

# PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

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## June (Week 4)

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# Prelims

## NATIONAL

### Black Softshell Turtle

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** A major temple in Assam has signed a memorandum of understanding with two green NGOs, the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden and the Kamrup district administration for the long-term conservation of the rare freshwater black softshell turtle or the *Nilssonia nigricans*.

#### Details:

- A vision document 2030 was also launched after Turtle Survival Alliance India and Help Earth signed the pact involving the **Hayagriva Madhava Temple** Committee.
- **The temple, revered by both Hindus and Buddhists**, is at Hajo, about 30 km northwest of Guwahati.
- Until sightings along the Brahmaputra's drainage in Assam, the black softshell turtle was thought to be "extinct in the wild" and confined only to ponds of temples in northeastern India and Bangladesh.
- The **International Union for Conservation of Nature** had in 2021 listed the turtle as "**critically endangered**".
- **But it does not enjoy legal protection under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972**, although it has traditionally been hunted for its meat and cartilage, traded in regional and international markets.

#### About Black Softshell Turtle:

- **Scientific Name:** *Nilssonia nigricans*
- **Features:**
  - They look almost the same as the Indian peacock softshell turtle (*Nilssonia hurum*), which is classified as **Endangered** in the **IUCN Red List**.
- **Habitat:**
  - A **freshwater species** and there are 29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises found in India.
  - They are found in **ponds of temples in northeastern India and Bangladesh**. Its distribution range also includes the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.
- **Protection Status:**
  - IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered
  - CITES: Appendix I
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: No legal protection
- **Threats:**
  - Consumption of turtle meat and eggs, silt mining, encroachment of wetlands and change in flooding pattern.
- **Sea Turtles of Indian Waters:**
  - There are five species in Indian waters i.e. **Olive Ridley, Green turtle, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback**.
    - The **Olive Ridley, Leatherback and Loggerhead** are listed as '**Vulnerable**' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
    - The **Hawksbill turtle** is listed as '**Critically Endangered**' and **Green Turtle** is listed as '**Endangered**' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.



- They are protected in **Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**, under **Schedule I**.

#### **Turtle Conservation:**

- **National Marine Turtle Action Plan:**

- It contains ways and means to not only **promote inter-sectoral action for conservation** but also guide improved coordination amongst the government, civil society and all relevant stakeholders on the response to cases of stranding, entanglement, injury or mortality of marine mammals and also conservation of marine turtles.

- **Indian Ocean Sea Turtle Agreement (IOSEA):**

- India is a signatory to the **Indian Ocean Sea Turtle Agreement (IOSEA)** of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), a **United Nations backed initiative**.
- It puts in place a **framework** through which **States of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asian region**, as well as other concerned States, can work together to conserve and replenish depleted **marine turtle populations** for which they share responsibility.

- **KURMA App:**

- It has a built-in digital field guide covering 29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises of India.
- It was developed by the **Indian Turtle Conservation Action Network (ITCAN)** in collaboration with the **Turtle Survival Alliance-India** and **Wildlife Conservation Society-India**.

- **World Turtle Day** is observed every year on **23<sup>rd</sup> May**.

### **Proposed e-commerce rules**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The government has proposed changes to the e-commerce rules under the Consumer Protection Act to make the framework under which firms operate more stringent. While a number of new provisions are similar to what the Centre sought of social media companies through the IT intermediary rules announced earlier this year, several proposals in the e-commerce rules are aimed at increasing liabilities for online retailers for goods and services purchased on their platforms.*

#### **Are there any changes that could impact the shopping experience of users?**

- Firstly, the draft rules issued by the Consumer Affairs Ministry seek to ban “specific flash sales” by e-commerce entities.
- While as per the draft rules, conventional e-commerce flash sales are not banned, specific flash sales or back-to-back sales “which limit customer choice, increase prices and prevents a level playing field are not allowed”.
- The rules have also introduced the concept of “fall-back liability”, which says that e-commerce firms will be held liable in case a seller on their platform fails to deliver goods or services due to negligent conduct, which causes loss to the customer.
- In several cases, when problems arise with goods purchased from their marketplaces, e-commerce platforms direct the consumers to the respective sellers to solve any grievance. With fall-back liability, consumers will be able to reach out to the platform itself.
- The rules also propose to restrict e-commerce companies from “manipulating search results or search indexes”, in what comes as a response to a long-standing demand from sellers and traders to prevent preferential treatment to certain platforms.

#### **What else do these new rules change for consumers?**





- E-commerce companies will also be restricted from making available to any person information pertaining to the consumer without express and affirmative consent. No entity shall record consent automatically, including in the form of pre-ticked checkboxes.
- Further, the companies will have to provide domestic alternatives to imported goods, adding to the government's push for made-in-India products.
- The draft amendment also proposes to ask e-commerce firms to mandatorily become a part of the National Consumer Helpline.

#### **What changes for e-commerce companies?**

- Any online retailer will first have to register itself with the Department of Promotion for Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- The rules propose mandating that no logistics service provider of a marketplace e-commerce entity shall provide differentiated treatment between sellers of the same category.
- Taking on from the DPIIT's foreign direct investment policy for e-commerce marketplaces, parties and associated enterprises related to e-commerce companies will not be allowed to be enlisted as sellers on the respective platform.
- Any entity having 10 per cent or more common ultimate beneficial ownership will be considered an "associated enterprise" of an e-commerce platform.

#### **What are the commonalities with the IT intermediary rules?**

- On the lines of the IT intermediary rules announced for social media companies, the Consumer Affairs Ministry has proposed to mandate e-commerce companies appoint a grievance officer, a chief compliance officer and a nodal contact person "for 24x7 coordination with law enforcement agencies".
- The provisions also look to ask e-commerce companies to share information with a "government agency which is lawfully authorised for investigative or protective or cyber security activities, for the purposes of verification of identity, or for the prevention, detection, investigation, or prosecution, of offences under any law for the time being in force, or for cyber security incidents".
- The draft rules propose that the information sought by the government agency will have to be produced by the e-commerce company "within 72 hours of the receipt of an order from the said authority".

### **Draft Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** Recently the Centre released the **draft Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021** to the general public for comments until July 2. The new draft proposes to amend the Cinematograph Act of 1952 with provisions that will give the Centre "revisionary powers" and enable it to "re-examine" films already cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

#### **Revision of certification**

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting proposes to add a provision to the Act that will equip the Centre with revisionary powers on account of violation of Section 5B(1) (principles for guidance in certifying films).
- The current Act, in Section 6, already equips the Centre to call for records of proceedings in relation of a film's certification.
- The Ministry explained that the proposed revision "means that the Central Government, if the situation so warranted, has the power to reverse the decision of the Board"

- Currently, because of a judgment by the Karnataka High Court, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in November 2020, the Centre cannot use its revisionary powers on films that have already been granted a certificate by the CBFC.
- The new draft makes space for the government's intervention.

### **Age-based certification**

- The draft proposes to introduce age-based categorisation and classification. Currently, films are certified into three categories — 'U' for unrestricted public exhibition; 'U/A' that requires parental guidance for children under 12; and 'A' for adult films.
- The new draft proposes to divide the categories into further age-based groups: U/A 7+, U/A 13+ and U/A 16+. This proposed age classification for films echoes the new IT rules for streaming platforms.

### **Provision against piracy**

- The Ministry noted that at present, there are no enabling provisions to check film piracy in the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- The draft proposes to add Section 6AA that will prohibit unauthorised recording. The proposed section states, "notwithstanding any law for the time being in force, no person shall, without the written authorisation of the author, be permitted to use any audio-visual recording device in a place to knowingly make or transmit or attempt to make or transmit or abet the making or transmission of a copy of a film or a part thereof".
- Violation shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term "which shall not be less than three months but which may extend to three years and with a fine which shall not be less than Rs 3 lakh but which may extend to 5 per cent of the audited gross production cost or with both".
- The draft proposes to certify films for perpetuity. Currently a certificate issued by the CBFC is valid only for 10 years.

## **Delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Union government's invitation to 14 key political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir for a meeting with the Prime Minister in the national capital this week has led to speculation about possible scheduling of the Assembly elections. On Independence Day last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said elections would be held in J&K after the delimitation process in the Union Territory was over. Delimitation is crucial for kick-starting the political process in J&K.*

### **What is delimitation and why is it needed?**

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha seat to represent changes in population over time.
- This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be questioned before any court.
- The objective is to redraw boundaries (based on the data of the last Census) in a way so that the population of all seats, as far as practicable, be the same throughout the State. Aside from changing the limits of a constituency, the process may result in change in the number of seats in a state.

### **How often has delimitation been carried out in J&K?**

- Delimitation exercises in J&K in the past have been slightly different from those in the rest of the country because of the region's special status — which was scrapped by the Centre in August 2019.



- Until then, delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in J&K was governed by the Constitution of India, but the delimitation of the state's Assembly seats was governed by the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- Assembly seats in J&K were delimited in 1963, 1973 and 1995. The last exercise was conducted by the Justice (retired) K K Gupta Commission when the state was under President's Rule and was based on the 1981 census, which formed the basis of the state elections in 1996.
- There was no census in the state in 1991 and no Delimitation Commission was set up by the state government after the 2001 census as the J&K Assembly passed a law putting a freeze on the fresh delimitation of seats until 2026.
- This freeze was upheld by the Supreme Court. The J&K Assembly, at that time, had 87 seats — 46 in Kashmir, 37 in Jammu and 4 in Ladakh. Twenty-four more seats are reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The freeze, some political parties argue, has created inequity for Jammu region.

### **Election Petition**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has filed an election petition in the Calcutta High Court challenging the Assembly election result of Nandigram constituency, where she had contested and lost. She has sought that Suvendhu Adhikari's election be declared void on grounds of corrupt practice and discrepancies in the counting procedure conducted by the Returning Officer.

#### **What is an election petition?**

- The Election Commission's role ends with the declaration of results, that is once the Returning Officer has signed the final result sheet (Form 20).
- After that, an election petition is the only legal remedy available to a voter or a candidate who believes there has been malpractice in an election. Such a person can challenge the result through an election petition submitted to the High Court of the state in which the constituency is located.
- Such a petition has to be filed within 45 days from the date of the poll results; nothing is entertained by courts after that.
- Although the Representative of the People Act of 1951 suggests that the High Court should try to conclude the trial within six months, it usually drags on for much longer, even years.

#### **On what grounds can an election petition be filed?**

- Under Section 100 of the RP Act, an election petition can be filed on the grounds that:
- On the day of the election, the winning candidate was not qualified to contest.
- The winning candidate, his poll agent or any other person with the consent of the winning candidate has indulged in a corrupt practice. Section 123 of the RP Act has a detailed list of what amounts to corrupt practice, including bribery, use of force or coercion, appeal to vote or refrain from voting on grounds of religion, race, community, and language.
- Improper acceptance of the nomination of the winning candidate or improper rejection of a nomination.
- Malpractice in the counting process, which includes improper reception, refusal or rejection of any vote, or the reception of any vote which is void.
- Non-compliance with the provisions of the Constitution or the RP Act or any rules or orders made under the RP Act.

#### **What happens if the court finds that a contention of malpractice is correct?**

- This depends on relief that is claimed by the petitioner in her election petition. Under Section 84 of the RP Act, the petitioner may ask that the results of all or the winning candidates may be declared void.



- In addition to that, the petitioner may also ask the court to declare her (in case the petition is filed by a candidate) or any other candidate as the winner or duly elected.
- So the verdict on an election petition, if found in favour of the petitioner, may result in a fresh election or the court announcing a new winner.

### **NISHTHA Capacity Building Programme**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *The Ministry of Tribal Affairs and NCERT jointly organised a NISHTHA Capacity Building Programme for teachers and principals of the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS).*

#### **Details:**

- 120 teachers and principals from the EMRS completed the 40-day NISHTHA-National initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement Program.
- The capacity building program is aimed to build competencies among teachers and school principals and Improving Quality of School Education through Integrated Teacher Training.
- The teachers were from the three states of Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- The program will be conducted for more EMRS teachers from across the country.

### **Integrated theatre commands**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat held a meeting with the Vice Chiefs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, and representatives of the Ministries of Home and Finance, National Security Council, Integrated Defence Staff, and Department of Defence, among others. The meeting was held in the backdrop of concerns about the **proposed model of the integrated theatre commands** — both within the Services and outside, as it involves paramilitary forces as well.*

#### **What are integrated theatre commands?**

- In the simplest words, it is a unified command under which all the resources of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force are pooled, depending on the threat perception.
- The commands could be geographical — like looking at a border with a particular country — or thematic, like a command for all maritime threats.
- Several nations in the world have theatre commands, including the United States and China.
- The idea of creating an integrated tri-Services command in India is not new — it had been recommended at various levels after the Kargil conflict.
- When Gen Rawat was appointed Chief of Defence Staff in January 2020 with a mandate to raise such commands within his three-year tenure, the idea was finally brought to the design table.
- After his appointment, Gen Rawat had commissioned studies within each of the armed forces to come up with ideas of what these commands could look like. These were headed by the Vice Chiefs of the forces.

#### **What is the proposal under discussion?**

- A model with four to five integrated tri-Services theatre commands is under discussion, with each command headed by a three-star officer.

- This officer, the theatre commander, will report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), which, as the name suggests, includes the three Service chiefs, and is headed by the CDS as its permanent chairman.
- This brings in a major change — the Service chiefs currently have all the operational control over their forces; operational powers will now move to the COSC.
- Each of these commands will have the needed assets from all the three forces. Operational control over all of those assets, regardless of the force, will lie with the commander of that theatre.

**The proposed commands are:**

- A Maritime Theatre Command, which will take care of all the maritime security needs of the country on both the eastern and the western seaboard, and will include air strike assets and amphibian forces of the Army.
- An Air Defence Command, which will be mandated with air defence across the country and beyond. The fighter jets will have reconnaissance and surveillance assets as well.
- Two or three land-based commands are proposed. If there are two commands, there will be one each for India's borders with China and Pakistan.
- But there is also a proposal to have another command looking at India's borders with Pakistan and China in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, given the unique territory and security needs of the country in that region.
- A final decision is yet to be taken.

**What will be the role of the Services, if not operational?**

- As of now, the Services have to speak to each other in times of need and urgency to request their assets to conduct a particular operation.
- The proposal is to have a theatre commander who will have operational control of the assets under his command, thus enhancing jointness among the forces, and also reducing duplication of resources.
- However, this would leave the Service chiefs with no direct control over their assets operationally. This does not mean their roles will be made redundant. Now the Services will have the core tasks to Raise, Train and Sustain their respective forces.
- Also, as each chief will be a member of the COSC, and an expert of his/her domain, his or her inputs will be necessary for all operational decisions.

**How many commands are there now; are any of them tri-Service commands?**

- As of now, the three forces have 17 commands between them.
- The Army has seven commands: Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western, Central, Southwestern and Army Training Command (ARTRAC).
- The Air Force has seven as well: Western, Eastern, Southern, Southwestern, Central, Training, and Maintenance commands.
- The Navy has three: Western, Eastern and Southern, of which Southern is largely about training.
- Even if these commands operate in the same region, they are not co-located, and their areas of operational responsibility are not necessarily the same.
- There are two existing tri-Service commands as well — the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), which is headed by rotation by officers from the three Services, and the Strategic Force Command, which is responsible for India's nuclear assets.



## **India's first maritime arbitration centre**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Gujarat Maritime University signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Financial Services Centres Authority in GIFT City to promote the Gujarat International Maritime Arbitration Centre (GIMAC). This will be the first centre of its kind in the country that will manage arbitration and mediation proceedings with disputes related to the maritime and shipping sector.*

### **Where is the GIMAC being set up?**

- The GIMAC will be part of a maritime cluster that the Gujarat Maritime Board (GMB) is setting up in GIFT City at Gandhinagar.
- The Maritime Board has rented about 10,000 square feet at GIFT House which is part of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) area with the clearance from the development commissioner.
- The centre is expected to be ready by the end of August.

### **Why is such a centre needed?**

- There are over 35 arbitration centres in India. However, none of them exclusively deals with the maritime sector.
- The arbitration involving Indian players is now heard at the Singapore Arbitration Centre. The idea is to create a world-class arbitration centre focused on maritime and shipping disputes that can help resolve commercial and financial conflicts between entities having operations in India.
- Globally, London is the preferred centre for arbitration for the maritime and shipping sector.
- The maritime cluster consisting of ship leasing and brokering services is being set up with the intention of drawing back all the maritime and shipping business which is located offshore like Dubai and Singapore.
- Arbitration is an add-on maritime service which we are trying to provide within the Gujarat Maritime cluster that is being created within GIFT City.

## **Food security (Assistance to State Government Rules) 2015**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *The Department of Food & Public Distribution notified amendment in Food security (Assistance to State Government Rules) 2015.*

### **Details:**

- This move is expected to improve transparency and curb leakages at ration shops at the time of weighing of foodgrains for beneficiaries.
- The move will also encourage ePoS linkage with electronic weighing machines.
- The notified amendment aims to ensure the right quantity to beneficiaries in the distribution of subsidised foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 as per their entitlement.
- It also incentivises states that have been using ePoS efficiently and encourages states to improve efficiency in ePoS operations and generate savings.
- According to the amendment, states that are operating their ePoS devices judiciously and are able to generate savings from the additional margin of Rs 17 per quintal can now utilise the savings for purchase, operations and maintenance of electronic weighing scales and their integration with the point of sale devices.



- While distribution through ePoS devices ensures that subsidised foodgrains are provided to the rightful beneficiary through biometric authentication, integration of ePoS devices with electronic weighing scales would ensure that the beneficiary is given the right quantity of foodgrains by the Fair Price Shop dealer as per his entitlement.

### **Class action suits**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The families of 71 people who were killed after Cyclone Tauktae battered ONGC's barge vessels off Bombay High last month have received compensation up to Rs 2 lakh from ONGC, and between Rs 35 lakh and Rs 75 lakh from Afcons, which was assigned the project contract. Three directors of ONGC have been suspended, and NHRC has issued notices to the Petroleum Ministry, ONGC, and the Coast Guard. A surviving engineer has filed a case of criminal negligence against the deceased captain of barge P-305, which sank. Neither ONGC nor Afcons have taken responsibility for the loss of lives. In the ONGC matter, there is little the families can do in terms of personal injury suits, or class action suits. Both these legal options are weak in India, and not considered a worthwhile exercise.*

#### **What are class action suits?**

- A class action suit is a legal action or claim that allows one or many plaintiffs to file and appear for a group of people with similar interests. Such a group forms a “class”.
- A class action suit derives from representative litigation, to ensure justice to the ordinary individual against a powerful adversary.
- While class action suits have a history dating back to the 18th century, these were formally incorporated into law in the United States in 1938 under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.
- Over the years, class action has become so successful at curbing negligence, that it is now a part of US corporate and consumer laws, environmental litigation, etc.
- The ubiquity of representative litigation in the US has given rise to a class of lawyers called “ambulance chasers” — those who solicit for clients at an accident or disaster site, largely for personal injury cases.
- They get financial compensation for their clients from the perpetrator, a percentage of which they keep. While such soliciting violates professional legal conduct in the US, it has helped hold people and corporations accountable.

#### **Is there an Indian equivalent of US class action suits?**

- The most actionable suit was the Bhopal gas leak from the Union Carbide factory in 1984, where more than 3,700 people died.
- Three class action suits were filed in the US, which dismissed all claims for environmental clean-up, personal injuries, and medical compensation. In India, the central government filed a case on behalf of the persons who had been injured as a result of the gas leak.
- Eventually, Union Carbide was asked to pay \$470 million in compensation, one-seventh of the claim asked for. This also ended all civil and criminal complaints. The water is still contaminated, people still haven't recovered from their injuries, and multiple generations suffer the effects.
- During the 2009 Satyam Computers scandal, there was fraud and misrepresentation to the stock exchanges, regulator, and investors.
- A class action suit was filed, but because India didn't have an appropriate law, 300,000 Indian investors were deprived of damages while Satyam's US investors were made whole. The amendment of Section 245 of the Companies Act, as mentioned below, was a consequence of this case.





- In 2015, the Government of India filed a case on behalf of consumers in the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission against Nestle after the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India found higher than permissible levels of lead in instant noodles. The case is still pending.
- India now has legal provisions for filing class action suits, but under four laws:
  - Order 1 Rule 8 of the Civil Procedure Code refers to representative suits, which is the closest to a classic class action suit in a civil context in India. It does not cover criminal proceedings.
  - Section 245 of the Companies Act allows members or depositors of a company to initiate proceedings against the directors of the company in specific instances. There are threshold limits, requiring a minimum number of people or holders of issued share capital before such a suit can proceed. This type of suit is filed in the National Company Law Tribunal. Currently, no class action matters have been filed under this provision.
  - The Competition Act under Section 53(N) allows a group of aggrieved persons to appear at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal in issues of anti-competitive practices.
  - The Supreme Court has held that in certain complaints under the Consumer Protection Act, they can be considered as class action suits. (Rameshwar Prasad Shrivastava and Ors v Dwarkadhis Project Pvt Ltd and Ors)

#### **Is a class action suit comparable with public interest litigation?**

- For filing a public interest litigation (Article 32 or Article 226 of the Constitution), the plaintiff need not have a personal interest or claim in the matter.
- The PIL must serve a matter of public interest. A crucial difference is that unlike a class action suit, a PIL cannot be filed against a private party.

#### **What has deterred the development of a mature body of class action suits in India?**

- There are several hurdles, which are not necessarily regulatory in nature.
  - **Underdeveloped system of torts:** Tort law has not developed sufficiently in India for a number of reasons, primarily due to the high cost and time-consuming nature of litigation, especially in cases concerning the law of torts. As civil breaches, litigants find it too expensive and complicated, and therefore do not pursue such cases.
  - **Lack of contingency fees:** The rules of the Bar Council of India do not allow lawyers to charge contingency fees, i.e., a percentage of the damages claimants receive if they win a case. This disincentivises lawyers from appearing in time-consuming cases that class action suits inevitably are. Revisiting this rule in specific cases may be a good first step in bringing class action suits into the mainstream.
  - **Third-party financing mechanisms for litigants:** Since litigation costs are high, class action suits can be made easier by allowing external parties to fund or sponsor the cost of litigation. Some states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka have made changes in the Civil Procedure Code to allow this.

### **Peter Pan Syndrome**

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

**Context:** A special court in Mumbai has **granted bail to a 23-year-old** accused of sexually assaulting a minor. The court found the two were romantically involved, and that the 14-year-old had voluntarily been with the accused. During the hearing, the accused had told the court he suffered from “Peter Pan Syndrome”, prompting the special public prosecutor to argue that a medical examination of the man showed no signs of abnormality, and that the defence itself could not provide medical papers to support the claim.



### What is Peter Pan Syndrome?

- Peter Pan is a fictional character created by Scottish novelist James Matthew Barrie in the early 1900s. His character is one of a care-free young boy, who never grows up.
  - He features in several of Barrie's books and plays, and has since been adapted in numerous films, television series and comics.
  - These works describe stories of Peter and his friend Wendy travelling to Neverland, a mythical island, where they meet fairies, pirates and mermaids, amongst other creatures.
- It is said that people who develop similar behaviours — of living life carefree, finding responsibilities challenging in adulthood, and basically, “never growing up” — suffer from Peter Pan Syndrome.
- While the World Health Organization does not recognise Peter Pan Syndrome as a health disorder, many experts believe it is a mental health condition that can affect one's quality of life.
- The term ‘Peter Pan Syndrome’ first appeared in 1983, in a book authored by Dr Dan Kiley titled ‘Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up’. He described it as a “social-psychological phenomenon”.
- As Peter Pan Syndrome hasn't officially been diagnosed as a health disorder, there aren't clearly-defined symptoms or characteristics or even reasons which cause it. However, according to HealthLine, it could affect one's daily routine, relationships, work ethic, and result in attitudinal changes.
- The ‘Peter Pan Syndrome’ affects people who do not want or feel unable to grow up, people with the body of an adult but the mind of a child.
- They don't know how to or don't want to stop being children and start being mothers or fathers.
- The syndrome is not currently considered a psychopathology. However, an increasingly larger number of adults are presenting emotionally immature behaviors in Western society.
- Peter Pan Syndrome can affect anyone, irrespective of gender, race or culture. However, it appears to be more common among men.

### Like Peter Pan Syndrome, a Wendy Syndrome

- Wendy Syndrome takes after Wendy Darling, who appears beside Peter Pan but is seen as playing an antithetical character. She is often called a “mother”, taking on the role of an adult or someone more mature.
- Healthline describes people suffering from Wendy Syndrome as often seen “making decisions, tidying up messes, and offering one-sided emotional support”.

## **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3711111.ece) )

**Context:** Information and Broadcasting Ministry Joint Secretary Vikram Sahay said on Friday that over 1,500 publishers had so far submitted information in the formats prescribed under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

### Background:

- On February 25, the Centre framed **the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021**, in the exercise of powers under **section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000** and in supersession of the earlier Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011, which will come into effect from May 26.

### Overview of the new rules:

- It mandates a **grievance redressal system** for over the top (OTT) and digital portals in the country. This is necessary for the users of social media to raise their grievance against the misuse of social media.
- **Significant social media firms** have to appoint a **chief compliance officer** and have a **nodal contact person** who can be in touch with law enforcement agencies 24/7.
- **A grievance officer:** Social media platforms will also have to name a **grievance officer** who shall register the grievance within 24 hours and dispose of it in 15 days.
- **Removal of content:** If there are complaints against the dignity of users, particularly women – about exposed private parts of individuals or nudity or sexual act or impersonation etc – social media platforms will be required to remove that within 24 hours after a complaint is made.
- **A monthly report:** They also will have to publish a monthly report about the number of complaints received and the status of redressal.
- There will be **three levels of regulation for news publishers** — self-regulation, a self-regulatory body, headed by a retired judge or an eminent person, and oversight from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, including codes of practices and a grievance committee.
- Social media companies with more than 50 lakh registered users will be considered ‘significant social media intermediaries’, as per the new norms.

### What happens in case of non compliance?

- Social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp messenger **could face a ban** if they do not comply with the new Information Technology rules.
- They also run the risk of losing their status as “**intermediaries**” and may become liable for criminal action if they do not comply with the revised regulations.

### What are the Concerns being raised?

- Various industry bodies have written to the government **for up to a one-year compliance window, particularly in view of the pandemic.**
- Concerns have also been expressed over potential **unavailability of ‘safe harbour’ protection** given to intermediaries under **Section 79 of the IT Act**, under the new rules.
- They have requested a re-think over a clause in the new rules which can lead to **imposition of criminal liability upon the employees for non-compliance by intermediaries**, asking for it to be dropped in the interest of ease of doing business.
- **Originator traceability mandate in end-to-end encrypted platforms** could end up weakening the security architecture of the platform. This could render the entire citizenry susceptible to cyberattacks by hostile actors.
- Additionally, the extant data retention mandate entailed **risking privacy of users in India and abroad** in addition to security risks and technical complexities which requires a lot of time for development and testing before integration with the existing ecosystem.

### Ambergris

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *In the past few weeks there have been two cases where the Mumbai Police has arrested five persons trying to sell Ambergris or whale vomit. What is so valuable about Ambergris and why is it being smuggled?*

### What is Ambergris?

- Ambergris, French for grey amber, is generally referred to as whale vomit.



- A sperm whale eats several thousand squid beaks a day.
- Occasionally, a beak makes it way to the whale's stomach and into its looping convoluted intestines where it becomes ambergris through a complex process, and may ultimately be excreted by the whale.
- It is a solid waxy substance that floats around the surface of the water body and at times settles on the coast.
- German physician Franz Schwediawer in 1783 called it "preternaturally hardened whale dung".



## INTERNATIONAL

### Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB)

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Bhutan's Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) programme launched in partnership with India.*

#### About the TIWB Programme:

- It is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- The programme has been launched in Bhutan with India as the Partner Jurisdiction.
  - India has provided the Tax Expert for this programme.
  - This programme is expected to be of about 24 months' duration through which India in collaboration with the UNDP and the TIWB Secretariat aims to aid Bhutan in strengthening its tax administration by transferring technical know-how and skills to its tax auditors, and through sharing of best audit practices.
  - The focus of the programme will be in the area of International Taxation and Transfer Pricing.
- The objective of the TIWB Initiative is to enable sharing of tax audit knowledge and skills with tax administrations in developing countries through a targeted, real time "learning by doing" approach.
- Selected experts will work with local tax officials directly on current audits and audit-related issues concerning international tax matters and general audit practices relevant for specific cases.

### Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

(Source: The Hindu)

**Context:** *Pakistan was retained on the greylist, or the list of countries under "increased monitoring", by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), as the Paris-based UN watchdog judged it deficient in prosecuting the top leadership of UN Security Council-designated terror groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Al Qaeda and Taliban.*

#### Financial Action Task Force

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) **is an inter-governmental body** established in 1989 during the G7 Summit in Paris.
- The objectives of the FATF **are to set standards and promote effective implementation** of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- Its **Secretariat** is located at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) headquarters in Paris.
- **Member Countries:** it consists of **thirty-seven** member jurisdictions.
  - **India** is one of the members.
- FATF has two lists:
  - **Grey List:** Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.
  - **Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

- The **FATF Plenary** is the decision making body of the FATF. It meets three times per year.

### **Full ship shock trials**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The US Navy carried out a ‘full ship shock trial’ on the USS Gerald R Ford, its newest and most advanced nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, by detonating around 18 tonnes of explosives a few metres near the ship, to ensure its hardness was capable of withstanding battle conditions.*

#### **What is a Full Ship Shock Trial (FSST)?**

- During World War II, American warships suffered severe damage from enemy mines and torpedoes that had actually missed their target, but exploded underwater in close proximity.
- The US Navy has since worked to improve the shock proofing of their ship systems to minimise damage from such “near miss” explosions.
- In FSSTs, an underwater explosive charge is set off near an operational ship, and system and component failures are documented, as per a 2007 document on the subject by the JASON group of elite US scientists.
- The FSST “probes whether the components survive shock in their environment on the ship; it probes the possibilities of system failures, and large components that could not be otherwise tested,” the document says.
- Such trials are usually conducted on ships that are the first of a new class to be built – like the Gerald R Ford.

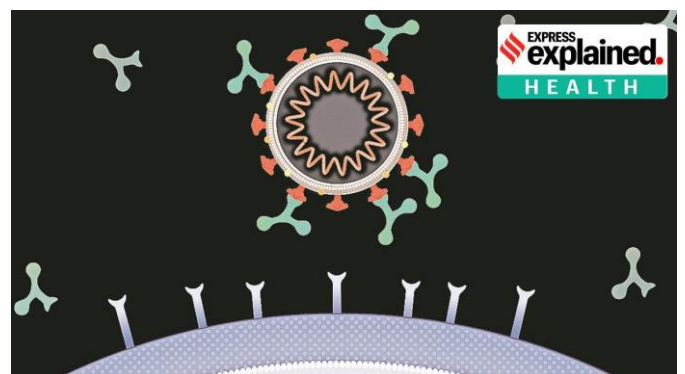
### **Monoclonal antibodies**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *An experimental monoclonal antibody cocktail, REGEN-COV2, has been found to be a life-saving treatment for some of the most severely affected Covid-19 patients, results of a clinical trial in the UK have shown.*

#### **What are monoclonal antibodies?**

- To fight a viral infection, our bodies create proteins known as antibodies.
- Monoclonal antibodies are artificial antibodies that mimic the activity of our immune systems.
- They are produced through a process that involves extracting specific antibodies from human blood and then cloning them.
- These monoclonal antibodies are designed to target a virus or a specific part of one — for instance, REGEN-COV2 is a cocktail of two monoclonal antibodies developed to target the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. The monoclonal antibodies bind to specific parts of the spike protein, blocking its ability to infect healthy cells.







- Besides Covid-19, monoclonal antibodies have been used in the treatment of cancers as well as Ebola and HIV.

## Summer solstice

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The longest day of 2021 for those living north of the Equator is June 21. In technical terms, this day is referred to as the summer solstice, the longest day of the summer season. It occurs when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Cancer, or more specifically right over 23.5 degree north latitude.*

### **Why do we have summer solstice?**

- Since Earth rotates on its axis, the Northern Hemisphere gets more direct sunlight between March and September over the course of a day, which also means people living in the Northern Hemisphere experience summer during this time.
- The rest of the year, the Southern Hemisphere gets more sunlight.
- During the solstice, the Earth's axis — around which the planet spins, completing one turn each day — is tilted in a way that the North Pole is tipped towards the sun and the South Pole is away from it.
- Typically, this imaginary axis passes right through the middle of the Earth from top to bottom and is always tilted at 23.5 degree with respect to the sun.
- Therefore, the solstice, as NASA puts it, is that instant in time when the North Pole points more directly toward the sun than at any other time during the year. Solstice means “sun stands still” in Latin.
- This day is characterised by a greater amount of energy received from the sun. According to NASA, the amount of incoming energy the Earth received from the sun on this day is 30 per cent higher at the North Pole than at the Equator.
- The maximum amount of sunlight received by the Northern Hemisphere during this time is usually on June 20, 21 or 22. In contrast, the Southern Hemisphere receives most sunlight on December 21, 22 or 23 when the northern hemisphere has its longest nights— or the winter solstice.
- Although June 21 will be the longest day in 2021, it does not necessarily mean that it brings the earliest sunrise or latest sunset. It depends on the latitudinal location of the country.

## Ranked choice voting

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Ranked choice voting made its debut in New York City's mayoral primary in one of the most high-profile tests yet for a system gaining use in pockets across the US. The system is based on a simple premise: Democracy works better if people aren't forced to make an all-or-nothing choice with their vote.*

### **How does ranked choice voting work?**

- Rather than pick just one candidate, voters get to rank several in order of preference. Even if a voter's top choice doesn't have enough support to win, their rankings of other candidates still play a role in determining the victor.
- But the system is more complex than a traditional election, making it tough to forecast a winner. It could take longer to get results.
- In New York City's version, voters get to rank up to five candidates, from first to last, on their ballot.



- If one candidate is the first choice of a majority of voters — more than 50% — that person wins the race outright, just like in a traditional election.
- If nobody hits that threshold, ranked choice analysis kicks in.
- Vote tabulation is done in rounds. In each round, the candidate in last place is eliminated. Votes cast ranking that candidate first are then redistributed to those voters' second choices.
- That process repeats until there are only two candidates left. The one with the most votes wins.

## How does ranked-choice voting work?

FAVORITE COLOR	
COLOR	RANK
Teal	2
Orange	3
Purple	1
Pink	4

### On the ballot

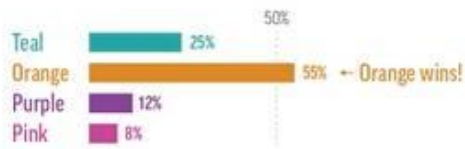
In a ranked-choice voting system, voters rank their top choices in order of preference, rather than selecting a single candidate. Let's use favorite colors as an example.

← First choice

← Last choice

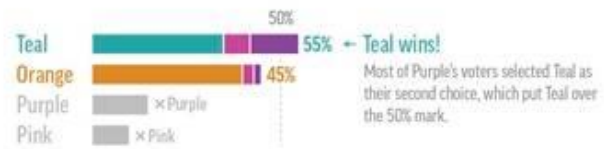
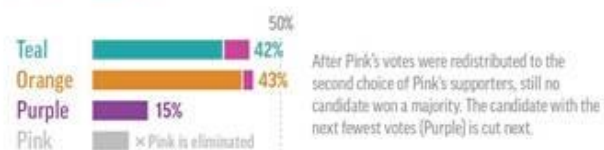
### First vote count

The first step is to evaluate voters' first choices. If one candidate is the first choice of a majority of voters and earns more than half of the vote, that candidate wins!



### Getting to a majority

If no candidate wins a majority of first-choice votes, the ranked choices come into play. The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and those votes are redistributed to the candidates listed as the second choice on those ballots.



AP

# Mains

## GS II

### Lakshadweep: A plan for the worse

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

**Context:** *Lakshadweep is on the boil. Four regulations that the administration of India's smallest Union Territory initiated between January and April this year have triggered protests in the otherwise calm coral islands, igniting a debate on conservation of their unique culture and ecology.*

#### **Draft Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation, 2021**

- This was the first of the four new draft regulations, dated January 28, and aims to curb criminal activities on the islands.
- Section 3 of the regulation allows the administration to detain a “person with a view to preventing him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”. This detention can be up to a year (Section 13) without public notice.
- The authority making the detention order has to communicate to the detenu grounds of detention within seven days from the date of detention (Section 8) but it does not have to “disclose facts which it considers to be against the public interest to disclose”.
- Worse, the expiry or revocation of a detention order “shall not bar the making of another detention order under Section 3 against the same person”, the regulation states.
- Such measures may end up being misused and might become tools to muzzle dissent.
- As per the latest National Crime Records Bureau data, Lakshadweep had no cases of murder, kidnapping, robbery, rape or dacoity in 2019.

#### **Draft Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation, 2021**

- This draft regulation, dated February 25, prohibits “selling or buying beef or beef products”.
- If found guilty, a person can be “punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to ten years but shall not be less than seven years and with fine which may be extend to Rs 5 lakhs but shall not be less than Rs 1 lakh”, reads the regulation.
- Similarly, through an executive order on February 23, the administration removed the ban on alcohol in Lakshadweep.
- According to Census 2011, 96.58 per cent of Lakshadweep's population are Muslims.

#### **Draft Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation, 2021**

- This draft regulation, also dated February 25, says a person with more than two children cannot contest Gram Panchayat elections. Lakshadweep has one district panchayat and 10 gram panchayats.
- Its population growth rate has seen a dramatic fall — from 17.19 per cent in 2001 to 6.1 per cent in 2011, which does not indicate a need to control population.
- The government's argument is the high population density of Lakshadweep — 2,013 persons per sq km against the national average of 382 persons per sq km, as per Census 2011. Experts, however, say that the two-child norm are no guarantee of population control.
- Lakshadweeps's population, as per Census 2011, is 64,473.



- While the regulation is yet to be enforced, the administration diluted the powers of Panchayats through an executive order on May 5.

### Draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation, 2021

- Also called Draft Lakshadweep Town and Country Planning Regulation, this regulation, dated April 28, provides for constitution of a Planning and Development Authority with sweeping powers over the use of land and waters.
- The authority has the “permission to develop land and for other powers of control over the use of land; to confer additional powers in respect of the acquisition and development of land for planning; and for purposes connected with”.
- Section 2(9) of the draft regulation defines development as “the carrying out of building, engineering, mining, quarrying or other operations in, on, over or under, land, the cutting of a hill or any portion there of or the making of any material change in any building or land, or in the use of any building or land, and includes sub-division of any land”.
- These clauses vest the administrator with powers to acquire any piece of the island for development and remove or relocate islanders if their existence in the localities conflicts with the proposed town planning or developmental activities.
- In Suheli and Cheriam, which are usually uninhabited but are frequented by fishers seasonally, the administration has demolished fishers’ sheds and taken control of the land; while in Minicoy and Kadmat, both of which are inhabited, the plans are underway, says a source requesting anonymity. Of the Union Territory’s 36 islands, only 10 are populated.

## Trouble in archipelago

While protesters demand that all new projects be undertaken in uninhabited islands, the administration has started activities in four islands, two of which are populated

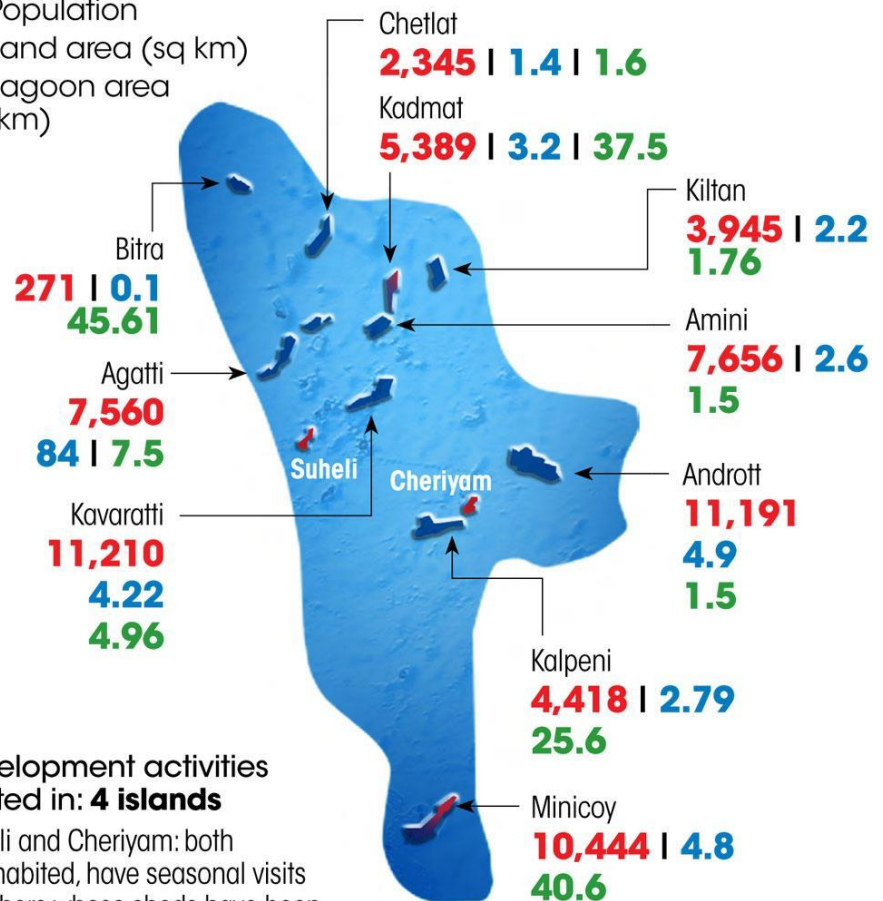
Total islands: **36**

Inhabited islands: **10**

Kavaratti, Agatti, Amini, Kadmat, Kiltan, Chetlat, Bitra, Andrott, Kalpeni and Minicoy

### Legends

**00** Population  
**00** Land area (sq km)  
**00** Lagoon area (sq km)



### Development activities started in: 4 islands

Suheli and Cheriyam: both uninhabited, have seasonal visits by fishers whose sheds have been demolished;  
 Minicoy and Kadmat: populated, with developmental plans underway

Sources: Census 2011; Save Lakshadweep Forum

- They are planning such mega projects in four of the islands where people live. This conflicts with the Raveendran panel’s recommendations.
- Development in the island has to be as per the Integrated Islands Management Plan (IIMP), approved in 2015 by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- IIMP was made after incorporating recommendations of the Justice Raveendran Committee, appointed by the Supreme Court.

### Major differences





- Scientists say there are significant differences between the Maldives and Lakshadweep, though both archipelagoes appear alike.
- The Maldives has a concentration of 26 atolls (ring-shaped coral reef islands) and each atoll has hundreds of islands. In total, the Maldives has more than 1,000 islands, while Lakshadweep has just 36.
- Most of the tourism activities happen there on previously uninhabited islands. Even if you assume that Lakshadweep islands are ready, the plan does not favour the local economy significantly.
- The economic and infrastructural projects may introduce significant changes in the land-lagoon ratio of the islands, says the Save Lakshadweep Forum. Lagoons are necessary for reef recovery.

### **Fragile ecology**

- Lakshadweep's ecology is very fragile. Any development plan for this region must consider this. As things stand, the proposed plans do not seem to be well thought-out.
- What is unique about Lakshadweep is that the fate of the people who make the islands their home are closely linked with the marine life.
- The health of Lakshadweep's coral reefs will, therefore, eventually determine the well-being of human communities in the archipelago and the habitability of the islands.
- Hence, protecting the coral reefs and the already emaciated natural habitats of the islands is paramount.
- In Lakshadweep, land is a limited commodity. Every acre of the inhabited and uninhabited islands is used by local communities for livelihood activities.
- Diverting this land towards infrastructure development could only serve to intensify the ecological impacts on the land.
- The proposed plans to occupy the lagoons with floating constructions and solar panels are also misguided, given how vital the lagoons are, especially in the wake of climate disturbances and for local livelihoods.
- Initiatives such as these would increase land and water pollution, strain the already stretched freshwater reserves, and increase demand of commercial reef fish.

### **Atolls already weak**

- Climate-related disturbances to Lakshadweep reefs over the past two decades have resulted in atoll reef frameworks being seriously compromised, calling into question the ability of these frameworks to continue to sustain human populations in Lakshadweep over the medium- to long-term, show studies done by NCF.
- Given that, the current plans for infrastructure-heavy development on the islands is "ill-advised, to say the least".
- Any stress on the land, lagoon and reef, over and above what the system is already under, would push Lakshadweep over a critical boundary of ecological decline, from which recovery could be extremely difficult and protracted.
- There is also the problem of waste management, say P Pookunhi Koya, former member of Parliament from Lakshadweep and convenor of the Save Lakshadweep Forum.
- Massive-scale tourism, as being mooted by the administration, will introduce unforeseen levels of waste, and managing it is going to pose gargantuan challenges to the ecosystem. The proposals are silent on constructive solutions. They only focus on profit maximisation.
- Activists also claim that when the administration says it will roll out villa projects in the islands, it is not in favour of inviting bids from local people for the projects.
- The islanders say it is bizarre and shocking to see the administration going ahead with the plans unilaterally and with no significant move to take the community into confidence.





## **How press freedom is being eroded in Hong Kong**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Hong Kong's raucous and politically diverse news media, though free from the constraints placed on journalism next door in mainland China, has contended with various threats over the years. But after a draconian national security law went into effect a year ago, those challenges have multiplied dramatically.*

**Here are some of the ways press freedom in Hong Kong is being eroded:**

### **A vague new law**

- In June 2020, the Chinese government imposed a sweeping national security law meant to stamp out opposition to its rule in Hong Kong, a former British colony that was returned to Beijing in 1997.
- The law was enacted after months of anti-government protests in Hong Kong that posed the greatest political challenge to Beijing in decades, with some protesters calling for the territory's independence.
- While the law is focused on the four crimes of terrorism, subversion, secession and collusion with foreign forces, the vague way it is written has implications for the news media, legal experts say.
- Hong Kong's chief of police, Chris Tang, warned earlier this year that the police would investigate news outlets deemed to be endangering national security, citing Apple Daily as an example.
- Officials have not provided much clarity on what that means. In comments this week, Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's chief executive, suggested that it was up to journalists themselves to figure out how to avoid breaking the national security law.
- The law should not affect "normal journalistic work," she said, though she did not explain what she considered normal.
- With no one sure where the lines are, a common response has been self-censorship. Journalists avoid certain topics in interviews, activists have deleted their social media histories and libraries have pulled books by pro-democracy figures off the shelves for review.
- Activists, academics and others are also less willing to speak openly, a reluctance that was reinforced last month when a judge, explaining why a former lawmaker charged under the national security law had been denied bail, cited comments she had made in interviews as well as in private WhatsApp messages to reporters.

### **A freewheeling tabloid shut down**

- In August 2020, police officers arrested Lai under the national security law, as he had predicted in an opinion essay for The Times.
- Hours later, they raided the offices of Apple Daily, his fiercely pro-democracy newspaper. Some reporters livestreamed video of the raid as officers rifled through their desks. The police also arrested Lai's two sons and four executives from his company, Next Digital.
- Lai, who had already been arrested over his role in unauthorized protests in 2019, was charged under the national security law with colluding with foreign forces, including by calling for sanctions against Hong Kong.
- He is already in prison for a total term of 20 months for two protest-related cases, but he still faces additional charges including fraud and three counts under the national security law, which could carry a lifetime prison sentence. (Hong Kong's first national security trial began Wednesday.)
- The August raid now appears to have been just a warm-up. Last week, hundreds of police officers raided the Apple Daily newsroom for a second time, arresting five top executives and editors, seizing journalists' computers and freezing company accounts.
- Two of those arrested have been charged under the security law with conspiracy to commit collusion with foreign powers. A senior superintendent in the police's national security department also warned the public not to share Apple Daily articles online.



- Unable to pay its employees with its accounts frozen, Apple Daily said Wednesday that it would close after 26 years.
- The day had begun with the arrest of the paper's lead opinion writer, Yeung Ching-kee, who wrote under the pen name Li Ping. China's Communist Party and its allies in Hong Kong "have decided to strangle Apple Daily, to kill Hong Kong's freedom of press and freedom of speech," he wrote after Lai's arrest last year.

#### **A public broadcaster under pressure**

- RTHK, a government-funded public broadcaster known for its independent reporting, is being increasingly reined in.
- In a report early this year, the Hong Kong government accused the broadcaster of lacking transparency and objectivity and said it should be more tightly supervised. Other officials have suggested closing it altogether.
- A string of senior officials have left RTHK in recent months, including the director of broadcasting, who was replaced by a civil servant with no journalism experience.
- Since then, the broadcaster has canceled shows, rejected media awards and deleted archival content from its YouTube and Facebook accounts. Lam was given her own show, airing four times a day, to explain changes to electoral laws that critics say all but shut out pro-democracy candidates.
- In April, Choy Yuk-ling, a freelance producer for RTHK, was fined after being found guilty of making false statements to obtain public records, in a case the Committee to Protect Journalists called "absurdly disproportionate."

#### **Bureaucratic barriers**

- Beyond the national security law, there have been smaller policy changes that Hong Kong journalists say could impede their ability to do their work.
- Some of the changes involve interactions with the police, who had some tense confrontations with journalists during the 2019 protests. Last year, the police said they would recognize journalists' credentials only if they worked for outlets registered with the government or for prominent international news organizations.
- Separately, the government is set to allow companies to conceal sensitive ownership data, which critics say could make it more difficult to uncover fraud.
- Media outlets have also reported delays in the processing of visas for foreign employees, and in a handful of cases they have been denied.
- The Times cited the national security law and visa disruptions in its decision last summer to relocate some staff members from Hong Kong to Seoul, South Korea, though other international news organizations have said they have no plans to leave.

### **Blended learning**

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/hong-kong-journalists-face-new-challenges/article17444444.html) )

**Context:** A recent circular by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposes that all higher educational institutions (HEI) teach 40% of any course online and the rest 60% offline. The concept note circulated by the UGC argues that this "blended mode of teaching" and learning paves the way for increased student engagement in learning, enhanced student-teacher interactions, improved student learning outcomes and more flexible teaching and learning environments, among other things.

#### **Details:**



- The note also enlists a few other key benefits such as increased opportunity for institutional collaborations at a distance and enhanced self-learning accruing from blended learning (BL).
- Another claim is that BL benefits the teachers as well. It shifts the role of the teacher from being a “knowledge provider to a coach and mentor”.
- The note says this will enable teachers to have a greater influence and effect on students’ learning.
- Further, as against traditional classroom instruction which is “teacher-directed, top-down, and one-size-fits-all”, BL is “student-driven, bottom-up, and customized”.
- The note adds that BL introduces flexibility in assessment and evaluation patterns as well.
- Educators wish to embrace the forward-looking proposal but the ground reality is different.

### Challenges

- The latest All India Survey on Higher Education (2019-20) report shows that 60.56% of the 42,343 colleges in India are located in rural areas and 78.6% are privately managed. Can these colleges successfully implement BL? And what would be the cost of such education?
- Only big corporates are better placed to invest in technology and provide such learning.
- Second, according to datareportal statistics, Internet penetration in India is only 45% as of January 2021. This policy will only exacerbate the existing geographical and digital divide resulting in the exclusion of a large number of rural students.
- Third, BL leaves little room for all-round formation of the student that includes the development of their intelligent quotient, emotional quotient, social quotient, physical quotient and spiritual quotient.
- What is the guarantee that BL will enhance interactions between students and teachers that lead to personality development, character building and career formation? The listening part and subsequent interactions with the teacher may get minimised.
- Also, the concept note assumes that all students who enter the arena of higher education have similar learning styles and have a certain amount of digital literacy to cope with the suggested learning strategies of BL.
- This is far from true. Education in India is driven by a teacher-centred approach. Expecting these students to switch over quickly to collaborative and technology-enabled learning will be stressful for them and may accentuate the existing dropout rate in higher education.

### Recommendations

- Given these challenges, it is worth considering a few recommendations. The government should ensure equity in access to technology and bandwidth for all HEIs across the country free of cost. Massive digital training programmes must be arranged for teachers.
- Even the teacher-student ratio needs to be readjusted to implement BL effectively. This may require the appointment of a greater number of teachers. The design of the curriculum should be decentralised and based on a bottom-up approach.
- More power in such education-related policymaking should be vested with the State governments. Switching over from a teacher-centric mode of learning at schools to the BL mode at the tertiary level will be difficult for learners.
- Hence, the government must think of overhauling the curriculum at the school level as well.
- Finally, periodical discussions, feedback mechanisms and support services at all levels would revitalise the implementation of the learning programme of the National Education Policy 2020, BL, and lead to the actualisation of the three cardinal principles of education policy: access, equity and quality.

**The ‘Union government’ has a unifying effect**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )



**Context:** *The Tamil Nadu government's decision to shun the usage of the term 'Central government' in its official communications and replace it with 'Union government' is a major step towards regaining the consciousness of our Constitution. Seventy-one years since we adopted the Constitution, it is time we regained the original intent of our founding fathers beautifully etched in the parchment as Article 1: "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States".*

#### Details:

- If a student of Indian polity attempts to trace the origin of the term 'Central government', the Constitution will disappoint him, for the Constituent Assembly did not use the term 'Centre' or 'Central government' in all of its 395 Articles in 22 Parts and eight Schedules in the original Constitution.
- What we have are the 'Union' and the 'States' with the executive powers of the Union wielded by the President acting on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.
- Then, why did the courts, the media and even the States refer to the Union government as the 'Centre'?
- Even though we have no reference to the 'Central government' in the Constitution, the General Clauses Act, 1897 gives a definition for it.
- The 'Central government' for all practical purposes is the President after the commencement of the Constitution. Therefore, the real question is whether such definition for 'Central government' is constitutional as the Constitution itself does not approve of centralising power.

#### Intent of Constituent Assembly

- On December 13, 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru introduced the aims and objects of the Assembly by resolving that India shall be a Union of territories willing to join the "Independent Sovereign Republic".
- The emphasis was on the consolidation and confluence of various provinces and territories to form a strong united country.
- Many members of the Constituent Assembly were of the opinion that the principles of the British Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) be adopted, which contemplated a Central government with very limited powers whereas the provinces had substantial autonomy.
- The Partition and the violence of 1947 in Kashmir forced the Constituent Assembly to revise its approach and it resolved in favour of a strong Centre.
- The possibility of the secession of States from the Union weighed on the minds of the drafters of the Constitution and ensured that the Indian Union is "indestructible".
- In the Constituent Assembly, B.R Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, observed that the word 'Union' was advisedly used in order to negative the right of secession of States by emphasising, after all, that "India shall be a Union of States".
- Ambedkar justified the usage of 'Union of States' saying that the Drafting Committee wanted to make it clear that though India was to be a federation, it was not the result of an agreement and that therefore, no State has the right to secede from it.
- "The federation is a Union because it is indestructible," Ambedkar said.
- The usage of 'Union of States' by Ambedkar was not approved by all and faced criticisms from Maulana Hasrat Mohani who argued that Ambedkar was changing the very nature of the Constitution. Mohani made a fiery speech in the Assembly on September 18, 1949 where he vehemently contended that the usage of the words 'Union of States' would obscure the word 'Republic'.
- Mohani went to the extent of saying that Ambedkar wanted the 'Union' to be "something like the Union proposed by Prince Bismarck in Germany, and after him adopted by Kaiser William and after him by Adolf Hitler".
- Mohani continued, "He (Ambedkar) wants all the States to come under one rule and that is what we call Notification of the Constitution. I think Dr. Ambedkar is also of that view, and he wants to have that kind of Union. He wants to bring all the units, the provinces and the groups of States, everything under the thumb of the Centre."
- However, Ambedkar clarified that "the Union is not a league of States, united in a loose relationship; nor are the States the agencies of the Union, deriving powers from it. Both the Union and the States are





created by the Constitution, both derive their respective authority from the Constitution. The one is not subordinate to the other in its own field... the authority of one is coordinate with that of the other”.

- The sharing of powers between the Union and the States is not restricted to the executive organ of the government.
- The judiciary is designed in the Constitution to ensure that the Supreme Court, the tallest court in the country, has no superintendence over the High Courts.
- Though the Supreme Court has appellate jurisdiction — not only over High Courts but also over other courts and tribunals — they are not declared to be subordinate to it.
- In fact, the High Courts have wider powers to issue prerogative writs despite having the power of superintendence over the district and subordinate courts. Parliament and Assemblies identify their boundaries and are circumspect to not cross their boundaries when it comes to the subject matter on which laws are made. However, the Union Parliament will prevail if there is a conflict.

### Word play

- The members of the Constituent Assembly were very cautious of not using the word ‘Centre’ or ‘Central government’ in the Constitution as they intended to keep away the tendency of centralising of powers in one unit.
- The ‘Union government’ or the ‘Government of India’ has a unifying effect as the message sought to be given is that the government is of all.
- Even though the federal nature of the Constitution is its basic feature and cannot be altered, what remains to be seen is whether the actors wielding power intend to protect the federal feature of our Constitution.
- As Nani Palkhivala famously said, “The only satisfactory and lasting solution of the vexed problem is to be found not in the statute-book but in the conscience of men in power”.

### India's Africa policy

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *Africa is considered a foreign policy priority by India. The Narendra Modi government designed a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries. Its implementation was managed quite well, with much political will invested in expanding the multi-faceted engagement. Even as the COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines. But now the policy implementation needs a critical review.*

### The macro picture

- The latest economic data confirms what was apprehended by experts: India-Africa trade is on a decline. According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, in 2020-21, India's exports to and imports from Africa stood, respectively, at \$27.7 billion and \$28.2 billion, a reduction of 4.4% and 25% over the previous year.
- Thus, bilateral trade valued at \$55.9 billion in 2020-21, fell by \$10.8 billion compared to 2019-20, and \$15.5 billion compared to the peak year of 2014-15.
- India's investments in Africa too saw a decrease from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21.
- Total investments over 25 years, from April 1996 to March 2021, are now just \$70.7 billion, which is about one-third of China's investment in Africa. COVID-19 has caused an adverse impact on the Indian and African economies.
- India's top five markets today are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Togo. The countries from which India imports the most are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Guinea. India's top three





exports to Africa are mineral fuels and oils (processed petroleum products), pharmaceutical products and vehicles.

- Mineral fuels and oils, (essentially crude oil) and pearls, precious or semi-precious stones are the top two imports accounting for over 77% of our imports from Africa. The composition of the India-Africa trade has not changed much over the two decades.

### Global competition

- These latest trends in bilateral economic relations should be assessed against two broad developments.
  - First, COVID-19 has brought misery to Africa.
    - As on June 24, 2021, Africa registered 5.2 million infections and 1,37,855 deaths. Given Africa's population (1.3 billion) and what happened elsewhere (the United States, Europe and India), these figures may not have drawn international attention, but Africans have been deeply affected and remain ill-equipped.
    - A recent World Health Organization survey revealed that 41 African countries had fewer than 2,000 working ventilators among them. Despite these shortcomings, Africa has not done so badly.
    - Experts suggest that the strength of community networks and the continuing relevance of extended family play an important supportive role.
    - Besides, Africa has some of the protocols in place, having recently suffered from Ebola, and managed it reasonably well.
    - Sadly though, with much of the world caught up in coping with the novel coronavirus pandemic's ill effects, flows of assistance and investment to Africa have decreased.
  - Second, as a recent Gateway House study, Engagement of External Powers in Africa; Takeaways for India, showed, Africa experienced a sharpened international competition, known as 'the third scramble', in the first two decades of the 21st century.
    - A dozen nations from the Americas, Europe and Asia have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent's political and social challenges and, in turn, to benefit from Africa's markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence.
    - A mix of competition and contestation involving traditional and new players, especially the United States, the European Union (EU), China, Japan and India, has attracted much attention from governments, media and academia.
- While China has successfully used the pandemic to expand its footprint by increasing the outflow of its vaccines, unfortunately India's 'vax diplomacy' has suffered a setback.
- This came in the wake of the debilitating second wave of COVID-19 in the country and the shortage of vaccine raw materials from the U.S. Geopolitical tensions in Asia and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled New Delhi to concentrate on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers, particularly the U.S. Consequently, the attention normally paid to Africa lost out.

### India's role

- This must now change. For mutual benefit, Africa and India should remain optimally engaged. It was perhaps this motivation that shaped the substantive intervention made by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on May 19 in the UN Security Council's open debate on conflict and post-pandemic recovery in Africa.
- Touching on politico-diplomatic dimensions, he regretted that "the voice of Africa is not given its proper due" in the Security Council.
- He highlighted India's role in peacekeeping in Africa, in lending support to African counter-terrorism operations, and contributing to African institutions through training and capacity-enhancing assistance. India's aid for economic development in the African continent is set to continue, he assured. His visit to Kenya (June 12-14 ) has helped to re-establish communication with Africa at a political level.



- It is time to seize the opportunity and restore Africa to its primary position in India's diplomacy and economic engagement. The third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in 2015. The fourth summit, pending since last year, should be held as soon as possible, even if in a virtual format.
- Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans to Africa must be allocated, as previous allocations stand almost fully exhausted. Without new commitments, India's Africa policy would be like a car running on a near-empty fuel tank.

#### **Areas with promise**

- The promotion of economic relations demands a higher priority. Industry representatives should be consulted about their grievances and challenges in the COVID-19 era.
- It is essential "to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa", as the above-mentioned study argues. This means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.
- Finally, to overcome the China challenge in Africa, increased cooperation between India and its international allies, rates priority.
- The recent India-EU Summit has identified Africa as a region where a partnership-based approach will be followed.
- Similarly, when the first in-person summit of the Quad powers is held in Washington, a robust partnership plan for Africa should be announced. For it to be ready in time, work by Quad planners needs to begin now.

#### **Protecting prisoners' rights**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The catastrophic surge in COVID-19 cases across India in April and May led to a great number of deaths (still being counted) and put an enormous strain on the healthcare system and governments. In the midst of the surge, prisoners were largely forgotten. The failure of the authorities to reduce severe overcrowding in prisons left thousands of prisoners at risk of infection and death. According to data, there are 12,715 inmates lodged in 11 sections of Tihar Jail alone as against the lodging capacity of 7,425. Out of them, 11,077 are undertrials.*

#### **Violating human rights**

- As was expected, given the poor state of prisons in India, hundreds of prisoners got infected during the pandemic and a number of them died.
- This vitiates a fundamental right derived from Article 21 of the Constitution. Overcrowded jails are a violation of the human rights of prisoners (Re-Inhuman Conditions in 1382 v. State of Assam, 2018).
- As the court said in Charles Sobraj v. The Suptd., Central Jail, Tihar, 1978, "imprisonment does not spell farewell to fundamental rights".
- The aim of imprisonment is not merely deterrence of crime but also reformation. Apart from risking the lives of inmates, ignorance of the poor conditions of prisons has also added to the misery of the families of those in jail.
- Since physical meetings between the inmates and family members were suspended, many families have been unaware of the conditions of their loved ones in prison.
- While the Supreme Court ordered that prisons adopt video conferencing technologies to overcome the lack of physical meetings, this has not been properly implemented, according to Amnesty International. A report of the organisation noted that prisoners in Jammu and Kashmir were allowed a phone call to their family only once in 15 days.

#### **Political prisoners**



- Ever since the pandemic outbreak, human rights activists have demanded the immediate release of political prisoners on humanitarian grounds but this has fallen on deaf ears.
- There are several Kashmiris kept in preventive detention in jails in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and other parts of India. A number of them are undertrials.
- According to Article 14 (3)(c) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an accused has the right to be tried without undue delay.
- The state is bound to provide legal assistance to prisoners, ensure their safe and timely release and safeguard their rights to a fair and speedy trial (*Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar*, 1979). But this is not the reality for a large number of prisoners.
- Taking cognisance of this issue, the Supreme Court directed the States to examine releasing inmates, convicted or facing trial on non-serious charges, from jails either on regular bail or on parole.
- It also directed them to provide transport facility to the prisoners to reach home. It is hoped that States will comply. Some have said that they have begun reviewing prison occupancy.
- Given that States have started vaccinating prisoners too, the situation may improve soon. But India cannot ignore the problem of overcrowding, pandemic or no pandemic.

## GS III

### Revival of the rural economy

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic could be slowly receding with a decline in the official estimates of daily infections and deaths. The economy is also very gradually getting back to normal, with many States beginning to ease some of the restrictions imposed in their lockdowns. However, the challenge of an economic recovery is far more serious than the health pandemic despite official claims of there being an economic recovery. Last month, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the estimates of the Indian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for the fiscal year 2020-21. The decline in GDP, at 7.3%, was slightly better than expectation, even though this is a gross underestimate of the reality given the methodological issue of underestimation of the economic distress in the unorganised sector.*

#### **Making things worse**

- But what makes economic recovery challenging is that this decline followed three years of sharp decline in GDP even before the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the country.
- Economic growth had already decelerated to 4% in 2019-20, less than half from the high of 8.3% in 2016-17.
- Since then, the slowdown in the economy has not only made things worse as far as economic recovery is concerned but also come at a huge cost for a majority of households which have lost jobs and incomes.
- The pandemic has only worsened an already fragile economic situation. The sharp decline in GDP was partly a result of the trend of a slowdown in economic activity since 2016-17. But a large part of the economic outcome in the first year of the pandemic is also a result of a mishandling of the economic situation.
- While a strict national lockdown certainly hit economic activity last year, what made matters worse was the less than adequate response from the Government in increasing fiscal support to revive demand in the economy.

- Many of the grand announcements remained largely on the monetary side without the enabling policy framework to help small and medium enterprises as well as the large unorganised sector which bore the brunt of the restrictions in economic activity.

### **Agriculture, a key driver**

- Despite the lack of fiscal support, an important contributor to the better-than-expected economic performance was the resilience of the rural economy, particularly the agricultural sector.
- While rural areas were the first point of refuge for a majority of migrants who walked back thousands of kilometres from urban metropolitan areas, agriculture was the only major sector (other than electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services) which reported an increase in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2020-21. It not only provided jobs to returning migrants but also sustained the economy in the rural areas.
- Agriculture has not only been the biggest saviour during the period of the pandemic but has consistently been an important driver of the economy throughout the last five years which has seen the economy slow down sharply.
- The average growth rate in agriculture GVA in the last five years, at 4.8%, is significantly higher than the GVA growth of the economy as a whole, at 3.6%, in the last five years.
- But can the rural sector play saviour again? Unlikely, in the present context. And it will not be due to any natural calamity such as drought but a result of the neglect and policy missteps by the Government.
- Even though the lockdowns imposed by the State governments at the beginning of the second wave were less severe when compared to last year, they did impact the non-agricultural economy as is evident from the high frequency data for the last two months.
- The expectation of positive growth in this fiscal year may suggest recovery. However, given that the economy has already suffered last year, any recovery will largely be a statistical artefact driven by the low base of last year rather than a real recovery.
- The fact that a majority of households have already suffered job losses and income decline which are yet to regain their pre-pandemic levels suggests caution in making any inference on an economic recovery.
- However, even the aggregate data are unlikely to capture the actual extent of devastation in the rural areas. While this is true for even the basic estimates of death and the health catastrophe caused by the pandemic, it is even more severe in its economic impact.
- Similar to the official statistics which have underestimated deaths due to the pandemic in most States — as has been brought out recently in several newspapers — the economic distress in rural areas is also largely unreported and underestimated.
- The second wave affected rural areas disproportionately, in terms of health but also in terms of livelihoods. Many households have lost an earning member and an equally large number have spent a large sum on private health care expenditure in dealing with the infection. It will not be surprising if rural areas now witness a sharp rise in indebtedness from non-institutional sources.
- However, the response from the Government has not been commensurate with the scale of the pandemic in rural areas. Unlike last year, the Government has not increased the allocation this year for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).
- For the country as a whole, despite an increase in employment demand in NREGS, the person-days generated in May 2021 was only 65% when compared to May 2020. While the free food-grain scheme has been extended this year as well, it does not include pulses as was provided last year. Similarly, there has not been any cash transfer to vulnerable groups, unlike last year.

### **Decline in jobs, income**

- The impact of declining incomes and job losses on demand is now visible even in rural areas. While real wages have continued to decline with the latest estimates of April 2021 showing a decline in rural non-agricultural wages by 0.9% per annum in the last two years, agricultural wages continue to stagnate.
- One indicator of declining demand is the decline in wholesale prices of most of the agricultural commodities. Cereals and vegetables, which together account for more than half of crop output, have



seen prices decline on a year-on-year basis for more than six months now. This is happening at a time when international agricultural prices are at an all-time high.

- Some of this is reflected in the rise in inflation in pulses and oilseeds groups, both of which are largely imported.
- The net result is a peculiar situation where output prices for dominant agricultural commodities in the domestic market are declining while consumer prices of essentials such as edible and pulses are contributing to rising inflation.

### **Inflation threat**

- Rising inflation further threatens to reduce the purchasing power of the rural economy struggling with declining incomes and job losses. This is further compounded by the shift in terms of trade against agriculture which has put agricultural incomes under strain.
- The rise in input prices for diesel has already contributed to rising input costs but the recent increase in fertilizer prices for most of the complex fertilizers have also added to the misery of farmers. Rising inflation in international commodity prices also threatens the rural non-farm economy.
- A majority of the rural non-farm sector already struggling from low demand has now seen its profit margins getting impacted due to the increase in the cost of raw material.
- Despite these setbacks, the rural economy including the agricultural economy continues to remain crucial for any strategy of economic revival. But for that, it will require proactive intervention from the Government to protect the rural population by speeding up vaccination.
- Unfortunately, so far, the rural areas have been lagging behind in the overall rate of vaccination. At the same time, rural areas will also need greater fiscal support, both in terms of direct income support to revive demand in the economy but also through various subsidies and protection from the rising inflation in input prices.
- This urgent intervention is not just necessary to support economic revival but also prevent another humanitarian crisis, this time as a result of economic mismanagement.

## **The gender technology gap has to end**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has swept South Asia in recent months, existing inequalities have come to light. One aspect stands out: access to technology has never been so crucial to ensuring public health and safety. Around the world, information and access to health care have largely moved online, and those left behind face grave disadvantages.*

### **Limited or no access**

- According to Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA) estimates, over 390 million women in low- and middle-income countries do not have Internet access. South Asia has more than half of these women with only 65% owning a mobile phone.
- In India, only 14.9% of women were reported to be using the Internet. This divide is deepened by earlier mandates to register online to get a vaccination appointment.
- Recent local data revealed that nearly 17% more men than women have been vaccinated. While improving awareness of how to access vaccination and help are crucial to protecting women, the mindset around digital technology and device ownership must also change.
  - For example, when families share a digital device, it is more likely that the father or sons will be allowed to use it exclusively. In part, this is due to deeply held cultural beliefs: it is often believed that women's access to technology will motivate them to challenge patriarchal societies.



There is also a belief that women need to be protected, and that online content can be dangerous for women/expose them to risks. As a consequence, girls and women who ask for phones face suspicion and opposition.

- These gaps prevent women and LGBTQIA+ people from accessing critical services.
- In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example, fewer women than men received the necessary information to survive COVID-19. Vaccine registration usually requires a smartphone or laptop. Men and boys are thus more likely to get timely information and register than women and girls.
- The concept of feminism goes beyond the rights of women. It is about a way of life. In simple terms, it means being inclusive, democratic, transparent, egalitarian, and offering opportunities for all. We can call it equality through innovation.
- Feminist technology (sometimes called “femtech”) is an approach to technology and innovation that is inclusive, informed and responsive to the entire community with all its diversity.

### **Steps to an equitable future**

- At UN Women, we are encouraging companies to sign up and agree to principles that will lead to a more equitable future for all. As part of the Generation Equality Forum, the goal is to double the number of women and girls working in technology and innovation.
- By 2026, the aim is to reduce the gender digital divide and ensure universal digital literacy, while investing in feminist technology and innovation to support women’s leadership as innovators.
- Through digital empowerment programmes and partnerships such as EQUALS and International Girls in ICT Day celebration across the region led by UN Women and the International Telecommunication Union, we hope that more girls will choose STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) as their academic focus, enter digital technology careers, and aspire to be the next leaders in digital technology.

### **Hardly a neutral world**

- What we see today is that most technologies that are available to the layperson are created by men, for men, and do not necessarily meet everyone’s requirements.
- The supposedly neutral world of technology is full of examples of this: from video games to virtual assistants to the increasingly large dimensions of “handheld” smartphones, technology is not always made with everyone in mind.
- Policy cannot solve this on its own, but the private sector can. Companies should not look at gender-equal technology solely from an altruistic perspective, but from a pragmatic one.
- According to GSMA, closing the gender gap in mobile Internet usage in low- and middle-income countries would increase GDP by U.S.\$700 billion over the next five years. Women and girls are the largest consumer groups left out of technology and could be major profit drivers.
- In the App Store, there are about two million apps, most of which cater to young men. Why not design apps geared specifically towards mothers or apps for women to access telemedicine consultation? Or digital networks to connect women to informal job opportunities so they can still earn while balancing caring for their families?
- Other than apps, built-in features on mobile phones such as an emergency button connecting women to law enforcement if they face unwanted street harassment should also be considered.
- Women and girls do not have the same access to these technologies as men and boys, nor are they available at the same price. That is not acceptable.
- There is no need to reinvent the wheel. In the 1950s, dishwashers and washing machines were promoted as a method of emancipating women. Household goods producers, for example, target most of their advertising at women because they often control the household budget. Digital technology could be approached similarly.
- We now have the opportunity to shape our future in a way that is more equal, diverse, and sustainable in the world of technology in the aftermath of the medical and socioeconomic devastation in the past year.

- Now is the time to act. The right thing to do is also the smart thing to do. Bringing an end to the gender technology gap will save lives and make livelihoods more secure.
- As a result, the next pandemic, once it arrives, may not be nearly as destructive. It can only lead to a better community and a better world for us all.

### **AgriStack: The new digital push in agriculture raises serious concerns**

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

**Context:** On April 13, 2021, the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft Corporation to start a pilot project in 100 villages of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. The MoU requires Microsoft to create a 'Unified Farmer Service Interface' through its cloud computing services. This sets in motion the ministry's plan of creating 'AgriStack' (a collection of technology-based interventions in agriculture), on which everything else will be built.

#### **Details:**

- The government, through this MoU, aims to provide 'required data sets' of farmers' personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for 'smart and well-organised agriculture'.
- Thereafter, the ministry signed four other MoUs — with Star Agribazaar, Patanjali Organic Research Institute for agricultural management and services, Amazon Internet Services, and Esri India on June 1 for different operations under AgriStack.
- On the same day, the government published a consultation paper called *The India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture* (IDEA), laying out a proposed framework for 'AgriStack', for public feedback by June 30.
- Incidentally, the paper came three weeks after some 55 groups put out a letter demanding that the government make public the details on the MoU with Microsoft and go for a public consultation on the digital push in agriculture.
- With these MoUs, agriculture has become the latest sector getting a boost of 'techno solutionism' by the government. But it has, since then, also become the latest sector to enter the whole debate about data privacy and surveillance.
- Since the signing of the MoUs, several concerns related to sharing farmers' data with private companies (the major one being Microsoft whose owner Bill Gates is said to be the largest private farmland owner in the US by an analysis done by *The Land Report* in January 2021), have come to light.
- In all the MoUs, there are provisions under which the agriculture ministry will enter into a data sharing agreement with the private companies of the likes of Amazon, Microsoft and Patanjali.
- The government has now invited more technology / agritech players for collaboration, even though there is no information on the process or criteria of selecting the first five companies.

#### **What do the MoUs say?**

- The MoU with Star Agribazaar mentions, among other things, 'farmer data sanitisation', land profiling and crop estimation using remote sensing in three districts of Kota (Rajasthan), Guna (Madhya Pradesh) and Mathura (Uttar Pradesh).
- It mentions building a generalised advisory platform for farmers, including mobile applications, for pre- and post-harvest advisories.

- The MoU with Patanjali talks about developing a mobile application for advising farmers on soil nutrition, accurate quantification on farmer crop and yield, fertiliser recommendations, and training farmers for using this application in three districts — Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Hamirpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Morena (Madhya Pradesh).
- In the MoU with Amazon Internet Services, it is discussed that the company will build a “National Agri Data Stack” that can serve as a foundational data layer on which “agri focussed solutions” will be built.
- It will also offer its cloud services to solution providers / partners to help build “solutions across agri value chain” and will also help agriculture related start-ups.
- The Esri India MoU discusses how the company will support the ministry in establishing a ‘national agriculture geo hub’, provide the required GIS tools and technologies and create and collate farmer and other agriculture data services on GIS platform.
- The development has raised serious concerns about information asymmetry, data privacy and consent, profiling of farmers, mismanaged land records and corporatisation of agriculture.

### Serious concerns

- The project was being implemented in the absence of a data protection legislation. It might end up being an exercise where private data processing entities may know more about a farmer’s land than the farmer himself.
- The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 is currently still with the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Despite its shortcomings, it does provide some key protections to users such as basic user rights to correction, deletion and erasure as well as consent-based mechanism for the processing of data and purpose limitation obligations.
- It also allows for a Data Protection Authority to administer and regulate the processing of data.
- Without such safeguards, private entities would be able to exploit farmers’ data to whatever extent they wish to.
- This information asymmetry, tilted towards the technology companies, might further exploit farmers, especially small and marginal ones.
- One of the biggest worries is the threat of financial exploitation. We have already seen how microfinance firms have wreaked financial havoc in rural hinterlands.
- Now, once Fintech companies are able to collect granular data about the farmers’ operations, they may offer them usurious rates of interest precisely when they would be in the direst need for credit
- The formation of ‘Agristack’ also implies commercialisation of agriculture extension activities as they will shift into a digital and private sphere.
- With this, the risk of commodifying agriculture and farmer data ran high. Agristack could strengthen the asymmetry in information flow by providing all information about farmers and their farming easily to corporations who looked at farmers as a consumer base, be it agri inputs — seed, chemical fertiliser and pesticides, machinery companies or fin-tech companies and to those for whom farmers were suppliers like the food industry, garment industry, etc, Krishnan said.
- Although there is a non-disclosure agreement in the MoU, there is also a clause on ‘limitation of liability’ which essentially provides indemnity for breach of contract.
- As a part of the MoU, we will set up a Geo hub, which is a GIS system where all the data can be brought together and analytics can be run to create valuable insights for the agriculture department and the farmers.
- By setting up a geo hub as a ‘proof of concept’, it will be easy to understand how this technology can help in improving the welfare of the farmers and their incomes. We will share the technology with the government and it will be their prerogative on how they want to use the data generated with that technology.

## **Sustainable mobility: Role of EVs in achieving SDGs**

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

### **Electric mobility must be the cornerstone for the country's sustainable future**

- India is steadily marching towards a development agenda that is sustainable and inclusive, yet keeping in mind the exigent demands of its billion-strong population for socio-economic progress.
- This is in line with the country's strong commitment to achieving globally negotiated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India has had considerable success in decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 24 per cent between 2005 and 2016.
- While the emissions intensity of GDP has come down, the emissions in absolute terms have not, causing widespread warming and a range of adverse social and ecological effects.
- As per an IPCC report, an increase in global temperatures by 1.5°C relative to pre-industrialisation levels can lead to a dangerous rise in the sea level and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations through adverse health impacts, loss of livelihood opportunities, as well as food and economic insecurity.
- India is likely to be one of the nations most significantly affected, given its large coastline, huge population, and high levels of inequality and poverty. Community focused, sustainable development is the need of the hour to combat climate change and its many threats.



### **The transport sector**

- One of the major culprits for the increase in emissions is the country's transport sector which accounts for 13.5 per cent of the country's energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with road transport accounting for a whopping 90 per cent of the sector's final energy consumption.
- ICE vehicles, which constitute a vast majority of our motor fleet, are rightfully criticised for increasing air pollution, jeopardising societal health outcomes and perpetuating the use of fossil fuels — all of which threaten India's SDG efforts.
- Reducing transport-related emissions by adopting clean mobility solutions should be an important part of any sustainable development strategy to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13).

### **EVs, a ray of hope**

- To help India meet its SDG goals, a strong push towards clean mobility is crucial and here EVs provide a shimmering ray of hope.
- They eliminate tailpipe emissions, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, improve community health, safeguard energy security, and improve prospects for employment and upskilling.
- Coupling electric mobility targets with renewable energy targets will further help in decarbonising the transport sector.
- If powered by clean energy sources, EVs can help in increasing the share of renewables in the energy mix (SDG Target 7.2) and contribute to tackling air pollution and related health effects (SDG Target 3.9).
- The linkages do not just stop here. With the EV industry slated to generate 10 million jobs in India, EV manufacturing can offer job creation, entrepreneurship, and formalisation and growth of MSMEs (SDG Target 8.3).



- It can promote sustainable and inclusive industrialisation (SDG Target 9.2) and facilitate the integration of small scale industrial enterprises in value chains and markets (SDG Target 9.3).
- At the end of their life cycles, batteries can be mined for precious metals, helping achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (SDG Target 12.2). Recycling and proper end of life management of used batteries can also substantially reduce waste generation (SDG Target 12.5).
- India has taken a number of initiatives to promote EV uptake and manufacturing. Notwithstanding these measures, there is still scope for greater action on this front. SDGs can be our guide yet again, providing principles that can animate policy.
- Universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (SDG Target 7.1) should serve as the normative bedrock for all EV-related decision making. India must also commit itself to providing access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems (SDG Target 11.2) by mainstreaming EVs across all vehicular segments including buses for emission-free public transport.

### **Upgrade infrastructure**

- The industrial sector may be encouraged to upgrade infrastructure and adopt clean and environmentally sound technologies (SDG Target 9.4) by electrifying freight transport and embracing EVs for delivery and ridesharing.
- It may further enhance scientific research and upgrade technological capability (SDG Target 9.5) to disrupt existing value chains and establish India as a focal point for EV manufacturing and related exports.
- SDGs are not just principles to abide by but promises to our future generations for a secure and safe future.
- EVs hooked to renewable sources can be a magic bullet that can cover a wide range of SDG goals while keeping it aligned with existing measures identified for the country's clean economic revival.
- A lot of groundwork has already been done in terms of prioritising this sector and having the right policy support from the government. As experts and decision makers from around the world meet for the Transport and Climate Change Week in Berlin, India must affirm its resolve to pursue a mobility future that is sustainable, and premised on the broader consensus built across nations on the basis of trust.
- It is high time electric mobility is entrenched as a cornerstone of the country's sustainable development agenda.

## Current Affairs Quiz

- 1) Consider the following statements with respect to Herbicide Tolerant Bt (HTBt) Cotton
1. It has been genetically modified (GM) making the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate.
  2. It is the only transgenic crop that has been approved by the Centre for commercial cultivation in India.

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

- 2) Freshwater gharials are listed under which of the following category -

- a. Critically Endangered
- b. Vulnerable
- c. Near Threatened
- d. Endangered

Answer : a

- 3) Consider the following statements with respect to Green Hydrogen:

1. Hydrogen when produced by electrolysis using renewable energy is known as Green Hydrogen.
2. The production cost of Green hydrogen is very low when compared to the production costs of grey hydrogen.

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

Production cost is high.

- 4) Members of the State Legislative Assembly is/are disqualified-

1. If he/she holds any office of profit under the Government of India.
2. If he/she failed to disclose the criminal records against him/her.
3. If he/she is disqualified under the provisions of the Tenth schedule.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer : d

- 5) Components of fiscal policy are-

1. Roll out of Goods and Services Tax
2. Deciding Minimum Support Prices
3. Deciding the buffer stocks of Food Grains



4. Grants to states

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

Answer : c

6) Consider the following statements with respect to Black Softshell Turtle:

- 1. They are found in ponds of temples in north-eastern India and Bangladesh.
- 2. It is listed as Vulnerable under IUCN Red list.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : b

It is protected under IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered, CITES: Appendix I

7) Consider the following statements with respect to Monoclonal Antibodies

- 1. They are artificial antibodies that mimic the activity of person's immune systems.
- 2. They are produced through a process that involves extracting specific antibodies from human blood and then cloning them.

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 : c

8) Consider the following statements with respect to High Court:

- 1. The President can establish a high court for a Union territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a High Court.
- 2. The Jurisdiction of a High Court can be shifted only through an Act of Parliament.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : a

The Parliament may by law constitute a high court for a Union Territory or declare any court in any such territory to be a high court for all or any of the purposes of this Constitution.

9) Consider the following statements with respect to Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020:

- 1. In India e-commerce entities are registered separately with Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- 2. Chief compliance officer has discretionary powers to ban fraudulent flash sales by e-commerce entities.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

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

Answer : d

The e-commerce entities are registered under the Companies Act, Indian Partnership Act or Limited Liability Partnership Act and not separately with DPIIT.

The new draft on Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules proposed the appointment of chief compliance officer and resident grievance officer.

The government has proposed a ban on 'mis-selling' of goods and services offered on such platforms.

- 10) Which of the following statements is/are correct about Tax inspectors without Borders initiative?
- 1. It is a joint initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
  - 2. India is a partner jurisdiction of this initiative that aid Bhutan in strengthening its tax administration.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

It is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

- 11) Consider the following statements about African Swine Fever:
- 1. It is a highly contagious fatal animal disease that infects both domestic and wild pigs.
  - 2. It spreads through contaminated food and does not involve any vector in transmission.
  - 3. It is not a threat to human being since it only spreads from animals to other animals.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

- 12) Consider the following statements about CPI and WPI inflation:
- 1. Retail Inflation (CPI) has crossed the RBI's upper limit of 6% recently.
  - 2. The government stands to benefit from this inflation as it will lower the national debt in relation to the size of the economy.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

- 13) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Ranked Choice Voting System?
- 1. In this system, voters ranks candidates in order of preference.
  - 2. Under the system, it is difficult for someone to get elected without broad support, unlike the traditional election.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only



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

Answer : c

14) Consider the following statements about Class Action Suits:

- 1. It is a legal action or claim that allows one or many plaintiffs to file and appear for a group of people with similar interests.
- 2. In India, the legal provisions for filing class action suits are covered under Civil Procedure Code and Competition Act.

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 : c

15) Consider the following statements about Ebola Virus:

- 1. It is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through mosquitos.
- 2. Inmazeb and Ebanga were two monoclonal antibodies approved for the treatment of Ebolavirus.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

16) Consider the following statements with respect to Antarctic Treaty:

- 1. It is joint statement outlined the aims of the United States and the United Kingdom over Antarctic continent.
- 2. The treaty put a freeze on any disputes between claimants over their territories on the continent.

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 signed in Washington on 1 December 1959 by the twelve countries.

17) Vandana Aggarwal Committee was constituted recently for -

- a. To look into issues pertaining to India's Capital goods Sector
- b. To examine global best practices in ship financing and leasing
- c. To look into the feasibility of allowing life insurers to offer indemnity-based health policies
- d. To advise SEBI on measures required for transparency and simplification in mutual fund regulations

Answer : b

18) Consider the following statements about UN General Assembly:

- 1. Under the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.

2. Each Secretary-General has the option of a second term if they can garner enough support from Member states.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

19) Consider the following statements about to Indian Ocean Sea Turtle Agreement (IOSEA) :

1. It aims to maintain and recover marine turtle populations by promoting cooperation among Governments
2. India is a signatory to the IOSEA of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : d

Both are correct

20) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Ambergris?

1. It is a solid waxy substance that floats around the surface of the water body and at times settles on the coast.
2. It is a leading marine pollutant released from ships which affects marine living organisms and humans.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

A sperm whale eats several thousand squid beaks a day and a beak makes it way to the whale's stomach and into its looping convoluted intestines where it becomes ambergris.

It contains alkaloids, acids, and a specific compound called ambreine, which is similar to cholesterol.