PRAYAS4IAS

FEBRUARY WEEK 4

BRICS

Brazil · Russia · India · China · South Africa

RuPay▶

Febraury (Week 4)

INDEX

Contents

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%
- ST: 3%
- Category 1: 4% (75 castes, including Gollas, Uppars)
- 2A: 15% (102 castes, including Kurubas, Idigas, Madiwals)
- 2B: 4% (Muslims and other minorities)
- 3A: 4% (12 castes, including Vokkaligas, Bunts)
- 3B: 5% (Lingayats and 42 sub-castes)

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.

- o 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 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.
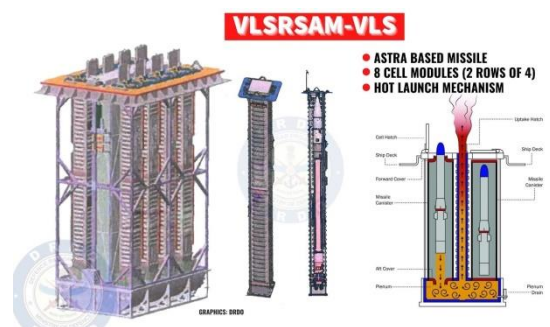
Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)

(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.
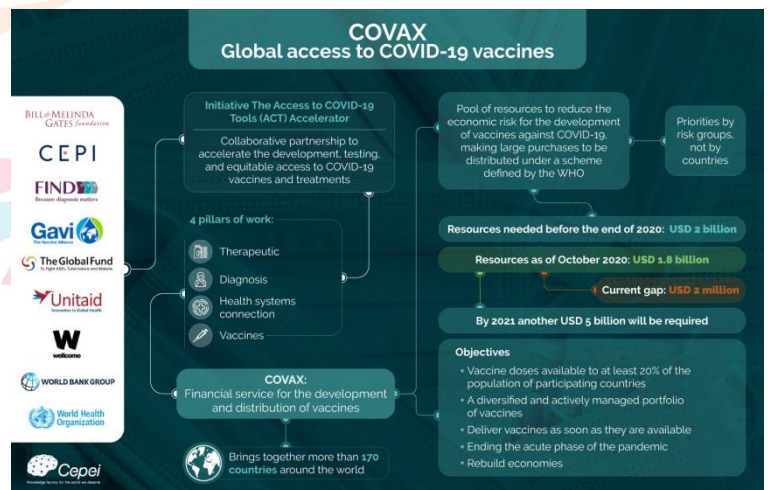
COVAX

(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.

International Brands Rise to the Top of Indian Streaming Market

Market share of streaming (OTT) platforms in India in Q2 2020

Others 19%
NETFLIX 20%
SONY LIV 4%
ALT BALAJI 4%
7%
ZEE5 9%
Disney+ hotstar 17%
prime video 20%

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 litheness 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, Tutinama, 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 decribes 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**
  o 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:**
  o African States: 13 seats
  o Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
  o Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
  o Western European and other States: 7 seats
  o 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 pubic 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 proving 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)

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 subsidiarised 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 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-
    a) Sitting Judge of Supreme Court or High Court
    b) Retired Judge of Supreme Court or High Court
    c) Eminent person from the relevant fields like media, human rights, child rights etc.
    d) 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):
    5. INCOIS is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
    6. It is located in Hyderabad.
    Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?
    e) 1 only
    f) 2 only
    g) Both 1 and 2
    h) 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:
    1. It is a non-violent farmers' agitation that forced the British government to repeal three laws related to agriculture back in 1907.
    2. It was founded by Ajit Singh, uncle of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh.
    3. 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?
    a. 1 and 2 only
    b. 1 and 3 only
    c. 2 and 3 only
    d. 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:
    1. Article 324 deals with powers and functions of Election Commission of India.
    2. ECI conducts elections to Central, State and Local Governments.
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. 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.