

# PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

MARCH WEEK 2



## March (Week 2)

### INDEX

#### Contents

<b>Prelims</b> .....	3
<b>NATIONAL</b> .....	3
News Umbrella Entities (NUEs).....	3
The Sattras .....	3
Hunter's Syndrome .....	4
SC seeks States' views on 50% cap on quota .....	5
Parliamentary Standing Committee report on Water Resources .....	6
Cannabis cultivation in India .....	7
Maitri Setu .....	7
Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme .....	8
Various schemes and programmes of Department of Science and Technology.....	8
UAPA.....	9
Polavaram Irrigation Project .....	10
Conservation of the Sun Temple at Konark.....	11
Kala-azar .....	11
Kerala HC restrains Centre on IT rules.....	12
COTPA 2003 .....	13
Lok Sabha gives approval for National Capital Territory Bill .....	13
INS Karanj .....	14
DoT's notification on trusted telecom equipment .....	15
Sebi's new AT1 bond norms.....	16
Seabuckthorn.....	17
Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 .....	18
Herath.....	19
Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi .....	19
Exercise DUSTLIK II.....	19
Shramik Kalyan Portal.....	20
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b> .....	21
2001 FO32 .....	21
Child Tax Credit of USA .....	21
<b>Mains</b> .....	23
<b>GS I</b> .....	23

Significance of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March .....	23
<b>GS II</b> .....	25
Gender insensitivity of the Judiciary .....	25
Revisiting the quota template.....	27
Transparency in Electoral Financing .....	29
US-Afghanistan.....	30
Quad: strategic opportunity or quagmire? .....	32
<b>GS III</b> .....	34
A Revamped and need-based PDS .....	34
Cyber Security .....	36
Transparency in Railways.....	37
'Red Echo' over India.....	39
Spectrum sale, price test and the road ahead for 5G.....	40
Agri-regulatory system .....	42
Working towards climate justice in a non-ideal world .....	44
India must take the lead in regulating cryptos .....	45
How to make India a global export hub.....	47
Current Affairs Quiz .....	50

# Prelims

## NATIONAL

### News Umbrella Entities (NUEs)

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** From Reliance and Tata to Amazon and Paytm, companies with any presence in India's tech or financial services ecosystem are making a beeline to **set up new umbrella entities (NUEs)** for payment systems — an idea floated by the Reserve Bank of India to create an alternate mechanism to the existing National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The RBI has set a deadline of March 31 for firms to submit their applications for setting up NUEs.

#### What are NUEs?

- As envisaged by the RBI, an NUE will be a non-profit entity that will set-up, manage and operate new payment systems, especially in the retail space such as ATMs, white-label PoS; Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.
- In addition to this, they will develop new payment methods, standards and technologies as well as operate clearing and settlement systems.

#### Which players are planning to set up NUEs?

- Only those entities that are owned and controlled by Indian citizens with at least three years of experience in the payments segment can become promoters of NUEs.
- Also, foreign investment is allowed in NUEs as long as they comply with the existing guidelines.

#### What is the need for NUEs?

- Currently, the umbrella entity for providing retail payments system is NPCI, which is a non-profit entity, owned by banks.
- NPCI operates settlement systems such as UPI, AEPS, RuPay, Fastag, etc. Players in the payments space have indicated the various pitfalls of NPCI being the only entity managing all of retail payments systems in India.
- RBI's plan to allow other organisations to set up umbrella entities for payments systems aims to expand the competitive landscape in this area. For the players planning to establish these NUEs, the aim is to get an even bigger share in the digital payments sector.

### The Sattras

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** In poll-bound Assam, the campaigns of both the BJP and the Congress could not be more different. Yet, one place figures prominently in the campaign trails of both parties — the Bartadrava Than/Sattra (monastery) in Nagaon, which is the birthplace of renowned Vaishnavite saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva.





### What are Sattras?

- Sattras are monastic institutions created as part of the 16th century Neo-Vaishnavite reformist movement started by Vaishnavite saint-reformer Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1596).
- As the saint travelled across Assam, spreading his teachings and propagating an egalitarian society, these Sattras/Thans were established as centres of religious, social and cultural reforms in the 16th century.
- Today, Sattras are spread across the state, promulgating Sankaradeva's unique "worship through art" approach with music (borgeet), dance (xattriya) and theatre (bhauna).
- Each Sattra has a naamghar (worship hall) as its nucleus and is headed by an influential "Sattradhikar". Monks, known as bhakats, are inducted into Sattras at a young age. They may or may not be celibate, depending on the kind of Sattra they are inducted into.

### What is Sankaradeva's philosophy?

- Sankaradeva propagated a form of Bhakti called eka-sharana-naam-dhrama, and espoused a society based on equality and fraternity, free from caste differences, orthodox Brahmanical rituals and sacrifices.
- His teaching focused on prayer and chanting (naam) instead of idol worship. His dharma was based on the four components of deva (god), naam (prayers), bhakats (devotees), and guru (teacher).
- Scholars, however, argue that post the demise of Sankaradeva, the nature of the Vaishnavite movement has changed significantly.

### Hunter's Syndrome

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Delhi High Court has set up a special committee to find a time-bound solution on ways to provide treatment and therapy options to patients suffering from rare diseases. The High Court's direction came while hearing a bunch of petitions filed by patients suffering from rare diseases such as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) and Hunter's syndromes seeking direction to the government to provide them uninterrupted free treatment in view of the exorbitant cost of treatment.*

### What is Hunter's Syndrome?

- Hunter syndrome is a very rare, inherited genetic disorder caused by a missing or malfunctioning enzyme.
- In Hunter syndrome, the body doesn't have enough of the enzyme iduronate 2-sulfatase. This enzyme's job is to break down certain complex molecules, and without enough of this enzyme, the molecules build up in harmful amounts.
- The buildup of massive amounts of these harmful substances eventually causes permanent, progressive damage affecting appearance, mental development, organ function and physical abilities.
- Hunter syndrome is far more common in boys. The condition is one type of a group of inherited metabolic disorders called mucopolysaccharidoses (MPSs). Hunter syndrome is also known as MPS II.
- There's no cure for Hunter syndrome. Treatment involves managing symptoms and complications.



## SC seeks States' views on 50% cap on quota

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

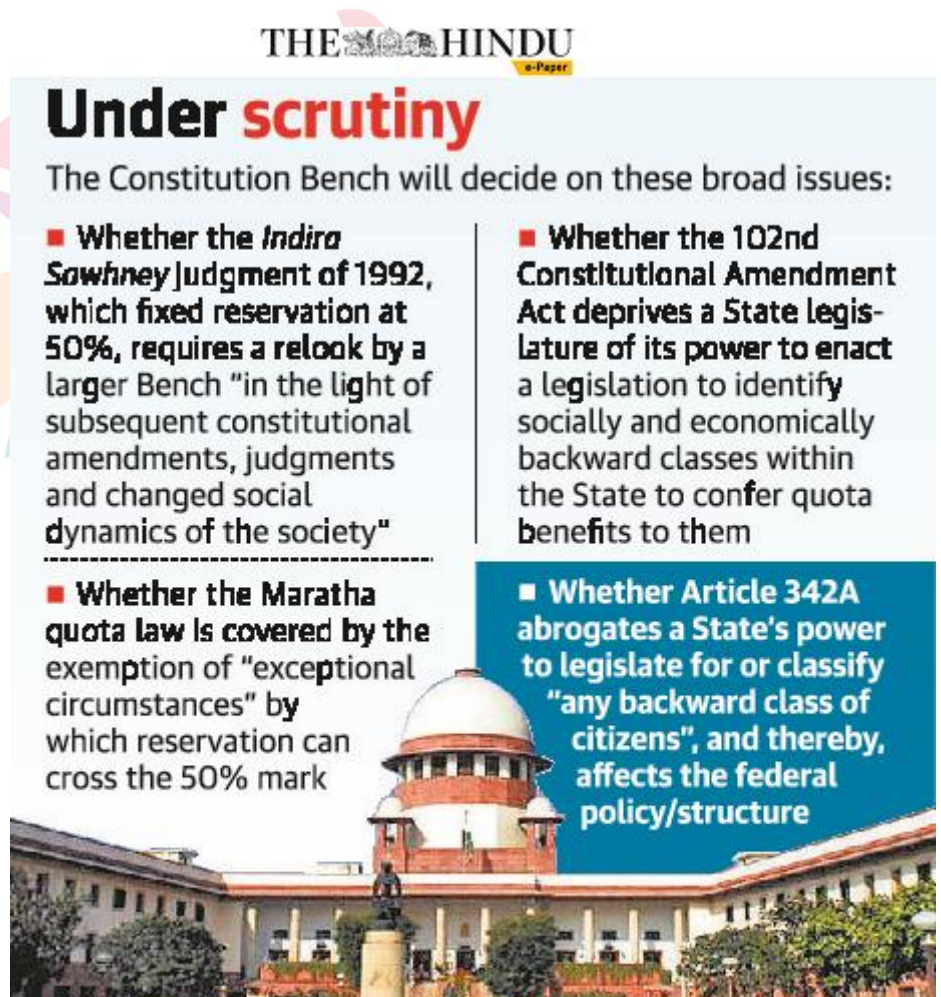
**Context:** The Supreme Court decided to examine whether its nearly three-decade-old judgment which fixed reservation for the marginalised and the poor in government jobs and educational institutions at 50% needs a relook.

### Background

- In 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the “Lakshman rekha” for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in “extraordinary circumstances”.
- However, over the years, several States, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, have crossed the Rubicon and passed laws which allow reservation shooting over 60%.

### Maratha quota law

- A five-judge Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, set up to hear the challenge to the Maratha quota law, decided not to confine the question of reservation spilling over the 50% limit to just Maharashtra.
- The Bench expanded the ambit of the case by making other States party and inviting them to make their stand clear on the question of whether reservation should continue to remain within the 50% boundary or not.
- Justice Bhushan, leading the Constitution Bench, decided to start the hearing from March 15, giving time for the other States to prepare their arguments.
- The court, meanwhile, framed a series of questions, which include whether the Indira Sawhney verdict of 1992, fixing 50% limit on quota, needs to be relooked by a larger Bench of more than nine judges.
- Another question is whether the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018, which provides 12% to 13% quota benefits for the Maratha community, thus taking the reservation percentage in the State across the 50% mark, was enacted under “extraordinary circumstances”.
- The Indira Sawhney judgment had categorically said “50% shall be the rule, and only in certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas population into mainstream the said 50% rule can be relaxed”.
- The court will also examine whether the Maharashtra State Backward Classes Commission, under the chairmanship of Justice M.C. Gaikwad, had made up a case of “extraordinary circumstances” of



deprivation suffered by the Maratha community, requiring the helping hand of reservation even at the cost of crossing the 50% line.

- In fact, the Bombay High Court had, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment.
- A significant question the Bench wants to judge is whether the Constitution (One Hundred Second Amendment) Act of 2018, which introduced the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), interferes with the authority of the State legislatures to provide benefit to the social and educationally backward communities in their own jurisdiction.
- The Constitution Amendment Act had introduced Articles 338B and 342A in the Constitution. Article 338B deals with the NCBC. Article 342A empowers the President to specify the socially and educationally backward communities in a State.
- It says that it is for the Parliament to include a community in the Central List for socially and backward classes for grant of reservation benefits.
- The court wants to delve into the issue whether Article 342A strips the State legislatures of their discretionary power to include their backward communities in the State List.

### **Parliamentary Standing Committee report on Water Resources**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the Jal Shakti Ministry in October 2020, according to information provided to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources.*

#### **Details:**

- Less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it, while it is available in only 2-6% of anganwadis in Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bengal.
- At a time when schools and anganwadis are just starting to reopen after a year-long shutdown, COVID-19 safety protocols require repeated handwashing by students and teachers. In its report on the demand for grants submitted to the Lok Sabha on Monday, the Standing Committee urged the Ministry to take up the matter with laggard States.
- The campaign to provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for washing hands and in toilets in every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school was launched on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti. The 100-day period should have ended on January 10, 2021.
- However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply, the Ministry told the Parliamentary panel.
- Seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab — achieved 100% coverage. A number of other States also made significant progress in that time, and 1.82 lakh grey water management structures and 1.42 lakh rainwater harvesting structures were also constructed in schools and anganwadi centres.



## **Cannabis cultivation in India**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *In a significant announcement in his annual budget speech, Himachal Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur announced that the state government is coming up with a policy to allow controlled cultivation of hemp or cannabis in the state. This means the state wants to legalise commercial cultivation of the plant for non-recreational uses such as making medicines and fabrics.*

### **Isn't cannabis cultivation illegal in India?**

- Yes and no. In 1985, India banned the cultivation of cannabis plant under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. But this Act allows state governments to allow controlled and regulated cultivation of hemp for obtaining its fibre and seed for industrial or horticultural purposes.
- In 2018, Uttarakhand became the first state in the country to do so, allowing the cultivation of only those strains of cannabis plant which have a low concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) — the primary psychoactive constituent of cannabis that produces a high sensation.
- Uttar Pradesh followed a similar policy, while Madhya Pradesh and Manipur are reportedly considering it as well.

### **What are the uses of hemp?**

- In parts of Himachal such as Kullu and Mandi, hemp had traditionally been used for making footwear, ropes, mats, food items, etc.
- Globally, cannabis products are increasingly being used for health and medicinal purposes, and the plant has also been used to make building material.

### **What are the psychoactive intoxicants prepared from cannabis plant?**

- Mainly charas and ganja. The separated resin of the plant is called charas or hashish and it can be concentrated to obtain hashish oil (in Himachal, charas and the cannabis plant, in general, are called bhang while elsewhere, bhang may refer to an intoxicating drink prepared from the plant).
- The dried flowers and leaves of the plant are called ganja or marijuana (also weed, pot or dope). Charas and ganja can be smoked and can also be used to prepare some edible drinks and foods.
- Currently, charas, ganja, or any mixture or drink prepared from the two products are banned in India under the NDPS Act, regardless of hemp cultivation.

## **Maitri Setu**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *PM to inaugurate 'Maitri Setu' between India and Bangladesh on 9th March.*

### **About Maitri Setu:**

- The bridge 'Maitri Setu' has been built over the Feni river which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura State and Bangladesh.
- The name 'Maitri Setu' symbolizes the growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.
- The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd at a project cost of Rs. 133 Crores.
- The 1.9 km long bridge joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.





- It is poised to herald a new chapter for trade and people to people movement between India and Bangladesh.
- With this inauguration, Tripura is set to become the 'Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 Kms from Sabroom.
- The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom, which will ease the movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, provide new market opportunities for products of North-East states and assist seamless movement of passengers to and from India and Bangladesh.

### **Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** MoU between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and the Central Silk Board on a convergence model for the implementation of Agroforestry in the silk sector under the ongoing Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme.

#### **About Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF):**

- This scheme has been implemented since 2016-16 as part of the recommendation of the National Agroforestry Policy 2014.
- It is implemented by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare in 20 states and 2 UTs.
- This sub-mission is under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- SMAF aims to encourage farmers to plant multi-purpose trees together with the agriculture crops for:
  - Climate resilience
  - Additional source of income to the farmers
  - Enhanced feedstock to inter alia wood-based and herbal industry
- Hence, there is a concerted effort to include medicinal, fruits, fodder, tree-borne oilseeds, lac host, etc. in addition to the longer rotation timber species.
- This is especially targeted for augmentation of sericulture host plants e.g. Mulberry, Asan, Arjuna, Som, Soalu, Kesseru, BadaKesseru, Phanat, etc. to be cultivated both as block plantations and border or peripheral plantations on farmlands.

### **Various schemes and programmes of Department of Science and Technology**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** DST has been committed to give a platform and help women having a career break to come back to mainstream careers in science: Dr. Sanjay Mishra, Head, KIRAN programme

- **Vigyan Jyoti:** Programme running in 50 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNV) since December 2019.
  - It has now been expanded to 50 more JNVs for the year 2021-22.
  - Activities include student-parent counselling, visit to labs and knowledge centres, interactions with role models, science camps, academic support classes, resource material distribution, and tinkering activities.
  - Online academic support to students includes streaming of video classes, study materials, daily practice problems, and doubt clearing sessions.



- **Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI):** Launched for mentoring of institutions for transforming them towards more inclusive and sensitive approach towards women and to promote gender equity in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM) domains.
  - The aim is to bring about gender balance in institutions.
- **Consolidation of University Research for Innovation and Excellence in Women Universities (CURIE):** Targets to improve infrastructure in women-only universities.
- **Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (WISTEMM):** Indo-US Fellowship that gives exposure to women to some of the best international scientific institutions for boosting their capability and enthusiasm.
- **Knowledge Involvement for Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) programme:** To provide various career opportunities to women scientists and technologists.
  - It is primarily aimed to bring gender parity in the Science & Technology sector by inducting more women talent in the research & development domain through various programmes.
- **Women Scientist Scheme (WOS scheme):** addresses the challenges faced by S&T qualified women primarily due to social responsibilities.
  - Its two components WOS-A and WOS-B are directly implemented by the KIRAN Division and the third component WOS-C or KIRAN-IPR is implemented by TIFAC with grant-in-aid from DST.
  - The WOS was launched to address the critical issues of “career-break”, identify neglected well-qualified women in the field of S&T and to provide opportunities to women scientists.
  - Women Scientist Scheme-A (WOS-A) – Research in Basic/Applied Science
  - Women Scientist Scheme-B (WOS-B) – S&T interventions for Societal Benefit
  - Women Scientist Scheme-C (WOS-C) – Internship in Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) for the Self-Employment

## UAPA

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *There has been over 72% increase in the number of persons arrested under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act) in 2019 compared to year 2015, data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the Lok Sabha show.*

### About UAPA

- **The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 enables more effective prevention of certain unlawful activities of individuals and associations** and for dealing with terrorist activities, and other related matters.

### Extent and Application of this Act

- It is applicable across the entire country
- Any Indian or foreign national charged under UAPA is liable for punishment under this Act, irrespective of the location of crime/offense committed
- UAPA will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if the crime is committed on foreign land, outside India
- **The provisions of this Act apply also to citizens of India and abroad.**
- Persons on ships and aircraft, registered in India, wherever they may be are also under the ambit of this act.

### Definition of the Unlawful Activity in India

- unlawful activity” refers to any action taken by individual or association (whether by committing an act or by words, either spoken or written or by signs to questions, disclaims, disrupts, or is intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.
- This act also prohibits the cession of a part of the territory of India or the secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union, or which provoke any individual or group of individuals to bring about such cession or secession.

#### **Changes in The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967**

- The union cabinet not only changed the NIA act of 2008 but also changed the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. Lok Sabha passed the NIA amendment act, 2019 on Jul 15, 2019, and Rajya Sabha Passed it on 17th July 2019.
- Amendment to Schedule 4 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act will allow the NIA to declare an individual suspected to have terror links as a terrorist.
- Currently, only organisations are designated as 'terrorist organisations' but after the change in the UAPA, 1967 an individual can also be termed a terror suspect.

### **Polavaram Irrigation Project**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** Government of Andhra Pradesh has informed that the earlier completion schedule for Polavaram Irrigation Project (PIP) was December, 2021. However, in its 13th meeting held in November, 2020, it has been revised to April, 2022.

#### **About the Polavaram Irrigation Project:**

- It is an under construction multi-purpose national irrigation project on the Godavari River in the West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh.
- It has been given national project status by GOI.
- The reservoir covers the famous Papikonda National Park.
- Even though the first conceptual proposal for the project was mooted in 1941, the foundation stone was laid in 1980.
- The project will provide irrigation benefits in the upland areas of Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari and Krishna Districts.
- It will also provide drinking water supply to Visakhapatnam Township and other towns and villages enroute and industrial water supply to the Visakhapatnam coast based steel plant and other industries in the vicinity.
- It is also envisaged to generate hydel power, provide navigation facilities, develop pisciculture, and boost urbanisation and offer recreational facilities as well.
- It is located in Polavaram, Andhra Pradesh.
- The project is touted as the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh.

## Conservation of the Sun Temple at Konark

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Several steps have been taken by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to mitigate the impact of saline action, water logging, erosion and vegetative intrusions on monuments, including the Sun Temple, Konark.*

### **About Sun Temple, Konark:**

- The Konark Sun temple is dedicated to the Hindu sun god Surya, and, conceived as a giant stone chariot with 12 wheels, it is the most famous of the few sun temples built in India.
- It was built around 1240 or 1250 CE by King Narasimhadeva I (r. 1238-1264 CE) of the Eastern Ganga dynasty.
- It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984.
- Architecture:
  - The temple is built in the **Kalinga style** of temple architecture, which is a sub-type of the Nagara style.
  - Its shikhara which was said to be 70m high fell in the 19th century.
  - The jagamohana (mandapa) has survived. This is the largest enclosed space in Hindu architecture although it is not accessible any more.
  - The temple is set on a high base. There are detailed carvings. There are 12 pairs of gigantic wheels sculpted with spokes and hubs representing the chariot wheels of the sun god. The whole temple resembles a processional chariot.
  - On the southern wall, there is a huge sculpture of Surya or sun god made of greenstone. It is believed that there were 3 more such images in different directions made out of different stones. The fourth wall had the doorway from which the sun rays would enter the garbhagriha.
- The temple is beautifully sculptured with visually overwhelming narratives.
- It attracts many tourists every year.
- The Konark Sun Temple is depicted on the reverse side of the Indian currency note of Rs 10 to signify its importance to Indian cultural heritage
- The temple was called 'Black Pagoda' in European sailor accounts as early as 1676 because it looked a great tower which appeared black.
- This temple, along with the Puri Jagannath Temple, served as important landmarks for sailors in the Bay of Bengal.



## Kala-azar

**Context:** *Seven new cases of Kala-azar or Visceral Leishmaniasis have been reported in the last one week in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, casting serious doubt on the state government's efforts to eradicate the disease in the state by 2022.*

### **What is Kala Azar?**



- Kala azar is a slow advancing and naturally occurring disease that is caused by a protozoan parasite of Leishmania genus. In India, the only parasite that causes this disease is Leishmania donovani.
- The parasite mainly infects the reticuloendothelial system and can also be found in abundance in bone marrow, liver and spleen.
- The condition when Leishmania donovani invades skin cells, stays and develops and shows dermal lesions is known as Post Kala-azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL). Certain kala-azar cases show PKDL after a few years of treatment.
- According to recent studies, PKDL may appear without passing through visceral stage. However, satisfying data is yet to be produced in the course of PKDL.

### Kala-Azar Symptoms

- Loss of interest and desire of everything, pale appearance, loss of weight with weakness.
- Abnormal enlargement of the spleen, usually nontender and soft.
- Dry, skin and scaly skin of hands, abdomen, feet and face that gives the Indian name Kala-azar which means 'Black Fever'.
- Anaemia (a condition of deficiency of haemoglobin or red cells in the blood) progresses rapidly.
- Anaemia along with emaciation (weakness) creates a typical appearance of the affected person.

### Kerala HC restrains Centre on IT rules

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

**Context:** The Kerala High Court restrained the Centre from taking coercive action against Live Law Media Private Ltd., which owns a legal news portal, for not complying with Part III of the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

#### Details:

- The court issued notice to the Centre on a petition filed by the firm challenging the rules regulating digital news media, curated content (OTT platforms), and social media intermediaries.
- When the petition came up, counsel for the Centre submitted that there was time till March 24 for complying with the rules.
- The petition said Part III of the rules imposed an unconstitutional three-tier complaints and adjudication structure on publishers.
- This administrative regulation on digital news media would make it virtually impossible for small or medium-sized publishers, such as the petitioner, to function. It would have a chilling effect on such entities, the petition said.
- The creation of a grievance redressal mechanism, through a governmental oversight body (an inter-departmental committee constituted under Rule 14) amounted to excessive regulation, it contended.



- The petitioner pointed out that Rule 4(2), which makes it mandatory for every social media intermediary to enable tracing of originators of information on its platform, purportedly in furtherance of Section 69 of the IT Act, violated Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression).
- It also deprived the intermediaries of their “safe-harbour protections” under Section 79 of the IT Act.
- The petition also added that the rules obligating messaging intermediaries to alter their infrastructure to “fingerprint” each message on a mass scale for every user to trace the first originator was violative of the fundamental right to privacy of Internet users.

### **COTPA 2003**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *Doctors, cancer victims and restaurateurs in Assam have asked the Centre to amend the COTPA 2003 for removing designated smoking rooms in hotels, restaurants and airports to protect people from second-hand smoke.*

#### **Details:**

- COTPA expands to **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003.**
- The doctors, cancer victims and restaurateurs made the appeal at a function in Guwahati to mark World No Smoking Day on Wednesday.
- Appreciating the government for initiating the process to amend COTPA 2003, they sought immediate removal of a current provision that permits smoking areas to make India 100% smoking-free and check the spread of COVID-19 infection in the country.
- Section 4 of the COTPA 2003 prohibits smoking in any place to which the public has access.
- But the Act allows smoking in designated smoking areas of certain public places such as restaurants, hotels and airports.
- Anti-tobacco activists said exposure to passive smoking happens in hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs and clubs, risking the lives of thousands of non-smokers.

### **Lok Sabha gives approval for National Capital Territory Bill**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Lok Sabha passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that seeks to regularise unauthorised colonies that existed in the National Capital Territory of Delhi as on June 1, 2014, and had seen development up to 50% as on January 1, 2015.*

#### **Survey extension**

- Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri, speaking on the Bill, said there “was a public perception that the issues with regard to unauthorised colonies were delayed by those who were in office earlier.”
- In 1947, 17% of the total population of the country lived in urban areas, Delhi’s population at that time was eight lakh. After partition and relocation, it went up to 22 lakhs, and I expect that during the Census of 2021, the population would be close to two crore people.
- Mr. Puri also quoted a letter received by his Ministry from the Delhi government seeking the extension of a survey of unauthorised colonies. “That is why we brought this Bill,” he said.



- Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi, said that a large number of people living in unauthorised colonies in Delhi were not receiving proper amenities and that this Bill provided ownership rights to those living in these colonies.
- It would facilitate access to institutional credit and also improve the basic amenities.
- The Bill was then passed by voice vote. The government had introduced the Bill and got it cleared in the Rajya Sabha in February, in the first part of the Budget session.

## **INS Karanj**

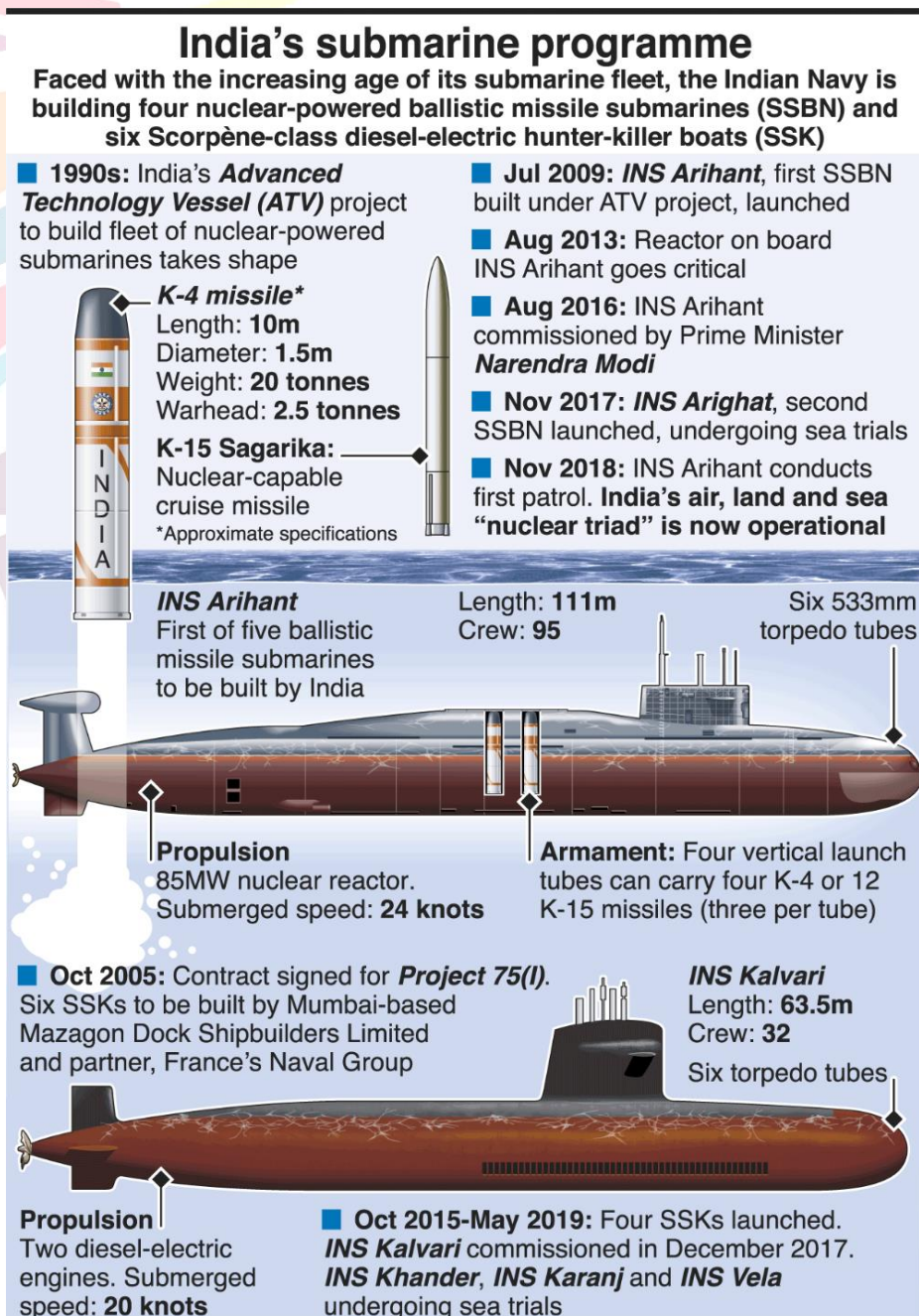
(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** The Indian Navy inducted its third Scorpene-class conventional diesel electric submarine, *INS Karanj*, into service.

The first submarine of the class, *INS Kalvari*, was commissioned in December 2017 and the second, *INS Khanderi*, in September 2019. A fourth submarine, *Vela*, was launched into the water in May 2019 and the fifth, *Vagir*, in November 2020, and both are undergoing sea trials. The sixth is in an advanced stage of outfitting.

### **What are Scorpene-class submarines?**

- The Scorpene class submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world. The submarine has superior stealth features, such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels and ability to attack with precision-guided weapons on board.
- The Indian Navy intends to use the submarines for missions such as area surveillance, intelligence gathering, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare and minelaying operations. The submarines are armed with six torpedo-launching tubes, 18 heavy weapons, tube-launched MBDA SM-39 Exocet anti-ship missiles and precision-guided weapons. It can launch crippling attacks on



Sources: IISS, Jane's Defence Weekly, The Diplomat

© GRAPHIC NEWS



surface and underwater enemy targets.

- Moreover, the attack submarines can travel at a maximum submerged speed of approximately 20 knots and have the ability to remain submerged for 21 days. It has a diving depth of more than 350m.
- The Scorpene class of submarines were designed by French naval shipbuilding firm DCNS in partnership with Spanish shipbuilding firm Navantia.

### What is INS Karanj?

- Karanj has been equipped with the best sensors in the world and is fitted with an integrated platform management system to provide centralised propulsion and machinery control.
- The powerful diesel engines can quickly charge batteries for a stealthy mission profile. Also, its modular construction enables upgradation to air independent propulsion in future.
- She is fitted with a permanent magnetic synchronous motor, making it one of the quietest submarines in the world.

### Project 75I

- Under this project of the Indian Navy, six latest-generation attack submarines are being built. They are expected to be completed by 2022. The project is taking shape at Mazagon Dock in Mumbai.
- Naval Group is among the five Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) shortlisted for the Navy's project that was processed through the Strategic Partnership (SP) model of defence procurement. MDL and Larsen & Toubro are the two Indian companies shortlisted under it.

### The History of Karanj

- The earlier version of the submarine, which belonged to the Foxtrot class, was first commissioned in 1969 at Riga in the erstwhile USSR.
- A proposal to form a submarine arm, also referred to as the silent arm, of the Indian Navy was first envisaged in 1959, but it was only in 1964 that the Soviet government agreed for transfer by purchase for four Foxtrot-class submarines, of which INS Karanj was a part.
- All the four constituted the 8th Submarine Squadron and played a key role during the 1970-71 Indo-Pak war.
- The INS Karanj went on to serve the nation for 34 years till 2003. In recognition of the valiant action of her officers and crew, a number of personnel were decorated, including the award of Vir Chakra to the then commanding officer V S Shekhawat.

### **DoT's notification on trusted telecom equipment**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has amended the licensing conditions for telecom companies to include defence and national security as parameters when purchasing 'trusted telecom products' and sourcing equipment from 'trusted telecom equipment sources'.*

### What are trusted telecom products or trusted telecom equipment sources?

- With the advent of technology, some countries such as China, the US, Russia, Japan stole a march over others in developing new technology that would be able to carry signals over long distances without much interference. This was overall good for betterment of technology in the telecom space.
- However, due to geo-political tensions, these countries, over time, became non-trusting of one another's technological advances and accused each other of spying using modern technologies. This resulted in



each nation curating its own list of companies, countries and products that it trusted, especially in crucial sectors such as telecom.

- A trusted telecom product or a trusted telecom equipment source, therefore, is simply a product, a company, or a technology that has been deemed safe by the government of a country for use in crucial and critical infrastructure.
- In December last year, India's Cabinet Committee on Security approved the setting up of a new National Security Directive on telecommunication sector with an intent to classify telecom products and their sources under the 'trusted' and 'non-trusted' categories.
- The list of products telecom companies will be allowed to use in their network would be approved by the National Cyber Security Coordinator, which in turn will make its decision based on the approval of a committee headed by the deputy National Security Advisor (NSA). The expert committee will also have members from other departments and ministries, independent experts as well as two industry members.

#### **What does the DoT's notification on trusted telecom equipment say?**

- The DoT amended the telecom licensing norms and included defence and national security as parameters for the purchase of trusted telecom products and from trusted equipment sources.
- Including defence and national security as parameters means the designated authority can, at any time, citing these two aspects, ask telecom companies not to use products which it has deemed unsafe.
- The new norms will kick in from June 15, following which telecom companies will not be able to use any products that do not appear on the trusted telecom equipment source list or the trusted telecom product list.
- If a telecom company wishes to expand its network by using any equipment that does not come from a trusted source or is not on the list of trusted telecom products, it will have to take prior permission from the designated authority, which is the National Cyber Security Coordinator.

#### **Which companies or countries will the new policy impact?**

- The new policy could potentially make it more difficult for Chinese telecom equipment vendors like Huawei and ZTE to supply equipment to Indian telecom players in the future. Both, Huawei and ZTE, have been under global scrutiny for allegedly installing 'backdoor' or 'trap door' vulnerabilities and spying for the Chinese government and have been banned by several countries.
- Of the three telcos, almost 30 per cent of Bharti Airtel's existing network comprises Chinese telecom equipment, it is as much as 40 per cent for Vodafone Idea. State-run telcos Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL), too, have equipment from Chinese vendors, including Huawei and ZTE, in their 3G and older networks.

### **Sebi's new AT1 bond norms**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The decision of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to slap restrictions on mutual fund (MF) investments in additional tier-1 (AT1) bonds has raised a storm in the MF and banking sectors. The Finance Ministry has asked the regulator to withdraw the changes as it could lead to disruption in the investments of mutual funds and the fund-raising plans of banks.*

#### **What are AT1 bonds? What's total outstanding in these bonds?**

- AT1 Bonds stand for additional tier-1 bonds. These are unsecured bonds which have perpetual tenure. In other words, the bonds have no maturity date.

- They have call option, which can be used by the banks to buy these bonds back from investors. These bonds are typically used by banks to bolster their core or tier-1 capital.
- AT1 bonds are subordinate to all other debt and only senior to common equity. Mutual funds (MFs) are among the largest investors in perpetual debt instruments, and hold over Rs 35,000 crore of the outstanding additional tier-I bond issuances of Rs 90,000 crore.

#### **What action has been taken by the Sebi recently and why?**

- In a recent circular, the Sebi told mutual funds to value these perpetual bonds as a 100-year instrument.
- This essentially means MFs have to make the assumption that these bonds would be redeemed in 100 years.
- The regulator also asked MFs to limit the ownership of the bonds at 10 per cent of the assets of a scheme.
- According to the Sebi, these instruments could be riskier than other debt instruments. The Sebi has probably made this decision after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed a write-off of Rs 8,400 crore on AT1 bonds issued by Yes Bank Ltd after it was rescued by State Bank of India (SBI).

### **Seabuckthorn**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to start planting seabuckthorn in the cold desert areas of the state this year, Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur announced in his budget speech last week. We explain the ecological and medical benefits of this bush.*

#### **What is seabuckthorn?**

- It's a shrub which produces an orange-yellow coloured edible berry. In India, it is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region, generally in dry areas such as the cold deserts of Ladakh and Spiti. In Himachal Pradesh, it is locally called chharma and grows in the wild in Lahaul and Spiti and parts of Kinnaur.
- According to the Seabuckthorn Association of India, around 15,000 hectares in Himachal, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are covered by this plant.

#### **What are the ecological, medicinal and economical benefits of the seabuckthorn plant?**

- As a folk medicine, seabuckthorn has been widely used for treating stomach, heart and skin problems. In the last few decades, scientific research worldwide has backed many of its traditional uses.
- Its fruit and leaves are rich in vitamins, carotenoids and omega fatty acids, among other substances, and it can help troops in acclimatising to high-altitude.
- Besides being an important source of fuelwood and fodder, seabuckthorn is a soil-binding plant which prevents soil-erosion, checks siltation in rivers and helps preserve floral biodiversity.
- In the Lahaul valley, where willow trees are dying in large numbers due to pest attack, this hardy shrub is a good alternative for protecting the local ecology.
- Seabuckthorn also has commercial value, as it is used in making juices, jams, nutritional capsules etc.
- But wild seabuckthorn cannot sustainably supply raw material to the industry, and the plant needs to be cultivated on a large scale as is being done in China.

## **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Supreme Court asked the Centre to respond to a plea challenging the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. In agreeing to examine the law, the court has opened the doors for litigation in various places of worship across the country including Mathura and Varanasi.*

### **What is the law about?**

- Passed in 1991 by the P V Narasimha Rao-led Congress government, the law seeks to maintain the “religious character” of places of worship as it was in 1947 — except in the case of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, which was already in court.
- The law was brought in at the peak of the Ram Mandir movement, exactly a year before the demolition of the Babri Masjid.
- Introducing the law, then Home Minister S B Chavan said in Parliament that it was adopted to curb communal tension.

### **What are its provisions?**

- The clause declaring the objective of the law describes it as “an Act to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”.
- Sections 3 and 4 of the Act declare that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947 and that no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- Section 4(2) says that all suits, appeals or other proceedings regarding converting the character of a place of worship, that were pending on August 15, 1947, will stand abated when the Act commences and no fresh proceedings can be filed.
- However, legal proceedings can be initiated with respect to the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship after the commencement of the Act if the change of status took place after the cut-off date of August 15, 1947.

### **What does it say about Ayodhya, and what else is exempted?**

- Section 5 says: “Act not to apply to Ram Janma Bhumi Babri Masjid. Nothing contained in this Act shall apply to the place or place of worship commonly known as Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid situated in Ayodhya in the State of Uttar Pradesh and to any suit, appeal or other proceeding relating to the said place or place of worship.”
- Besides the Ayodhya dispute, the Act also exempted:
  - any place of worship that is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site, or is covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958;
  - a suit that has been finally settled or disposed of;
  - any dispute that has been settled by the parties or conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence before the Act commenced.

## **Herath**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *PM greets people on Herath.*

### **What is Herath?**

- The festival of Mahashivaratri, celebrated all over India, is locally known as Herath in Jammu & Kashmir.
- It is a three-day festival and symbolizes the values of devotion and harmony.
- The Kashmiri Pandit community celebrates this festival with religious fervour by offering “Watak Nath Pooja”.
- The festival marks the wedding of Lord Shiva with Goddess Parvati.

## **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Cabinet approves creation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi.*

### **About Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi:**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN) as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for share of Health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess.
- It is a non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account.
- Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
- Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the following flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare:
  - Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)
  - Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)
  - National Health Mission
  - Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)
  - Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies
  - Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.
- The scheme is under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- The major benefit of the scheme will be enhanced access to universal & affordable health care through the availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of the financial year.

## **Exercise DUSTLIK II**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *The India – Uzbekistan joint military exercise “DUSTLIK II” commenced at Ranikhet (Uttarakhand).*

### **About Ex DUSTLIK:**



- This is the Second Edition of the annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies. The first edition was held in Uzbekistan in 2019.
- Both contingents will be sharing their expertise and skills in the field of counter-terrorist operations in mountainous/rural/urban scenario under UN mandate. The exercise will culminate into a 36 hour-joint validation exercise.
- This joint exercise will provide impetus to the growing military and diplomatic ties between the two nations and also reflects the strong resolve of both nations to counter-terrorism.

### **Shramik Kalyan Portal**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Indian Railways ensures 100% compliance of payment of minimum wages to contract workers through e-application Shramik Kalyan Portal.*

#### **About Shramik Kalyan Portal:**

- The Shramik Kalyan e-application of the national transporter was launched in October 2018, which ensures the compliance of provisions of the Minimum Wages Act.
- Besides, it also ensures that contractual workers who are working in Indian Railways get their rightful due by enforcing them to upload wage payment data regularly into the e-application.
- This helps the Railways to keep vigil over wages disbursed by contractors to contract workers.
- This e-application is also being used by all PSUs working under the Railway Ministry.
- The Shramik Kalyan Portal allows all the contractors of various Indian Railways units i.e., divisions/PUs/workshops/PSUs to register themselves on the portal and add Work Orders subsequently, that are issued by different units of Indian Railways to them.
- To ensure that wages paid by the contractors conform to Minimum Wages fixed by the government, there are checks in the portal from time to time.



## INTERNATIONAL

### 2001 FO32

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *On March 21, the largest asteroid predicted to pass by Earth in 2021 will be at its closest. It won't come closer than 2 million km to Earth, but it will present a valuable scientific opportunity for astronomers who can get a good look at a rocky relic that formed at the dawn of our Solar System.*

#### Speed & distance

- Scientists know its orbital path around the Sun very accurately, since it was discovered 20 years ago and has been tracked ever since.
- For comparison, when it is at its closest, the distance of 2 million km is equal to  $5\frac{1}{4}$  times the distance from Earth to the Moon. Still, that distance is close in astronomical terms, which is why 2001 FO32 has been designated a “potentially hazardous asteroid”.
- During this approach, 2001 FO32 will pass by at about 124,000 kph – faster than the speed at which most asteroids encounter Earth. The reason for the asteroid's unusually speedy close approach is its highly eccentric orbit around the Sun, an orbit that is tilted  $39^\circ$  to Earth's orbital plane. This orbit takes the asteroid closer to the Sun than Mercury, and twice as far from the Sun as Mars.
- As 2001 FO32 makes its inner solar system journey, the asteroid picks up speed. In a statement announcing the upcoming approach, NASA likened the asteroid's picking up of speed to a skateboarder rolling down a halfpipe. Later, the asteroid slows after being flung back out into deep space and swinging back toward the Sun. It completes one orbit every 810 days (about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  years).
- After its brief visit, 2001 FO32 will continue its lonely voyage, not coming this close to Earth again until 2052, when it will pass by at about seven lunar distances, or 2.8 million km.
- Even if it is at the smaller end of the scale, 2001 FO32 will still be the largest asteroid to pass this close to our planet in 2021. The last notably large asteroid close approach was that of 1998 OR2 on April 29, 2020. While 2001 FO32 is somewhat smaller than 1998 OR2, it will be three times nearer to Earth.

### Child Tax Credit of USA

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Buried in US President Joe Biden's historic \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, passed by the Senate on Saturday, is a radical provision that could benefit approximately 66 million American children.*

#### Details:

- The Biden administration's **American Rescue Plan** includes the enhanced Child Tax Credit bill, which, if approved, would provide parents with a whopping \$3,600 (Around Rs 2.6 lakh) per child under the age of six and \$3,000 (around Rs 2.2 lakh) per child of age six through 17 for a single year.
- The proposal is not new. It is an expanded version of a pre-existing policy. Apart from making the child tax credit available for more families in the US, the **latest coronavirus stimulus bill** would also increase the overall amount received by parents.

#### What exactly is the Child Tax Credit?



- The Child Tax Credit is given to parents and caregivers to help reduce their tax bill. Under the existing policy, American taxpayers can claim a credit of up to \$2,000 for each qualifying child — a US citizen under the age of 17, who has lived with the taxpaying caregiver for a minimum of six months.
- Taxpayers also have the option of availing of a partial refund if the credit exceeds the amount of taxes that the family owes. As of now, parents can get up to \$1,400 of the balance as a refund, which is known as the additional child tax credit (ACTC) or refundable CTC.
- To be eligible for the credit, a taxpayer must earn at least \$2,500. Married couples filing jointly with an adjusted gross income (AGI) of up to \$400,000 can avail of the full credit, as can individuals with an AGI of less than \$200,000.
- For people earning more than these limits, only a partial credit is permitted. The credit is reduced by \$50 for every \$1,000 of additional income.





# Mains

## GS I

### Significance of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

#### Details:

- On the 91st anniversary of the historic salt march led by Mahatma Gandhi from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off a symbolic 386-kilometre 'Dandi march', following the same route on Friday. The PM also launched Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav to celebrate 75 years of India's Independence.
- The 24-day march from March 12 to April 5, 1930 was a tax resistance campaign against the British salt monopoly. Based on Gandhi's principle of non-violence or Satyagraha, the march marked the inauguration of the civil disobedience movement.
- The Dandi march was easily the most significant organised movement against the British Raj after the non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s. In all the attention that it drew from the national and international media and world leaders, it was truly a turning point in the Indian Independence movement.



#### Why did Gandhi call for the Dandi March?

- The 1882 Salt Act gave the British a monopoly in the manufacture and sale of salt. Even though salt was freely available on the coasts of India, Indians were forced to buy it from the colonisers. Gandhi decided that if there was any one product through which the civil disobedience could be inaugurated, then it was salt.
- "Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life," he said, explaining his choice, even though many in the working committee of the Congress were not too sure about it. The British government, including the Viceroy Lord Irwin too did not take the prospect of a campaign against the salt tax too seriously.
- Addressing a massive gathering in Ahmedabad on March 8, Gandhi declared his decision to break the salt laws. "That is for me one step, the first step, towards full freedom," he said as quoted in historian Ramachandra Guha's book, 'Gandhi: The years that changed the world (1914-1948)'. Guha wrote, "Gandhi wanted this to be a long march, or pilgrimage perhaps, where his leisurely progress would



enthuse people along the way and attract wider publicity too.” Finally, he decided on Dandi to be the point at which the salt law would be broken.

### **What happened during the march?**

- There was great excitement in Ahmedabad on the eve of the march. A large crowd gathered around Sabarmati ashram and stayed through the night. Gandhi wrote to Nehru that night, informing him about rumours of his arrest. That did not happen though and Gandhi woke up a free man the following day.
- He gathered his walking mates, a group of 78 men, who were bona fide ashramites. These included Manilal Gandhi from South Africa and several others from all across India. “There were thirty-one marchers from Gujarat, thirteen from Maharashtra, lesser numbers from the United Provinces, Kerala, Punjab and Sindh, with Tamilnad, Andhra, Karnataka, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa sending one man apiece. The diversity was social as well as geographical, for among the chosen marchers were many students and khadi workers, several ‘untouchables’, a few Muslims and one Christian,” wrote Guha. Even though women too wanted to be part of the march, Gandhi preferred to keep it restricted to men alone.
- They started out at 6:30 AM, amidst a large group cheering them along with flowers, greetings and rupee notes. On their way they stopped at a number of villages, where Gandhi addressed large crowds with fiery speeches on the need to boycott the salt tax.
- Newspapers of the day reported on how at every stop Gandhi was greeted by enthusiastic followers. “Indescribable scenes of enthusiasm marked the progress of the march of the Swaraj Army on this fourth day. . . . The rich and the poor, millionaires and mazurs [workers], ‘caste’ Hindus and so-called untouchables, one and all, vied with one another in honouring India’s great liberator,” noted a report in the Bombay Chronicle. Other newspapers, particularly the international ones like the Time magazine and The Daily Telegraph, though provided a much bleaker picture of the march.
- Gandhi reached Dandi on April 5. The following day, early morning he proceeded along with the other marchers to the sea, where he picked up lumps of natural salt lying in a small pit. The act was symbolic, but was hugely covered by the press, and was the beginning of several other acts of civil disobedience in other parts of India.
- “With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire,” said Gandhi while picking up the salt in his hand. “Now that the technical or ceremonial breach of the Salt Law has been committed it is open to any one who would take the risk of prosecution under the Salt Law to manufacture salt wherever he wishes and wherever it is convenient. My advice is that the workers should everywhere manufacture salt to make use of it and to instruct the villagers to do so,” he told a representative of the Free Press.

### **What was the significance of the Dandi march?**

- The popularity gained by the march shook up the British government. It responded by arresting more than 95,000 people by March 31. The following month Gandhi proceeded to Dharasana salt works from where he was arrested and taken to the Yerawada Central Jail.
- As Gandhi broke the salt laws in Dandi, similar acts of civil disobedience took place in other parts of India. In Bengal, for instance, volunteers led by Satish Chandra Dasgupta walked from Sodepur Ashram to the village of Mahisbathan to make salt. K.F Nariman in Bombay led another group of marchers to Haji Ali Point where they prepared salt at a nearby park.
- The illegal manufacture and sale of salt was accompanied by the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. What started as salt satyagraha soon grew into mass satyagraha. Forest laws were flouted in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Central Provinces. Peasants in Gujarat and Bengal refused to pay land and chowkidari taxes. Acts of violence too broke out in Calcutta, Karachi and Gujarat, but unlike what happened during the non-cooperation movement, Gandhi refused to suspend the civil disobedience movement this time.
- The Congress Working Committee decided to end the Satyagraha only in 1934. Even though it did not immediately lead to self rule or dominion status, the Salt Satyagraha did have some long term effects. “Indian, British and world opinion increasingly recognised the legitimate claims of Gandhi and the



Congress for Indian Independence,” wrote Richard L. Johnson who authored the book, ‘Gandhi’s experiments with truth: Essential writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi’. Moreover, the British also realised that control over India now depended completely on the consent of the Indians.

## GS II

### Gender insensitivity of the Judiciary

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** A survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation in 2018 had rated India as the most dangerous country for women. According to a National Crime Records Bureau report (2019) as many as 32,032 rapes were reported in 2019 — or 88 incidents of rape a day. Every hour, 39 instances of crime against women including four instances of rape are committed in India. Reported rape cases have increased by 88% over a decade. Four lakh cases of crimes against women were reported in 2019.

#### Gender insensitivity

- The recent observations by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), S.A. Bobde, while granting bail to a government servant who is accused of repeated rape and torture of a 16-year-old child have been widely criticised though the Chief Justice of India has now denied having suggested marriage to the rape accused.
- To be fair to the head of India’s judiciary, not only was the question possibly raised due to the record before him in accordance with the powers of judges under Section 165 of Indian Evidence Act, 1872 to ask any question but he also did promptly realise the sensitivity involved and quickly corrected himself by saying, ‘we are not forcing you to marry the victim’.
- The worrisome issue is that legally speaking, rape is not even a compoundable offence and parties are not allowed to enter into compromise. Seeking an apology from the Chief Justice of India is not appropriate; however, South African Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng was recently directed by the Judicial Conduct Committee to apologise unconditionally for making pro-Israeli comments in a webinar.
- The real problem is that such avoidable utterances reflect the patriarchal mindset of our judges and the larger society. These statements demonstrate our gender insensitivity. While today the Chief Justice of India is being criticised from all over, let us remember that there have been several orders and judgments by Indian judges in the past which have done huge disservice to gender justice.
- Accordingly, the innocent question by the Chief Justice of India (“When two people are living as husband and wife, however brutal the husband is, can the act of intercourse between them be called rape?”) is neither the first nor the last instance.
- Here, in this instance, the man had married the victim at a temple and subsequently refused to recognise her as wife and married another woman. The accused had allegedly caused injuries to the private parts of the woman, yet was granted bail. Here again, what the Chief Justice of India said was similar to the Modi government’s affidavit, in 2017, in the Delhi High Court.
- The RSS too had opposed marital rape being made a crime. Interestingly, the Justice J.S. Verma Committee (2013), which was constituted after the Delhi gang rape (2012) had said that rape should be viewed not as an infringement of a woman’s chastity or virginity but a violation of her bodily integrity and sexual autonomy.
- This autonomy cannot be permanently lost by entering into marriage. Rape remains rape irrespective of the relationship.



### **In the higher judiciary**

- Let us look at similar observations by other judges to understand the patriarchal attitude of judges. A few years ago, the top court orally asked a convict who had molested a girl 10 years ago to fall at her feet and that if she forgave him, the Court too would limit his sentence of imprisonment to the period already undergone.
- In its June 22, 2020 order while granting advance bail to the rape accused, Justice Krishna S. Dixit of the Karnataka High Court asked why 'the victim had gone to her office at night'; why had she 'not objected to consuming drinks with him'. He further observed that 'the explanation offered by the complainant that after the perpetration of the act, she was tired and fell asleep is unbecoming of Indian women; that is not the way our women react when they are ravished'.
- After a hue and cry, the judge expunged this controversial statement on July 2, 2020. The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court, in a strange ruling, had ordered that the sentence of the 'rape convict can be cut if he agrees to pay ₹1 lakh to the victim'. Of course, the poor victim accepted the offer. In another case, the Bombay High Court had ordered that breaking a promise of marriage is neither cheating nor rape.
- Here, the victim had filed for divorce from her husband to marry the accused. Justice Mridul Bhatkar granted bail to the accused observing that 'it is an unfortunate case of frustrated love affair'. The Madras High Court had granted bail to a rape accused so that he could mediate with the victim. The Supreme Court had to quickly intervene to get the bail cancelled.

### **The Bhanwari Devi case**

- Who can forget the shocking decision in Bhanwari Devi (1995); she was gang-raped in 1992. The acquittal order by the Rajasthan court gave absurd reasons such as a higher caste man cannot rape a lower caste woman for reasons of purity; her husband could not have watched his wife being raped; men who are 60-70 years old cannot commit rape and one relative cannot commit rape in front of another relative. It has been 25 years but the appeal against such a bizarre judgment has not been disposed of.
- Even in other matters about women, a few of our judges at times demonstrate our society's attitude toward women. A 2020 judgment from the Guwahati High Court treated refusal of applying sindoor (vermilion) and wearing conch shell bangles (shaka) as sufficient basis to grant divorce to the husband.
- A few years ago, the Madras High Court gave an absurd order by directing that 'divorcees too should maintain sexual purity to claim alimony'. Even a progressive judge like Justice M. Katju in D. Velusamy vs D. Patchaiammal (2010) had termed a second Hindu wife as a 'mistress' and 'keep', and thus not entitled to maintenance.
- In Narendra vs K. Meena (2016), the top court held that under Hindu traditions, a wife on marriage is supposed to fully integrate herself with her husband's family and that if she refuses to live with her in-laws, it would amount to cruelty and the husband would be entitled to divorce her under the Hindu Marriage Act. The High Court had ruled in favour of the wife.
- But the Supreme Court reversed the High Court's order, observing that 'in India, generally people do not subscribe to the western thought, where, upon getting married or attaining majority, the son gets separated from the family. In normal circumstances, a wife is expected to be with the family of the husband after the marriage. She becomes integral to and forms part of the family of the husband'.
- Interestingly, though the wife is an integral part of her husband's family, yet she is not a coparcener under the Hindu Succession Act. The Court also used Indian and Hindu ethos interchangeably without realising that under Muslim Personal Law, a wife has an absolute right to demand separate residence for herself.
- In Rajesh Sharma vs The State Of Uttar Pradesh (2017), a two judge Bench of Justices Adarsh Kumar Goel and Uday Umesh Lalit in yet another controversial order observed that there should be no automatic arrests on charges of cruelty. In this case, a demand of dowry was made for ₹3 lakh and a car, which the wife's family was not able to meet. The pregnant wife was sent to her house, where she experienced trauma and her pregnancy was terminated. She was allegedly tortured, as noted by the lower

court. An offence under Section 498A is non-bailable and non-compoundable so that the victim is not pressured into a compromise. And it is cognisable in that a police officer can make an arrest without a warrant from the court. The court did not hesitate in issuing a number of directions in favour of the accused — no arrest should normally be effected till the newly constituted Family Welfare Committee submitted its report; personal appearance of accused and out-station family members need not be insisted upon; bail application should be decided the same day. In 2017, the court decided to review this judgment.

#### And in ‘Hadiya’

- In the infamous Hadiya (2017) case too, some of the observations of the Kerala High Court about Hadiya’s independent agency and powers of her father over her were equally shocking and patriarchal.
- Even though the Supreme Court in 2018 upheld the validity of her marriage and overruled the High Court’s strange judgment, the fact is that the top court’s order of investigation by the National Investigation Agency into the matter of marriage of two adults was absolutely erroneous.
- One hopes the controversy now will lead to greater gender sensitivity by our judges, at least in their oral observations and questions, if not the final judgments. It would be better to target patriarchy rather than the Chief Justice of India. Of course the power to ask questions too must reflect gender sensitivity.

### Revisiting the quota template

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Supreme Court, while examining the constitutional validity of the Maratha reservation, said on Monday that it will look into whether the landmark 1992 decision in Indra Sawhney v Union of India needs to be revisited. The potential reconsideration of the 11-judge ruling, popularly referred to as the Mandal case, could alter the structure of reservations that has been in place for decades.*

#### Why is the Supreme Court considering revisiting the Mandal case?

- A Constitution Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan is currently hearing the challenge to the Maharashtra law providing quotas for Marathas in jobs and admissions in the state.
- While the Bombay High Court had upheld the constitutional validity of the quota, it said the quota should be reduced from 16% to 12-13%, as recommended by the State Backward Classes Commission. The ruling was challenged before a Supreme Court Bench, which referred it to a larger Constitution Bench.

#### What is under challenge in the Maratha quota?

- There are two main constitutional questions for the court to consider in the challenge to the Maratha quota law.
  - First, is whether states can declare a particular caste to be a socially and educationally backward class.
  - The second is whether states can breach the 50% ceiling for “vertical quotas” set by the Supreme Court.

#### What is the Indra Sawhney case that the Bench has referred to?

- In 1979, the Second Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) was set up to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes. The Mandal report identified 52% of the population at that time as “Socially and Economically Backward Classes” (SEBCs) and recommended 27% reservation for SEBCs in addition to the previously existing 22.5% reservation for SC/STs.





- In 1990, when the V P Singh led-government set out to implement the Mandal report, it was challenged in court amidst widespread protests against the move. The case came up before a nine-judge Bench and a 6:3 verdict was delivered in 1992.

### **What did the verdict say?**

- The court upheld the office memorandums that essentially implemented the Mandal report. The majority opinion, penned by justice Jeevan Reddy, said the executive orders mandating 27% reservation for backward castes were valid and that the reservation was made not just on the basis of caste, even if it appears so, but on the basis of objective evaluation of social and educational backwardness of classes, which is the criteria previously laid down by the court.
- The landmark Indra Sawhney ruling set two important precedents. First, it said that the criteria for a group to qualify for reservation is “social and educational backwardness”. Additionally, the court also reiterated the 50% limit to vertical quotas it had set out in earlier judgements in 1963 (M R Balaji v State of Mysore) and in 1964 (Devadasan v Union of India), reasoning that it was needed to ensure “efficiency” in administration. The court said this 50% limit will apply — unless in “exceptional circumstances”.
- While the social and educational backwardness criteria stemmed from interpretation of various constitutional provisions, the 50% limit is often criticised as being an arbitrary limit.

### **How does the Maratha reservation relate to the Indra Sawhney case?**

- Based on the 102nd Amendment to the Constitution, which gives the President powers to notify backward classes, the court will have to look into whether states have similar powers. Also, since this power flows from the Constitution, whether the President is still required to comply with the criteria set by the Supreme Court in the Mandal case.
- The relevance of the Indra Sawhney criteria is also under question in another case in which the validity of the 103rd Amendment has been challenged. The 103rd Amendment, passed in 2019, provides for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the economically weaker section in the unreserved category.
- Similar to the Maratha issue are the cases of Patels in Gujarat, Jats in Haryana, and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh.
- Additionally, with the implementation of the Maharashtra law, the vertical quota in the state could go up to 68% which was earlier 52% before the passing of the law. This aspect will also come under question. Since the Indra Sawhney verdict gives a pass to breach of the 50% quota rule only in exceptional circumstances, the court will have to test if the Maharashtra law qualifies to be an exception.

### **Have any other states breached the 50% ceiling before?**

- States have breached the 50% ceiling before and intend to bring more reservation.
- A notable example is Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 1993, reserves 69% of the seats in colleges and jobs in the state government. However, this was done by amending the Constitution, to place the law in the Ninth Schedule after the Indra Sawhney judgment.
- The Ninth Schedule provides the law with a “safe harbour” from judicial review under Article 31A of the Constitution. Laws placed in the Ninth Schedule cannot be challenged for reasons of violating any fundamental right protected under the Constitution. However, when the Tamil Nadu law was challenged in 2007 (I R Coelho v State of Tamil Nadu), the Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous 9-judge verdict that while laws placed under Ninth Schedule cannot be challenged on the grounds of violation of fundamental rights, they can be challenged on the ground that it violates the basic structure of the Constitution.
- A later Bench was to decide whether the Tamil Nadu law itself (breaching the 50% ceiling) violates basic structure, based on the I R Coelho verdict. The Bench has not yet been set up.

## **Transparency in Electoral Financing**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Election Commission of India has announced dates for elections to five Legislative Assemblies. It is a matter of grave concern that the petition challenging the electoral bonds scheme, which deals with the vexed issue of election funding, continues to languish in the Supreme Court. The delay in adjudicating on the case filed in September 2017 is inexplicable in light of the observation by the apex court that the matter gives rise to “weighty issues which have a tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country.”*

### **No transparency**

- The political system in India has traditionally been hostile to the idea of transparency in electoral financing. Political parties have zealously opposed any examination of the linkages between their governments’ policies and decisions, and the interests of their major donors.
- When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government announced the launch of a new instrument of political party funding to ostensibly ensure greater transparency and eliminate black money from the system, it was hoped that the issue of anonymous financing would be squarely dealt with.
- However, using the money bill route to bypass the Rajya Sabha, the government introduced regressive amendments to laws, including the Income Tax Act of 1961, the Companies Act of 2013, and the Representation of the People Act of 1951, to introduce electoral bonds which allow donors to anonymously donate unlimited amounts of funds to political parties.
- Under the scheme, an electoral bond, issued in the nature of a promissory note, can be bought by any Indian citizen or company incorporated in India.
  - The scheme allows parties to receive these bonds without the public, the Election Commission or even the Income Tax Department knowing the identity of the donors.
  - It has legitimised opacity and opened the floodgates for anonymous donations to parties, dealing a severe blow to voters’ right to know. People’s ability to track donations by big businesses and expose quid pro quo has been undermined.
- Expressing its opposition to electoral bonds in the Supreme Court, the Election Commission has contended that they will have an adverse impact on transparency in political party financing and would make it impossible for the constitutional body to ascertain whether donations received were in compliance with the statutory framework governing political parties.
- In 2016 and 2017, amendments were made to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, with retrospective effect to bail out the BJP and Congress, which were found guilty by the Delhi High Court of having received contributions from foreign sources in violation of the FCRA.
- In conjunction with these amendments, which enabled Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies to make donations to political parties, electoral bonds allow anonymous financing by foreign entities opening Indian elections to the influence of foreign interests.

### **Money laundering**

- One of the stated objectives of introducing electoral bonds was to address the problem of black money and large cash donations. Proponents of electoral bonds have argued that since bonds can only be purchased via cheques, demand drafts, direct debit or electronic clearing, they will stem the flow of black money.
- The problem with this assertion, however, is that it completely overlooks the crux of the problem: the provision of the Income Tax Act under which political parties were exempted from disclosing sources of donations of less than ₹20,000. Most parties claimed that a majority of their income was received in denominations smaller than ₹20,000 thus doing away with the requirement to disclose the source of donation.



- It is an open secret that most of the anonymous donations received by parties were large cash contributions, which were 'broken down' and shown as multiple small donations. If the government was serious about addressing the malaise of black money, it should have done away with the provision of non-disclosure of sources.
- Instead, amendments to the Income Tax Act in 2017 only lowered the stipulated ceiling of anonymous contributions from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000. Creative accountants can easily neutralise the impact of a lowered ceiling by multiplying the number of unattributed cash donations by a factor of 10, enabling donors to continue to anonymously pump cash into the system.
- In fact, electoral bonds are likely to abet money laundering since the amendments to the Companies Act in 2017 removed the cap of 7.5% on political contributions by a company as a percentage of its average net profits of the preceding three years.
- This allows for black money to be easily routed through shell companies to purchase electoral bonds, an apprehension also expressed by the Election Commission. Even the Reserve Bank of India flagged serious concerns about the electoral bonds.

### **Big money in electoral politics**

- The rationale given by the government for providing anonymity to donors of electoral bonds is to allow donors to use legitimate funds to support political parties by protecting them against the wrath of rival parties, especially the party in power.
- But as bonds are issued only through the State Bank of India, it would not be difficult for the party in power to access information about the identity of purchasers and details of bonds sold to them, and match those to deposits in political party accounts.
- It is no surprise, therefore, that the lion's share of donations through bonds have been cornered by the BJP – it bagged 95% of bonds issued in the first tranche in March 2018 and approximately 60% of bonds sold till March 2019.
- Bonds worth nearly ₹6,500 crore have been sold so far. They have consolidated the role of big money in electoral politics. Information obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act shows that bonds with the highest denomination value of ₹1 crore are the most preferred by donors and constitute 92% of the total value of bonds sold till October 2020.
- Electoral bonds militate against every known principle of transparency and lend themselves to use by special interest groups, corporate lobbyists and foreign entities to acquire a stranglehold on the electoral process and governance at the expense of citizens. To ensure public trust in the electoral process, it is critical that the Supreme Court immediately adjudicates on the matter.
- If bonds are to be retained as an instrument for contributing to political parties, donations must be made transparent and parties should be obligated to file reports with the Election Commission and other oversight bodies disclosing the names of donors and amounts received. This information must also be placed in the public domain. These steps are necessary to safeguard democracy and ensure that elections do not become a mere formality.

### **US-Afghanistan**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The peace process in Afghanistan has reached a critical turning point. As when then U.S. President Barack Obama announced the exit of U.S. forces from Afghanistan (and the Taliban famously exulted – 'you may have the watches, but we have the time'), and more recently, when the Doha Agreement was concluded a year ago between the U.S. Government and the Taliban. Now, a more decisive step is in store.*

### **A U.S. review**



- Afghan social media and political circles are rife with details, corroborated by official sources in Afghanistan, that the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, has unveiled the initial conclusions of the review by the United States of its strategy in Afghanistan in a letter he has addressed simultaneously to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani and the head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah.
- Mr. Ghani has been virtually read the riot act by Mr. Blinken, whose letter confirms the intention to fully withdraw all U.S. military forces from Afghanistan as early as May 1, as specified in the Doha Agreement. Mr. Ghani has been warned that without them, the security situation will deteriorate and the Taliban could make rapid gains.
- Despite the Doha Agreement, the Taliban has not ended its ties with the al-Qaeda and other similar terrorist groups. Nor have intra-Afghan negotiations progressed. The policy review ordered in Washington DC by U.S. President Joe Biden has been shrouded in secrecy.
- What appeared in the U.S. media indicates that some within the U.S. Administration are voicing the need to defend American values. Protagonists in the Pentagon are passionate about keeping a modicum of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.
- Mr. Biden has long held, even as Vice-President, that Pakistan is strategically more important to the U.S. than Afghanistan, and that U.S. troops should be pulled out of the Afghan battlefield as soon as possible. Donald Trump was doing nothing different from his predecessor, only in his inimitable way, which Mr. Biden wishes to distance himself from and leave a narrative of orderly exit.
- The ongoing review had raised hopes in Kabul of a turnaround in U.S. policy. That is not happening in substance. The U.S. is anxious to proceed to a final settlement rapidly on terms visible from the very outset of the peace process. The continuation of Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the State Department was an early sign that, in substance, U.S. policy is going to remain unaltered.
- The U.S. maintains that its objective is to bring about a just and durable peace through political negotiations in a manner that Afghanistan remains united, sovereign, and democratic, and preserves the gains made over the past two decades. This is a tall order, as it contradicts the abiding U.S. priority, to cut its losses and be out of Afghanistan at the earliest.
- The conundrum for the U.S. is that it cannot disengage from Afghanistan, if that is its priority, without accepting Pakistan's terms. These would not be acceptable to Afghan patriots who want freedom for Afghanistan to choose its political direction.
- If training, combat support, and the supply of weapons are stopped from Pakistan, the Taliban could be on its knees. The U.S. Government is wary but resigned about Pakistan's negative role. Instead of pressuring Pakistan, it is seeking Afghan acquiescence for a power-sharing arrangement with the Taliban, enabling the exit of U.S. soldiers.

### The road map

- The U.S. Government is advocating 'a new, inclusive government' in Afghanistan, which implies an immediate 50% share for the Taliban in an interim government, as a quid pro quo for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. This will be without reference to a mandate from the people as elections will be held only in the future, after the principles guiding Afghanistan's future constitutional and governing arrangements are worked out.
- As a prelude to the ceasefire, the U.S. has proposed to the Taliban to reduce violence for three months, intended to head off the Taliban's threatened spring offensive.
- When the intra-Afghan negotiations envisaged under the Doha Agreement stalled, Russia offered Moscow as an alternate venue. Instead, the United Nations is being asked to convene, with Turkey being asked to host a meeting of foreign ministers or envoys from China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the U.S. to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan.
- **Mr. Ghani is being encouraged to work closely with a broad consultative group, for which the core leaders identified are Abdullah Abdullah, former President Karzai, and an important former Mujahideen commander, Professor Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. The objective of this exercise is to build**



**consensus on specific goals and objectives for negotiations with the Taliban on power-sharing, governance, and essential supporting principles.**

### **The implications for India**

- India remains fully committed to Afghanistan. Despite the policy flux there, bilateral relations are flourishing. There have been frequent and productive high-level exchanges between Indian and Afghan leaders. The Afghanistan acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Haneef Atmar, is visiting New Delhi on March 22.
- India is to be part of the future consultation process on Afghanistan. Invites to prominent elders and senior Afghan leaders such as Abdullah Abdullah, Ustad Ata Muhammad Noor, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum over the past few months have helped India reconnect with the political spectrum in Afghanistan.
- India has stayed the course with a long-term commitment to supporting state institutions in Afghanistan, expanding its development partnership, working with all communities across the country, and asking leaders of all Afghan ethnicities to remain together. That policy has been well-received by most of the Afghan people and government, it was well-suited to the time, and it has served India well.
- The moment has now come to directly engage with those leaders on the ground who will determine the course that the peace process will take. The patriotic Afghan people admire their erstwhile leaders, President Najibullah and Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who were committed to building the nation. Prints and postcards of their portraits are still popular in the streets and bazaars of Kabul. Their photographs are displayed on the windscreens of many Kabul taxis. Such people look to India as a friend and expect solidarity.
- If the American plan results only in a 'reduction in violence' and not its complete cessation, and U.S. forces are pulled out, India must step up to assist materially those who want to defend the Afghan republic. It should explore commonalities with key countries in dealing with the rapidly evolving situation. When in the late 1990s no country was willing to help the democratic forces in Afghanistan, India and Iran had scaled up their support. That time is again at hand.

### **Quad: strategic opportunity or quagmire?**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *On March 5, the Indian media carried news reports, based on remarks by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known briefly as Quad, would soon meet at summit level, thus signalling the importance attached to this grouping by the Biden administration. The Quad, which comprises the U.S., Japan, Australia and India, had in February been described by the U.S. State Department as having "essential momentum and important potential".*

### **Details:**

- India's engagement with the Quad goes back to China's expanding footprint in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region over the last few years.
- China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, proposing logistical connectivity across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, rang alarm bells in India as the projects were viewed as encroachments into India's strategic space. India responded with an upgradation of its naval capabilities and enhancement of ties with the Indian Ocean Region littoral states and other major powers in the region.
- Separately, largely as a result of their shared concerns relating to the rise of China, India has been deepening its security ties with the U.S. Building on the initiatives of earlier administrations, the Obama and Trump presidencies focused on interoperability of defence equipment and training based on defence

purchases, frequent land and sea exercises, and agreements harmonising the two countries' military doctrines and operations.

### India in the Quad

- The U.S.'s focus on the west Pacific due to aggressive Chinese maritime activity gradually pulled India into the ambit of the Indo-Pacific that views the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as an integrated geopolitical space.
- Besides the U.S. navy, India expanded its maritime ties with other regional states, the most high-profile of the interactions being the Quad. Since November 2017, the joint naval exercises of Quad members are being supplemented by extensive consultations on security issues.
- However, India's involvement with the Quad was initially cautious due to its reluctance to join an overt anti-China coalition. For instance, at the Shangri La Dialogue in June 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Indo-Pacific as a "geographical definition" and firmly denied it was a "strategy" or a "club of limited members ... directed against any country". Despite this, in September 2019, India agreed to elevate the Quad platform to ministerial level.
- This had dire consequences. By affiliating with the U.S.-led maritime coalition, India ignored the principal areas of its security concerns; as former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon noted, "New Delhi and Washington see eye to eye on maritime strategy, but not on what to do on the Asian mainland".
- **India is the only Quad member that is not in the west Pacific** and the only one that shares an undemarcated 3,500-km land border with China. From April 2020, Indian and Chinese forces had their latest border face-off in Ladakh, abruptly ending a long period of productive relations.

### Ties with China

- In retrospect, this confrontation appears to be China's sharp response to the steady shift in India's regional posture in favour of an alignment with the U.S. and its allies against China, particularly the increasing interoperability between the respective forces. China has given India a rude reminder that India's security concerns lie in its northern borders, not the west Pacific.
- The U.S. views China's rise as a threat to the world order it has led since the Second World War and is anxious to pull in allies to retard China's ambitions and maintain its global hegemony.
- Despite rhetoric relating to the promotion of a 'rules-based' world order (the rules being most frequently violated by the U.S. itself), the Quad neither shares a strategic vision nor is it animated by a shared agenda. This is obvious not only from its inability to deter China in the west Pacific, but also by its members' anxiety to maintain close ties with China.
- Thus, in 2020 China became India's number one trade partner, with two-way trade at \$77 billion. Again, China-U.S. trade continues to favour China — American investors hold \$1 trillion of Chinese equity, and 75% of U.S. companies in China say they will continue to invest there.
- The Quad has a core structural problem as well in that it pivots around the U.S. The U.S. is a super-power with global interests, but it is also self-centred in defining and pursuing its interests, even as its policies experience major shifts due to government change or domestic lobbies.
- Clearly, the Quad riles China as a hostile grouping, but hardly serves the security interests of its members.

### Resetting alignments, policies

- Not surprisingly, the stand-off at Ladakh has been a bitter experience for India: it has affirmed the limits of India-U.S. security ties, the folly of Indian involvement in the Quad, and the need to focus national attention and resources in areas of abiding interest for India — the border, the neighbours and the Indian Ocean.
- Ladakh also offers some valuable lessons for India.

- One, the rebuilding of ties with China will have to be a priority concern. Though it will take time for trust to be restored, what will help will be for India to dilute its focus on the Indo-Pacific and the Quad and accept that the borders and the Indian Ocean are where its crucial interests lie.
- Two, the Ladakh experience has highlighted certain deficiencies at home: the government appears to be largely focused on reshaping the national ethos on the basis of a narrow and exclusive political ideology that has raised doubts about India's continued commitment to democratic pluralism. It hardly needs reiteration that India's capacities can only be built by a united people committed to the national cause.
- Finally, foreign policy cannot be a part-time concern of the national leadership; in terms of priority and attention, it should be on a par with domestic affairs. While this approach is being corrected, it should also be noted that India's foreign policy has often been ad hoc, reactive and short term, reflecting the absence of a broad strategic culture. As the global scenario gets more complex and India's ambitions increase, a cohesive strategic vision would give substance and drive to India's pursuit of its interests over the long term.
- Ladakh offers a clear blueprint for the content and direction of national policy. Implementing it will ensure that the martyrdom of our soldiers in the northern snows would not have been in vain.

### GS III

#### A Revamped and need-based PDS

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament in January, rightly flagged the issue of a growing food subsidy bill, which, in the words of the government, "is becoming unmanageably large."*

#### **Details:**

- The reason is not far to seek. Food subsidy, coupled with the drawal of food grains by States from the central pool under various schemes, has been on a perpetual growth trajectory.
- During 2016-17 to 2019-20, the subsidy amount, clubbed with loans taken by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) under the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) towards food subsidy, was in the range of ₹1.65-lakh crore to ₹2.2-lakh crore.
- In future, the annual subsidy bill of the Centre is expected to be about ₹2.5-lakh crore.

#### **High drawal rate**

- During the three years, the quantity of food grains drawn by States (annually) hovered around 60 million tonnes to 66 million tonnes. Compared to the allocation, the rate of drawal was 91% to 95%.
- As the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which came into force in July 2013, enhanced entitlements (covering two-thirds of the country's population), this naturally pushed up the States' drawal. Based on an improved version of the targeted Public Distribution System (PDS), the law requires the authorities to provide to each beneficiary 5 kg of rice or wheat per month.
- For this financial year (2020-21) which is an extraordinary year on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the revised estimate of the subsidy has been put at about ₹4.23-lakh crore, excluding the extra budgetary resource allocation of ₹84,636 crore.



- Till December 2020, the Centre set apart 94.35 million tonnes to the States under different schemes including the NFSA and additional allocation, meant for distribution among the poor free of cost.
- Importantly, the government has decided to abandon the practice of extra budgetary resource allocation and include in the food subsidy amount itself, arrears in loans outstanding of the FCI drawn through the NSSF. Even in the figure of revised estimates for 2020-21, the arrears constitute a portion.

### Issue prices and politics

- It is against this backdrop that the Survey has hinted at an increase in the Central Issue Price (CIP), which has remained at ₹2 per kg for wheat and ₹3 per kg for rice for years, though the NFSA, even in 2013, envisaged a price revision after three years.
- What makes the subject more complex is the variation in the retail issue prices of rice and wheat, from nil in States such as Karnataka and West Bengal for Priority Households (PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration card holders, ₹1 in Odisha for both categories of beneficiaries to ₹3 and ₹2 in Bihar for the two categories, according to an official document. Needless to say, in Tamil Nadu, rice is given free of cost for all categories; this includes non-PHH.
- The Centre, by stating through the Survey that it is difficult to reduce “the economic cost of food management in view of rising commitment” towards food security, does not want the NFSA norms to be disturbed.
- But, a mere increase in the CIPs of rice and wheat without a corresponding rise in the issue prices by the State governments would only increase the burden of States, which are even otherwise reeling under the problem of a resource crunch. Political compulsions are perceived to be coming in the way of the Centre and the States increasing the prices.
- The politics of rice has been an integral feature of the political discourse. Promises by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in the 1967 Assembly election in Tamil Nadu — three measures (approximately 4.5 kg) at ₹1 — and the Telugu Desam Party during the 1983 poll in Andhra Pradesh — ₹ 2 per kg — captured the imagination of the voter.
- One should ponder over the advisability of keeping so low the retail prices of food grains at fair price shops, even after the passage of nearly 50 years and achieving substantial poverty reduction in the country.
- As per the Rangarajan group’s estimate in 2014, the share of people living below the poverty line (BPL) in the 2011 population was 29.5% (about 36 crore).

### Recast the system

- In this context, it is time the Centre had a relook at the overall food subsidy system including the pricing mechanism.
- It should revisit NFSA norms and coverage. An official committee in January 2015 called for decreasing the quantum of coverage under the law, from the present 67% to around 40%. For all ration cardholders drawing food grains, a “give-up” option, as done in the case of cooking gas cylinders, can be made available.
- Even though States have been allowed to frame criteria for the identification of PHH cardholders, the Centre can nudge them into pruning the number of such beneficiaries.
- As for the prices, the existing arrangement of flat rates should be replaced with a slab system. Barring the needy, other beneficiaries can be made to pay a little more for a higher quantum of food grains. The rates at which these beneficiaries have to be charged can be arrived at by the Centre and the States through consultations.
- These measures, if properly implemented, can have a salutary effect on retail prices in the open market. There are no two opinions about reforms implemented in the PDS through various steps, including end-to-end computerisation of operations, digitisation of data of ration cardholders, seeding of Aadhaar, and automation of fair price shops.
- Yet, diversion of food grains and other chronic problems do exist. It is nobody’s case that the PDS should be dismantled or in-kind provision of food subsidy be discontinued. After all, the Centre itself did



not see any great virtue in the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode at the time of giving additional food grains free of cost to the States during April-November last year (as part of relief measures during the pandemic).

- A revamped, need-based PDS is required not just for cutting down the subsidy bill but also for reducing the scope for leakages. Political will should not be found wanting.

## **Cyber Security**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *This year, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), launched the Cyber Crime Volunteers Program with the aim to allow citizens to register themselves as “Cyber Crime Volunteers” in the role of “Unlawful Content Flaggers”. As per the official website of the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the programme will help law enforcement agencies in identifying, reporting and in the removal of illegal/unlawful online content. The programme, which will be launched all over the country, is going to have its test run in Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura.*

### **An explainer**

- This form of surveillance, which enables citizens to “watch over” one another is called lateral surveillance. The conventional understanding of the term, surveillance, is its use in the hierarchical sense, i.e. the vertical relationship between the person watching and the person being watched, which is usually the state and its citizenry. Lateral or social or peer-to-peer surveillance differs from typical surveillance.
- While surveillance of any kind shows an imbalance of power between the person who surveils, and the one under surveillance, lateral surveillance specifically ensures that the imbalance of power no longer exists. Informal watching of communities by their members has been an age-old part of society, and its members view it as a harmless activity. The problem arises when it is organised and state-sponsored.
- In the 1970s, the United States had the neighborhood watch schemes which increased community policing. With the introduction of technology and development of applications such as Citizen and Nextdoor, monitoring of people and their behaviour has become easier.
- Further, government and private sector institutions alike collect swathes of data for supposedly ‘public functions’. Specifically in the sphere of crime prevention, much like the cyber crime prevention programme, there has been a transition in the outlook from a ‘punishing state’ to a ‘preventive state’.

### **Its extent in India**

- This is not the first time state-sponsored lateral surveillance has been implemented in India. For example, the C-Plan App in Uttar Pradesh launched for keeping a tab on anti-social elements, is designed to receive inputs from certain identified individuals in villages across the State.
- These individuals have been given the responsibility to solve local problems such as providing information about simmering communal tensions or land disputes taking place in their respective villages through the mobile application.
- The scope of lateral surveillance was greatly expanded during the pandemic lockdown, both with and without the introduction of technology.
- The Karnataka government released a PDF with the names and addresses of around 19,000 international passengers who were quarantined in Bengaluru while in the North, a woman was harassed and boycotted by her neighbours after the Delhi government marked her house with a quarantine sticker.

### **Tool for exclusion, suspicion**

- If a pattern were to be drawn, one notices that lateral surveillance is used to further emotional objectives such as community building and strengthening relationships with neighbours where emotional and social factors act as a driving force, thus creating a situation where privacy may be undermined for the betterment of the community.
- However, surveillance technologies not only act as a tool for social control but also as a tool for social exclusion. Lateral surveillance thus makes it easier to discriminate between those who conform to the social norms of the majority.
  - For example, the LGBT community in South Korea came under the scanner after a cluster of novel coronavirus cases were reported from a particular area which had resulted in large-scale circulation of homophobic content and comments against the patients who tested positive from the community. This not only made it difficult for authorities to collect information but also increased troubles for the people belonging to the sexual minority in getting themselves tested.
- State-sponsored lateral surveillance is harmful as it creates a culture of ‘hate’, ‘fear’ and ‘constant suspicion’ against an ‘enemy’. Wherever the state identifies that it “cannot be everywhere”, it deploys this mechanism. This culture places a duty on people to ‘keep an eye out’ for ‘their own safety’ and this heightens the fear of crime in society.
- Such perceived threats have a tendency to increase intolerance, prejudice, xenophobia and casteism in our society, while also violating the fundamental right to privacy, and, consequently, the unfettered expression of free speech and behaviour.

### **In policy**

- Despite the potential harm, the government, on February 25, notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 which intends to expand “due diligence” obligations by intermediaries.
- However, this not only substantially increases surveillance but also promotes lateral surveillance.
  - For example provisions pertaining to user directed take downs of non-consensual sexually explicit content or ‘any other matters’ and even the harsh content take down/data sharing timelines will enable intermediaries to remove or disable access to information within a short period of time of being notified by users, circumventing the “actual knowledge” doctrine given in *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India*.
  - This will further create an incentive to take down content and share user data without sufficient due process safeguards, violating the fundamental right to privacy and freedom of expression.
- One wonders how long it would be before a neighbour with a “passion to serve the nation on a single platform and contribute in [the] fight against cybercrime in the country” reports you or me on a social media platform or otherwise.

### **Transparency in Railways**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *A surprising feature of the post-Budget discourse in Parliament and in the media these past few weeks has been the total absence of one topic: Railways. Apparently, the understated objective of doing away with a separate Budget for the Railways, namely, shifting the spotlight away from it, has been handsomely achieved. However, sweeping under the carpet the serious problems of viability facing the country’s largest and most crucial transport organisation, by taking cover behind the diversions provided by other, more topical issues thrown up by the Union Budget, will not make them disappear.*

### **Finances are out of whack**



- Recent public statements about the performance of the Railways on the freight front seem to suggest that all is well with the Railways. In a recent interview, the CEO and Chairman of the Railway Board highlighted the fact that freight loading in January 2021 was the highest ever. A recent press report says that the freight earnings in 2020-21 are likely to be more than in 2019-20 despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Both these achievements are commendable by themselves but need to be seen in proper perspective. About the record-breaking loading in January 2021, what is relevant is the freight earnings, which during the entire year are projected to be ₹1,24,184.00 crore in the Revised Estimates for 2020-21.
- This is, in fact, lower than what was achieved in 2018-19 (₹1,27,432.72 crore). As for the freight revenues going past that of the last financial year, that was only to be expected, with freight traffic having a relatively free run due to cancellation of most regular passenger services due to COVID-19.
- Meanwhile, an important financial performance index has been airbrushed to project a picture totally removed from reality.
- The Operating Ratio (OR), which is broadly the ratio of working expenses to revenues, has been artificially kept below 100% by making less-than-required provision for pension payments during 2019-20 and 2020-21. While the official figures of OR are 98.36% for 2019-20 and 96.96% for 2020-21, the actual OR works out to 114.19% and 131.49%, respectively, if the required provision is made for pension payments.
- The purpose of indulging in this self-delusional exercise is not clear. Technically, the Indian Railways are well and truly in the red. Tinkering with statistics cannot alter that reality.
- Perhaps for the first time ever, the Indian Railways were unable to adequately provide for the Pension Fund, both for 2019-20 and 2020-21, totalling ₹78,119 crore. The Railway Ministry has reportedly sought a loan from the Central Exchequer to meet this shortfall.
- While the under-provisioning for 2020-21 can be explained by the shortfall in revenues due to the pandemic, the shortfall amounting to ₹27,642 crore even during 2019-20 (when there was no COVID-19) should be a cause for serious concern.
- In fact, the passenger and freight earnings in 2019-20 were less than in 2018-19, indicating that a downslide had started even before the outbreak of COVID-19, probably due to the economic slowdown. Railway finances are out of whack. And COVID-19 has nothing to do with it.

### **Immediate challenges**

- It is not as though all this has happened suddenly. The fact is, over the years, traffic revenues have been unable to keep pace with the increase in staff costs and pension payments. While the passenger and freight revenues increased by 84.8 % from 2010-11 to 2019-20, the staff and pension costs raced ahead at almost double that rate, by 157%, in the same period.
- Further, while in 2010-11, the staff plus pension costs formed 55.7% of the traffic earnings, by 2019-20, they had shot up to 77.5% of the traffic earnings. This, despite the fact that there has been a reduction of about one lakh staff on roll during this period. The spike in the staff and pension costs is largely attributable to the implementation of the Central Pay Commission recommendations, a 10-yearly feature.
- Being a Ministry of the Government of India, the Indian Railway's finances are bound to be subjected to another fatal body blow by the next (Eighth) Pay Commission around 2025-26.
- Therefore, the immediate challenges are achieving a quantum jump in the revenues, particularly on the freight front, and a drastic reduction in the number of employees, there being no way to reduce the number of pensioners in the short run.
- It is in this context that the full commissioning of the two Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs), slated to be operational by 2022, assumes great urgency and importance. A related aspect is the product mix of freight that will be carried in the near future.
- A disturbing feature of freight traffic is the overwhelming dependence on one commodity: coal. Despite all the marketing efforts over the years, almost 50% of freight earnings are contributed by the transport of coal. With the availability of alternative sources of renewable energy such as solar at competitive prices, the dependence on coal-based thermal power plants is bound to reduce to meet the incremental

energy needs. Even these are likely to be set up at the pitheads, requiring no substantial movement over the Railways system.

- Also, India is a signatory to the 2015 Paris Agreement, committed to achieving targeted reductions in carbon emissions in a time-bound manner. The Railways have to therefore think seriously of a life after coal.
- An option that merits consideration is the adoption of the roll-on roll-off model of transporting loaded trucks on rail on the DFCs, which apart from boosting revenues has the added advantage of reducing the overall carbon footprint.
- The other major challenge facing the Railways is the burgeoning staff costs including pension. At this juncture, the reported move to go in for recruitment of 1.5 lakh staff is simply baffling. There have been suggestions to corporatise the Railways's Production Units and outsource the medical services.
- The government needs to firm up its policies on these crucial issues after discussions with all stakeholders. More than a year ago, a grand proposal to merge all cadres and have a single Indian Railways management cadre was announced to eliminate "departmentalism".
- This implies that the existing organisational set up will continue, because it will take at least 25-30 years for any beneficial impact to be felt.
- On the other hand, moves are afoot to invite private players to operate passenger and freight services. These are conflicting moves, akin to driving a car with one foot on the accelerator and the other on the brakes.

### **Need for public scrutiny**

- A separate Railway Budget has passed irrevocably into history. However, the need for a detailed public scrutiny of the affairs of one of the largest undertakings in the country, public or private, at least once a year has not gone away.
- As suggested earlier by this writer in these columns, an annual report called 'Indian Railways Report' on the lines of the annual Economic Survey should be placed in Parliament every year detailing the physical and financial performance of the Railways, identifying the challenges and plans for the future to meet the country's rail transport needs.
- The Railways are in the midst of an unprecedented financial distress and are faced with fundamental organisational issues. This is no time for evasiveness and obfuscation but for clarity and transparency. It is also time to confront reality.

### **'Red Echo' over India**

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

**Context:** On March 3, Maharashtra Power Minister Nitin Raut announced that a State Cyber Cell probe had found 14 Trojan horses in the servers of the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company. These malwares had the potential to disrupt power distribution in the State. The announcement came in the wake of a report from Recorded Future, a U.S.-based cybersecurity firm, stating that a group linked to the Chinese government, which it called 'Red Echo', had targeted 10 vital nodes in India's power distribution system and two seaports.

### **How did Recorded Future track malware in Indian systems?**

- Recorded Future did not look directly into the servers of India's power system. Instead, it found a large number of IP addresses linked to critical Indian systems communicating for months with AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE servers connected to Red Echo.
- These servers had domains spoofing those of Indian power sector entities configured to them. For example, it had an 'ntpc-co.com' domain, which spoofs the original ntpc.co.in.



AXIOMATICASYMPTOTE servers act as command-and-control centres for a malware known as ShadowPad.

### What is ShadowPad?

- ShadowPad is a backdoor Trojan malware, which means it opens a secret path from its target system to its command-and-control servers. Information can be extracted or more malicious code delivered via this path. Mr. Raut had said that there was an attempt to “either insert or remove around 8 GB of data from the server”.
- Security firm Kaspersky says ShadowPad is built to target supply-chain infrastructure in sectors like transportation, telecommunication, energy and more. It was first identified in 2017, when it was found hidden in a legitimate software produced by a company named NetSarang.
- Trojanised softwares, or softwares that have dangers hidden in them, like the eponymous Trojan horse from Greek mythology, are the primary mode of delivery for ShadowPad.

### How are ShadowPad and Red Echo linked to China?

- Kaspersky states that several techniques used in ShadowPad are also found in malware from Winnti group, “allegedly developed by Chinese-speaking actors”. Security analysis firm FireEye links ShadowPad to a group known as ‘APT41’, which it says overlaps with the Winnti group.
- Microsoft has been tracking another group under the name ‘Barium’. In September 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that a federal grand jury had indicted “five computer hackers, all of whom were residents and nationals of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), with computer intrusions affecting over 100 victim companies in the United States and abroad”.
- The U.S. Department of Justice confirmed that these were the intrusions that various security researchers were tracking using different threat labels such as ‘APT41’, ‘Barium’, ‘Winnti’, ‘Wicked Panda’, and ‘Wicked Spider’. The Department of Justice statement said the “defendants also compromised foreign government computer networks in India and Vietnam”.
- Security firm FireEye also “assesses with high confidence” that ‘APT41’ “carries out Chinese state-sponsored espionage activity in addition to financially motivated activity potentially outside of state control”, i.e., the group not only spies for the Chinese government but also does cybercrime when it suits them. The group has been known to target the video-game industry.
- Recorded Future in its report notes large overlaps in the systems used by Red Echo and ‘APT41/Winnti/Barium’. “At least 3 of the [Red Echo] targeted Indian IP addresses were previously seen in a suspected APT41/Barium-linked campaign targeting the Indian Oil and Gas sectors in November 2020,” it says.

### What is the objective of Red Echo?

- Recorded Future says the kind of infrastructure sought to be accessed by Red Echo, such as Regional Load Despatch Centres, has minimal espionage possibilities.
- However, it adds, “we assess they pose significant concerns over potential pre-positioning of network access to support Chinese strategic objectives.” Prepositioning in cyber warfare means to have malware assets in crucial places that can be called on when an actual attack is launched.

## **Spectrum sale, price test and the road ahead for 5G**

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3741111.ece) )

**Context:** India’s first auction of telecommunications spectrum in five years ended recently, with the government generating a revenue of ₹77,815 crore from the exercise. Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Jio accounted for close to 60% of the spectrum bought, followed by Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea. On offer

*was over 2,308 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum valued for the auction by the government at ₹3.92 lakh crore, and bids were successfully received for 37% or 855.6 MHz. The auction lasted less than two days.*

### **How has the industry been since the last auction?**

- A lot has changed in the industry since 2016, when the previous auction took place. The participants then included Tata Teleservices, Idea Cellular, Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India, Reliance Communications and Aircel.
- In the last few years, there has been a consolidation in the industry, as a result of which there are only three major players now — Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea. An IIFL Securities report last December suggested that Jio and Bharti Airtel are, by increasing their market share, shaping the industry toward “a near two-player structure”. On the other hand, Vodafone Idea, it said, is struggling financially.
- In recent years, while the user base has grown, the industry itself has witnessed unforeseen financial stress in the form of an important court case against it. The reference is to the Supreme Court verdict last September that ordered telecom players to share revenues coming from even non-telecom services with the government.
- It gave telecom companies 10 years to pay their adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues to the government, with 10% of the dues to be paid by March 31, 2021. Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel were the worst-hit by this order.
- **Why was an auction needed now?**
  - All three players needed to renew some of their spectrum as the validity was set to expire later this year.
- **Wasn't this for the 5G rollout?**
  - No. The auction for that is likely to happen later. In the auction that was held on March 1 and 2, the government offered spectrum for 4G in the following bands: 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz and 2,500 MHz.

### **What do these bands stand for?**

- To explain this, we have to begin with the term ‘spectrum’, which, in this context, stands for the portion of the electromagnetic wave range that is suitable for communication purposes. As this is a huge economic resource, which also provides unimaginable benefits to any population, it is controlled by the government.
- Industry organisation GSMA, a body that represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, says in its blog that one slice of this spectrum is not the same as another slice. The difference is in terms of the frequency of these waves (the number of times the waves repeat themselves in a second).
- It says, “Spectrum bands have different characteristics, and this makes them suitable for different purposes. In general, low-frequency transmissions can travel greater distances before losing their integrity, and they can pass through dense objects more easily. Less data can be transmitted over these radio waves, however. Higher-frequency transmissions carry more data, but are poorer at penetrating obstacles.”
- In this context, hertz is a measure of the number of cycles per second, and 1 megahertz stands for 1 million hertz. Telecom providers cover their bases by using both low and high-frequency bands.

### **Who bought what in the auction?**

- Reliance Jio was the biggest spender in the auction. It shelled out ₹57,122 crore, just over 60% of which was to acquire spectrum in the 800 MHz band, according to a report by Edelweiss. It spent the remaining on 1,800 MHz and 2,300 MHz bands.
- Bharti Airtel, which dished out ₹18,699 crore, spent half of its money on the 800 MHz and 900 MHz bands. It also spent on the 2,100 MHz and 2,300 MHz bands.
- **Vodafone Idea, the report said, “was the most conservative of the lot”. It used almost two-thirds of its ₹1,993-crore spend on the 900 MHz band. It spent the remaining on the 1,800 MHz band. The spectrum will be assigned to bidders for a period of 20 years.**

### How do analysts view the auction strategy of these three companies?

- Though the auction is largely seen as an opportunity to renew expiring spectrum, analysts say Reliance Jio's "higher-than-expected" spend is an attempt to improve network experience.
- The Edelweiss report says Reliance Jio could have gone for it because "in recent quarters, Bharti Airtel has onboarded a disproportionately higher share of smartphone subscribers leveraging its superior network".
- Vodafone Idea's low-key presence in the auction is linked to its balance-sheet constraints. It is also likely that the players are preserving their resources for the upcoming 5G era.

### Why did the 700 MHz band have no takers?

- The 700 MHz band, as also 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,300 MHz bands, are seen playing an important role in the 5G rollout (the fifth generation of mobile networks that promises to connect everybody as also everything much faster and at much lower latency).
- The 700 MHz band was not expected to find any takers given its prohibitive floor price. Some see this as an opening for the government to scale down the reserve price when it comes up for bidding in future.
- What an ICICI Securities report called the "king" in 5G, the C-band, which is the band between 3,300 MHz and 4,200 MHz, was not on offer in this round of auctions.

### How did this auction compare to the last round?

- In 2016, about 40% of the 2,355 MHz of spectrum (at a reserve price of ₹5.6 lakh crore) was sold, giving the government ₹65,789 crore in revenue. This time, the Centre has managed to get more.
- The government said the revenue generated by the auction has exceeded its expectations, which was about ₹45,000 crore, according to Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash.
- The expectations were low because of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the top three telecom players were looking to renew expiring spectrum and consolidate holdings in select bands.

### Agri-regulatory system

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The intense debates around the recently enacted farm laws have brought to light the issue of developing a sound regulatory framework to promote India's agricultural growth — and in keeping pace with the changing times. While the country is divided on the need for the three new farm laws, the fact remains that farmers, mainly smallholders, across India continue to face various constraints in carrying out farming activities. They include constraints in accessing agricultural inputs, markets, finance, human resources, and information, which are critical for increasing farmers' competitiveness.*

### Role for the government

- The existing institutional set up that controls farm production often fails to ease these constraints. A way out of this problem is to develop a suitable regulatory system that would enable farmers to overcome their constraints.
- Governments can play a critical role in this regard by enacting laws and regulations that influence farmers' access to agricultural inputs, cost of production, farmers' participation in agricultural markets and value chains, the competitiveness of farmers, and private investment in the farming sector.
- Where does India stand on this front in comparison to other countries? A recent publication by the World Bank titled Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA) 2019 provides some interesting insights on this question. Based on eight indicators, the EBA measures the extent to which government

regulatory systems in 101 countries worldwide make it easier for their farmers to operate agricultural activities.

- The indicators are supplying seed, registering fertilizer, securing water, registering machinery, sustaining livestock, protecting plant health, trading food, and accessing finance.
- These indicators measure the strength of a country's agricultural regulatory environment pertaining to market integration and entrepreneurship in agriculture.
- The EBA is akin to the Doing Business project of the World Bank, which ranks the ease of doing business in countries.

### **India's poor standing**

- Among 101 countries covered, India ranked 49 on the EBA aggregate score. France, Croatia, and the Czech Republic are the three top-ranking countries. Among emerging groups of 20 (EG 20) countries, India has the second least favourable regulatory environment for farming activities after South Africa. Turkey is the top-performing country among EG 20 countries, followed by Argentina, Brazil, the Russian Federation, Mexico and China.
- Notably, India lags behind its close competitors in world agriculture, namely China, Brazil, and the Russian Federation. Compared to these three countries, India has the weakest performance on five out of eight indicators.
- They are registering fertilizer and machinery, securing water, sustaining livestock, and protecting plant health indicators. Registering fertilizer and machinery indicators measure domestic laws and regulations that provide farmers access to fertilizer and agricultural machinery.
- The regulatory processes that help farmers make appropriate decisions regarding the level of investment in irrigation are measured by securing water indicator. Sustaining livestock indicator captures the quality of regulations affecting farmers' access to livestock farming inputs. The quality of legislation on phytosanitary standards (SPS) is captured through the protecting plant health indicator.
- Inadequate access to quality agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, water, and mechanical power can cause productivity loss, higher cost of food production and uncertainty, and lower capacity of farmers to produce surpluses, adopt new plant varieties and accept new opportunities to improve their income.
- The regulatory system that governs irrigation management is essential for reducing the variability of farm output, prices, and incomes, minimising vulnerability to natural shocks, and incentivising the production of riskier and high returns crops.
- Gaining access to the global agricultural value chain requires a sound regulatory framework on SPS. For instance, thanks to active involvement by the SPS authority, namely National Agrarian Health Service (SENASA-Peru), Peru had become one of the world's leading exporters of asparagus.

### **Seed supply**

- The comparative score of India on supplying seed, trading food, and accessing finance indicators is high. Supplying seed indicator evaluates laws and regulations that ensure timely release of seed to farmers. A robust seed supply system is required for improving yield and adopting new crop varieties. The trading food indicator assesses laws and regulations that facilitate exporting of farm products by farmers.
- The regulatory framework on the use of warehouse receipts is assessed using accessing finance indicator. A robust warehouse receipts system enables the farmers to obtain the credit needed to invest in agriculture.
- Warehouse receipt operators accept deposits of crops and provide warehouse receipts to farmers as evidence of deposited crops. By using warehouse receipts as collateral, farmers can receive credit.
- The EBA project results reveal that, compared to its close competitors, the strength of India's agricultural regulatory environment is weak on the whole and with respect to key performance indicators.
- The future of world agriculture and food production is expected to increasingly depend on middle-income countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia, just like the high-income countries dictating the fortunes of global agriculture in the past five decades (<https://bit.ly/3ryD0cL>).



- To make the best use of this great opportunity, India needs to put in place an agricultural regulatory system that would make it easier for its farmers to conduct agricultural activities, thereby improving their productivity, competitiveness, and income.

## **Working towards climate justice in a non-ideal world**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The election of Joe Biden as U.S. President has catapulted climate change to the top of the global agenda, allowing him to keep his promise to “lead a major diplomatic push” to increase global climate ambition. This also works well for him in rebuilding the trans-Atlantic alliance apart from keeping at bay the domestic fissures from a tenuous hold of the Democrats in the U.S. Congress while being resolute on climate change.*

### **The U.S.’s moves**

- Interestingly, the U.S. is not just striding back to the Obama signature achievement of the Paris Accord with its voluntary commitments but also to the Bush days. This is, perhaps, best evidenced by the presidential call to reconvene the Major Economies Forum (MEF) starting with a Leaders’ Climate Summit in April this year.
- The MEF, which was first convened in March 2009, originated in the Bush-era U.S. efforts to rope in major emitters.
- It was also to push a way forward on climate change without heed to the principle of differentiated responsibilities and recognition of historical responsibilities, which are rightly hallowed principles of the climate discourse given the decades of staying power of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere.
- The serious unwillingness of emerging economies to be labelled “major emitters” saw the meeting retitled “Major Economies Meeting” given the clear link between GDP and GHG.
- While the meeting’s purport was not hidden, the retitling provided a feel-good and one from which retraction was not possible for the emerging economies.

### **Stern message, border levies**

- This time the push appears to have come to shove, with all countries being told to commit to net zero (GHG emissions) by 2050 with credible plans to ensure meeting this domestic target. Indeed, the Chinese, who posited themselves as reaching there by 2060, have been sternly told to be there a decade earlier.
- Taking a cue from the new U.S. Administration, the UN Secretary-General has even called on countries to declare national climate emergencies apart from building a coalition for a carbon-neutral world by 2050. As of today, countries representing around 65% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have already agreed to this. The UN Secretary-General would like this figure to reach 90% within 2021.
- These plans and their implementation will, undoubtedly, be subject to international reviews and verification. Not said as yet, but non-compliance may not be just naming and shaming. Historical responsibilities and differentiation, obviously, have no place in this discourse; but neither does the level of development.
- India, with its huge population and now one of the world’s largest economies, can easily be in the crosshairs of such a discourse no matter its extraordinarily small carbon footprint in per-capita terms and huge development imperatives.
- Adding to the challenges of this proposed global goal is the distinct possibility of the EU imposing carbon border levies on those who do not take on high carbon cut-down targets and do so unilaterally if there is no global agreement. While as of now the U.S. Administration appears ambivalent on these border levies, the possibility of their coming around cannot be ruled out. In such a scenario, World Trade

Organization rules that presently exclude the use of tariffs on environmental grounds will certainly get modified.

### A fund pay-in idea

- The issue of money, especially the lack of it, is a perennial one in the climate discourse. In this context, Raghuram Rajan has recently put forward a proposal for India to consider — it calls on countries to pay into a global fund amounts based on their carbon emissions over and above the global per-capita average of five tons.
- This obviously disincentivises coal in a big way while incentivising renewables. Those above the global average would pay, while those below would receive the monies. While this would suggest a certain equity, it may be unacceptable to the developed countries even though Mr. Rajan has gone along with the drumbeat to forget historical responsibility.
- As far as India is concerned, for starters such a proposal may appear attractive as India today has per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emission of only 2 tons and is a global record setter in pushing renewables. But will real politics allow a major economy to benefit from such fund flows or indeed even be the recipient of any form of concessional climate finance? Unlikely.
- Moreover, the long-term implications of such a proposal in a setting of a sharply growing economy and reliance on coal-produced electricity for several decades require examination in detail, quite apart from factoring in the twists and turns that negotiations could give to such an idea. And then, of course, there are alternatives such as emission trading.
- Furthermore, the proposal focuses on current and future emissions, and in keeping with the contract and converge approach, allows practical considerations to trump fairness by not only giving a short shrift to historical responsibility but also denying priority access to the remaining carbon space for developing countries.
- In that sense, it double penalises them while giving developed countries a certain free pass. Here it bears noting that more than 75% of the carbon space available to humankind to keep global temperature rises to 1.5° C has already been taken up by the developed world and China.
- Climate negotiations are not just about the environment and human well being or even energy, but are also about global governance, and will henceforth be pursued with a vigour which requires India to carefully calibrate its approach including on the economic and political fronts.
- Climate justice is an imperative for India, which needs to leverage its green and pro-nature commitment to ensure carbon and policy space for its developmental and global aspirations. India's diplomatic and negotiating efforts must be quickly geared to that end.

### **India must take the lead in regulating cryptos**

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

**Context:** Yet another episode in the battle of the regulators against Bitcoin et al unfolded last month as news began doing the rounds that a Bill proposing a ban on these assets has been listed in the Lok Sabha bulletin. The RBI Governor did his bit to increase the anxiety of users by stating that the central bank had 'major concerns' regarding private cryptocurrencies.

### **Details:**

- The Finance Minister has, however, assuaged sentiments by stating that there will not be an outright ban on private cryptocurrencies and there will be a window available in which experiments can take place. She has also stated that the government would be taking a 'calibrated' approach towards these assets.
- It is not difficult to see what is worrying the Centre and the RBI. Bitcoins and the bevy of other crypto assets such as Ethereum, Litecoin and Polkadot operate in a boundary-less digital world, in total regulatory vacuum. The Centre is clearly concerned about investors burning their fingers trading in these



assets; the price of Bitcoin rose 68 per cent in the first two months of 2021, following an over 300 per cent rally in 2020. The RBI is concerned about money laundering and terror financing through cryptocurrencies.

- But the experience of the Indian and other global regulators over the past decade shows that banning private cryptocurrencies in one country makes the ecosystem go underground while continuing to proliferate in other countries; quite akin to the whack a mole game.
- Perhaps, India can take the lead in setting up a supervisory framework for private cryptocurrency mining, possession and trading. This can help address the RBI's concerns while helping earn some revenue for the exchequer.

### **Impossible to ban**

- The basic structure of cryptocurrencies makes it downright impossible for any regulator to ban their creation or exchange. The creator of the cryptocurrency concept, rules and framework is anonymous and it is now owned by public at large, worldwide. It is not possible to pin down the ownership of the copyright on any one individual or company.
- Similarly, the mining and maintaining of the open ledger is done by common people scattered across the globe. Even if one country clamps down on mining, it can be done in others.
- And, then, there is really nothing wrong with the actual process of mining for cryptocurrencies that can be termed illegal or criminal. The creation of cryptocurrencies is similar to other geeky pastimes such as creating intricate software codes or apps or solving complex puzzles
- Even if India bans the mining and trading of private cryptos, they will continue to be mined in other countries. These activities are likely to continue within India, too, since it is quite difficult for regulators to track these digital activities. With most of the miners being rebels against the existing system of fiat currencies, they may not be willing to listen to government diktat and cease their activity.
- Closing down domestic trading platforms for cryptocurrencies is likely to be equally futile since it is quite easy for Indians to trade on overseas platforms.
- This was evident in 2018 when the RBI had asked financial institutions to stop facilitating transactions involving cryptocurrencies. Many platforms that were enabling trading in these assets had to be shut down and traders began buying and selling Bitcoin and other cryptos on overseas platforms.
- With the Supreme Court quashing the ban last year, cryptocurrency trading platforms have begun operations again and are currently doing brisk business.

### **The way out**

- It is obvious that privately created cryptocurrencies with no regulatory backing cannot serve as legal tender to buy and sell goods in the country; that role has to be played by the RBI issued digital currency, which is currently in the works. But there is no reason to ban mining and other background activities of private cryptocurrencies since the people involved have no mal-intentions.
- That said, the cryptocurrencies thus created can be misused by people with criminal intent for illegal money transfers. So the government needs a record of all the existing cryptocurrencies in the country and those that are freshly created.
- Trading of private cryptocurrencies on trading platforms can also be allowed. But with regulatory oversight. This will give the government information about the exchange of cryptocurrencies between resident Indians and also help it tax the profits.
- So, the first step is to set up a regulatory body to supervise private cryptocurrencies.
- All those holding private cryptocurrencies on a specified date should register with the supervisory body and disclose their holdings along with their PAN numbers and other KYC details, which shall be updated on a central portal.
- All miners should also register with the regulator and disclose the number of coins mined on a daily basis. The off-market transfers of the cryptocurrencies from the holders should also be disclosed and updated on a central portal.



- The cryptocurrency trading platforms too should be asked to register with the regulator and made to adhere to net-worth, risk-management, disclosures and governance rules established by the regulator.
- All traders on the platform should first register with the supervisory body and then trade on the platforms. The platforms should put out daily reports on transactions on the platform and maintain all records which can be scrutinised by the regulator at any time.
- The Centre can consider taxing the gains made on these platforms, which will be an additional source of revenue for the exchequer.

### No easy way out

- Most governments have dismissed the private cryptocurrency ecosystem as being too small to require a detailed regulatory framework and have preferred to ban them outright or to ignore the presence of such activities in the country.
- Both options are not preferred and India can set an example for other countries in legalising private cryptocurrency activities. Not only will this help address RBI's concerns, it will also help in the growth of an ecosystem that could become the future of payment system, eventually.

### How to make India a global export hub

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](https://www.bhaskar.com/article/india-how-to-make-india-a-global-export-hub-11711111) )

**Context:** In the current fiscal, hit by the Covid pandemic, the Indian economy, according to the IMF, is expected to shrink by 10.3 per cent. However, in 2021-22 it has predicted that India will witness a growth of 8.8 per cent.

### Details:

- The path for such a V-shaped recovery has been paved by the Union Budget 2021-22, which has laid emphasis on infrastructure, health, finance and agriculture. However, to consolidate this recovery and to realise the 'Make in India' dream in the short run and 'Make for the world' in the long run, India needs a robust Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) that can support exporters and reverse the pandemic-induced economic downturn.
- To achieve export growth, it is important to adopt an integrated approach in the new FTP which is being formulated for implementation from April 1.
- India's exports over the last decade have not been too encouraging; since 2011 it has been hovering around \$300 billion. India's share in world merchandise exports was 1.5-1.7 per cent during this period, and as percentage of GDP also it has not been encouraging — falling from 17 per cent in 2011 to 12.4 per cent in 2018.
- The new FTP needs to tackle several issues.
  - The existing FTP incentivised exports through schemes such as the Merchandise Exports from India (MEIS) and the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG). Under MEIS, exporters receive duty credit scrip for a percentage of the value of goods exported, which can be used for payment of different taxes and duties. Under the EPCG, exporters can import capital goods at concessional or zero import duty.
  - However, in 2019, the WTO dispute panel ruled that these schemes violate WTO rules and should be rolled back. Following this, India decided to replace MEIS with the Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) scheme, under which taxes and duties like *mandi* tax, VAT, coal cess, and excise duty on fuel, which were previously non-refundable, will be refunded.
  - As it is a humongous task to fix appropriate rates for all product categories, it is important for the government to ensure that the benefits of this scheme is evenly distributed to all important export sectors.



- Exporters have complained that this scheme has benefited the textile sector more than any other. Other schemes such as EPCG and advance licensing also need to be overhauled so that they become WTO compatible.

### **Local manufacturing**

- To promote local manufacturing in sectors that have the potential to scale up globally, like mobile and electronic equipment, pharma, and textiles, the recently announced Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is a good initiative. Under this, manufacturers will be incentivised by the government on incremental sale of goods based on certain eligibility criteria for five years.
- This initiative has been taken at a time when many multinationals are moving out of China. The scheme will motivate them to establish units in India. Many MNCs have started talking to their Indian counterparts for relocation to India.
- However, since the US-China trade war began, only three out of 56 companies had relocated to India as of October 2019. Vietnam has been a clear winner with 26 companies setting up shop there.
- India was not able to attract MNCs moving out of China because the manufacturing sector is beset by many problems. Its contribution in GDP has been 16-17 percent in past decade; in China, its share is about 40 per cent.
- Multiple factors such as cost and quality of power, high logistics cost (around 14 per cent compared with the global benchmark of 9 per cent), low labour productivity, insufficient labour reforms and low R&D expenditure have contributed to this poor performance.
- To make India a global export hub, from where high value-added technology-intensive products are exported, the interlinking of FTP with FDI and industrial policies is required.
- This would help India become a part of global value chain (GVC). In today's GVC, there is dominance of intra-firm trade at the global level.
- Further, manufacturing infrastructure also needs to improve significantly. This can be achieved by setting up SEZs for sectors identified under the PLI scheme
- The new FTP should help exporters explore the under-tapped markets. India should revive its ties in Africa through trade and investment. The FTP should also find ways of increasing people-to-people cooperation and provide technical support to exporters to understand the legal and business environment.
- Also, emphasis must be given to enhancing trade relations with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Similarly, the 'Act East' policy should be further strengthened.
- Since, entering RCEP is out of question, at least in the near future, India should pave the path for meaningful negotiation with the EU for a free trade agreement (FTA). The efforts have been stalled as India wants to start with 'mini deal', whereas the EU is not agreeing for anything less than a full-fledged FTA.

### **Do away with protectionism**

- Since 2018, import tariffs for several product categories have been raised. To achieve the goal of 'Atamirbhar Bharat', the Budget also increased the duties on a few more product categories like mobile handset and auto components. This has been done to develop domestic capabilities in the identified sector. All such protection should be accompanied with a 'sunset' clause.
- The government should gradually phase out of import tariff, especially for strategic partners. In the last couple of years, the US has raised the issue of high tariff several times. The US is now India's largest trading partner, in 2019-20 bilateral trade between the two nations stood at \$88.75 billion.
- As the new Biden regime appears favourable towards India, it is important to resolve tariff issues quickly. Moreover, these protectionist measure could hamper India becoming a part of the global value chain if continued for long.
- It is important for policy-makers to realise the economy of a country cannot grow without enhancing its export performance. However, seeing trade policy in isolation — that is, increasing exports through incentives and discouraging imports through tariff and non-tariff barriers — is not correct. Policymakers

must help India attract MNCs and, at the same time, strengthen domestic manufacturers to make India a global export hub.



## Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements with respect to Sattras who were in news recently:

1. They are monastic institutions created by Neo-Shaivite reformer Basavanna.
2. Each Sattrra has a naamghar (worship hall) as its nucleus and is headed by an influential Sattradhikar.

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

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

Answer : b

- They are monastic institutions created as part of the 16th century **Neo-Vaishnavite** reformist movement started by Vaishnavite saint-reformer **Srimanta Sankaradeva** (1449-1596).

2) Consider the following statements about Technology and Innovation Report, 2021:

1. It was launched by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
2. According to the report, India was the biggest 'overperformer' in frontier technologies.

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

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

Answer : c

Both the statements are correct

3) Consider the following statements with respect to OBC Reservation:

1. The reservation for OBCs is a 'constitutional' dispensation to be provided by the State legislation.
2. The extent of reservation given to the OBCs in local bodies cannot take the total reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs beyond the 50 per cent ceiling.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

- Recently, the Supreme Court held that the reservation for OBCs is only a 'statutory' dispensation to be provided by the State legislation unlike the 'constitutional' reservation regarding SCs/STs, which is linked to the proportion of population.

4) Which of the following statements are correct with respect to National Cyber Security Strategy 2020?

1. It is formulated by NITI Aayog and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
2. It calls for an index of cyber preparedness, and attendant monitoring of performance.

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

- A National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 is being formulated by the Office of National Cyber Security Coordinator at the National Security Council Secretariat.

5) In which of the following cases did the Supreme Court put a limit for reservation in jobs and education at 50%?

- a) Keshavnanda Bharti Case
- b) Indra Sawhney case
- c) Minerva Mills case
- d) Olga Tellis Case

Ans. b)

- **In 1992**, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the “Lakshman rekha” for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in “extraordinary circumstances”, in the Indra Sawhney case.

6) What does the Constitution (One Hundred Second Amendment) Act of 2018 deals with?

- a) National Judicial Appointment Commission
- b) National Commission for Women
- c) National Commission for SC/ST
- d) National Commission for Backward Classes

Ans. d)

7) Consider the following statements:

1. Article 338 empowers the President to specify the socially and educationally backward communities in a State
2. Article 342A deals with the National Commission for Backward Classes.

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. c)

Both the statements are incorrect

Article 338B deals with the NCBC. Article **342A empowers the President to specify the socially and educationally backward communities in a State.**

8) Consider the following statements with respect to Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill 2019:

1. It **designates individuals as terrorists** on certain grounds provided in the Act.
2. The Bill empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans. c)

**Key amendments:**

- To **designate individuals as terrorists** on certain grounds provided in the Act.
- The Bill empowers the Director General of NIA to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.





- The Bill empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

9) Recently Disha Bill has been passed by which state?

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Telangana
- c) Karnataka
- d) Rajasthan

Ans. a)

- The Union government informed the Lok Sabha on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021 that an **inter-ministerial consultation for the Andhra Pradesh Disha (Special Courts for Specified Offences against Women and Children) Bill, 2020**, had been initiated.
- The **Bill paves the way for awarding the death penalty for rape and gang rape, and expediting the verdicts in trials of such cases to 21 days.**

10) Covaxin, vaccine against coronavirus has been developed by:

- a) Bharat Biotech
- b) Indian Council of Medical Research
- c) Serum Institute
- d) Both a and b

Ans. d)

11) Which of the statements given below is/are correct about the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021?

- 1. It introduced two distinct sets of regulations — one, due diligence norms to be followed by ‘intermediaries’ and two, ‘Code of Ethics’ ought to be adhered to by ‘publishers’, along with a three-tier compliance mechanism.
- 2. It provides for a three tier regulatory system to administer a loose ranging Code of Ethics.
- 3. It does not recognize digital news media as a separate category of entities.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Ans. c)

**The parent (IT) Act does not recognise digital news media as a separate category** of entities and does not seek to subject them or their content to any set of special regulations.

The new act recognize digital news media as a separate category.

12) Exercise Dustlik – II is between India and

- a) Ukraine
- b) Uzbekistan
- c) Tazikistan
- d) Russia

Ans. b)

- At **Exercise Dustlik-II between India and Uzbekistan** from March 10-19, the Army will showcase its Counter Insurgency (CI) and Counter Terrorism (CT) skills.

13) The country’s biggest floating solar power plant is situated at -

- a) Maharashtra
- b) Goa

- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Telangana

Ans. d)

The country's biggest floating solar power plant till date, by generation capacity, which is being developed by the NTPC in the reservoir of its thermal plant at Ramagundam in Peddapalli district, **Telangana**, is set to be commissioned by May-June next.

14) Consider the following statements with respect to INS Karanj:

- 1. It is the third of six Scorpene-class submarines being built under Project-75 by Mazagon Dock Limited, Goa.
- 2. It is a nuclear powered submarine to be commissioned into Indian Navy in collaboration with France.

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 : d

- Both statements are correct

15) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Sun Temple at Konark?

- 1. The temple was built by the Ganga dynasty king Anantavarman Chodaganga in the 12th century CE.
- 2. The Jaganmohan of the temple was filled with sand and sealed by the British in 1903 to ensure the stability of the monument.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

- It was built by King Narasimhadeva I, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty.

16) Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary is located in which of the following regions?

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Rajasthan
- c. Haryana
- d. Delhi

Answer : d

It is located in Southern Delhi Ridge of Aravalli hill range on Delhi-Haryana border.

17) What is Tor Proxy?

- a) A satellite of China
- b) A naval ship of Russia
- c) Dark Web
- d) A malware

Ans. c)

18) Consider the following statements with respect to the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

Which of the statement is incorrect?

- a. The Act prohibits conversion of any place of worship
- b. The Act provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the day of commencement of this Act



- c. Nothing contained in this Act shall apply to the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid situated in Ayodhya
- d. The Act also exempted any place of worship that is covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958

Answer : b

There is no such provision.

19) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the 1930 Dandi March?

- 1. Gandhi was arrested during this act of nonviolent civil disobedience movement and the event continued without him.
- 2. Gandhi agreed to call off this satyagraha in exchange for an equal negotiating role at a London conference on India's future.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

Both statements are correct

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Seabuckthorn :

- 1. It produces edible fruit which is rich in vitamins, carotenoids and omega fatty acids
- 2. It is found generally in arid and dry areas such as deserts.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

- In India, it is found above the tree line in the Himalayan region, generally in dry areas such as the cold deserts of Ladakh and Spiti.