and where each receives individual attention, can greatly increase telehealth capacity by eliminating repetition of common advice.

Utilising shared appointments

- Remote shared medical appointments essentially virtualise in-person shared medical appointments (SMAs) which have been offered successfully in the United States for over 20 years. Patients get more time with their clinician, albeit not in private.
- SMAs enable peer support and peer-to-peer learning. Providers who have offered SMAs have found them to improve both productivity and outcomes for many conditions, notably diabetes. SMAs could help tackle India's widespread "sugar" problem.
- The Aravind Eye Hospital in Puducherry has successfully trialled in-person SMAs for patients with glaucoma, a disease that causes gradual, irreversible blindness. Glaucoma progression can be slowed through regular follow up and taking prescribed medications. The eye hospital found that in shared appointments, patients spur one another to engage more and ask more questions. Such (virtual) peer interaction could be welcome in the current paradigm of social distancing.
- eSanjeevani and other telehealth platforms could consider offering virtual shared medical appointments. Patients in different villages, with similar conditions can be seen at once remotely by a generalist or specialist, during the pandemic. Once transmission risk subsides, seeing patient groups within each village centre will help build supportive bonds, enable sharing of local knowledge, and likely attract supplementary providers (physiotherapists, optometrists, etc) due to scale.

- Testing and vaccine adoption is stymied by misinformation. Providers can offer virtual group information sessions accessible via smartphone in which a health-care worker explains the benefits of COVID-19 testing and vaccination and answers questions, reaching potentially quite large audiences. Engaging in real time with a care provider in an interactive format will likely encourage safe behaviours to a greater extent than if the same information is provided without interaction.
- Switching to radically different care delivery models requires rigorous testing combined with mentoring, training and behaviour change for both patients and providers. Adoption of in-person shared medical appointments has been slow.
- The unique telehealth capacity crisis which COVID-19 has created is drawing interest to virtual SMAs. Training platforms such as ECHO, which train primary-care providers in many States through an online platform — can accelerate adoption and should also guide implementers on how to gather data that can be used to scientifically validate this care model.
- Patients who choose to attend an in-person SMA often like the experience and return for more. This is likely for virtual SMAs too. Trialling and acceptance of this model could amplify the impact of health systems both during the pandemic and beyond.

The plusses

- Relative to other nations, India is well poised to ramp up telehealth. Data plans are cheaper in India than anywhere.
- It is possible to get 1.5GB of data a day for a few hundred rupees a month, and Indians from all socioeconomic groups regularly enjoy group video chats with friends and relatives. Having a group interaction with a care provider on an appropriately secure platform is certainly conceivable.
- WHO's Global Strategy on Digital Health, adopted by the World Health Assembly, is a call to action providing a road map for nations to rapidly expand digital health services.
- With innovation in systems thinking, learning and adaptation, new digital tools bring an opportunity to leapfrog into a reality of 'Health for All'.

A growing rights crisis in Lanka

(India's Neighbourhood)
(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Indian leaders have committed to supporting the rights of minority Tamils in Sri Lanka to “live with equity, equality, justice, peace and dignity”. In pledges to the United Nations, the Indian government has also vowed to uphold global human rights.*

Details:

- These commitments have become crucial. The human rights situation in Sri Lanka has worsened since Gotabaya Rajapaksa became President in 2019.
- At its next session, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) will face a crucial test in taking action for protecting vulnerable Sri Lankans and upholding international law. India, as a council member, will have a key role.
- Rajapaksa was the defence secretary in the government led by his brother Mahinda from 2005 to 2015, a period marked by particularly egregious human rights abuses. Critics of the government were murdered, tortured, and forcibly made to disappear.
- Tens of thousands of civilians were killed in the civil war which ended in 2009 between government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with both sides responsible for numerous war crimes. In the final months of the war, the armed forces indiscriminately shelled civilians and summarily executed suspected LTTE fighters.

Renewed fears

- When Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the 2015 presidential election, there was hope for change. There was greater freedom of expression.
- The repressive and heavily militarised situation in Tamil-majority areas began to improve. The new government supported a consensus resolution at the Human Rights Council that offered victims of abuses and their families truth, justice, and reconciliation.
- **But now, fear has returned. Tamil communities in the north and the east fear increasing abuses. Since last year, singing the national anthem in Tamil has been dropped from Independence Day celebrations. The religious rights of minorities are under attack, including interference with Hindu temples.**
- In January, the authorities bulldozed a memorial at Jaffna university that commemorated Tamil civilian victims of the civil war. People who participated in a protest march in February are now facing criminal investigation.
- **The Rajapaksa government, in 2020, renounced its commitments under the 2015 Human Rights Council resolution and is threatening victims' families and activists who supported it. A presidential commission set up to investigate supposed "political victimisation" of officials by the previous government has recommended the exoneration of those implicated in cases of abuse. Numerous people who were involved in war crimes have been appointed to senior roles.**

Loss of accountability

- The Rajapaksa government has shown outright disdain for accountability. In September last year, Sri Lanka told the Human Rights Council that allegations against senior military officers are "unacceptable" and without "substantive evidence".
- Last March, Rajapaksa pardoned former army sergeant Sunil Ratnayake, who killed eight Tamil civilians, including children. In October, the government amended the Constitution to remove constraints on political interference in Sri Lanka's courts.
- Since 2012, the Human Rights Council has sought to work with Sri Lanka to promote reconciliation and accountability, efforts that India has backed. Sri Lanka is now rejecting that endeavour, instead proposing a new domestic commission that UN experts have dismissed as lacking credibility or independence.
- The UNHRC should recognise the government's actions for what they are — an effort to impede justice. A new resolution is urgently needed to protect vulnerable minority communities in Sri Lanka, by upholding the principle of accountability for the worst crimes. India should join other member states in supporting a resolution to reduce the growing risk of future atrocities.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill 2021

(Functions and Responsibilities of the Union)

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3741121.ece))

Context: In a rare exercise last week, the Government of India tabled *the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill 2021* that seeks to give effect to a long-standing political demand to group seven Scheduled Caste subsects in Tamil Nadu under the heritage name 'Devendrakula Velalar' (DKV). The subsects include Devendrakulathan, Kadaiyan (excluding the coastal areas of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts), Kalladi, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Vathiriyar. These subsects have a predominant presence in south Tamil Nadu, which is a communally sensitive region.

The rationale

- Caste-based political parties and organisations, spearheading the demand, feel that shedding individual Dalit caste tags would help in the social advancement of the community. Their argument is that existing caste names were being used more in a derogatory sense to belittle the community. The DKVs, they insist, were prosperous wetland owners, and not oppressed sections, socially or economically. Besides, these seven Scheduled Caste subsects share similarities, culturally.
- The demand for such grouping has its genesis in latter day British India when these subsects were included under the Scheduled Castes on the basis of their economic conditions. However, the voices remained feeble for long, only gaining traction in the 1990s with the emergence of influential community leaders such as K. Krishnasamy (founder, Puthiya Tamilagam) and John Pandian (founder, Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam).
- Caste clashes between the Mukkulathors, an Other Backward Classes (OBC) community, and the Pallars, in the latter half of 1990s over the naming of districts and transport corporations after community leaders, led to a community consolidation.
- By the turn of the millennium, the community leaders placed an unusual additional demand — to delist the seven subsects from the Scheduled Castes arguing that being in the Schedule, instead of being a facilitator, served as a detriment to social advancement. This was at a time when some OBC communities were vociferous in wanting to be socially devalued and included among the Most Backward Classes.

A political risk

- Mr. Krishnasamy, as MLA, periodically raised the twin demands of grouping and exclusion from the Scheduled Castes list. Mainstream parties were cognisant of these demands but treaded cautiously given the sensitivity of the subject and the dissent among sections of the subsects over the ‘delisting’ proposal. Delisting and shuffling of castes from one reserved social class to another was fraught with political and administrative risks.
- It could not only disturb the internal sharing of the communal reservation quota pool by existing castes, but also invite objections from other communities or spur political demands for similar reclassification.
- In February 2011, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) responding to an appeal from senior Congress leader S. Peter Alphonse, constituted a one-man committee headed by Justice M.S. Janarthanam (retd.) to examine the grouping of the seven sub-castes. A change in regime in May 2011 halted progress.
- However, in 2015 the issue drew national attention when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership, sensing a political opportunity to consolidate a vote bank in Tamil Nadu, a State where it has minimal presence, threw its weight behind the demand. As per Census 2011, the seven subsects constitute about 17.07% of the Scheduled Castes. In the southern districts, the concentration of their population in many constituencies would be far greater.
- Amit Shah, then BJP president, along with S. Gurumurthy, co-convener of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, at a public meeting organised by M. Thangaraj of the Thevendrar Thannaarva Arakkattalai, endorsed the demand. Mr. Krishnasamy, suspicious of Mr. Shah’s intent then, has since veered toward the BJP. Mr. Shah took it forward by arranging a meeting between a delegation led by Mr. Thangaraj and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who instantly offered support if the State government submitted a report.

Steps to a review

- But State Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami’s All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) government was wary of being seen as hasty. It set up a committee headed by S. Sumathi, Professor of Anthropology, University of Madras, to study the issue. Her report, “Devendrakula Velalar – Cultural and Social Patterns of Seven Sub-Communities”, was not made public, but it favoured a grouping of the subsects.
- To win over the Puthiya Tamilagam ahead of the last parliamentary elections, Mr. Palaniswami constituted a committee headed by Hans Raj Verma, IAS, to make recommendations on the demand.



Significantly, the government had eliminated the Vathiriyan caste from the purview of the panel as there was opposition from the community to being classified under DKV.

- With pressure from Mr. Krishnasamy mounting and the AIADMK fearing an erosion of its traditional support base of Mukkulathors due to the sidelining of the close aide of former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, V.K. Sasikala, who belongs to the community, Mr. Palaniswami decided to act. In the midst of electioneering in December 2020, he announced that he would write to the Centre to classify the seven subsects (including Vathiriyan) as DKV following the Verma panel recommendation.

Picking up the gauntlet

- The Centre lost no time and tabled the Bill in Parliament just a day before Mr. Modi visited Chennai on February 14, where he sought to personally connect with the community by saying, “Devendra rhymes with my own name Narendra.”
- While community leaders see the Bill as a ‘crescent’, they still insist on the fulfilment of the second demand of exclusion from the Scheduled Castes for a ‘full moon’ to rise. However, there has been opposition from within. A section of Pallars and other castes is apprehensive of losing the benefit of Scheduled Castes reservation, which is essential for access to higher education and government job opportunities.
- While electorally, the AIADMK-BJP alliance could now aim to consolidate the DKV vote bank, like any caste issue, it has its share of trouble. Apart from the resistance from the Vathiriyans, who even moved court challenging the demand for grouping, there is an undercurrent of resentment from within the Vellalar community, an influential OBC segment, to the assignment of the DKV title. The traditional Vellalars are spread across Tamil Nadu under sub-groups such as Kongu Vellalar, Thuluva Vellalar, Saiva Vellalar, Choliya Vellalar, Chera Vellalar and Pandya Vellalar.
- Claiming entitlement for the exclusive use of the ‘Vellalar’ title, they see the demand for use of the same title by the Dalit subsects as “identity theft” and “cultural misappropriation”. They claim that the use of the ‘Vellalar’ title by the subsects was a modern day inclusion by community leaders and not a historic practice.
- They have no objection to the social advancement of the seven subsects including their demand to be delisted from the Scheduled Castes. The Vellalars suggest that the subsects could be grouped under the title ‘Devendrakulathars’ or ‘Devendrakulars’, but not ‘Vellalar’; an electoral fallout cannot be ruled out.
- In fact, some Vellalar representatives have argued that in the parliamentary elections, the AIADMK-BJP alliance was hurt in Vellalar-dominated western region, its traditional stronghold, due to their backing of the DKV classification demand. They claim that Mr. Palaniswami, a Kongu Vellala Gounder, was unable to consolidate the community’s support.
- However, considering the anti-Modi sentiments prevalent then and in the absence of psephological evidence, it would be hard to judge if the community voted against the ruling alliance over the issue of using the Vellalar title.

Dalit concerns

- Among the Dalits too, opinion is divided on the grouping of subsects under a common title. There are apprehensions that over time, this could trigger arguments as to which of the larger groups is numerically stronger, thereby clouding the larger Dalit cause. This section argues that Dalits as such cannot be treated as a homogeneous group considering the differences within in terms of social status and geographical identity.
- Whatever the outcome of the current move, it is indeed unique for a community to have placed social advancement as priority to be delisted from the Scheduled Castes forgoing the concessions it offers. Also, this would be a precedent for using anthropological study for social grouping in Tamil Nadu. Politically, though, this would remain a trapeze walk.



The pressing need to adjudicate, not mediate

(Judiciary)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The recent judgment of the Supreme Court that refused to review its earlier verdict on the Shaheen Bagh protest is inseparable from its political context. The verdict of October 7, 2020 declared that there is no absolute right to protest, and it could be subjected to the orders of the authority regarding the place and time. Apart from thinking about the legal and constitutional issues, it can also lead to a discourse on the moral authority of the top court in dealing with such fundamental questions related to freedom.*

Protests, a political challenge

- Both the judgments came out at the time of ongoing street agitations. Protest “at anytime and anywhere” has not been as simple as conceived in the judgments. The agitations against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the farm laws also brought out the immense agony and hardship that the protesters had to face.
- In the anti-farm laws struggle, they experienced suffering over almost the entire winter for a cause which they believe as one that concerns the whole nation. They had to pay a heavy price for their convictions.
- Many were subjected to malicious prosecution by the state on serious charges of sedition and terrorist activities. Not only the protesters but also their supporters, including comedians and journalists, were not spared. All freedoms under Article 19 of the Constitution, from freedom of expression to that of peaceful association, were seriously impaired.
- Even today, many languish in jail for the offence of dissent and the more serious offence of ‘andolan’. Disha Ravi, a 22-year-old climate activist, was booked recently for ‘conspiracy against the government’. Such arrests continue because the protests are a political challenge to the existing regime, a theme which the Court did not even address with contextual details.

A problematic ‘balancing’

- There is a more significant question that a citizen could pose against the Court’s pronouncements on the Shaheen Bagh protest. The agitations on the street became an imperative because the issues were not subjected to a timely judicial examination.
- The subject matter of almost all the major protests which have happened recently in India, be it over ‘economic reservation’, the CAA or the farms laws, involved legal and constitutional issues requiring immediate and effective adjudication in terms of their constitutional validity.
- The top court could not exercise its constitutional role and ensure judicial scrutiny on an aggrandising executive and an equally imposing Parliament by exercising its counter-majoritarian function. Having failed to do so, the kind of ‘balancing’ which the Court now tries to attain by way of the Shaheen Bagh orders will pose more questions than it answers.
- In the original judgment on Shaheen Bagh, the Court attempted to “mediate” the issue and admitted in the judgment that it “did not produce any solution”. The Court’s duty during the testing times is to adjudicate, and not to mediate. A reconciliatory approach is not a substitute for juridical assertion.
- The review petition provided the Supreme Court an opportunity to revisit its earlier folly where it merely acted as a judicial extension of the executive. It could have taken empirical lessons from a political situation that was almost proximate to an internal Emergency.
- Constitutional morality is a philosophy that should primarily apply to the constitutional courts. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar used this idea in terms of institutions and not of individuals. Had there been a timely adjudication of the validity of the laws which was questioned by the process recognised by the law, the torment on the street could have been probably reduced.

Think fair and effective



- A fair and effective adjudicative mechanism in constitutional matters can meaningfully sublimate the agitation on the street. Studies have shown that social movements could be less radical and less oppositional when the issues could be effectively sorted out by way of fair litigative means.
- Sociologist Luke Martell was of the opinion that the radical green movement in Britain has been at a slower pace when compared with other parts of western Europe, because the “public enquiry system” in the United Kingdom could “process ecological demands, integrate them into the political system and minimise radicalisation of the movement arising out of exclusion and marginalisation”. The principle can have application across the constitutional democracies.
- The textbook theory of “balancing” the right to protest and the right to move along the road does not need any reiteration in the constitutional climate of the present day. When fear is the new normal for the average Indian, the Court’s only role is to act as the guardian of the right to dissent.
- In the review petition, the petitioners rightly apprehended that the observations in the earlier judgment against the indefinite occupation of public space “may prove to be a license in the hands of the police to commit atrocities on legitimate voice of protest”. The Court, by its present rejection of the plea, has reinforced an illiberal state’s intimidating stand during another unjust political situation.
- Its affirmation of the earlier view is not merely insensitive or surreal. It illustrates an instance of “abusive judicial review”, as described by David Landau and Rosalind Dixon, where the Court not only refuses to act as the umpire of democracy but aids the executive in fulfilling its strategies. In the process, it legitimises very many illegitimate state actions.

State’s intrusion is a worry

- In the 2020 verdict, the Supreme Court has also failed to properly appreciate and contextualise the earlier Constitution Bench judgment in *Himat Lal K. Shah vs Commissioner of Police* (1972) even after referring to it.
- It is the state’s intrusion into the realm of rights that should worry the Court. In *Himat Lal K. Shah*, the Court said that the rule framed by the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner conferred arbitrary power on the police officers in the matter of public meetings and, therefore, was liable to be struck down.
- Justice Kuttyil Kurien Mathew, in *Himat Lal K. Shah*, explained that “freedom of assembly is an essential element of a democratic system” and that “the public streets are the ‘natural’ places for expression of opinion and dissemination of ideas”.

GS III

Spotlight on dams after Chamoli disaster

(Infrastructure)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A snow avalanche triggered possibly by a landslide caused a flash flood in the Rishi Ganga river, a tributary of the Alaknanda in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, on a sunny morning on February 7, washing away a functional small hydroelectric project and destroying the under-construction 520 MW Tapovan Vishnugad project of the NTPC on the Dhauliganga river. The death toll from the disaster was 38 as of Friday. Rescue teams were straining to locate scores of people who remained missing. These were mostly workers in the two power projects, besides some local residents.



Why did it happen?

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah told Parliament that satellite imagery from Planet Labs indicated that the landslide-avalanche event at an altitude of 5,600 metres occurred in a glacier in the Rishi Ganga catchment, and covered an area of 14 sq. km, causing the flood.
- In the initial rescue, 12 people trapped in a tunnel in the NTPC project and 15 from the Rishi Ganga project were saved.
- While a fuller picture of the loss of life and destruction will emerge only after rescue operation and inquiry is complete, the disaster that struck Chamoli has turned the spotlight on several ongoing dam-based hydroelectric projects, rampant road building, tree felling for projects, and also construction practices in the State.

Why is the Chamoli incident of concern?

- Uttarakhand, which gained a distinct identity in the year 2000 as a separate State carved out from Uttar Pradesh, is geologically unique. As a part of the lesser Himalaya, in the populated terrane — a region bounded by earth faults — it remains active in terms of deep movement of rock assemblages.
- In an article in Current Science in 2014, geologist K.S. Valdiya pointed to the fragility of the entire landscape from a geological point of view: “As the northward moving peninsular India presses on, the lesser Himalaya rock assemblages are compressed and are pushed under the huge pile of the Great Himalayan rocks, the latter riding southwards onto and over the lesser Himalaya.
- The movement has been going on since the MCT [the Main Central Thrust] was formed 20-22 million years ago.” The MCT, running east-west along the Himalaya, is where the Indian and Eurasian plates connect. The result of these geological stresses, scientists say, is weakening of rocks, making the development of large dam projects in the region unwise.
- There are several researchers who refer to other characteristics that call into question the wisdom of committing vast resources to large dam-building in Uttarakhand. A key concern is the active nature of rock fractures, known as faults, which respond to earthquakes, creating enormous instability, especially along slopes.
- In an assessment of the proposed 315-metre-high India-Nepal Pancheshwar dam project across the Kali river in the Kumaon region, with a drainage area of 12,000 sq. km, Shubhra Sharma and colleagues wrote in Current Science in 2019 that the chosen site could witness a strong earthquake in the Nepal area from the Rangunkhola Fault, perhaps of a magnitude of 7.4, with a potentially serious fallout.
- Investigations done along rivers Kali, Darna, Gori, Western Dhaul, Alaknanda, Mandakini and Bhagirathi, which offer the bounty of hydropower, have been found to be tectonically active in recent times across the area of the MCT. In fact, many locations in a 50-km area within the MCT zone have witnessed several earthquakes of varying intensity, including those with magnitudes of over 5.
- Although dam builders assert that their structures can withstand even high-intensity earthquakes, researchers say lessons from large structures, such as the Tehri dam, should also be studied, since there are concerns about induced seismic effects caused by the repeated filling and emptying of the reservoir, which may be deforming the area around the young dam.
- Moreover, the geology of mountains in many parts of Uttarakhand is such that the threat of landslides is high. Rocks here have been weakened by natural processes across time and are vulnerable to intense rainfall as well as human interference, in the form of house-building and road construction.
- The careless disposal of enormous debris from mining and construction projects has added to the problem, blocking flow paths and providing additional debris. In fact, researchers from IIT Roorkee writing in the Indian Geotechnical Journal (2018) estimate that various tourist locations such as Gopeshwar, Joshimath, and Badrinath fall within high-hazard and very high-hazard zones for landslides, as does Chamoli town, calling for preventive and protective measures.

Should Uttarakhand worry about the effects of climate change?

- The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate found that in the Himalayan ranges, there could be variations in overall water

availability, but floods, avalanches and landslides were all forecast to increase. Changes in monsoonal precipitation could also bring more frequent disasters.

- In 2013, catastrophic loss of lives was seen in the floods that swept Kedarnath. They were triggered by heavy rainfall over a short period in June, first destroying a river training wall, and then triggering a landslide that led to the breaching of the Chorabari moraine-dammed lake, devastating Kedarnath town.
- What this means is that aberrations in the Indian summer monsoon caused by changes to long-term climate could produce even greater damage, by bringing debris and silt down the river courses, destroying physical structures, reducing dam life, and causing enormous losses.
- These problems are also aggravated by the erosion of mountain slopes and the instability of glacial lakes in upper elevations. On the other hand, as the IPCC Special Report points out, the retreat of glaciers in the high mountains has produced a different kind of loss — of aesthetic and cultural values, declines in tourism and local agriculture.

Are expensive hydroelectric projects worth the investment today?

- In reply to a question in the Lok Sabha in September 2020, the Power Ministry stated that in the 25 MW-plus category, there are projects with a combined capacity of 12,973.50 MW under installation. Of this, eight projects totalling 2,490 MW are in Uttarakhand, most of them by the Central government.
- The Ministry describes this source of power as “highly capital-intensive” but without recurring cost, renewable and cheaper compared to coal and gas plants. But a response it gave earlier this month in the Lok Sabha indicates that it has been offering incentives since March 2019 to make hydropower attractive.
- These include classification of large hydropower projects as Renewable Energy sources, creating a separate category for hydropower within Non-Solar Renewable Purchase Obligation, tariff rationalisation to bring down tariff, and budgetary support for putting up enabling infrastructure such as roads and bridges.
- The International Renewable Energy Agency estimated that in 2019, the average levelised cost of electricity in India was \$0.060 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for small hydropower projects added over the last decade. In comparison, the global cost for solar power was \$0.068 per kWh in 2019 for utility-scale projects.
- Though hydropower has been reliable where suitable dam capacity exists, in places such as Uttarakhand, the net benefit of big dams is controversial because of the collateral and unquantified damage in terms of loss of lives, livelihoods and destruction of ecology. Chipko movement activist Sunderlal Bahuguna argued that large dams with an expected life of about 100 years, that involve deforestation and destruction, massively and permanently alter the character and health of the hills.

Farm laws and ‘taxation’ of farmers

(Agriculture)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Over the past three decades, a major rationale offered in favour of liberalising Indian agriculture was that farmers were “net taxed”. In other words, incomes of farmers were kept artificially lower than what they should have been. It was argued that this “net taxation” existed because protectionist policies deprived farmers of higher international prices, and the administered price system deprived farmers of higher domestic market prices. If there were more liberal domestic markets and freer global trade, prices received by farmers would rise.

Details:



- These arguments are raised again in the debates around the three farm laws. According to this view, farm laws are necessary to end the net taxation of agriculture. For this purpose, data on Producer Support Estimate (PSE) are used.
- A recent study found that PSE in Indian agriculture was -6% between 2014-15 and 2016-17. In contrast, PSE was +18.2% in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, +19.6% in the European Union countries and +9.5% in the U.S.
- The farm laws would weaken restrictive trade and marketing policies in India and “get the markets right”. This, in turn, would eliminate negative support and raise farmers’ prices.
- In these debates, a common example cited is that of milk. There is no Minimum Support Price (MSP) in milk, and a substantial share of milk sales takes place through the private sector, including multinationals like Nestle and Hatsun. Yet, India’s milk sector is growing faster than the foodgrain sector. If the milk sector can grow without MSP and with private corporates, why cannot other agricultural commodities? This article attempts a closer look at these claims.

PSE and its estimation

- The PSE is estimated using a methodology advocated by the OECD. The OECD defines the PSE as “the annual monetary value of gross transfers from consumers and taxpayers to agricultural producers, measured at the farm gate level, arising from policies that support agriculture...”
- The PSE has two components. The first is market price support (MPS). MPS is that part of the gross transfers to producers arising from “a gap between domestic market prices and border prices of a specific agricultural commodity”.
- The second is budgetary transfers (BOT). BOT includes all budgetary expenditures on policies that support agricultural production. PSE is the sum of MPS and BOT, expressed also as a percentage of the value of agricultural production.
- The PSE for Indian agriculture in 2019 was ₹-1,62,740 crore, or -5.5% of the value of production. Within the PSE, the MPS was negative while BOT was positive. The MPS was ₹-4,61,804 crore, or -15.5% of the value of production. The BOT was ₹+2,99,064 crore, or +10.1% of the value of production.
- The MPS for a commodity is calculated as the product of its annual production and the difference between its international and domestic prices. The problem begins here: the international price is considered a benchmark with no reference to the actual possibilities of domestic producers obtaining that price.
- Let us assume a commodity ‘A’ whose international price is higher than its domestic price.
 - First, ‘A’ may be produced in large quantities but may also be essential for domestic food security. Hence, it may not be regularly exported. Yet, its MPS will be negative. Examples are rice and wheat in India.
 - Second, most of the short-term changes in MPS may be illusory if they result from short-term fluctuations of international prices or relative exchange rates, or shocks to global demand or supply. Such fluctuations are more pronounced in agriculture because international agricultural markets are infamously imperfect, narrow and dominated by monopolistic multinational companies.
 - Third, if a country starts exporting ‘A’ to benefit from higher international prices, will the differential between international and domestic prices remain? In mainstream trade literature, a “small country assumption” is used where all countries are assumed to be price-takers and no single country is considered capable of triggering a major rise or fall in prices. But this is an unrealistic assumption. The international market for most agricultural commodities is small, while countries like India are large producers. Even if India exports a small additional share of the production of ‘A’, its impact on the international prices of ‘A’ will be disproportionately inverse. Consequently, the differential between domestic and international prices would considerably narrow, if not simply disappear.
- Due to such fluctuations in MPS, the PSE also fluctuates widely. The PSE for Indian agriculture was +1.9% in 2000. It fell to -14% in 2004, -20.4% in 2008 and -27.8% in 2013. Afterwards, it rose to -3.8%

in 2015 and -5.5% in 2019. These fluctuating PSEs mean nothing in terms of taxation or subsidisation of producers. They only mean that international prices were volatile.

- In summary, the MPS is a wrong measure of taxation in agriculture because the international price is no “true price” to be accepted as a benchmark. Further, a negative MPS, by itself, implies neither a government that squeezes revenues out of farmers nor the absence of absolute profitability in agriculture.

The case of milk trade

- Proponents of farm laws use the OECD estimates of MPS and PSE to show the perils of restrictive markets. By the same logic then, if the increasing penetration of private companies and the absence of MSP in milk are positive features, we should expect positive and rising MPS and PSE for milk.
- However, milk had the highest negative MPS among India’s major agricultural commodities in 2019. The MPS for milk was ₹-2,17,527 crore, which accounted for about 47% of the total MPS in agriculture.
- As a share of its value of production, the MPS for milk was -37.5%. Thus, if we go by the OECD estimates, milk was one of the most heavily “taxed” agricultural commodities in India.
- Consider the period between 2015 and 2019. If the growth of private firms in milk trade was a positive change, the MPS for milk should have increased over this period. In 2015, the MPS for milk was positive at ₹16,190 crore. But in 2016, the MPS turned negative at ₹-57,223 crore and by 2019 it fell further to ₹-2.17 lakh crore. In other words, “taxation” of milk producers intensified between 2015 and 2019.
- In reality, the MPS for milk turned negative not because of any compression of domestic prices. In fact, the average domestic price for milk rose from ₹25,946/tonne in 2015 to ₹28,988/tonne in 2019. But the average international reference price for milk rose faster from ₹24,905/tonne to ₹39,884/tonne in 2019. This led to a rise in the price differential from ₹1,041/tonne in 2015 to ₹10,896/tonne in 2019.
- To argue from the above that India’s milk producers were “taxed” is as meaningless as arguing that India’s farmers as a whole were “taxed” to the tune of ₹4,61,804 crore in a year. The reason is that the OECD methodology, either for milk or for other commodities, does not offer any realistic assessment of the extent of taxation or subsidisation.

The lack of logic in debates

- But these issues do not seem to bother the advocates of farm laws in India. In the debates, it is telling that these advocates (a) use the OECD estimates to highlight the overall negative MPS for agriculture as a problem; (b) but conveniently remain silent on the negative MPS for milk; and (c) yet, argue in the same breath that milk producers have benefited from the growth of private firms. The absence of logic in this line of argument is nothing but appalling.
- In fact, what is missed in these debates is the elephant in the room: the BOT. The West’s PSEs in agriculture are positive and higher than India’s because they have higher BOT than in India.

Looking ahead after the Ladakh walk back

(Security)

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3741221.ece))

Context: *In the end, the murmurs of an imminent breakthrough after the last round of military-diplomatic talks between India and China on January 24 were finally confirmed last week when Beijing made the announcement of the start of disengagement between the two armies, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian Army, in Ladakh. This is not the end of the 10-month-old military stand-off yet but, palpably, the beginning of the end. It is a welcome move because heightened tensions between the two nuclear-armed Asian powers serve no useful purpose for anyone, certainly not India’s.*

Political priority

- The current disengagement is limited to two places on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh: north bank of Pangong lake and Kailash range to the south of Pangong. There are three other sites of contention on the Ladakh border where the PLA had come in — Depsang, Gogra-Hot Springs and Demchok — and talks will be held to resolve these after the current phase of disengagement is completed.
- There have been regular clashes between the soldiers of both sides at the north bank of Pangong lake, and nearly a quarter of all the Chinese transgressions on the LAC between 2014 and 2019 have taken place in the area. It has limited strategic importance, but is a popular tourist spot after the climax of the superhit Hindi film, 3 Idiots, was shot there.
- Moreover, unlike other areas of contestation, there are habitations in the vicinity of the north bank which can observe any Chinese ingress. These sightings have been reported by the elected Ladakhi representatives to the media, including in this newspaper, to the embarrassment of the central government which has been keen on keeping the news of Chinese control of Indian territory off the news cycle and out of public sight.
- This means the disengagement at north bank was a political priority — imagine the impact of tourists visiting the area again to signal normalcy — and led to it being clubbed with the Kailash range to the south of the lake.
- While Chinese troops had moved into the Indian side of the LAC in the other areas, the Kailash range was the only place where Indians had taken the initiative to hold hitherto unoccupied peaks in end-August. A heavy deployment of troops and tanks caught the Chinese by surprise who responded by their own deployment, with the two sides separated by a few yards.

A stance that is unclear

- With soldiers and tanks in eyeball range, the Kailash range was a tinderbox that could spark off a much bigger crisis with a minor accident. The Chinese have been insistent in the talks that the two sides disengage from this area first.
- Knowing that this was the only leverage it had, New Delhi had resisted taking that call until now, instead seeking a simultaneous resolution of all the flashpoints on the Ladakh border. In its statement, the government has not clarified the reasons for its change of stance which was clearly dictated by something more than the desire to remove the most dangerous flashpoint on the border.
- Even though it does not restore the status quo ante of April 2020 and the details about the south bank are sketchy, the disengagement deal on the two banks of Pangong is a fair deal for India when seen from the limited prism of only these areas.
- But when considered from the perspective of the whole LAC in Ladakh, it raises questions about the wisdom of giving up the only leverage India had for the sake of disengagement at north bank.

Depsang issue, buffer zones

- The Indian military leadership is aware of the strategic importance of the Depsang plains in the Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) sector, not only due to its proximity to the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road, the DBO airstrip and the Karakoram Pass, but because of the threat it poses to Indian control over the Siachen glacier.
- This remains the only area on the Indian landmass where China and Pakistan can physically collude militarily, and has been identified by former northern army commanders as tough to defend in case of a Chinese military attack.
- The excuse that the Depsang problem precedes the current crisis on the LAC and thus must be treated separately holds little water, for it would be in India's interest to club them together and find a holistic solution. Moreover, even the current crisis on the north bank of Pangong lake has been there since at least October 2019 though it flared up substantially in May 2020.

- The current disengagement plan provides us with a window into the mindset of the Indian decision makers who prefer the creation of a ‘no patrol’ zone or buffer zone as a solution to the tensions on the LAC.
- Before the buffer zone was created at the north bank of Pangong, a similar buffer zone was created in Galwan in July 2020 around the place where India lost 20 soldiers in a deadly clash a month earlier. That buffer zone has held good till date, even though it denies India access to the areas up to PP14 which it patrolled earlier. There are worries that such buffer zones would lie majorly on the Indian side of the LAC, thus converting a hitherto Indian-controlled territory into a neutral zone.
- A no patrol zone has not been announced, at least publicly by the Defence Minister, for the Kailash range and that exposes the limitations of any plan to create such buffer zones in all the contentious border areas for the sake of peace and tranquility on the LAC.
- Owing to the disputed nature of the border and a lack of trust between the two sides, any perceived violations of ‘no patrol’ zones can lead to deadly outcomes as seen in Galwan on June 15, 2020. At best, these buffer zones can provide a temporary reprieve but are no alternative to the mutual delineation of the LAC and a final settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary.

A power differential

- As the Indian media highlighted the rapid pace of the PLA’s withdrawal from disengagement sites, obliquely suggesting a Chinese weakness, the response from Chinese experts was in the form of a threat. Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University was quoted in the Global Times saying that if the PLA can withdraw this many armaments and ground forces in one day, it can also return equally swiftly.
- It goes to the nub of New Delhi’s weakness vis-à-vis Beijing: India does not have the military capacity and the political will to evict the Chinese troops out of its territory. Because of the power differential with China, India’s best-case scenario is to deploy sufficient troops to prevent any PLA ingress as was done with a massive deployment on the LAC after May 2020.
- The option of undertaking a prompt quid pro quo military operation in Chinese territory, as advocated by the Non-alignment 2.0 strategy document produced by Centre for Policy Research in 2012 , contains escalatory risks which an India in economic recession lacks the appetite for.

The enduring impact

- The Ladakh border crisis of 2020 will leave a lasting impact on India’s strategic calculus. The political imperative of defending every inch of territory, while lacking the wherewithal to reverse a Chinese ingress, is likely to favour an enhanced deployment of the Indian Army all along the LAC, from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.
- Not only will it stretch the Army, it would divert scarce resources towards the continental border away from the maritime domain. With India’s attractiveness to the United States and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the Quad, firmly anchored in the Indian Ocean, such a move would work to China’s advantage.
- It is another matter that having struck a disengagement deal with China, New Delhi itself may no longer be as enthusiastic about the Quad as it was a couple of months ago when the Chinese threat was imminent. Will it lead to a reset of ties with Beijing?
- By seeking the restoration of peace and tranquillity on the LAC instead of a reversion to the status quo ante as of April 2020, the Narendra Modi government has made a political choice in Ladakh. It will have to bear the strategic consequences of that choice.

Current Affairs Quiz

- 1) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect about Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI)?
1. It is a longitudinal survey to examine aging and retirement among India's population aged 55 and above.
 2. According to the recent report, every 20th family has a history of cancer and it is prevalent more in rural areas than urban areas.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

- Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI), a longitudinal survey to examine aging and retirement among India's population aged 45 and above.
- According to the report, every 20th Indian family has a history of cancer and it is more prevalent in urban areas compared to rural India.

- 2) Fossils of 550-million-year-old 'Dickinsonia', the earliest known living animal has been recently discovered in:

- a. Bhimbetka
- b. Chamoli
- c. Guwahati
- d. Hampi

Answer : a

3. Which of the following statement/s is/ are correct about Aspirational District Programme?

1. Aspirational Districts are those districts in India, that are affected by poor socio-economic indicators.
2. It is being implemented all over the country, covering all the States and Union Territories.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. a)

The 115 districts were identified from 28 states, at least one from each state and not Union Territories.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Archaeological Survey of India?

1. *The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was formed in 1861 by a statute passed into law by Canning.*
2. Alexander Cunningham was its first Archaeological Surveyor, to excavate and conserve India's ancient built heritage.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are incorrect?

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

Ans. d

Both the statements are correct.

5. Which of the statements given above is/are correct about hydrogen fuel?

1. Hydrogen produced from fossil fuels is called blue hydrogen.
2. Hydrogen generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options is called grey hydrogen
3. Hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called green hydrogen.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. c)

Hydrogen produced from fossil fuels is called grey hydrogen; this constitutes the bulk of the hydrogen produced today. Hydrogen generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options is called blue hydrogen; hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called green hydrogen.

6. What is an anticipatory transit bail, recently in news?

- a) Bail given by the a court in its jurisdiction before arrest of a person
- b) Bail given by a court outside its jurisdiction before arrest of a person
- c) Bail given by a court after arrest of a person
- d) None of the above

Ans. b)

7. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to GrapeNet?

1. It is a new safeguard against malware that infects computers.
2. It is developed by Centre for Development of Advance Computing.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. d)

- The GrapeNet is a web-based certification and traceability software system for monitoring fresh grapes exported from India to the European Union.
- It is an internet based electronic service offered by APEDA to the stakeholders for facilitating testing and certification of Grapes for export from India in compliance with the standards identified by NRC Pune, on the basis of consultation with the exporters.

8) Which of the following statement/s is/ are incorrect with respect to Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)?

1. It exercises original jurisdiction in relation to recruitment and all service matters of all-India services, the Central civil services, civil posts under the Centre and members of the defence forces.
2. The appeals against the orders of the CAT could be made only in the Supreme Court and not in the high courts.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a



- Its jurisdiction extends to the all-India services, the Central civil services, civil posts under the Centre and civilian employees of defence services.

9. E-Chhawani App portal and mobile app has been launched recently by -

- a) NITI Aayog
- b) Ministry of Agriculture
- c) Ministry of Defense
- d) Ministry of Home Affairs

Ans. c)

10) Which of the following organization has developed India's Instant messaging app Sandes?

- a. Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In)
- b. Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)
- c. National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO)
- d. National Informatics Centre (NIC)

Answer : d

11) Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Arjun Main Battle Tank MK-1A?

1. It is jointly designed, developed and manufactured by DRDO and Lockheed Martin, an US corporation.
2. It has a computer-controlled integrated fire control system with stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

- It was initiated by DRDO in 1972 with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) as its lead laboratory.
- It is indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by CVRDE and DRDO along with 15 academic institutions, eight labs and several MSMEs.

12. Consider the following statements with respect to India's boundary with Myanmar:

1. India and Myanmar share a maritime border along India's Lakshadweep Island.
2. Only North eastern states of India share a boundary with Myanmar.

Which of the above statement/s are correct?

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

Ans. b

India and Myanmar share a maritime border along Andaman Islands.

13. Arunachal Pradesh shares its longest border with -

- a) China
- b) Nepal
- c) Bhutan
- d) Bangladesh

Ans. a)

- Arunachal shares its longest border with China, followed by Myanmar and Bhutan.

14. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct about Galwan River?

1. It flows from the disputed Aksai Chin region administered by China to the Ladakh region of India.
2. It originates in the western side of the Karakoram range.
3. It flows in west to join the Shyok river in India.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. c)

The **Galwan River** flows from the disputed Aksai Chin region administered by China to the Ladakh region of India. It originates near the caravan campsite **Samzungling** on **the eastern side** of the Karakoram range and flows west to join the Shyok River.

15. The Preseverance Mars Rover that landed on mars recently was sent by-

- a) NASA
- b) ROSCOSMOS
- c) JAXA
- d) ISRO

Ans. a)

16 Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to AMRUT?

1. AMRUT was launched with the aim to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for rural transformation.
2. It was launched in 2015.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. b)

AMRUT was launched with the aim to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for urban transformation not rural transformation.

17. Right to privacy is a fundamental right under -

- a) Article 21
- b) Article 19
- c) Article 14
- d) Article 25

Ans. c)

18 Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect with respect to Maharaja Suheldev?

1. He is said to be an eleventh century ruler of Shrasvati, located in present-day Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district.
2. He bravely fought against the Mahmud Ghazni during the invasion of Somnath.

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

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

Answer : b

- He is popularly known to have defeated and killed the Ghaznavid general Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud at Bahraich in 1034 CE, at Chittaura Lake.

19. Consider the following statements with respect to Mandarin Duck:

1. It is a small-exotic bird native to East Asia.
2. It is very rare to spot and mentioned as critically endangered under IUCN Red list.

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 mentioned as Least Concern under IUCN Red list.

20. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the Vivad se Vishwas scheme?

1. This is an indirect tax scheme for settling tax disputes between individuals and the income tax department.
2. It offers a complete waiver on interest and penalty to the taxpayers who pay their pending taxes by a deadline.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. b)

- This is a direct tax scheme (not an indirect tax scheme) for settling tax disputes between individuals and the income tax department.

Special Issue

February (Week 3)

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All about the LIC IPO process

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Decks are being cleared systematically for the mega listing of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), India's largest financial institution with assets of over Rs 32 lakh crore. While the government is clearing the hurdles before the IPO, one after another, market regulator Sebi has relaxed the norms to make the listing process easier and smooth.*

What has Sebi done to smoothen the LIC IPO process?

- Currently, issuers with a post-issue market capitalisation of Rs 4,000 crore are required to offer at least 10 per cent of the post-issue capital to the public and achieve a minimum public holding of 25 per cent within three years.
- Sebi has now said the issuer with a post-issue market capitalisation needs to make an offer of Rs 10,000 crore and five per cent of the incremental amount beyond the Rs one lakh crore.
- The size will ultimately depend on the valuation.

What does the Sebi decision mean?

- The post issue market capitalisation is likely to be around Rs 10 lakh crore on a conservative estimate. It can go up to Rs 15 lakh crore once the embedded valuation is known.
- As per the new Sebi rule, on a Rs 10 lakh crore market capitalisation yardstick, LIC will have to make an issue of Rs 55,000 crore (Rs 10,000 crore plus five per cent of Rs 9 lakh crore).
- If the market capitalisation is expected to be Rs 15 lakh crore, the IPO size would become Rs 80,000 crore.
- If it's Rs 8 lakh crore, the IPO size would be Rs 45,000 crore.
- Still, LIC IPO will be the largest to hit the Indian capital market.

When is the LIC IPO expected?

- The IPO is expected to hit the market in the third quarter. The economy is on the comeback trail and the stock markets are also buoyant, making things easier for the LIC IPO.
- The government has already announced that up to 10 per cent of the IPO issue size would be reserved for its policyholders.
- As LIC currently services almost 30 crore policies across the country, it's expected to be a smooth sailing for the IPO.

What has been the progress on listing formalities so far?

- The government has made the LIC Amendment Act as part of the Finance Bill, thereby bringing the required legislative amendment for launching the IPO.
- Although LIC is currently under the supervision of the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority, it is governed by the LIC Act of 1956 which enables LIC to obtain a special dispensation in several areas including higher stakes in companies.
- The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), which oversees the government's equity in public sector firms, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC. Besides, Deloitte and SBI Caps have been appointed as pre-IPO transaction advisors.

How is LIC performing against the backdrop of Covid pandemic?

- The corporation's composite market share in number of policies and first year premium was 67.82 per cent and 70.57 per cent respectively for the period ended September 2020.



- LIC, a contrarian investor, took every available opportunity in the market investing more than Rs 260,000 crore in debt and equity (as of September 2020) as compared to Rs 244,931 crore invested last year during the same period.
- It booked more than Rs 15,000 crore as profits in the capital market till September. LIC has achieved more than Rs 25,000 crore in first year premium income in individual new business performance in the half year as compared to Rs 24,867.70 crore in the same period of last year.
- It also settled more than 82 lakh claims amounting to more than Rs 48,000 crore .

Hydrogen fuel and Electric Vehicles: All you need to know

Context: *Traditionally a slow mover in frontier electric vehicle (EV) technologies, India has made an uncharacteristically early entry in the race to tap the energy potential of the most abundant element in the universe, hydrogen. Less than four months after the United States Department of Energy announced an investment up to \$100 million in hydrogen production and fuel cell technologies research and development, India has announced a National Hydrogen Mission.*

Details:

- A handful of mobility-linked pilots are already under way.
 - In October, Delhi became the first Indian city to operate buses running on hydrogen spiked compressed natural gas (H-CNG) in a six-month pilot project. The buses will run on a new technology patented by Indian Oil Corp for producing H-CNG — 18 per cent hydrogen in CNG — directly from natural gas, without resorting to conventional blending.
 - Power major NTPC Ltd is operating a pilot to run 10 hydrogen fuel cell-based electric buses and fuel cell electric cars in Leh and Delhi, and is considering setting up a green hydrogen production facility in Andhra Pradesh.
 - IOC is also planning to set up a dedicated unit to produce hydrogen to run buses at its R&D centre in Faridabad.
 - As a supporting regulatory framework, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways late last year issued a notification proposing amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, to include safety evaluation standards for hydrogen fuel cell-based vehicles.

Why hydrogen — and its types

- Hydrogen's potential as a clean fuel source has a history spanning nearly 150 years. In 1874, science fiction writer Jules Verne set out a prescient vision in *The Mysterious Island* — of a world where “water will one day be employed as fuel, that hydrogen and oxygen which constitute it, used singly or together, will furnish an inexhaustible source of heat and light, of an intensity of which coal is not capable”.
- In 1937, the German passenger airship LZ129 Hindenburg used hydrogen fuel to fly across the Atlantic, only to explode while docking at Naval Air Station Lakehurst in New Jersey, killing 36 people. In the late 1960s, hydrogen fuel cells helped power NASA's Apollo missions to the moon.
- After the oil price shocks of the 1970s, the possibility of hydrogen replacing fossil fuels came to be considered seriously. Three carmakers — Japan's Honda and Toyota, and South Korea's Hyundai — have since moved decisively in the direction of commercialising the technology, albeit on a limited scale.
- The most common element in nature is not found freely. Hydrogen exists only combined with other elements, and has to be extracted from naturally occurring compounds like water (which is a combination of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom). Although hydrogen is a clean molecule, the process of extracting it is energy-intensive.



- The sources and processes by which hydrogen is derived, are categorised by colour tabs. Hydrogen produced from fossil fuels is called grey hydrogen; this constitutes the bulk of the hydrogen produced today.
- Hydrogen generated from fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage options is called blue hydrogen; hydrogen generated entirely from renewable power sources is called green hydrogen. In the last process, electricity generated from renewable energy is used to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.

The case for green hydrogen

- Green hydrogen has specific advantages. One, it is a clean burning molecule, which can decarbonise a range of sectors including iron and steel, chemicals, and transportation. Two, renewable energy that cannot be stored or used by the grid can be channelled to produce hydrogen.
- This is what the government's Hydrogen Energy Mission, to be launched in 2021-22, aims for. India's electricity grid is predominantly coal-based and will continue to be so, thus negating collateral benefits from a large-scale EV push — as coal will have to be burnt to generate the electricity that will power these vehicles.
- In several countries that have gone in for an EV push, much of the electricity is generated from renewables — in Norway for example, it is 99 per cent from hydroelectric power. Experts believe hydrogen vehicles can be especially effective in long-haul trucking and other hard-to-electrify sectors such as shipping and long-haul air travel.
- Using heavy batteries in these applications would be counterproductive, especially for countries such as India, where the electricity grid is predominantly coal-fired.

How hydrogen fuel cells work

- South Korea and Japan especially, are focussed on moving their automotive markets to hydrogen, and the potential of the fuel cell. What is a fuel cell?
- Hydrogen is an energy carrier, not a source of energy. Hydrogen fuel must be transformed into electricity by a device called a fuel cell stack before it can be used to power a car or truck. A fuel cell converts chemical energy into electrical energy using oxidising agents through an oxidation-reduction reaction.
- Fuel cell-based vehicles most commonly combine hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity to power the electric motor on board. Since fuel cell vehicles use electricity to run, they are considered electric vehicles.
- Inside each individual fuel cell, hydrogen is drawn from an onboard pressurised tank and made to react with a catalyst, usually made from platinum.
- As the hydrogen passes through the catalyst, it is stripped of its electrons, which are forced to move along an external circuit, producing an electrical current. This current is used by the electric motor to power the vehicle, with the only byproduct being water vapour.
- Hydrogen fuel cell cars have a near zero carbon footprint. Hydrogen is about two to three times as efficient as burning petrol, because an electric chemical reaction is much more efficient than combustion.

FCEVs and other EVs

- Electric vehicles (EVs) are typically bracketed into four broad categories:
 - Conventional hybrid electric vehicles or HEVs such as Toyota Camry combine a conventional internal combustion engine system with an electric propulsion system, resulting in a hybrid vehicle drivetrain that substantially lowers fuel usage. The onboard battery in a conventional hybrid is charged when the IC engine is powering the drivetrain.
 - Plug-in hybrid vehicles or PHEVs such as the Chevrolet Volt too have a hybrid drivetrain that uses an IC engine and electric power for motive power, backed by rechargeable batteries which can be plugged into a power source.



- Battery powered electric vehicles or BEVs such as Nissan Leaf or Tesla Model S have no IC engine or fuel tank, and run on a fully electric drivetrain powered by rechargeable batteries.
- Fuel cell electric vehicles or FCEVs such as Toyota's Mirai, Honda's Clarity and Hyundai's Nexo use hydrogen gas to power an on-board electric motor. FCEVs combine hydrogen and oxygen to produce electricity, which runs the motor. Since they're powered entirely by electricity, FCEVs are considered EVs, but unlike BEVs, their range and refuelling processes are comparable to conventional cars and trucks.
- The major difference between a BEV and a hydrogen FCEV is that the latter enables a refuelling time of just five minutes, compared to 30-45 minutes charging for a BEV. Also, consumers get about five times better energy storage per unit volume and weight, which frees up a lot of space for other things, while allowing the rider to go farther.

The problem of critical mass

- Despite its promise, hydrogen technology is yet to be scaled up. Tesla CEO Elon Musk has called fuel cell technology "mind- bogglingly stupid".
- Globally, there were under 25,000 hydrogen fuel cell vehicles on the road at the end of 2020; by comparison, the number of electric cars was 8 million.
- A big barrier to the adoption of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles has been a lack of fuelling station infrastructure — fuel cell cars refuel in a similar way to conventional cars, but can't use the same station. There are fewer than 500 operational hydrogen stations in the world today, mostly in Europe, followed by Japan and South Korea. There are some in North America.
- Safety is seen as a concern. Hydrogen is pressurised and stored in a cryogenic tank, from there it is fed to a lower-pressure cell and put through an electro-chemical reaction to generate electricity. Hyundai and Toyota say safety and reliability of hydrogen fuel tanks is similar to that of standard CNG engines.
- Scaling up the technology and achieving critical mass remains the big challenge. More vehicles on the road and more supporting infrastructure can lower costs. India's proposed mission is seen as a step in that direction.

All about Australia vs Facebook

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Morrison has launched a global diplomatic offensive to drum up support for Australia's proposed law to force Internet giants Facebook and Google to pay media companies for the news content that is published on their platforms. He is learnt to have reached out to Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as well.

Initiative and pushback

- The proposed law, News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020, mandates a bargaining code that aims to force Google and Facebook to compensate media companies for using their content.
- The legislation sets a precedent in regulating social media across geographies, and is being closely watched the world over.
- Australia's opposition Labour supported the Bill in the House of Representatives on Wednesday, paving the way for it to clear the Senate and possibly become law soon.
- Meanwhile, even as Google moved to sign a deal with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, Facebook — which has 17 million users in Australia — retaliated with a news blackout, blocking all news links on its platform.



- In the process, it also ended up silencing some emergency services, and reportedly removed posts from Australia's Bureau of Meteorology, state health departments, fire and rescue services, charities, and emergency and crisis services.

Australia's legislation

- Back in 2017, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommended a voluntary code with an aim to address the negotiating skew between major digital platforms and media businesses. Based on these recommendations, the Australian government in 2019 asked various stakeholders and the ACCC to develop this voluntary code.
- The ACCC, however, pointed out in April 2020 that the businesses were not likely to reach an agreement voluntarily. The government then asked it to draft a mandatory code. The draft law was released in July, and the government subsequently introduced the Bill after carrying out some significant amendments.
- The provision requiring Google and Facebook to enter into payment negotiations with media companies — with an arbiter mandated to adjudicate if no agreement is reached — or face heavy fines, has met with resistance. The arbiter is deemed important mainly for smaller publishers who may face a negotiation skew with the platforms.
- Also, while the original code envisaged limiting tech platforms from introducing algorithm changes that affected how a particular publisher's news is consumed, and notifying these changes to the publishers, the Bill has cut down on the changes that have to be notified to news providers. This opens up the possibility of disrupting the level playing field between small and large news organisations.
- In January, Google threatened to remove its search engine from Australia, and Facebook warned it could block Australian users from posting or sharing news links. Google has now backtracked — but the basic argument of both companies is that the media industry was already benefiting from traffic routed to them by the digital platforms, and that the proposed rules would expose the Internet companies to “unmanageable levels of financial and operational risk”.

Big Tech strategy elsewhere

- Media outlets have reported that Facebook plans to launch its news tab feature (available in the US since 2019) in the UK, with likely tie-ups with The Guardian, The Economist, and The Independent. And that Google is rolling out its news offering platform, Google News Showcase.
- Both these platforms aim to formalise payment pacts with news outlets. In a statement last month, Google said that News Showcase — which features story panels that allow participating publishers to package the stories that appear within Google's news products — has on board more than 450 publications in a dozen countries, including Le Monde, Le Figaro, and Libération in France; El Cronista and La Gaceta in Argentina; TAG24 and Sachsische Zeitung in Germany; and Jornal do Commercio in Brazil.
- Google has said it will pay news publications in France for using their content online. However, its first response to France adopting the EU copyright rules was to stop displaying news snippets — until the French competition regulator stepped in, in October last year.
- Google also pulled its Google News service in Spain, which made payments to publishers mandatory. In Australia, Google seems to have opted for a more conciliatory position, even as Facebook has decided to go on the offensive.

The core issue

- Paying for news feed in itself appears to be less of an issue for the tech giants, given that Google agreed to pay news publications in France just hours before threatening to remove its search functions in Australia.



- The fight in Australia is in fact, centred on how much control these companies would be able to retain on their payout process — operational aspects such as deciding the quantum of payments for news feed sources, and having to reveal changes in their algorithms.
- European authorities have specifically linked payments to copyright, without putting a forcing device into the agreements. Australia's code, on the other hand, is almost entirely focused on the bargaining power of news outlets vis-à-vis the tech majors, and has some coercive features as well.
- It is more of a competition issue in Australia, of power equations between traditional news outlets and tech platforms, with the question of abuse of dominance by the latter hanging in the balance.

The debate in India

- Policymakers in India have so far focused on the dominance of intermediaries such as Google and Facebook, which are positioned in a way that service providers cannot reach customers except through these platforms.
- A substantial discussion on the impact of intermediary platforms on the health of news media outlets is yet to begin in any meaningful way.
- According to a FICCI-EY report for 2020, there are 300 million users of online news sites, portals and aggregators in the country — making up approximately 46% of Internet users and 77% of smartphone users in India at the end of 2019.
- With 282 million unique visitors, India is the second largest online news consuming nation after China. In India, digital advertising spends in 2019 grew 24% year-on-year to Rs 27,900 crore, according to EY estimates, and are expected to grow to Rs 51,340 crore by 2022.
- Dailyhunt and InShorts are the other major news aggregators in India. According to a January 2020 report by Harvard University's Nieman Lab, publishers were initially paid Rs 5-6 lakh monthly for content hosted on Dailyhunt — but they started to go off the platform after these terms were changed.
- Even without the conversation in India reaching the point where news aggregators are mandated to make payments to publishers, startups such as Dailyhunt and InShorts are yet to find a sustainable revenue model.

All about Saka Nankana Sahib and its history

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Nankana Sahib, the birth place of first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev, was also the site of the first big agitation by the SGPC to take back control of gurdwaras from mahants backed by the British. The centenary of Sri Nankana Sahib massacre, which is popularly known as Saka Nankana Sahib, is being marked in an event there on February 21 this year.*

Efforts to free Nankana Sahib

- The SGPC came to existence in November 1920, a month after Sikhs removed partial restrictions on Dalit rights inside Golden Temple in Amritsar.
- It started gurdwara reform movement which was aimed at taking possession of historical Sikh Gurdwaras, which had turned personal property of the priests, who were called mahants. These mahants were also accused of running practices from gurdwaras which were not approved in Sikhism.
- Mahant Narain Das was in control of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib. Newly formed SGPC asked him to improve the administration of gurdwaras in October 1920. However, the mahant took it as challenge to his authority and started equipping himself with arms and fortified the gurdwara.



- SGPC leader Lachman Singh Dharowal was attacked by mahant's men inside gurdwara on birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji in presence of British officials in November 1920. But no action was taken against the mahant.
- Sikh leaders made attempts to bring mahant to the negotiation table but their efforts failed.

The February massacre

- Meanwhile, all the mahants and other groups, who were in control of Sikh gurdwaras, also organised themselves and started holding meetings against any move of the SGPC to take control away from them.
- They called "Sikh Sanatan Conference" in Lahore on February 19, 20 & 21, 1921. Some motivated Sikh leaders took it as an opportunity to take control of the Gurdwara Nankana Sahiba as Mahant Narain Das would be busy in Lahore.
- Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders tried to stop the Sikh jatha on the way to Nankana Sahib but failed to convince the leaders leading the jatha.
- Mahant Narain Das also came to know about jatha coming to Gurdwara Nankana Sahib as he was all set to leave for Lahore by train and returned back.
- The unarmed Sikh jatha entered inside the gurdwara and with a plan to take possession of gurdwara in a non-violent manner. On the other side, the mahant was all prepared for an armed attack and he leashed his men equipped with fire arms, sticks and sharp-edged weapons on this jaths.
- As the jatha entered the gurdwara, all the gates were closed. Around 60 Sikhs were killed in the main hall. 25 bodies were found in a single room. A 12-year-old survived the attack after he managed to hide under the palanquin on which Guru Granth Sahib was installed.
- Many got bullet shots. Some injured Sikhs were even burnt alive in boiling water during the attack. Others were chased down to a railways track nearby and killed there. Total number of casualties stood between 150 to 200.

Taking control of the gurdwara

- After the incident, Mahant Narain Das ran away, while the British police arrested 26 Pathans and sent them to Lahore in special train. The incident, however, created an impression among Sikhs that the British government had played a hidden part in this massacre.
- All the prominent Sikh leaders reached Nankana Sahib on February 21, 1921. Kartar Singh Jhabbar reached with 2,200 Sikhs. Initially, police and Army tried to stop the jatha, but later Sikhs were allowed to take control of the gurdwara.
- The then Punjab Governor and his council members also reached Nankana Sahib on February 22 and ordered handing over control of gurdwara to Sikhs.
- Mahatma Gandhi reached Nankana Sahib on March 3, 1921. Gandhi said that the British government was part of this massacre. He also said that cruelty of this massacre was more than that of Jallianwala Bagh.
- "I wish to see the bravery of Lachhman Singh and Dalip Singh in Mulshi Peta. Without raising a little finger, these two warriors stood undaunted against the attack of Mahant Narain Das of Nankana Sahib and let themselves be killed," said Gandhi.

SGPC movement takes first political turn

- The British government also arrested Mahant Narain Das. Meanwhile, SGPC formed its own probe team and asked Mahatma Gandhi to be part of it. Gandhi asked Sikh leaders to give support to the non-cooperation movement of the Congress party.
- The SGPC called a meeting on March 6, 1921 and Prof Mota Singh passed a resolution and decided to support the non-cooperation movement being run by Mahatma Gandhi. The resolution said that Sikhs must give all the support to the non-cooperation movement.



- However, the move was not welcomed by some of the SGPC leaders. Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar, Harbans Singh and Bhai Jodh Singh had opposed this resolution as they feared that it would mix a religious movement with a political movement. However, a resolution was passed with a majority vote.

SGPC joining non-cooperation movement angered British

- The British government was not amused with the decision of SGPC leadership to be part of a political movement. Sikh leaders Kartar Singh Jhabbar, Teja Singh Bhuchar, Tara Singh Thethar, Bhai Lakha Singh and others were arrested from Nankana Sahib for allegedly taking illegal control of gurdwaras on March 15, 1921.
- In May 1921, SGPC asked Sikhs to wear black clothes and turbans as protest against British government. At Nankana Sahib, two big utensils were kept which were used to colour the turbans black. Arrested Sikh leaders were released after five months.
- The court found Mahant and his men guilty in just six months and main accused were sentenced to death. Later, death sentence was commuted to life term. Mahant was released from jail in 1930.
- However, Nankana Sahib Gurdwara agitation was just a big leap in Gurdwara Reform movement followed by Guru Ka Bagh Morcha and other agitations till Sikh Gurdwara Act came into existence in 1925.

Febraury (Week 4)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

Rupay Card

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: In a major thrust to RuPay's increasing market share, the Ministry of Railways has advised its 12.54 lakh workforce to convert their Debit/ATM Cards to RuPay-powered cards.

RuPay card:

- RuPay is India's indigenous card scheme created by the National Payments Corporation of India.
- It was conceived to fulfil RBI's vision to offer a domestic, open-loop, multilateral system which will allow all Indian banks and financial institutions in India to participate in electronic payments.
- It is made in India, for every Indian to take them towards a "less cash" society.
- RuPay is the first-of-its-kind domestic Debit and Credit Card payment network of India, with wide acceptance at ATMs, POS devices and e-commerce websites across India.
- It is a highly secure network that protects against anti-phishing.

Carbon Watch

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Chandigarh became the first state or Union Territory in India to launch Carbon Watch, a mobile application to assess the carbon footprint of an individual. Although the app can be accessed by everyone, it has specific options for the residents of Chandigarh to compile a detail study.

How does the app Carbon Watch work?

- As a person downloads the application, they will need to fill details in four parts — Water, Energy, Waste Generation and Transport (Vehicular movement).
- In the category of Water, the person will be required to inform about the consumption of water.
- In the Energy category, the details regarding the electricity units consumed every month at the house, monthly bill etc and usage of solar energy will have to be furnished.
- In the Waste category, the individual will need to inform about the waste generation on their part and their family. In the transport section, the individual will have to inform about the mode of transport used by them- four wheeler, two-wheeler or bicycle.
- With the mentioned information, the mobile application will automatically calculate the carbon footprint of the individual. The application will also provide information such as the national and world average of the emission, and the individual's level of emission generation.



National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Supreme Court allowed National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) proceedings in connection with the proposed ₹24,713-crore deal between Future Group and Reliance Industries to go on, but directed the Tribunal to refrain from passing any “final order of sanction of the scheme”.*

About NCLT

- The Central Government has constituted National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under section 408 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- The National Company Law Tribunal NCLT is a quasi-judicial body, exercising equitable jurisdiction, which was earlier being exercised by the High Court or the Central Government. The Tribunal has powers to regulate its own procedures.
- The establishment of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) consolidates the corporate jurisdiction of the following authorities:
 1. Company Law Board
 2. Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction.
 3. The Appellate Authority for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction
 4. Jurisdiction and powers relating to winding up restructuring and other such provisions, vested in the High Courts.
- In the first phase the Ministry of Corporate Affairs have set up eleven Benches, one Principal Bench at New Delhi. These Benches will be headed by the President and 16 Judicial Members and 09 Technical Members at different locations.

Powers of NCLT

- The NCLT has been empowered to exercise the following powers:
 1. Most of the powers of the Company Law Board under the Companies Act, 1956.
 2. All the powers of BIFR for revival and rehabilitation of sick industrial companies;
 3. Power of High Court in the matters of mergers, demergers, amalgamations, winding up, etc.;
 4. Power to order repayment of deposits accepted by Non-Banking Financial Companies as provided in section 45QA of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934;
 5. Power to wind up companies;
 6. Power to Review its own orders.
- The NCLT shall have powers and jurisdiction of the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR), the Appellate Authority for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (AAIFR), Company Law Board, High Courts relating to compromises, arrangements, mergers, amalgamations and reconstruction of companies, winding up etc.
- Thus, multiplicity of litigation before various courts or quasi-judicial bodies or forums have been sought to be avoided. The powers of the NCLT shall be exercised by the Benches constituted by its President.

Mumbai's undersea tunnel

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Come 2023, Mumbai will be home to India's first undersea tunnel, which will be part of the the city's Coastal Road project.*

Where are Mumbai's undersea tunnels being built?



- The twin tunnels, which have a length of 2.07 km of which a kilometre will be under the sea, are being built as part of the Mumbai Coastal Road Project, a 10.58-km stretch starting from the Marine Drive promenade to the Worli-end of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link.
- The road, which will comprise of land-filled roads on areas reclaimed from the sea, bridges and tunnels, is part of a plan to link South Mumbai with North with a toll-free freeway that is expected to ease up traffic in one of the most congested cities in the world.
- It is the first undersea road tunnel in the country which will pass through Arabian Sea near Girgaon Chowpatty. It will start from Priyadarshani Park and end at Netaji Subhash Road in Marine Drive.
- Unlike the big undersea tunnels in the world, include the Channel Tunnel that connects England and France, the twin tunnels in Mumbai are being built at a relatively shallow depth. Mumbai's undersea tunnel will be 20 metres below the seabed.
- In comparison, the Channel Tunnel at its deepest point is 75 metres below the sea bed. The Seikan Tunnel in Japan lies over 100 metres below the seabed. The Mumbai tunnel is also being built very close to the coast, where the depth of the sea is not more than 4 to 5 metres.

How will temperature be regulated inside the tunnel?

- The tunnel is basically a confined space and requires ventilation to ensure a tenable environment for users.
- The fact that these tunnels are under the sea makes the dispensation of carbon monoxide which is emitted by cars a difficult proposition. High levels of carbon monoxide inside the tunnel could be hazardous for commuters.
- To tide over the problem of flushing out these hazardous gases from inside the tunnel system, a first of its kind **ventilation system called Saccardo** will be installed inside the tunnel. The system monitors the emission levels inside the tunnel and shoots an air jet through large ventilation fans to drive out the fumes in the desired direction.


Karnataka's Reservation Policy

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Karnataka government has been besieged in recent weeks by demands from caste groups asking to be included among beneficiaries of job and education quotas in various categories, or to be placed in a category different from where they are currently. Despite an upper limit of 50 per cent reservations for all caste groups together, there is a strong push for quotas from even sub-sects of caste groups that are considered to be dominant communities.

What is Karnataka's current reservation policy?

- Reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, and Muslims are capped at 50% in accordance with an order of the Supreme Court.
- The quota break-up is as follows: Category I (Backward Classes) 4%; Category II A (OBCs) 15%; Category II B (Muslims) 4%; Category III A (Vokkaligas, etc.) 4%; Category III B (Lingayats, Marathas, Bunts, Christians) 5%; SCs 15%; and STs 3%.
- A total 95 communities and their sub-sects are recognised as Backward Classes, and 102 communities and their sub-sects as OBCs.

CURRENT MATRIX IN KARNATAKA		
● SC: 15%		● 2B: 4% (Muslims and other minorities)
● ST: 3%		● 3A: 4% (12 castes, including Vokkaligas, Bunts)
● Category 1: 4% (75 castes, including Gollas, Uppars)		● 3B: 5% (Lingayats and 42 sub-castes)
● 2A: 15% (102 castes, including Kurubas, Idigas, Madiwals)		
		Source: Karnataka govt

What are the major communities in Karnataka in terms of population?

- The Veerashaiva Lingayats are considered the single largest entity in Karnataka's 6-crore population, making up around 17%.
- Vokkaligas are at 15%, Muslims 9%, and Kurubas around 8%. The Backward Classes block of various sub-castes minus the Kurubas make up around 25%. SCs are around 15%, and STs 3%.

What are the new demands for reservations in Karnataka?

- The most pressing demands are from the agricultural Panchamasali sub-sect of the Veerashaiva Lingayats; the dominant Veerashaiva Lingayat community as a whole; the cattle-herding Kurubas; the tribal community of Valmiki Nayaks; and the agricultural community of Vokkaligas.
- The Panchamasali Lingayats are demanding inclusion in the OBC category to be eligible to avail 15% reservations; and the entire Veerashaiva Lingayat community too, is demanding OBC categorisation for 15% reservation.
- The Kurubas want to be part of STs, who currently have 3% reservation, and the Valmiki Nayaks are demanding expansion of the ST quota from 3% to 7.5%. The Vokkaligas, who are a dominant community, are also demanding inclusion in the OBC category.

Greater Tipraland

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Seventeen months after he resigned as the Congress state president, Tripura royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya has recently announced his new political demand of 'Greater Tipraland', which he claims would serve the interest of tribals, non-tribals, Tripuri tribals staying outside Tripura, even those outside India in Bandarban, Chittagong, Khagrachari and other border adjacent areas in Bangladesh.

What is Greater Tipraland?

- 'Greater Tipraland' is essentially an extension of the ruling tribal partner Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura – IPFT's demand of Tipraland, which sought a separate state for tribals of Tripura.
- The new demand seeks to include every tribal person living in indigenous area or village outside the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) under the proposed model.
- However, the idea doesn't restrict to simply the Tripura tribal council areas, but seeks to include 'Tiprasa' of Tripuris spread across different states of India like Assam, Mizoram etc. as well, even those living in Bandarban, Chittagong, Khagrachari and other bordering areas of neighbouring Bangladesh.
- When asked if his demand for 'Greater Tipraland' seeks to re-draw territorial boundary lines of Tripura or the proposed state including parts of Assam, Mizoram and Bangladesh, where Tripuris were claimed to live, the royal scion didn't specify the issue but answered if successful, Greater Tipraland would 'help' Tripuris in need of assistance in those areas.



Is it similar to Greater Nagalim?

- When asked if his call resembles the demand of ‘Greater Nagalim’ floated by the rebel Naga outfit – NSCN (IM) – now in peace talks with the central government, Pradyot Kishore has clarified Greater Tipraland is not in any way a rebel subject.
- “Our demand is a democratic issue and we shall proceed accordingly”, he said.

Indradhanush 3.0

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The States and Union Territories (UTs) have rolled out the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 3.0 scheme to cover children and pregnant women who missed routine immunisation during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Ministry said in a release.*

About Mission Indradhanush

- The Government of India is committed to improve immunization coverage and achieve full immunization coverage of 90 percent.
- This Mission was launched in December 2014 with the aim of fully immunizing unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children under UIP.
- The scheme targets children aged under 2 years and pregnant women for immunization.
- The mission incorporated immunization programme against 12 Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD) namely, Whooping cough, diphtheria, polio, tetanus, meningitis, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, pneumonia, Haemophilus influenzae type B infections, rotavirus vaccine, Japanese encephalitis (JE), measles-rubella (MR) and pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV).
- Launch of massive routine immunization campaigns, such as Mission Indradhanush (MI) and Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI), in part, reflects the government’s efforts under the Universal Immunization Program to reduce child mortality and morbidity.

Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI):

To further intensify the immunization programme, the government launched the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) on October 8, 2017.

- Through this programme, Government of India aims to reach each and every child up to two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme/UIP.
- Intensified Mission Indradhanush will cover low performing areas in the selected districts (high priority districts) and urban areas. Special attention will be given to unserved/low coverage pockets in sub-centre and urban slums with migratory population.

About Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0

- The mission will be conducted in two rounds.
- The first round will start from February 22, 2021 while the second phase will start from March 22, 2021.
- It will run across 250 districts or urban areas across the 29 States or Union Territories.
- Launched the awareness material or IEC package developed under the campaign
- The IMI 3.0 initiative was launched by the central government in order to provide immunization to the pregnant women and children free of cost in India.
- The scheme will strengthen and re-energize immunization programmes.
- It will help in achieving full immunization coverage for children and pregnant women rapidly.
- This mission also aims to reach the unreached population. It will reach to them with all the available vaccines under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- An IMI 3.0 Portal has been designed to manage the data reporting and analysis.



- To update the activities of the ministries/departments and will capture pre-campaign activities, during activity achievements, and post campaign indicators with indicators on immunization coverage and of the line ministries.

Various defence orders cleared by Defence Ministry

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh cleared procurement proposals worth ₹13,700 crore, including 118 Arjun MK-1A tanks for around ₹8,400 crore.*

Details:

- Bharat Forge announced that it has received a ₹117.95-crore order from the Defence Ministry under emergency procurement to supply its Kalyani M4 armoured vehicles to the Army.
- Other proposals from the DRDO cleared by the DAC include Nag missile carrier Namica, Arudhra medium power radars, Armour-Piercing Fin-Stabilized Discarding Sabot (APFSDS) 125mm practice ammunition.
- With the AoN accorded for the tanks, the Army will now place the indent with the Heavy Vehicle Factory (HVF), Avadi, a defence official said. Within 30 months from the date of indent, the HVF will deliver five tanks called the “pre-production model”.
- The Army will put them through General Service Quality Requirement (GSQR) evaluation and accord the Bulk Production Clearance (BPC) if found satisfactory, the official said.
- To systematically work towards reducing the time taken for capital acquisition, the DAC also approved that all capital acquisition contracts (delegated and non-delegated) other than design and development cases shall be concluded in two years.

Blast protection vehicles

- The Kalyani M4 is a multi-role platform, designed for quick mobility in rough terrain and in areas affected by mine and Improved Explosive Devices (IED) threats.
- It offers best in-class levels of ballistic and blast protection — up to 50kg TNT side blast or IED, roadside bombs due to its innovative design, built on a flat-floor monocoque hull. It successfully completed a series of extreme vehicle trials.

Coronil and WHO certification process

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh Tuesday said the sale of Coronil, which Yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali group claims is medicine for Covid-19, will not be allowed in the state “without proper certification from competent health organisations like WHO, IMA and others”.*

Details

- On February 19, **Ramdev, at a press meet, said Coronil had received certification** from AYUSH Ministry as a drug that can be used as “supporting measure in Covid-19” and as an immuno-booster.
- In a press statement released that day, Patanjali said: “Coronil has received the Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (CoPP) from the Ayush section of Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation as per the WHO certification scheme.” Calling Coronil “an evidence-based medicine to fight Covid-19”, Patanjali said under the CoPP, the drug can be exported to 158 countries.

- The WHO, however, distanced itself from the product the very same day. Without taking names, WHO South-East Asia wrote on Twitter, “WHO has not reviewed or certified the effectiveness of any traditional medicine for the treatment of COVID-19”.

What is the WHO certification scheme for drugs?

- The WHO indeed does not “approve or disapprove” drugs. **According to the UNO body**, the “role of WHO in the area of medicines regulatory support is two-fold. One aspect relates to the development of internationally recognised norms, standards and guidelines. The second aspect relates to providing guidance, technical assistance and training in order to enable countries to implement global guidelines to meet their specific medicines regulatory environment and needs.”
- Its certification scheme is for finished pharmaceutical products, and is a voluntary agreement among various countries.
- **According to the WHO, the scheme is** an “administrative instrument that requires a participating Member State (a certifying country), upon application by a commercially interested party (the applicant company), to certify/attest to the competent authority of another participating Member State (the recipient country) that:
 1. A specific pharmaceutical product is authorised for marketing in the certifying country, or if not, the reason why authorisation has not been accorded;
 2. The manufacturing facilities and operations conform to good manufacturing practices (GMP) as recommended by WHO.”

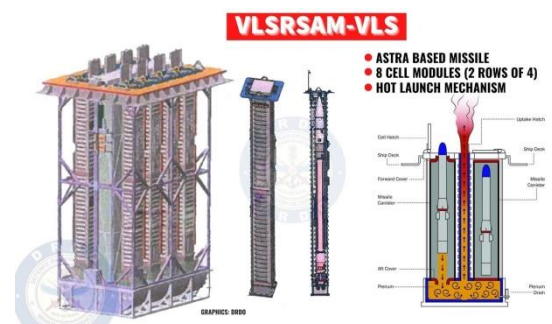
VL-SRSAM Missile System

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted two successful launches of Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM).*

About VL-SRSAM:

- VL-SRSAM is meant for neutralizing various aerial threats at close ranges including sea-skimming targets.
- It has been indigenously designed and developed by DRDO for the Indian Navy.
- The canister-based state-of-the-art weapon system can identify, track, engage and destroy the target with high kill probability. It has a strike range of about 40 km.



Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Union Minister for MSME & Road Transport & Highways inaugurated 50 artisan-based SFURTI clusters, spread over 18 States.*

About SFURTI:

- This scheme has been under implementation since 2005-06 for making traditional industries more productive, market-driven and competitive by organizing the traditional industries and artisans into clusters.

- The scheme envisages providing need-based assistance for replacement of production equipment, setting up of Common Facility Centres (CFC), product development, quality improvement, improved marketing, training and capacity building, etc. with the financial assistance extended by the Government.
- The scheme was modified as revamped SFURTI scheme during 2016-17.
- As on date, there are 371 clusters which have are being funded by the Ministry, supporting 2.18 lakh artisans with a total government assistance of Rs. 888 cr.
- SFURTI clusters are of two types:
 - Regular Cluster (500 artisans) with Government assistance of up to Rs.2.5 crore
 - Major Cluster (more than 500 artisans) with Government assistance up to Rs.5 crore

President's Rule

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal by the Home Ministry to dissolve the Puducherry Assembly and impose President's Rule in the Union Territory.*

How President's Rule is imposed

- President's Rule implies the suspension of a state government and the imposition of direct rule of the Centre. This is achieved through the invocation of Article 356 of the Constitution by the President on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.
- Under Article 356, this move can be taken "(1) If the President, on receipt of the report from the Governor of the State or otherwise, is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution..."

How long President's Rule can last

- A proclamation of President's Rule can be revoked through a subsequent proclamation in case the leader of a party produces letters of support from a majority of members of the Assembly, and stakes his claim to form a government.
- The revocation does not need the approval of Parliament.

State of India's environment

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

Context: *A new monitoring mechanism is indicating that industrial pollution levels continue to worsen in India. An evaluation of 88 industrial clusters identified by central and state pollution control boards (CPCB and SPCBs) as polluted industrial areas has thrown up a bleak picture of air, water and land contamination in the country, said the 2021 State of India's Environment (SoE) report.*

State of India's Environment report

- SoE is an annual publication brought out by *Down To Earth* in association with Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based non-profit. The report will be released February 25, 2021 at an online event by over 60 environmental thinkers and activists, journalists and academics from across India.
- In 2009, the Central Pollution Control Board had developed the Comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index (CEPI), which characterises the environmental quality of a location and identifies severely polluted industrial areas. According to CEPI data, **air pollution** worsened in 33 of the 88 industrial clusters between 2009 and 2018.



- In Delhi's Najafgarh drain basin, the CEPI air quality score went up from 52 in 2009 to over 85 in 2018. Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) had a score of 48 in 2009, which shot up to 86 in 2018.
- The Bulandshahr-Khurja area in Uttar Pradesh nearly doubled its score, from 42 in 2008 to over 79 in 2018. Gajraula (Uttar Pradesh) and Siltara (Chhattisgarh) scored over 70 in 2018.
- The **quality of water** deteriorated in 45 of the 88 clusters in this same period. Sanganer (in Rajasthan) and Gurugram (in Haryana) had a CEPI water quality score of more than 70 in 2018. Tarapur (Maharashtra), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Varanasi-Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh) — all indicated scores that were 80 or above.
- The comparison of CEPI 2009 and 2018 data shows that **land pollution** has increased in 17 of the 88 clusters. The worst performer here has been Manali, whose CEPI score went to over 71 in 2018 from 58 in 2009.
- In terms of **overall CEPI scores**, 35 of the clusters have indicated a rise in environmental degradation. Tarapur (in Maharashtra) has had the ignominy — says the SoE — of the highest overall CEPI score of over 96 in 2018.

Jammu's Chipko moment

(Source: The Hindu)

Context: *About 40 hectares of land covered by more than 38,000 trees in the eco-sensitive Raika-Bahu area is under threat of concretisation. With sanctions from the forest department, the new Jammu & Kashmir high court complex is set to replace the vegetation in the area.*

Context:

- Young environmentalists marked their protest against this deforestation plan by hugging trees in Raika village and marching peacefully through the area on February 14. The movement was led by Climate Front, a student-led environment awareness organisation.
- Raika-Bahu is an eco-sensitive area under the Bahu Conservation Reserve in Jammu. It is home to species like rock pigeon, Asian koel, barn owl, red-vented bulbul, jackal, wild boar and rhesus monkey.
- The reserve was established in 1981 and is spread over 19 square kilometres. It is located just 3.75 km from Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Raika-Bahu forest area, situated in the middle of the reserve along river Tawi, also supports the Gujjar community which rears goats, cows and buffaloes.

Clearances rushed

- The activists highlighted how the proposal was rushed through government departments for permissions.
- The relocation of the high court building was proposed in October, 2019 and with clearances from several departments received within a fortnight, the administration started acquiring forest land the same year.
- The project was cleared days before the reorganisation of J&K from a state to a Union Territory (UT), under provisions of the J&K Forest (Conservation) Act, 1997. Soon after, this was replaced by the more rigorous Indian Forest Act, 1972, which would have required several more clearances, pointed out environmentalists.
- A new complex is necessary, said administration officials, because the present High Court building is congested and surrounding roads are narrow, causing frequent traffic snarls.
- The area allotted to the department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, houses 1,706 trees and 22 bamboo clumps under Jammu division forest and 36,300 trees and 109 bamboo clumps fall under the area of Soil Conservation Department.
- Bamboo clumps are endangered in the forests of Jammu.

COVAX

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

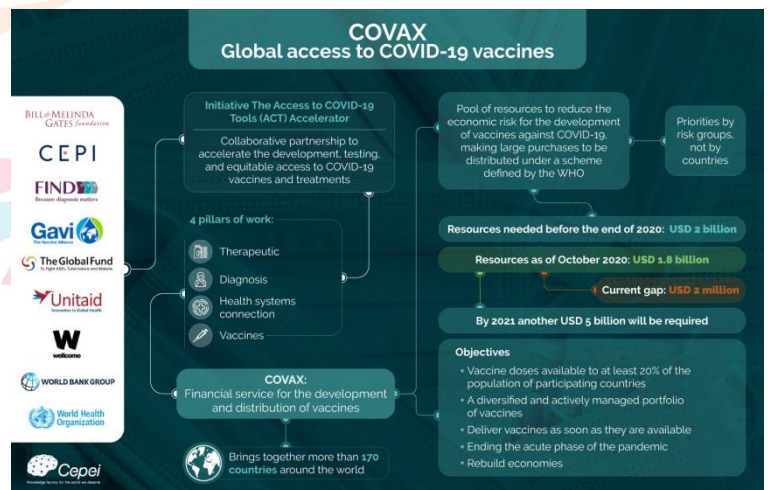
Context: *Ghana has become the first country in the world to receive a shipment of coronavirus vaccines under the COVAX program.*

Details:

- The AstraZeneca vaccine (known as Covishield in India) was given Emergency Use Listing (EUL) by the WHO this month. AstraZeneca and SII will together work with the COVAX facility to begin supplying the vaccine globally.
- Under the COVAX program, over 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines are expected to be delivered by the end of 2021.

What is COVAX?

- The COVAX program is led by the vaccine alliance GAVI, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) in partnership with UNICEF, vaccine manufacturers and the World Bank, among others.
- The aim is to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines globally in what is being called the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history.
- The program wants to vaccinate roughly 20 per cent of the population in the 92 Advance Market Commitment (AMC) countries, which include middle and lower-income nations that cannot afford to pay for COVID-19 vaccines. This means countries with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than US \$4000 and some other countries which are eligible under the World Bank International Development Association (IDA).
- As vaccines receive approval, they will be bought by the COVAX facility, which will then try to provide the doses for an average of 20 per cent of each of the eligible country's population free of cost. Out of its target of 2 billion vaccine doses, 1.3 billion doses will be delivered to the AMC countries.



Which vaccines are included in COVAX programme?

- Oxford-AstraZeneca became the first vaccine manufacturer to sign up under the programme in June 2020, and has guaranteed to supply 300 million doses.
- In January, COVAX announced that it had signed an agreement with Pfizer-BioNTech to purchase up to 40 million doses of their vaccine.
- In addition, the program has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Johnson and Johnson for 500 million doses of their single-dose vaccine, which the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared to be safe and effective recently.
- COVAX also has existing agreements with SII for 200 million doses.

Govt. to monitor OTT content

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: For the first time, the government, under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, has brought in detailed guidelines for digital content on both digital media and Over The Top (OTT) platforms, while giving itself overriding powers.

Emergency powers

- The new rules, unveiled at a joint press conference by Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar, lay down a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism.
- However, over and above this framework, the government has equipped itself with “emergency” powers to block public access of any information.
- The rules state, “in case of emergency nature” the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, may “if he is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient and justifiable” give orders to block access. Such orders can be released “without giving an opportunity of hearing” to the publishing platform.
- The first level of the grievance redressal system will be at the level of each OTT provider. Each complaint will have to be addressed within 15 days.
- If the complaint is not satisfactorily addressed, then the complainant can scale it up to **a self-regulatory body collectively established by the OTTs**. This body will be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, a High Court, or an independent eminent person from the field of media, broadcasting, entertainment, child rights, human rights or other relevant fields.
- **This self-regulatory body also has “censuring” powers in case of any incriminating content.**
- At the third tier, the government has equipped itself with overriding powers in the form of “oversight mechanism”. An inter-ministerial committee will perform this function and it will largely have the same powers as the collective self regulatory body of the OTTs.



Special Purpose Acquisition Companies (SPACs)

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](#))

Context: Today Special-Purpose Acquisition Companies (SPACs) are touted as an alternative to slow and inefficient IPOs.

What is it?

- A SPAC is an empty corporate shell that raises money from investors with the aim of acquiring private businesses by merging them. Essentially, a SPAC takes companies or start-ups public through the back door route.
- SPACs compete directly with private equity investors and strategic buyers for acquisition candidates. The success of SPACs lies in letting their investors own a piece of highly fancied emerging businesses that can quickly soar in value.

- Also known as blank-cheque companies, SPACs have no operations or business plans when they seek investor money. They raise money, then hunt around for merger candidates and hit jackpot if they get lucky with their investments.
- SPACs have raised more than \$48 billion in the US this year, according to Bloomberg. SPACs have been around since early 2000s, but have witnessed a resurgence of late. Virgin Galactic, a space tourism company founded by Sir Richard Branson, is often credited for kicking off the latest SPAC mania in 2019.

The Caracal

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The National Board for Wildlife and Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change last month included the caracal, a medium-sized wildcat found in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, in the list of critically endangered species. Though not under grave threat in its other habitats, the animal is on the verge of extinction in India, some experts believe. The recovery programme for critically endangered species in India now includes 22 wildlife species.*

The wildcat

- Besides India, the caracal is found in several dozen countries across Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia. While it flourishes in parts of Africa, its numbers in Asia are declining.
- The wildcat has long legs, a short face, long canine teeth, and distinctive ears — long and pointy, with tufts of black hair at their tips. The iconic ears are what give the animal its name — caracal comes from the Turkish karakulak, meaning ‘black ears’.
- In India, it is called siya gosh, a Persian name that translates as ‘black Ear’. A Sanskrit fable exists about a small wild cat named deergha-karn or ‘long-eared’.



In history and myth

- The earliest evidence of the caracal in the subcontinent comes from a fossil dating back to the civilisation of the Indus Valley c. 3000-2000 BC.
- The caracal has traditionally been valued for its liveness and extraordinary ability to catch birds in flight; it was a favourite coursing or hunting animal in medieval India.
- Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88) had siyah-goshdar khana, stables that housed large numbers of coursing caracal. It finds mention in Abul Fazl's Akbarnama, as a hunting animal in the time of Akbar (1556-1605). Descriptions and illustrations of the caracal can be found in medieval texts such as the Anvar-i-Suhayli, Tutiinama, Khamsa-e-Nizami, and Shahnameh.
- The caracal's use as a coursing animal is believed to have taken it far beyond its natural range to places like Ladakh in the north to Bengal in the east. The East India Company's Robert Clive is said to have been presented with a caracal after he defeated Siraj-ud-daullah in the Battle of Plassey (1757).

INTERNATIONAL

BRICS

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *China's President Xi Jinping may visit India in the second half of this year to attend the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) leaders' meeting, if a physical summit is held as is increasingly expected.*

About BRICS

- BRICS now brings together five economies accounting for 42% of the world's population, 23% of the global GDP and an around 17% share of world trade.
- As a formal grouping, BRIC started after the meeting of the leaders of Russia, India and China in St Petersburg on the margins of the G8-Outreach Summit in July 2006.
- The grouping was formalised during the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the margins of the UNGA in New York in September 2006. The first BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on June 16, 2009.
- It was agreed to expand BRIC to BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York in September 2010.
- South Africa attended the third BRICS Summit in Sanya on April 14, 2011. Last year, leaders of the grouping commemorated the 10th anniversary of BRICS in Johannesburg.

Chin Community

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Mizoram's apex students' body has asked the State government to provide asylum to some villagers in Myanmar affected by the military coup there. People belonging to Myanmar's Chin community were seeking to migrate to Mizoram to escape a military crackdown, primarily because of the Chin National Army (CNA), an extremist group seeking self-determination in Chin State across the border.*

The Chin Community

- The Chin state is a mountainous region in west Myanmar, bordering India and Bangladesh.
- The Chins are one of the major ethnic groups in Myanmar, and are mostly Christians.
- Buddhist-majority Myanmar was governed by a military junta since the 1960s, until recently. They carried out forced assimilation and repression of the Chin people, which resulted in numerous and often violent civil conflicts.
- The 2014 census shows 478,801 Chins living in Myanmar. Globally, there are about 30,000 Chin refugees in Malaysia and 3,300 in India registered with UNHCR. However, Chin organisations estimate that there are more than 200,000 Chin asylum seekers and refugees around the world.

UNHRC

(Source: [The Hindu](#))



Context: *The U.S. will seek re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Tuesday, as he “humbly” asked for the support of UN member states.*

The UNHRC

- On its website, the Human Rights Council describes itself as “an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them”.
- The UNHRC has “the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year”. The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).
- **Membership**
 - The Council is made up of 47 UN Member States, which are elected by the UNGA through a direct and secret ballot. The General Assembly takes into account the contribution of the candidate states to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.
- **Seats on the Council are distributed as follows:**
 - African States: 13 seats
 - Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
 - Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
 - Western European and other States: 7 seats
 - Eastern European States: 6 seats
- Members of the Council serve for a period of three years, and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.
- As of January 1, 2019, 114 UN Member States have served on the HRC. Both India and Pakistan are on this list.
- The HRC has a Bureau of one President and four Vice-Presidents, representing the five regional groups. They serve for a year, in accordance with the Council’s annual cycle.

Indo-China Trade

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *In 2020, even as relations with Beijing plunged to new lows and New Delhi took steps against Chinese-linked businesses, China reclaimed its position at the top of the list of India’s major trade partners, replacing the United States that had climbed to number 1 in 2019.*

2020 trade with China

- Trade between India and China from January to December 2020 stood at \$77.67 billion. Though lower than the \$85.47 billion traded between the countries in the 2019 calendar year, this figure was still higher than the \$75.95 billion traded between India and the US last year.
- In the (ongoing) financial year 2020-21, provisional data for the April-December period show China ahead of the US in India trade – \$60.63 billion compared to \$55.00 billion.



INDIA'S TRADE WITH US AND CHINA IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

	USA		CHINA	
	CALENDAR YEAR	FINANCIAL YEAR	CALENDAR YEAR	FINANCIAL YEAR
2015	\$61.60	\$62.12	\$70.80	\$70.72
2016	\$64.12	\$64.52	\$69.61	\$71.45
2017	\$70.76	\$76.38	\$84.70	\$89.71
2018	\$85.59	\$87.96	\$90.35	\$87.07
2019	\$90.10	\$88.91	\$85.47	\$81.87
2020	\$75.95	\$55.01*	\$77.67	\$60.63*

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

(All figures in billion dollars)

*(Apr-Dec)

Source:

Trends in China trade

- While India has been trying to reduce its trade imbalance and dependence on Chinese imports for several years now, it was only in 2018 that the US surpassed the value of goods that China traded with India in a financial year. However, India's trade with the US took a major hit during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- China got back to the top of the trade partners' list in a year in which armies of the two countries remained locked in a tense standoff in eastern Ladakh. Also in 2020, India committed itself to self-reliance through the Atma Nirbhar Bharat campaign, and implemented measures to restrict Chinese investments in the country.
- Dozens of China-linked apps were banned, a major infrastructure contract awarded to a Chinese firm was cancelled, and the import of certain kinds of power equipment was banned. Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes were announced across sectors to reduce dependence on critical goods from China, even though building self-reliance in these critical sectors will likely take several years.

Exports and imports

- Electrical machinery and equipment, at \$17.82 billion, and nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances, at \$12.35 billion, continued to top the list of goods imported from China in 2020 — even though the imports of these goods dropped by nearly 11 per cent in the last calendar year compared to one year previously.
- Exports of Indian iron and steel to China jumped by a massive 319.14 per cent over 2019, with shipments touching \$2.38 billion during January to December 2020. Iron and steel exports to China in 2019 were around \$567 million. Export of ores, slag, and ash increased by 62 per cent to \$3.48 billion in 2020 from \$2.15 billion in 2019.
- Overall, exports to China in 2020 were \$17.12 billion — around 10.70 per cent higher than in 2019. In the April-December period of the 2020-21 financial year, exports to China were \$15.26 billion, up from \$12.92 billion in the same period of financial year 2019-20.
- The increased exports, including those of iron and steel, could be the result of China's focus on domestic infrastructure projects.



Churmosquagogue

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *In the heart of Berlin, a new sacred building is coming up with the aim of bringing Christians, Jews and Muslims to a single place of worship. The foundation stone will be laid on May 27 by people of these faiths. Called the House of One or, colloquially, Churmosquagogue, it incorporates a church, a mosque and a synagogue.*

A difficult past

- The House of One is coming up on the site of the old St Peter's Church, which was damaged in World War II and completely demolished by the government of East Germany in 1964.
- The first phase of excavations, which lasted several years, threw up almost 4,000 skeletons. Several archaeological remains from this chapter of history will be preserved in a hall with an eight-meter-high ceiling at the Churmosquagogue.
- This square, where the city first came into existence and where its first church stood, is now to be home to the future. From the foundations of the old churches will grow a new place of worship, one that will allow people of different faiths to pray side by side.
- The people who come here will remain true to their own religion, continue to draw from its power, and engage in peaceable dialogue with one another and with members of the city's secular population. This house will be home to equality, peace, and reconciliation.

Mains

GS II

The structural fragility of Union Territories

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The sudden and inexplicable resignations of Congress MLAs from the Puducherry Assembly have turned out to be an ingenious move to topple the Congress government led by V. Narayanasamy. This was done in 2019 with devastating effect in Karnataka. In both cases, the governments lost majority and went out of office. Resigning from the membership of the House is every member's right. But according to Article 190 of the Constitution, the resignation should be voluntary or genuine. If the Speaker has information to the contrary, he or she is not obliged to accept the resignation.*

An innovative method

- But there is by now a familiar pattern to the resignations of Members of the Legislative Assembly. Such resignations invariably lead to the fall of the government and resignations take place only from the ruling parties in the States which are opposed to the ruling party at the Centre.
- These parties are, in fact, in a precarious condition because in most cases, the resignations are quite unanticipated and reduce the party's majority in the House abruptly. Even the most seasoned Chief Ministers who have weathered many storms look flummoxed in the face of this blow.
- Resignations are done with such precision that the exact number of MLAs required to reduce the majority resign, not more. This mode of toppling a government has an odd attractiveness about it because of its sheer novelty.
- The beauty of this scheme is that no MLA has to defect and face disqualification and get a bad name. It is a wonderful way to end defection and save the honour of the legislators.
- The Puducherry development has tremendous political significance. But the purpose of this article is to unravel the structural fragility of Union Territories (UTs) as units of the Indian federation which perhaps makes it easier for powerful operators in the political system to destabilise them.

Composition of the legislature

- The first question that arises in the context of these UTs is why the Constitution-makers/ Parliament thought it fit to provide a legislature and Council of Ministers to some of the UTs. The ostensible reason is to fulfil the democratic aspirations of the people of these territories.
- In other words, there was a realisation that the administration of these territories directly by the President through the administrators under Article 239 does not meet the democratic aspirations of the people. Therefore, the creation of a legislature and a Council of Ministers is logical and in consonance with the policy of the state to promote democracy.
- But a closer look at the relevant provisions in the Constitution reveals that this professed aim has often been sought to be defeated by the Union. Article 239A was originally brought in, in 1962, to enable Parliament to create legislatures for the UTs. Look at the composition of the legislature as provided in the Constitution.
- It is a body that is elected, or partly elected and partly nominated. There can be a Council of Ministers without a legislature, or there can be a legislature as well as a Council of Ministers. A legislature without a Council of Ministers or a Council of Ministers without a legislature is a conceptual absurdity.
- In our constitutional scheme, a legislature is the law-making body and a legislative proposal is initiated by the government, which is responsible to the legislature. Neither can the legislature exist without a Council of Ministers nor can the Council of Ministers exist without a legislature. Similarly, a legislature that is partly elected and partly nominated is another absurdity.



- In fact, a simple amendment in the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 can create a legislature with more than 50% nominated members. How can a predominantly nominated House promote representative democracy?

Issue of nomination

- The issue of nomination of members to the Puducherry Assembly had raised a huge controversy. The Government of Union Territories Act provides for a 33-member House for Puducherry of whom three are to be nominated by the Central government.
- So, when the Union government nominated three BJP members to the Assembly without consulting the government, it was challenged in the court. Finally, the Supreme Court (K. Lakshminarayanan v. Union of India, 2019) held that the Union government is not required to consult the State government for nominating members to the Assembly and the nominated members have the same right to vote as the elected members.
- Nomination as such is not new to the Indian legislature. There is provision for nomination of members to the Rajya Sabha [Article 80 (i)(a)]. But clause (3) of the Article specifies the fields from which they will be nominated. The purpose of this nomination is to enable the House to draw on the expertise of those eminent members who are nominated and thus enrich the debate in the House.
- But in the case of nomination to the Puducherry Assembly, no such qualification is laid down either in Article 239A or the Government of Union Territories Act. This leaves the field open for the Union government to nominate anyone irrespective of whether he or she is suitable.
- The Supreme Court took too technical a view on the matter of nomination and did not go into the need to specify the fields from which those persons could be nominated and also lay down a fair procedure to be followed for nomination of members.
- As things stand, the law invites arbitrariness in dealing with the nomination of members to the UT legislature. If a different party runs the government in the UT, this provision will be used by the Union government with a vengeance, which is what happened in Puducherry.

Administrator's power

- As a matter of fact, the UTs were never given a fully democratic set-up with necessary autonomy. The power vested in the administrator, who is known as the Lieutenant Governor in the UTs having a legislature, bear this out. The administrator has the right to disagree with the decisions of the Council of Ministers and then refer them to the President for a final decision.
- The President decides on the advice of the Union government. So, in effect, it is the Union government which finally determines the disputed issue. The administrator can, in fact, disagree with all crucial decisions taken by the State government when the territory is ruled by a different political party.
- Section 44 of the Government of Union Territories Act and Article 239 AA(4) (proviso) of the Constitution vests the power in the administrator to express his or her disagreement and refer the matter to the President and then take all actions he or she deems fit in the matter in total disregard of the elected government.
- Although in NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2019), the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had said that the administrator should not misuse this power to frustrate the functioning of the elected government in the territory and use it after all methods have failed to reconcile the differences between him/her and the Council of Ministers, experience tells us a different story.
- In Puducherry, the conflicts between the Lt. Governor and the Chief Minister were perennial. A frustrated Chief Minister at last had to knock on the door of Rashtrapati Bhavan seeking the removal of the Lt. Governor.
- Similarly, in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, one often hears of complaints against the Lt. Governor from the ministers about the non-cooperative federalism being practised by him. As a matter of fact, such conflicts between the administrator, who is the nominee of the President, and the elected government is inherent in the constitutional arrangement created for the UTs.



- No Union government really likes the idea of a free and autonomous government in the UTs and therefore tries to control it through the administrator. The weaponisation of the constitutional provision is done in full measure when the UT is ruled by a different political party.
- Experience shows that the UTs having legislatures with ultimate control vested in the central administrator are not workable. The redemption for the harried governments of these territories lies in the removal of the legal and constitutional provisions which enable the administrator to breathe down the neck of the elected government.
- So far as the conspiratorial resignation by legislators to bring down their own government is concerned, the political class will have to rack its brains on how to get the better of the predatory instincts of political parties through constitutional or other means.

Human rights

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The recent arrest of the 22-year-old environmental activist, Disha Ravi, for amplifying the farmer protests internationally, unmasked the government's designs to criminalise those who speak for human rights. This attitude was also visible in the Home Ministry's directions to social media companies to block accounts of those expressing a point of view contrary to that of the government. A democracy which does not ensure and secure universal rights for all is a democracy only in name.*

Nation and the idea of rights

- India played a signature role in drawing the world together to oppose the apartheid government of South Africa, and it took till 1962 to override the sovereignty shield used by the government to continue oppressing the Black population.
- India stayed firm from the 1950s till a resolution was adopted and a United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid was set up by the United Nations. India's work, in consistently creating awareness and resistance against the demonisation of Nelson Mandela via the Rivonia trial in 1963, checked the Apartheid regime from awarding him the death sentence.
- The principle document signed in the last century, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid down the terms for the post-war world, it enshrined the rights and the freedoms of all people, living everywhere.
- It was not something that was forced down India's throat by its colonial rulers. India was a member of the first Human Rights Commission, which was to draft the 'international bill of rights'. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted from January 1947 till December 10, 1948, when it was eventually adopted by the General Assembly.
- Along with the Charter of the United Nations that was signed earlier in San Francisco in 1945, Indian freedom fighters did their best to influence it and make its brief wider and more effective.

Rights are indivisible

- The makers of the Indian Constitution did not invoke paranoia about respecting Indian tradition, customs or hiding perverse practices. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan famously said while commending the Objectives Resolution, or the basic road map of the Constitution, to the Assembly, that the endeavour was "a fundamental alteration in the structure of Indian society,... to abolish every vestige of despotism, every heirloom of inorganic tradition."
- The triad of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' engraved in the Preamble, drew significantly from the slogan which had proved influential following the French Revolution. It flowed from the realisation, in



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's words, that given the vice-like grip of the "graded inequality" of the caste system, all three elements, together, were absolutely essential if Indians were to realise their full potential.

- To quote B.R. Ambedkar who on the eve of the adoption of the Preamble explained how Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were connected and locked into each other firmly: "Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them."

New Delhi's recent moves

- To cite Atmanirbhar as a counter to international concerns about freedoms, equality and the right to dissent amounts to hiding behind the flimsy excuse of sovereignty to escape the bitter truth of the slithering slope of democratic rights India appears to be going down.
- The case the Indian government is making is all the more specious as its own immediate concern expressed, officially by its External Affairs Minister when visiting Sri Lanka, on the Sri Lankan government needing to do more to safeguard Tamil lives belies this principle.
- The starkest case where India made human rights of citizens of other countries its business was in 2019 when the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, offered a home for certain persecuted citizens of three foreign countries.
- **When it comes to universal human rights and international attention, the premier example is of the liberation of Bangladesh which India led and shepherded by invoking these principles. That India chose to and continues to host the Dalai Lama, who attracts visible support from high-profile global celebrities, is a testament to New Delhi's commitment to human rights. That the public concern from international celebrities is tantamount to foreign 'intervention' carries no weight, as this is not about the Central Intelligence Agency or Vladimir Putin's Russia meddling in Indian electoral processes. In fact, the Bharatiya Janata Party has been cavalier about amending the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, or FCRA, rules permitting itself, a political party, to whitewash foreign funds with retrospective effect, in 2016.**

The issue is a reality problem

- The Prime Minister and his government have actively courted foreign approval. Two dozen foreign envoys were taken on a guided tour of Kashmir last week because getting a favourable opinion from foreigners matters to the government.
- At the height of tensions and the shutdown there, before Indian Members of Parliament were allowed, a delegation of far-right European Parliament members was bussed around deserted streets. The Prime Minister has personally appeared with celebrities in foreign lands during his numerous trips, seeking their approval.
- The craving for approval is natural for any publicity-seeking politician, but a democracy cannot be reduced to only demanding praise from the rest of the world and raising the bogey of 'internal matters' when international voices express solidarity with dissenters and raise serious concerns.
- Global concerns about democratic rights in India cannot be dealt with by arresting messengers, bullying 'amplifiers' or shutting down social media accounts. India does not have an image problem; it has a reality problem. Changing the reality and adhering to best democratic practices inside is the only durable solution if the Modi government wants its image 'fixed'.

The issue of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The status of WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in healthcare facilities is an important issue in development. In an article published recently in BMJ Global Health, researchers from Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP), Maryland, US, have estimated the cost of ensuring WASH and taking related steps for infection prevention and control for one year in healthcare facilities in all of India.*

Details:

- They estimate that improving WASH across the public healthcare facilities in India and maintaining this for a year would cost \$354 million (Rs 2567,00,00,000 approximately) in capital costs and \$289 million (Rs 2095,00,00,000 approximately) in recurrent expenses.
- The study further finds that the most costly interventions were providing clean water, linen reprocessing and sanitation while the least expensive were hand hygiene, medical device reprocessing and environmental surface cleaning.
- A 2019 joint global baseline report by WHO and UNICEF had pointed out that globally, one in four healthcare facilities lacked basic water servicing and one in five had no sanitation service and 42% had no hygiene facilities at point of care.

Impact of WASH

- A WHO document on WASH in healthcare facilities points out that 8,27,000 people in low- and middle-income countries die as a result of inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene each year. Also, death of 2,97,000 children under five years can be prevented each year if better WASH could be provided.
- On a positive note, a 2012 WHO report had calculated that for every dollar invested in sanitation, there was \$5.50 to be gained in lower health costs, more productivity and fewer premature deaths.

Worthy goal

- It is noteworthy that ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation to all is one of the 2030 sustainable development goals of the WHO.
- Given this context, the India study by CDDEP comes as a welcome first-level estimate.
- Inadequacies in providing WASH and also lack of infection prevention and control can lead to healthcare associated infections. Some of the pathogens to look out for are *Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella typhi*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and many more.
- These pathogens are commonly implicated as causative agents of healthcare associated infections because of their ability to develop resistance to antibiotics. Common healthcare associated infections include central-line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, surgical site infections and ventilator-associated pneumonia.

Antimicrobial resistance

- In the fight against the spread of antimicrobial resistance too, the importance of prevention of infections cannot be overemphasised. This study was a part of a larger project to determine the cost-effectiveness of WASH interventions to reduce healthcare-associated infections among mother and neonates across the Indian healthcare system.
- While this study forms the starting point for larger costing estimates, it also highlights the need for a concerted effort from local bodies, State and Central governments to sustainably address quality and inequality issues in WASH provision.
- The findings show that addressing gaps in WASH across the Indian healthcare system is not only within the realm of possibility in terms of affordability – when compared to other national health campaigns – but can also be combined with other national efforts to address health priorities such as antimicrobial resistance,” she says.
- The intersection between WASH, infection prevention and control and antimicrobial resistance is unique in that it offers policy makers an opportunity to address multiple overlapping problems through interventions on WASH in healthcare facilities.

India's online learning experience

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *As and when schools finally reopen in the country, the number of children returning to class has to be closely scrutinised. The education sector faces the challenges of delivery, especially of pedagogical processes, classroom assessment frameworks, students' support and teacher-student engagement.*

Realistic assessment is key

- More than just the numbers, the authorities have to realistically assess the level of understanding of students who have returned to schools after 'digital learning' at home.
- This is crucial as studies conducted on government-run schools in various States indicate poor performance — a majority of children, especially girl students, have missed out much on the various e-mail platforms offered.
- Apart from poor access to digital data, the children were burdened with household/farm work; girl students in particular were apprehensive of being given away in marriage. There is credible evidence that students, parents and teachers were unprepared for the pedagogic shift.

A challenge and the response

- School closures have had a significant impact on both students and their families, more in the case of the vulnerable and underprivileged sections. The lockdown happened during the last quarter of the academic year which led to the postponement of examinations and the curtailment of the prescribed syllabi.
- On their part, governments tried to put in place measures to address the situation. The basic strategy was to give a push to the digital distance learning method. The focus was on the use of text/video/audio content through SMS, WhatsApp, radio and TV programmes to reach out to students and engage them.
- The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development in March 2020 started sharing free e-learning platforms. They included the Diksha portal which has e-learning content aligned to the curriculum, and e-Pathshala, an app by the National Council of Educational Research and Training for Classes 1 to 12 in multiple languages.
- SWAYAM hosts 1,900 complete courses including teaching videos, computer weekly assignments, examinations and credit transfers, aimed both at school (Classes 1 to 12) and higher education.
- SWAYAM Prabha is a group of 32 direct to home channels devoted to the telecasting of educational programmes. While this looks fairly impressive, there are many pitfalls.
- Studies indicate that the rapid transition to digital learning has been very challenging. The initiative failed to take into account existing divides — spatial, digital, gender and class. A recent UNICEF report points out that the massive school closures exposed the uneven distribution of technology that is needed to facilitate remote learning. The chances for an education-enabled social and economic mobility appear to be grim in the country.

The impact is multi-fold

- Following closure of schools, boys became inattentive to studies while girls, with lesser opportunities, were more involved in household chores. With their educational routine having been disrupted, children, in many cases, have also forgotten what they learnt earlier. Again, the decision to postpone the board examinations and to allow automatic promotion to the higher classes is bound to affect the quality.
- A survey promoted by the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (<https://bit.ly/2ZDCzSy>), in July 2020, of 3,176 households of Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana and Delhi, found that in families which faced cash and food shortages, only 50% of the boys and girls were confident of returning to school.
- The abilities of the families and communities concerned to support the educational journeys of the children have been found to be affected.



- One should remember that attending schools is not about learning alone. The long closure of schools has also meant the disruption of a range of activities such as the mid-day meal scheme, the school health programme and pre-metric scholarships to girl children.
- These activities in the past have had a lot to do with the enrolment as well as regular attendance. As for the digital initiative, it was taken up in a haphazard manner. Many States lacked adequate digital infrastructure and even teachers were poorly equipped to teach. Also, they were not consulted before the initiative.
- Now, the biggest complaint of the authorities concerned seems to be that teachers have been drawing their salaries doing precious little.

The case of Rajasthan

- In States such as Rajasthan, the education of girl children is still a challenge. The State is positioned precariously — the second worst in overall literacy rates in India and the lowest literacy rate among the females (NSS, 2017-18); 20% of girls in the age group 15-16 were out of school against the national average of 13.5 (Annual Status of Education Report 2018).
- Despite pioneering initiatives in education such as the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi projects, Rajasthan continues to flounder in systemic issues of education that relate to quality, equity and gender.
- A study by the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur and Development Solutions, Delhi in September-October, found that most girls in Rajasthan (between 13-16 years) were keen to return to school. That as many as 97% of them in the districts surveyed — Tonk, Dausa, Karauli and Udaipur — had been enrolled in schools before the COVID-19 lockdown itself was a positive finding.
- However, the much touted online education plan of the State government did not work. In Rajasthan, the access of girls to education during the COVID-19 period was limited to 11%. Girls who had online access reported links through WhatsApp (92%) and YouTube (12%).
- The reasons for the inability of students to access online education were: lack of devices, poor or no Internet connectivity, and also girls' preoccupation with household activity.

NGO activities as a contrast

- Interestingly, schools run by the non-governmental organisation sector did fairly well during the interregnum. Catering mostly to the poor and backward segments, these schools did not go online. Instead, teachers visited individual students at home. They also taught children in small groups.
- There seems to be consensus that online classes are not comparable to actual classroom education. The attempts at digital learning have only exposed the wide digital divide between the rich and the poor and the urban and rural areas. Education planning has to be context specific, gender responsive and inclusive.
- Enabling measures should include access to online education, removal of barriers in pre-metric scholarships and ensuring the provision of mid-day meals, iron and folic acid tablets and provision of personal hygiene products to girl students even when schools are closed.
- Once schools reopen finally, the authorities should establish the re-enrolment of children as mandated by the National Education Policy 2020. Mass outreach programmes should be developed with civil society to encourage re-enrolment. Remedial tuitions and counselling are advisable, along with scholarships, targeted cash transfers and other entitlements to retain the poorest at school. It is also apt to consider making secondary education for girls free.
- Given the seriousness of the situation, one expects the governments to keep the budgetary share of education to 6% of GDP, as emphasised by the President of India.

NITI Aayog's draft national policy on migrant workers

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

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

A rights-based approach

- The draft describes two approaches to policy design: one focussed on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations; the other which “enhances the agency and capability of the community and thereby remove aspects that come in the way of an individual’s own natural ability to thrive”.
- The policy rejects a handout approach, opting instead for a rights-based framework. It seeks “to remove restrictions on true agency and potential of the migrant workers”; the goal, it says, “should not be to provide temporary or permanent economic or social aids”, which is “a rather limited approach”.
- Migration, the draft says, “should be acknowledged as an integral part of development”, and “government policies should not hinder but...seek to facilitate internal migration”. This compares with the approach taken in the Report of the Working Group on Migration, released in January 2017 by the then Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. The report argued that the movement from agriculture to manufacturing and services was inherently linked to the success of migration in the country.

Issues with existing law

- The 2017 report argued that specific protection legislation for migrant workers was unnecessary. “(Migrant workers) should be integrated with all workers...as part of an overarching framework that covers regular and contractual work,” it said.
- The report discussed the limitations of The Inter State Migrant Workers Act, 1979, which was designed to protect labourers from exploitation by contractors by safeguarding their right to non-discriminatory wages, travel and displacement allowances, and suitable working conditions.
- However, this law — which was modeled on a 1975 Odisha law — covered only labourers migrating through a contractor, and left out independent migrants.
- The 2017 report questioned this approach, given the size of the country’s unorganised sector. It called for a comprehensive law for these workers, which would form the legal basis for an architecture of social protection. This was in line with the recommendations of a 2007 report by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- The NITI Aayog’s policy draft too, mentions that the Ministry of Labour and Employment should amend the 1979 Act for “effective utilisation to protect migrants”.

Governance nuts and bolts

- The NITI draft lays down institutional mechanisms to coordinate between Ministries, states, and local departments to implement programmes for migrants. It identifies the Ministry of Labour and Employment as the nodal Ministry for implementation of policies, and asks it to create a special unit to help converge the activities of other Ministries.
- This unit would manage migration resource centres in high migration zones, a national labour Helpline, links of worker households to government schemes, and inter-state migration management bodies.
- Migration focal points should be created in various Ministries, the draft suggests. On the inter-state migration management bodies, it says that labour departments of source and destination states along major migration corridors, should work together through the migrant worker cells. Labour officers from source states can be deputed to destinations – e.g., Bihar’s experiment to have a joint labour commissioner at Bihar Bhavan in New Delhi.

Ways to stem migration

- Even as it underlines the key role of migration in development, the draft recommends steps to stem migration; this is an important difference with the 2017 report. The draft asks source states to raise

minimum wages to “bring major shift in local livelihood of tribals... (that) may result in stemming migration to some extent”.

- The absence of community building organisations (CBO) and administrative staff in the source states has hindered access to development programmes, pushing tribals towards migration, the draft says.
- The “long term plan” for CBOs and panchayats should be to “alleviate distress migration policy initiatives” by aiming “for a more pro-poor development strategy in the sending areas...that can strengthen the livelihood base in these areas”.
- Alongside the long-term goal, policies should “promote the role of panchayats to aid migrant workers” and integrate urban and rural policies to improve the conditions of migration. Panchayats should maintain a database of migrant workers, issue identity cards and pass books, and provide “migration management and governance” through training, placement, and social-security benefit assurance, the draft says.

The importance of data

- Both the 2017 report and the new draft stress the need for credible data.
- The draft calls for a central database to help employers “fill the gap between demand and supply” and ensure “maximum benefit of social welfare schemes”. It asks the Ministries and the Census office to be consistent with the definitions of migrants and subpopulations, capture seasonal and circular migrants, and incorporate migrant-specific variables in existing surveys.
- Both documents see limited merit in Census data that comes only once a decade. The 2017 report called on the Registrar General of India to release migration data no more than a year after the initial tabulation, and to include sub-district level, village level, and caste data. It also asked the National Sample Survey Office to include questions related to migration in the periodic labour force survey, and to carry out a separate survey on migration.

Preventing exploitation

- The policy draft describes a lack of administrative capacity to handle issues of exploitation. State labour departments have little engagement with migration issues, and are in “halting human trafficking mode”, the draft says. “The local administration, given the usual constraints of manpower, is not in a position to monitor... (This) has become the breeding ground for middlemen to thrive on the situation and entrap migrants.”
- The draft points to the legal support and registrations tracking potential exploitation in Nashik and certain blocks in Odisha; it also flags the poor supervision of migration trends by anti-trafficking units in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Specific recommendations

- The draft asks the Ministries of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, and Housing and Urban Affairs to use Tribal Affairs migration data to help create migration resource centres in high migration zones. It asks the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to focus on skill-building at these centres.
- The Ministry of Education should take measures under the Right to Education Act to mainstream migrant children’s education, to map migrant children, and to provide local-language teachers in migrant destinations.
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should address issues of night shelters, short-stay homes, and seasonal accommodation for migrants in cities.
- The National Legal Services authority (NALSA) and Ministry of Labour should set up grievance handling cells and fast track legal responses for trafficking, minimum wage violations, and workplace abuses and accidents for migrant workers.

GS III

Is stricter GST compliance justified?

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](http://www.thehindubusinessline.com))

Context: *Through announcements made in the Budget and notifications in the recent past, GST compliance has become much more onerous for taxpayers.*

Restriction of payment of tax via ITC

- The most critical piece of GST legislation is around input tax credit (ITC) claims. A taxpayer can reduce their outgoing tax liability by the amount of tax they have paid on the inputs used in their business. But the simplicity of this principle ends here. There are several restrictions which have been placed on claiming ITC i.e., not all input taxes are eligible to be claimed.
- Besides these restrictions that exist since the inception of GST, several other rules have been implemented which further curb how much ITC can be claimed by GST taxpayers. New Rule 86B which is effective from 1st January, 2021, has placed a restriction on setting off more than 99 per cent of tax liability from ITC where the value of taxable supplies (other than exempt supply and zero-rated supply) exceeds ₹50 lakh in a month.
- With this provision taxpayers are likely to have some ITC remaining in their books. Though some exemptions to this rule have been provided, however, placing such a restriction increases the effort on compliance for taxpayers.

Additional condition to claiming ITC

- The budget has amended section 16(2) of the CGST Act to include that a taxpayer shall be allowed to claim ITC only when the supplier has uploaded the invoice, mere possession of the invoice, receipt of goods and payment of the invoice shall not suffice.
- Therefore, it is no longer sufficient to be self-compliant, the onus of ensuring that suppliers are compliant is also on the buyer. Conversely, if the buyer does not impose compliance on its seller's, the buyer's ITC claim will not be allowed.

GSTR-3B tax liability must match with GSTR-1 tax liability

- GSTR-3B is used by taxpayers to report taxes due to be paid while GSTR-1 is the return of outward supplies. Where the liability declared in GSTR 3B is less than that declared in GSTR 1 in a particular month, the department may now proceed with the cancellation of GSTIN.
- There might be some practical difficulties in implementing such a provision as there are a number of corrections which are made in GSTR 3B which may result in lower tax liability as compared with GSTR 1.

Excessive powers to the GST officer

- Significant deviation between details of outward supplies between GSTR-3B and GSTR-1 or inward supplies between GSTR-3B and GSTR-2B which indicate contravention of Act, will lead to the department serving a notice to the taxpayer to explain why its GSTIN should not be cancelled. The taxpayer shall be required to submit a reply within 30 days of such notice being served to him.
- The budget has substituted Section 151 of the CGST Act. Now the jurisdictional commissioner shall have the power to call information from 'any person' relating to 'any matter' in connection with this Act.
- This means a GST officer will be able to seek information from any person to proceed with a matter within the Act. This gives vast powers to a GST officer. Some of these powers may end up being used to the detriment of a taxpayer.

Risk of attachment of property of the taxpayers and associates



- Where a GST return has been found to be incorrect during scrutiny or where ITC has been claimed fraudulently resulting in short payment of tax, the assessment officer can take permission from the GST commissioner and attach bank and properties of the taxpayer and even those of the Chartered Accountant of the taxpayer.
- This provision assumes a nexus between the CA and the business.

Risk management by the government has led to heightened burden of compliance

- In the recent past, several reports have appeared of tax evasion and fraudulent ITC claims by taxpayers.
- To respond to these swindles, our tax administration has established somewhat complex compliance requirements. Taxpayers must now put strong systems in place as a contravention can lead to significant business disruption.
- The government will benefit from further investments in technology that support taxpayers with growing compliance needs. All GST-related transactions must be captured in real time through e-invoicing. E-invoicing leaves a trace through government systems, where genuineness of transactions can be automatically verified as they happen.
- The department must have a service-based approach where taxpayer confidence around compliance is not broken. Perhaps the government should bring in more data analysis to identify businesses or industries or regions where non-compliance is likely to take place.
- The government must also place incentives for timely compliance. Rewarding those who are compliant and offering relief in taxes to them.
- It is easier to collect indirect taxes as they are paid when a transaction occurs; such taxes are not dependent on reporting of profit (loss) by the taxpayer. While there is ease of collection for the government, if there is a higher administrative burden on the business, the design of tax policies must be reviewed.
- The revenue authorities must play a supportive role and not terrorise taxpayers. This also requires the department to take swift action where there are lapses and quick justice to the innocent.

Clean energy post COVID-19

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The year 2020 was one that only a few of us will forget. While the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have played out unevenly across Asia and the Pacific, the region has been spared many of the worse effects seen in other parts of the world. The pandemic has reminded us that a reliable and uninterrupted energy supply is critical to manage this crisis.*

Healthy progress

- The good news is that our region's energy systems have continued to function throughout the pandemic. A new report, titled Shaping a Sustainable Energy Future in Asia and the Pacific: A greener, more resilient and inclusive energy system, released on Monday by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) shows that energy demand reductions have mainly impacted fossil fuels and depressed oil and gas prices.
- Renewable energy development in countries across the region, such as China and India, continued at a healthy pace throughout 2020.
- As the Asia-Pacific region moves towards clean, efficient and low-carbon technologies, the emergence of the pandemic raises some fundamental questions. How can a transformed energy system help ensure our resilience to future crises such as COVID-19? Can we launch a 'green recovery' post COVID-19

that simultaneously rebuilds our economies and puts us on track to meet global climate and sustainability goals?

- By emphasising the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guiding framework for recovering better together, we must focus on two critical aspects.
 - First, by making meaningful progress on SDGs, we can address many of the systemic issues that made societies more vulnerable to COVID-19 in the first place — health, decent work, poverty and socioeconomic inequalities, to name a few.
 - Second, by directing stimulus funding to investments that support the achievement of SDGs, we can build back better. If countries focus their stimulus efforts on industries of the past, such as fossil fuels, we risk not creating the jobs we need, or deflecting from the right direction for achieving the global goals that are critical for future generations. The energy sector offers multiple opportunities to align stimuli with clean industries of the future.

Added resilience

- Evidence shows that renewable energy and energy efficiency projects create more jobs for the same investment in fossil fuel projects. By increasing expenditure on clean cooking and electricity access, we can enhance economic activity in rural areas and support modern infrastructure that can make these communities more resilient and inclusive, particularly for the well-being of women and children.
- Additionally, investing in low-carbon infrastructure and technologies can create a basis for the ambitious climate pledges we need to fulfil to reach the Paris Agreement target of a 2-degree global warming limit. On this note, several countries have announced carbon neutrality. Phasing out the use of coal from power generation portfolios and substituting it with renewables, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and implementing carbon pricing are some steps we can take.
- The COVID-19 crisis has forced us to change many aspects of our lives. It has shown that we are more adaptive and resilient than we may have believed. But we should not waste the opportunities this crisis presents. It should not deflect us from the urgent task of making modern energy available to all and decarbonising the region's energy system through a transition to sustainable energy. Instead, it should provide us with a renewed sense of urgency.

The road map for reducing public sector role

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2021-22, announced a new policy for central public sector enterprises (CPSEs), which she said will serve as a clear roadmap for disinvestment of government-owned firms across sectors. “We have kept four areas that are strategic where bare minimum CPSEs will be maintained and rest privatised. In the remaining sectors, all CPSEs will be privatised,” the Minister said.

What goes outside government control?

- The government had revealed the broad contours of the policy in May 2020 as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package unveiled in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategic sectors identified at the time for retaining certain public sector entities within the government's control remain the same in the final policy approved by the Cabinet.
- These are atomic energy, space and defence, transport and telecommunications, power, petroleum, coal and other minerals, and lastly, banking, insurance and financial services. While the initial plan was to retain one to four public sector firms in these sectors, this has now been replaced by the phrase “bare minimum presence”.



- Once the government decides what is the bare minimum number of firms it wants to retain, the rest of the firms will be privatised, merged or subsidised with other CPSEs, or closed. For all firms in sectors considered non-strategic, privatisation or closure are the only two options being considered.
- The policy's objective is to minimise the public sector's role and create new investment space for the private sector, in the hope that the infusion of private capital, technology and management practices will contribute to growth and new jobs. The proceeds from the sale of these firms would finance various government-run social sector and developmental programmes.

Why is this significant?

- A bold push for disinvestment of the public sector was expected soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014 and announced that the government had "no business to be in business". This was seen as a clear intent to privatise a huge chunk of India's large public sector, a legacy from post-Independence policies that placed government firms at the 'commanding heights' of the economy.
- However, the first term saw little activity by the government on this front, barring an aborted attempt to sell 76% of its stake in the loss-ridden national carrier Air India. A few public sector enterprises were merged with other PSEs and the proceeds from the transactions counted as disinvestment proceeds in the government's accounts.
- In its second innings, however, there has been some enthusiasm to privatise, with a fresh push to sell Air India (lock stock and barrel, with 100% stake sale), followed by Maharatna oil PSU Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL), and the likes of Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India and Pawan Hans.
- The process for those sales is under way, although timelines and investor interest were affected by the pandemic. However, the process indicated a piecemeal approach to privatisation and created uncertainty.
- The new policy is significant as it goes beyond such an approach and lays down a rationale for deciding the future ownership pattern of 439 CPSEs, including their subsidiaries.
- For instance, it is now clear that 151 public sector firms in non-strategic sectors (including 83 holding companies and 68 subsidiaries) will either be closed or sold. The policy also brings public sector banks and insurance entities into the disinvestment ambit for the first time.

How is this different from policies in the past?

- This is the first time since 2004 that India is working on a slew of privatisation deals. Earlier, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government between 1999 and 2004 had managed to sell off majority stakes in a dozen-odd public sector enterprises, including Modern Foods, Balco, Hindustan Zinc, VSNL and a few hotels.
- A separate Ministry had been formed just for disinvestment, led initially by the late Arun Jaitley and then by Arun Shourie, who drove the process.
- An attempt to sell Air India at the time had, however, got stalled in the face of a political outcry. Prior to that, the early 1990s saw the stock market listing of minority stakes in a bunch of public sector firms, a policy that was replayed when the UPA government was in office from 2004 to 2014.
- The new policy goes beyond the Vajpayee-era privatisation drive, which was limited to a 'case-by-case' sale of entities in non-strategic sectors, by stressing that even strategic sectors will have a 'bare minimum' presence of government-owned firms.

What is likely to be sold?

- The government hopes to conclude the sale of Air India, BPCL and some other entities, where some progress has already been made over the past year. Ms. Sitharaman also promised the sale of two more public sector banks and a general insurance player in her Budget speech, along with plans to list the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India on the stock markets.
- The Union Budget has estimated ₹1.75 lakh crore as receipts from PSU stake sales in the year, compared to its target of ₹2.10 lakh crore for 2020-21, of which just about ₹20,000 crore has been raised so far. However, the Finance Ministry mandarins are confident of achieving next year's target.

What is the proposed process for selecting the CPSEs to be sold or retained?

- The NITI Aayog has been entrusted with suggesting which public sector firms in strategic sectors should be retained, considered for privatisation or merger or ‘subsidiarisation’ with another public sector firm, or simply closed.
- A core group of secretaries on disinvestment will consider the NITI Aayog’s suggestions and forward its views to a ministerial group. Apart from the Finance Minister, the group will include Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari and the minister in charge of the administrative ministry of the public sector enterprise concerned.
- After the ministerial group’s nod, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management in the Finance Ministry will move a proposal to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for an ‘in-principle’ nod to sell specific CPSEs. The NITI Aayog is expected to soon formalise its recommendations on which of the 77 public sector companies in strategic sectors should remain with the government.
- Public sector firms and corporations engaged in activities allied to the farm sector, such as providing seeds to farmers, or the procurement and distribution of food for public distribution, will not be privatised.
- Similarly, the policy excludes departments with commercial operations like Railways and Posts, firms making appliances for the physically challenged, and those providing support to vulnerable groups through financing of SCs, STs, minorities and backward classes. CPSEs “maintaining critical data having a bearing on national security”, security printing and minting companies, will also be retained in the public sector.

What are the risk factors?

- The turmoil in the global economy could impact the valuations of firms being privatised, as many potential investors may not have the appetite for bidding in these times. The prospect of post-deal scrutiny by audit and investigating agencies, like the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) and the CBI, will be a source of worry for officials, with similar cases pertaining to the Vajpayee-era transactions still cropping up in courts.
- Lastly, as economist Pronab Sen has warned, privatisation is a good idea, but doing it during a recession may dampen economic recovery as investors will end up buying existing capacities instead of embarking on fresh investments.

Conclusive land titling and its challenges

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Centre wants to reform the country’s land markets through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded. In 2020, even as laws for farm reform and labour code reform were being enacted, the government’s think tank, NITI Aayog, took steps to initiate land reforms. A Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling was sent to States and Union Territories last June seeking their comments. In September, after many States failed to send in their feedback, the Centre warned that their agreement would be presumed.*

How does the current system work and what will change in the new system?

- India currently follows a system of presumptive land titling. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions.
- Ownership, then, is established on the basis of current possession. Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease. Holding



registration papers does not actually involve the government or the legal framework guaranteeing the ownership title of the land.

- On the other hand, under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership. The title is granted by the government, which takes the responsibility for accuracy. Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government, not the title holder.
- Further, under conclusive land titling, the government may provide compensation to claimants in case of disputes, but the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership, says agricultural economist T. Haque, who chaired the Special Cell on Land Policy at NITI Aayog which recommended a shift to conclusive titling in a 2017 report.

Why is conclusive land titling needed?

- The main advantage is that a conclusive system will drastically lower litigation related to land.
- According to a 2007 World Bank study on 'Land Policies for growth and poverty reduction', land-related disputes accounted for two-thirds of all pending court cases in India. A NITI Aayog study on strengthening arbitration estimated that disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.
- Right now, because land titles are based on transactions, people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership.
- The potential impact is extensive. Once conclusive titling is in place, investors who want to purchase land for business activities will be able to do so without facing the constant risk that their ownership may be questioned and their entire investment may go to waste.
- Land disputes and unclear titling also create hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction, leading to costly delays and inefficiency. In cities, urban local bodies depend on property taxes that can be levied properly only if there is clear ownership data available. Ambiguity in ownership also results in a black market for land transactions, which deprives the government of taxes.
- In rural areas, the need is even more acute. Access to agricultural credit is dependent on the ability to use land as collateral.
- Without being able to prove their ownership of land and access formal credit from banks, small and marginal farmers are often left at the mercy of unscrupulous moneylenders, entrenching themselves in a mountain of debt.

What does the model Bill propose?

- The Bill circulated by the NITI Aayog in 2020 calls for Land Authorities to be set up by each State government, which will appoint a Title Registration Officer (TRO) to prepare and publish a draft list of land titles based on existing records and documents. This will be considered a valid notice to all potential claimants interested in the property, who will have to file their claims or objections within a set period of time.
- If disputing claims are received, the TRO will verify all the relevant documents and refer the case to a Land Dispute Resolution Officer (LDRO) for resolution. However, disputes which are already pending in courts cannot be resolved in this way.
- Having considered and resolved all the disputed claims, the Land Authority will publish a Record of Titles.
- Over a three-year period, these titles and the decisions of the TRO and the LDRO can be challenged before Land Titling Appellate Tribunals, which will be set up under the law. After a three-year period, entries in the Record of Titles will be considered conclusive proof of ownership. Further appeals can only be taken up in High Courts.

What are the difficulties?

- The biggest challenge is that land records have not been updated for decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

- Land records are often in the name of the grandparents of the current owner, with no proof of inheritance. Unless they are based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.
- Comprehensive village-level surveys with community involvement are a necessary precursor to the land titling process. Relying on current records or even satellite imagery will not provide the same accuracy as actual, on-the-ground, local surveys.
- However, local governments have not been provided with the resources or manpower to conduct such surveys.
- If surveys are not conducted, the onus falls on village claimants, many of whom have no access to documentation, to proactively challenge the titling during the three-year period.

New paradigm in animal husbandry

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In June 2020, while the country was reeling under the initial wave of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns, the Central government unveiled a string of measures to cushion the economy, as a part of which the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) was announced. As an allied industry of agriculture, the animal husbandry and dairy sector collectively employs more than 100 million people. Since the bulk of establishments in this sector is concentrated in rural India, the socio-economic relevance of this sector cannot be overstated.*

Details

- The AHIDF has been set up with an outlay of ₹15,000 crore. As per the provisions of AHIDF, a project will be eligible for a loan amount that covers up to 90% of the estimated cost – with an interest subvention of 3% for all eligible entities.
- Applicants can submit the proposal with a complete Detailed Project Report through the Udyami Mitra Portal. The Ministry's website has been updated with the relevant technical details for prospective applicants. As such, this is the first major fund launched by the government that includes a diverse set of stakeholders such as FPOs, private dairy players, individual entrepreneurs, and non-profits within its ambit.
- As an example of a sub-sector concern where the dairy value chain could be strengthened, there is a pressing need to enhance chilling infrastructure at collection centres by setting up bulk milk coolers to prevent wastage of milk.
- Currently, there is an infrastructure gap of about 120-130 MMT, which translates into an investment potential of approximately ₹20,000 crore. If the infrastructure needs for milk processing and distribution are included, then the overall potential investment opportunity is to the tune of ₹1,40,000 crore across the dairy value chain.
- There is also considerable potential to increase the productivity of cattle, especially by enhancing the quality of animal feed. With this in mind, the AHIDF has been designed to support the establishment of animal feed plants of varying capacities – including setting up of mineral mixture plants, silage making units, and animal feed testing laboratory.
- To spur on innovative solutions, the Ministry in collaboration with Invest India has invited ideas from domestic start-ups for the development of new varieties of green fodder and enriched animal feed. The infrastructure gap of 10-18 MMT in the production and supply of affordable compound cattle feed translates into an investment potential of around ₹5,000 crore.

Boosting the poultry industry



- In a similar vein, there are not only economic but nutritional benefits to boosting the poultry segment's output, efficiency and quality.
- India is the fourth largest chicken meat producer and the second largest egg producer in the world and is well-positioned to help mitigate rampant malnutrition given that chicken meat provides the cheapest source of protein per unit. With eggs being introduced as part of the mid-day meal within several anganwadis in the country, an upgradation in poultry infrastructure would be closely intertwined with social justice outcomes too.
- Finally, macro benefits regarding climate change and employment are linked to this sector. Enhanced infrastructure can make processing units more energy-efficient and help mitigate their carbon footprint.
- The AHIDF also has the potential to create over 30 lakh jobs, even as it overhauls domestic infrastructure towards giving greater prominence to India's dairy and livestock products in the global value chain.

The excise duty-fiscal policy contradiction

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *There used to be a time — and this was well before India began to globalise — when each Union Budget announced sales tax increases on tobacco products, especially cigarettes. The demand for cigarettes being somewhat inelastic, the rise in tax was expected to be a shot in the arm for the revenue-starved government of our poor country.*

Increase in excise duty

- India is less poor now, having risen to the rank of an emerging market economy. Yet, COVID-19 has ushered in a cataclysm. As opposed to a Budget estimate of 3.5% for fiscal deficit, the revised estimates show a 2.7 times larger deficit of 9.5% for FY 2020-21.
- Moreover, a comparison of the government's revised Budget estimates with the original Budget estimates reveals a fall in receipts from every source of taxation except excise. The revised Budget shows a rise of ₹94,000 crore on account of excise duties alone.
- Presumably, the increase comes from the much-debated excise duty increases on petroleum and diesel. As far as the Budget documents go, the excise duty rise will hardly compensate for the huge falls in other tax revenues.
- It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the excise rise, the fiscal deficit continues to be higher than the Budget estimate. In fact, the larger excise duty collection is not large enough to have significantly reduced the inflated fiscal deficit figure.
- Given the nature of the products on which the excise duty has gone up, prices of commodities will rise in general, directly or indirectly. This is because all these commodities fall either in the category of final goods, which individuals purchase for personal consumption, or in the category of intermediate goods, which are used to produce a variety of essential services such as public transport, agricultural water supply, hotels and restaurants
- With annual output shrinking by an estimated 7.7%, it is straightforward to conclude that unemployment has risen significantly. The accompanying price rise will be the unemployed persons' worst nightmare. The result will be severe inequality.

New philosophy

- As far as shrinkage in output is concerned, it is the unavoidable lockdown that needs to be blamed rather than the government's mismanagement of the economy. The associated inequalities though cannot be delinked from policy and, as political opponents will argue, COVID-19-linked income inequities ought to have been addressed through higher taxation of the rich.



- Even though such criticism does not lack wisdom, it appears that the philosophy underlying the government's economic policy framework has changed, a change that has not received adequate attention. In what follows, we shall address the issue from a pure economist's point of view.
- In this context, it is well worth our while to pursue Volume 1 of the Economic Survey 2020-21. Chapter 2 of the document considers the basics of fiscal policy with reference to Olivier Blanchard's 2019 presidential address to the American Economic Association.
- Professor Blanchard's view may appear to run counter to our own Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, according to which the fiscal deficit must be capped under 3.5% or so. The idea underlying the prescription was that a fiscal deficit automatically transformed to government debt.
- Such debts along with their servicing liabilities have a tendency to magnify over the years, thereby imprisoning governments in debt traps, where present borrowings keep increasing to repay past borrowings and service charges. This leaves little room for growth enhancing expenditure and reduces a government's credit worthiness in the eyes of lenders.
- Professor Blanchard, and following him the Economic Survey, propose a different viewpoint altogether. Debt-financed fiscal spending, according to them, could well be a driver of growth. It can improve the standard of living of the entire population, without necessarily removing inequality. The inequality, however, could well be benignant, for even though the rich will grow richer, the poor will escape out of poverty.
- A government's fiscal expenditure, Professor Blanchard points out, has stronger multiplier effects during recessions than during booms. In an economic boom, state expenditure may crowd out private expenditure on account of a rise in the interest rate. During recessions, private expenditure is low in any case, on account of a rise in precautionary savings and the grim state of long-term expectations.
- The government, however, is not affected by such psychological constraints. Its fiscal expenditure produces positive growth and this in turn can generate a feel good factor for the private sector over time, raise animal spirits, and improve the state of the economy.

Blanchard's argument

- What, however, constitutes the government's spendable resource? The obvious answer is debt, or the fiscal deficit itself. What will prevent the government from sinking into a debt trap? Professor Blanchard shows that the debt-to-GDP ratio can be prevented from exploding if the rate of growth of GDP happens to be higher than the sovereign rate of interest. This is the case in developed economies.
- In such economies, debt financed government expenditure will create a positive primary surplus (defined as the total government receipts minus expenditure net of interest payments) out of which interest payments can be made to keep the debt-GDP ratio under control. There will, of course, be a maximum value that this ratio can attain, a value that is higher the larger is the excess of the growth rate over the interest rate.
- According to the Economic Survey, India's average interest rate and growth rate over the last 25 years (leaving out FY 2020-21) have been 8.8% and 12.8% respectively. Hence, Professor Blanchard's condition is satisfied, so that debt financing of recession ought not to raise FRBM issues involving fear of future taxation to address past debts. To some at least, the argument may sound like an excuse for not resorting to higher taxation of the rich to remove economic inequality.
- The philosophy of the Economic Survey, on the other hand, appears to be that expenditure causes growth, rather than distributional equality. With improved growth, standards of living will rise across the population, bringing affluence of a sort to the economically deprived even as it makes the rich grow richer.
- This, of course, is not to support excise duty increases, for it goes against the very principle of the Blanchard argument, which emphasises maintainable debt and expenditure as the vehicle of development as opposed to increased tax burdens.
- Therefore, there appears to be a contradiction between the government's announced fiscal policy stance and the fiscal regime it is actually running. But then, Professor Blanchard's argument requires the growth rate to exceed the rate of interest, which was not the case in FY 2020-21.

Time to reset our relationship with nature: UN

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

Context: *It calls for strengthened action to protect and restore nature and nature-based solutions to achieve the sustainable development goals in its three social, economic and environmental dimensions. The new 168-page report called 'Making Peace with Nature' presents a strong case for innovation and investment to tackle climate, biodiversity and pollution —the three environmental emergencies within the framework of sustainable development goals.*

Growing triple crisis

- The three self-inflicted planetary crises are closely interconnected and put the well-being of current and future generations at unacceptable risk, warned the report released on February 18, 2021.
- Inequity in economic growth has left 1.3 billion people poor. At the same time, extraction of natural resources has multiplied three times creating a planetary emergency.
- More than one million of the estimated 8 million plant and animal species are increasingly at risk of extinction. Every year, nine million people die prematurely due to pollution.
- Even though the causes and mechanisms of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation are complex, these should be considered together, the report proposed.
- The world can transform its relationship with nature and tackle them together for securing a sustainable future and preventing future pandemics, said UN.
- The report delves into the 'triple crisis' by drawing on global assessments, including those from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. It also refers to UNEP's Global Environment Outlook report, the UNEP International Resource Panel and new findings on the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as the novel coronavirus diseases (COVID-19).
- Three sustainable development goals — poverty alleviation, food and water security and good health for all — will also be reached by addressing environmental crisis, said the report.
- It advocates for advancements in science and bold policymaking for a carbon neutral world by 2050, while bending the curve on biodiversity loss and curbing pollution and waste.
- By innovating and investing in those activities that protect both people and nature, it will be possible to reap success in the form of restored ecosystems and healthier lives, as well as a stable climate.
- The report highlights the importance of changing mindsets and values, and finding political and technical solutions that measure up to the Earth's environmental crises.

For a sustainable future

- Natural capital can be included by the governments to measure the economic performance. Nations are advised to put a price on carbon and shift trillions of dollars in subsidies from fossil fuels, non-sustainable agriculture and transportation towards low-carbon and nature-friendly solutions
- There is a need for setting ambitious international targets for biodiversity, such as expanded and improved protected area networks.
- New variants of coronavirus has made the fight against COVID-19 challenging and the pandemic may soon turn endemic in many countries.
- In context of this, the report cautions how ecosystem degradation heightens the risk of pathogens making the jump from animals to human. It has strongly advocated for importance of a 'one health' approach that considers human, animal and planetary health together.
- A sustainable economy driven by renewable energy and nature-based solutions will create new jobs, cleaner infrastructure and a resilient future, said the report. It is the bedrock of hope in the post-COVID-19 world.

GS IV

A proper transfer policy needed

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Good governance and better administration of development is often offered as a plausible solution to conflict management. At the heart of this solution are public administrators. Civil servants, no matter how dedicated, innovative and efficient they may be, need a stability of tenure to govern well.*

The J&K example

- Consider the case of Jammu and Kashmir. If the purpose of administering the region is to ensure peace and development, then it is unlikely to succeed till there is a proper transfer policy. As it stands presently, officers are transferred too often.
- This denies them the opportunity to settle down into an official role. At times, a particular administrative location is used as a testing lab where officers keep arriving and leaving, with a deleterious impact on officer morale, leading to a reduction in efficiency and effectiveness. The latter effect impacts development and governance and acts as a collective punishment to the population of that place. It has been a major reason for distrust, disconnect and alienation.
- This disenchantment is palpable in Shopian district, which has often been the epicentre of protests and militant-related activities. Since its district status in 2007, it has seen 13 Deputy Commissioners (DCs) at its helm. In the last few years, the transfer policy in Shopian has become a theatre of the absurd.
- The last three DCs have had a stay of 378 days, 537 days, and 25 days, respectively. The last DC assumed charge on January 19, 2021 and was transferred to Leh on February 13, 2021. The story is similar in many other districts and government departments across J&K.
- Often, the frequent transfer of officials is blamed on the interference of local politicians. However, the argument cannot be valid this time since there are no elected MLAs after the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly in late 2018. Since then, in the absence of elected representatives, the participation of local people in governance and development is through civil servants. It is this participation that has been the worst affected due to the frequent transfers.
- The issue of frequent transfers is not limited to J&K, of course, but is found across India. The analysis of the SUPREMO (Single User Platform Related to Employees Online) database of the Department of Personnel and Training, Government of India, shows that the average posting spell of civil servants in India is only about 15 months.
 - This is despite an increase in the median tenure since 2014 at the national level.
 - Ashok Khemka and Pradeep Kasni are two Haryana-based IAS officers whose cases symbolise this issue.
 - Mr. Khemka has been transferred more than 50 times in his career and Mr. Kasni 65 times.
 - The Union Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Jitendra Singh, publicly accepted his helplessness in 2016 about the frequent transfer of officers in States.

A major shortcoming

- The undermining of transfer guidelines has been a major shortcoming of personnel administration in India.
- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission has highlighted it. The Fifth Pay Commission had recommended that no premature transfer should be allowed and that there should be fixation of a minimum tenure for each post.



- The Hota Committee, which argued against frequent transfers, noted that “absence of a fixed tenure of officials is one of the most important reasons for tardy implementation of government policies, for lack of accountability of officers, for waste of public money because of inadequate supervision of programmes under implementation and for large-scale corruption.”
- An oft-repeated argument used for transfers is that they are “in the interest of administration.” However, they essentially weaken administration. Transfers often reflect administrative favouritism and create divisions among civil servants.
- If they are done on a political basis, this impacts the neutrality of the civil services. The core values of the civil services — neutrality, impartiality and anonymity — cannot be maintained without an efficient transfer policy.



Current Affairs Quiz

1. Consider the following statements with respect to NITI Aayog:
1. The Prime Minister is the Chairperson of NITI Aayog
 2. The advice and recommendations of NITI Aayog are binding

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

Ans. a)

It serves as an advisory Think Tank. Its recommendations and advice are not binding.

2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Juvenile Justice Act 2015?
1. It allowed the trial of juveniles in conflict with law in the age group of 16-18 years as adults.
 2. It also streamlined adoption procedures for orphans, abandoned and surrendered children.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : c

3. Which of the following is related to the life of Saka Nankana Sahib?
- a. First Sikh Commune
 - b. Birth place of Gurunanak Dev
 - c. Resting place of Guru Tegh bahadur
 - d. Battle ground of Guru Gobind Singh

Answer : b

Saka Nankana Sahib

- Nankana Sahib, the birth place of first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev.
- It also the site of the first big agitation by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to take back control of gurdwaras from mahants backed by the British.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Transatlantic Alliance
1. It is the foundation on which the collective security of the USA and Canada are built.
 2. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has recently joined as observer state in the alliance

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : c

- It is the foundation on which the collective security and shared prosperity of the USA and Europe are built.
- The TTIP negotiations were launched in 2013 and ended without conclusion at the end of 2016.

5. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to President's Rule?
1. Article 365 deals with President's rule.



2. The state legislative assembly would be either suspended or dissolved by the President during President's Rule.

Select the correct answer from the code given below:

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

Ans. c)

As per Article 365, President's Rule can be imposed if any state fails to comply with all directions given by the Union on matters it is empowered to.

6. Which of the following country is/are members of BRICS?

- 1. Russia
- 2. China
- 3. India
- 4. Britain
- 5. Sri Lanka

Select the Correct answer code:

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

Ans. a)

The members are: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

7. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)?

- 1. NCLT was formed based on the recommendations of the Justice Eradi Committee that was related to insolvency and winding up of companies in India.
- 2. The National Company Law Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body in India adjudicating issues concerning companies in the country. It was formed on June 1, 2016, as per the provisions of the Companies Act 2013 (Section 408)

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. c)

8. Chin community belongs to -

- a) China
- b) Nepal
- c) Bangladesh
- d) Myanmar

Ans. d)

People belonging to Myanmar's Chin community were seeking to migrate to Mizoram to escape a military crackdown, primarily because of the Chin National Army (CNA), an extremist group seeking self-determination in Chin State across the border.

9. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0?

- 3. The IMI 3.0 initiative was launched by central government in order to provide immunization to the pregnant women and children free of cost in India.



4. This mission also aims to reach the unreached population. It will reach to them with all the available vaccines under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. c)

10. What is Kalyani M4 ?

- a) A ballistic missile
- b) A fighter jet
- c) An armored vehicle
- d) A Submarine

Ans. c)

Bharat Forge announced that it has received a ₹117.95-crore order from the Defence Ministry under emergency procurement **to supply its Kalyani M4 armoured vehicles to the Army.**

11) Which of the following statements are correct with respect to Factors of high rainfall in Cherrapunji?

- 1. High rainfall in the area is caused by the orography favouring a monsoon wind regime.
- 2. The changes in the Indian Ocean temperature have a huge effect on the rainfall in the region.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : c

12. Which of the following statements are incorrect with respect to Land Titling system in India?

- 1. Land Titling is the generic term used to describe the programs implemented by the government to enable individuals and government to efficiently trade in rights in land and property.
- 2. India currently follows the Conclusive Land titling system under which the ownership title is granted by the government, which takes the responsibility for accuracy.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : b

Land Titling systems in India

- **Presumptive Land Titling** - India currently follows this system, it means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions.

13. Consider the following statements with about United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

- 1. Each elected member of UNHRC serves for a term of five years.
- 2. The member countries are allowed to occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Ans. d)

Each elected member serves for a term of three years.

Countries are disallowed from occupying a seat for more than two consecutive terms.

14. A self-regulatory body for OTTs recently announced by the government will be headed by-

- Sitting Judge of Supreme Court or High Court
- Retired Judge of Supreme Court or High Court
- Eminent person from the relevant fields like media, human rights, child rights etc.
- Both b and c

Ans. d)

- This body will be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, a High Court, or an independent eminent person from the field of media, broadcasting, entertainment, child rights, human rights or other relevant fields.

15. Consider the following statements about The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS):

- INCOIS is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
- It is located in Hyderabad.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. a)

INCOIS is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).

16. Consider the following statements with respect to Pagri Sambhal Movement, 1907:

- It is a non-violent farmers' agitation that forced the British government to repeal three laws related to agriculture back in 1907.
- It was founded by Ajit Singh, uncle of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh.
- The movement fought against the acts that gave the British government the right to take back the allotted land if the farmer even touched a tree in his field without permission.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Answer : c

- The agitation couldn't remain non-violent as Ajit Singh was booked for sedition after his speech at a public meeting in Rawalpindi in 1921 and violence erupted afterwards.

17. Consider the following statements with respect to Election Commission of India:

- Article 324 deals with powers and functions of Election Commission of India.
- ECI conducts elections to Central, State and Local Governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. b)

- It conducts election to Central and State Governments only. State Elections Commission conduct elections for local governments.

18. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to WHO Certification Scheme for Drugs?
1. The Scheme applies for both finished and pharmaceutical products.
 2. It is a mandatory agreement among various countries.
 3. Under this, the recommended manufacturing facilities and operations conform to good manufacturing practices (GMP).

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

It relates to the development of internationally recognised norms, standards and guidelines.

19. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct with respect to NASA's Perseverance Mission?
1. It will explore Jezero Crater, an ancient river delta that has rocks and minerals that could only form in water.
 2. It will be partially powered by Photo voltaic cell and by Hydrogen fuel Cell

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : a

A Multi-Mission Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generator (MMRTG) which converts heat from the natural radioactive decay of plutonium (Plutonium Dioxide) into electricity will power the mission.

20. Consider the following statements with respect to President's Rule:
1. It can be extended for a maximum period of six months with the approval of the Parliament.
 2. The revoking of proclamation of President's Rule does not require the parliamentary approval.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : a

It can be extended for a maximum period of three years with the approval of the Parliament, every six months.

Special Issue

February (Week 4)

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All about the Pagri Sambhall movement of 1907

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: As part of the ongoing farmers' protest, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) celebrated February 23 as 'Pagri Sambhal Diwas', where it has asked supporters across the globe to wear a green pagri/dupatta and post their pictures on social media, with the hashtag 'Go green for farmers'.

What was the original Pagri Sambhaal movement all about? Why does it resonate with farmer unions today?

- Pagri Sambhaal Jatta was a successful farm agitation that forced the British government to repeal three laws related to agriculture back in 1907. Bhagat Singh's uncle Ajit Singh was the force behind this agitation, and he wanted to channel people's anger over the farm laws to topple the colonial government.

Land Rights threatened

- The three farm-related acts at the centre of the storm in 1907 were the Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900, the Punjab Land Colonisation Act 1906 and the Doab Bari Act.
- These acts would reduce farmers from owners to contractors of land, and gave the British government the right to take back the allotted land if the farmer even touched a tree in his field without permission.
- Amid resentment against the laws, Bhagat Singh's father Kishan Singh and uncle Ajit Singh, with their revolutionary friend Ghasita Ram, formed Bharat Mata Society, aiming to mobilise this unrest into a revolt against the British government.
- Working hard to prepare the ground for the agitation against the three laws, they organised meetings in Lahore, addressed mostly by Kishan Singh and Ghasita Ram. Activists were sent especially to Lyallpur district to explain the three laws and their fallout to the public.

How the agitation got its name

- Ajit Singh persuaded Congress leader Lala Lajpat Rai to come on the stage during a rally in Lyallpur in March 3, 1907 to protest against the laws. Initially, Lala ji was not willing to join the agitation due to his assumptions that the movement was not limited to the farm agitation, which was true to an extent, as Ajit Singh did want to use it to revolt against the British.
- "Lala was first hesitant in addressing the meeting but people shouted that they were anxious to listen to him. Seeing the public enthusiasm, he made one of his finest speeches, full of eloquence and spirit," Ajit Singh wrote in his biography.
- Immediately afterwards, Banke Dayal, Editor of Jhang Sayal, read the historic song 'Pagri sambhaal oh Jatta', which became the anthem of the agitation.
- Ajit Singh wrote, "I chose Lyallpur district as our centre for agitation because it was a developed area. It had people from almost all parts of Punjab as also retired military people."

Amendment in law to pacify agitation

- On sensing the popular resentment, the British made minor amendment in the laws.
- An article by Bhagat Singh, published in daily newspaper 'Pipal' in 1931 and written from jail, notes, "Just before the public rally at Lyallpur in March 1907, Lala ji told Ajit Singh that the government had made some amendments in Colony act. In the gathering, while thanking the government for this amendment, we should request the government to cancel the whole law. However, Ajit Singh made it clear to Lala ji that the agenda of the meeting was not to inspire the public to stop paying agri-taxes."

Violence

- The agitation couldn't remain non-violent. Ajit Singh was booked for sedition after his speech at a public meeting in Rawalpindi on April 21, 1921. Violence erupted soon afterwards.



- “There were riots in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, etc. British personnel were manhandled, mud was flung at them, offices and churches were burnt, telegraph poles and wires cut. In Multan Division, Railway workers went on strike and the strike was called off only when the acts were repealed. The Superintendent of Police, Phillips, in Lahore was beaten up by rioters. British civil servants sent their families to Bombay and ships were chartered to take them to England,” wrote Ajit Singh.
- He further wrote, “Lord Kitchener got terrified since the peasantry was becoming rebellious, military and police were unreliable. Morely made a statement in the House of Commons that in all, 33 meetings took place in Punjab, out of which 19 were addressed by S Ajit Singh. That increase in land revenue was not the cause of this unrest. It was with a view to finishing British rule in India that it was being used as a political stunt. The result of all this agitation was that all the three laws were cancelled,” wrote Ajit Singh.
- British government repealed the three controversial laws in May 1907.

All about the New social media code

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Citing instructions from the Supreme Court and the concerns raised in Parliament about social media abuse, the government released guidelines that aim to regulate social media, digital news media, and over-the-top (OTT) content providers. For social media platforms, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 envisage a category of significant social media intermediaries, the threshold for which will be announced later. In addition, the government said that it wanted to create a level playing field in terms of rules to be followed by online news and media platforms vis-à-vis traditional media outlets.*

What is the background of these guidelines?

- At a press conference, Law & IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad cited a 2018 Supreme Court observation and a 2019 Supreme Court order, in addition to discussion in Rajya Sabha — once in 2018 and then through a report laid by a committee in 2020 — as the need for coming up with rules to “empower the ordinary users of digital platforms to seek redressal for their grievances and command accountability in case of infringement of their rights”.
- The government had been working on these guidelines for over three years; however, the big push came in the form of the violent incidents at the Red Fort on January 26, following which the government and Twitter were embroiled in a spat over the removal of certain accounts from the social media platform.

What are the key proposals that the guidelines make for social media?

- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act provides a “safe harbour” to intermediaries that host user-generated content, and exempts them from liability for the actions of users if they adhere to government-prescribed guidelines.
- The new guidelines notified on Thursday prescribe an element of due diligence to be followed by the intermediary, failing which the safe harbour provisions would cease to apply to these platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp.
- They also prescribe a grievance redressal mechanism by mandating that the intermediaries, including social media platforms, should establish a mechanism for receiving and resolving complaints from users. These platforms will need to appoint a grievance officer to deal with such complaints, who must acknowledge the complaint within 24 hours, and resolve it within 15 days of receipt.

Do the guidelines lay the rules for removal of content from social media?

- In essence, the rules lay down 10 categories of content that the social media platform should not host.



- These include content that “threatens the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of India, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or causes incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or prevents investigation of any offence or is insulting any foreign States”; “is defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another’s privacy, including bodily privacy; insulting or harassing on the basis of gender; libellous, racially or ethnically objectionable; relating or encouraging money laundering or gambling, or otherwise inconsistent with or contrary to the laws of India”, etc.
- The rules stipulate that upon receipt of information about the platform hosting prohibited content from a court or the appropriate government agency, it should remove the said content within 36 hours.

What does the due diligence entail for social media companies?

- In addition to appointing a grievance officer, social media platforms will now be required to appoint a chief compliance officer resident in India, who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the rules. They will be required also to appoint a nodal contact person for 24×7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
- Further, the platforms will need to publish a monthly compliance report mentioning the details of complaints received and action taken on the complaints, as well as details of contents removed proactively by the significant social media intermediary.
- While the rules have been notified and will take effect from Thursday, the due diligence requirements will come into effect after three months.

What are the penalties for companies violating these guidelines?

- In case an intermediary fails to observe the rules, it would lose the safe harbour, and will be liable for punishment “under any law for the time being in force including the provisions of the IT Act and the Indian Penal Code”.
- While the offences under the IT Act range from tampering with documents, hacking into computer systems, online misrepresentation, confidentiality, privacy and publication of content for fraudulent purposes, among others, the penal provisions vary from imprisonment for three years to a maximum of seven years, with fines starting from Rs 2 lakh.
- For example, any person who tampers with, conceals, destroys, or alters any computer source intentionally, shall be liable to pay a penalty of up to Rs 2 lakh, along with simple imprisonment of three years, or both.
- Under Section 66 of the IT Act, if a person, without the permission of the owner or any other person in charge of the computer or the computer network, damages the said properties, he would be liable to pay a penalty of up to Rs 5 lakh, or be jailed for up to three years or both.
- Section 67 A of the IT Act carries provisions to fine and imprison persons transmitting “sexually explicit act, or conduct”. In the first instance, such persons shall be liable to pay a penalty up to Rs 10 lakh and face imprisonment up to five years, while in the second instance, the jail term will go up to seven years.
- Executives of intermediaries which fail to act on an order issued by the government citing threat to sovereignty or integrity, defence, security of the state or public order, can be jailed for up to a period of seven years under Section 69 of the IT Act.

What is the current law in India with regard to data privacy on the Internet, and for social media users?

- Although there are no specific provisions under the IT Act of 2000 that define privacy, or any penal provisions relating to privacy, some sections of the Act deal with very specific cases of data breaches and privacy.
- For example, Section 43A provides for compensation if an intermediary is negligent in using reasonable and good quality security and safety parameters, which can protect the data of their users and citizens.



Though this section says that companies must use “reasonable security practices and procedures”, the same is not defined in very clear terms and can be interpreted in various ways.

- Section 72 of the IT Act has penal and imprisonment provisions if a government official in the course of his or her duty, gets access to certain information, and leaks it subsequently.
- Section 72A provides for criminal punishment if a service provider, during the course of providing the service or during the contract period, discloses personal information of the user without them being aware of it.

What do the rules for OTT services mean for consumers?

- For OTT service providers such as YouTube, Netflix, etc., the government has prescribed self-classification of content into five categories based on age suitability.
- Online curated content that is suitable for children and for people of all ages shall be classified as “U”, and content that is suitable for persons aged 7 years and older, and which can be viewed by a person under the age of 7 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 7+” rating.
- Content that is suitable for persons aged 13 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 13 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 13+” rating; content which is suitable for persons aged 16 years and above, and can be viewed by a person under the age of 16 years with parental guidance, shall be classified as “U/A 16+” rating.
- Online curated content which is restricted to adults shall be classified as “A” rating. Platforms would be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content that is classified as “A”.