

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

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Prelims

NATIONAL

127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Lok Sabha passed the 127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021, with unanimous support from the House and not a single vote against, with Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar stating that there was a need for careful examination of the demand made by several Lok Sabha MPs to remove the 50% cap on reservation currently in place.*

Orderly debate

Replying to the debate on the Bill, the first such debate in an orderly manner in a session marked by three weeks of disruptions and adjournments, Dr. Kumar said the issue required a careful going over of legal and constitutional issues. “In the Indra Sawhney case the court has observed that the limit can be increased beyond the 50% but only in certain special circumstances. The government is aware of the wishes of the members,” he said.

The Minister said the current Constitution Amendment Bill was historic legislation as 671 castes in the country would benefit from it and restore the States’ rights to make their own list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and should be considered as the 105th Constitution Amendment Bill after being renumbered.

The Bill seeks to restore the power of State governments to identify OBCs that are socially and educationally backward after a Supreme Court order in May 2021 empowered only the Centre to do so.

The amendment was thought necessary because the SC, in its order on Maratha reservation, upheld the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act that inserted Articles 338B and 342 A (with two clauses) after Article 342, which said the President of India, in consultation with the Governors, would specify socially and educationally backward classes, taking away the powers of State governments to do so.

Lead speaker for the Opposition, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary accused the government of turning a deaf ear to suggestions of the Opposition during the debate on the 102nd Constitutional Amendment in 2018.

Supporting the Bill, Mr. Chowdhary said, “You (BJP) tweaked the Constitution by bringing the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2018, which gave people the opportunity to go the courts and finally the Supreme Court removed the States’ power.”

“We support the Bill but our demand is to remove 50% ceiling in reservation. You should listen to the States, make it legal for States to cross the 50% ceiling,” he said. He received support on this from DMK’s T.R. Baalu and Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav who also demanded the lifting of a 50% ceiling.

Intervening in the debate, Minister for Labour Bhupendra Yadav said the Congress had buried old reports including the Kaka Kallekar and Mandal Commission report on backward classes.

He responded to Mr. Chowdhary’s charge of the government having created the need for this bill through its own actions. “When the 102nd Amendment was brought in 2018, the government’s intent was that both at the Central and the State level, OBC lists will be maintained. The same arguments were made in the Supreme Court, and its judgement on taking the States’ power away was not by consensus,” he said. He quoted the observations of two of the judges to bolster his argument. “It is our job to develop the legislative process,” Mr Yadav said, and asserted the Centre’s commitment to social justice.

Maratha quota

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Supriya Sule, whose party, a constituent of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra is pushing for Maratha reservation in connection with which the Supreme Court

delivered its verdict on the Centre being the only enumerator of OBCs, necessitating this Bill, said the credit should be given to the Maharashtra government which requested the Centre to move the Bill to address the issue. She too put her heft behind the removal of the 50% cap on reservations.

Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise set to begin between the navies of India and Saudi Arabia.*

Details:

- This is the first bilateral naval exercise between the navies of India and Saudi Arabia.
- The sea phase has already begun.
- For deeper understanding of each other's operational practices, lectures by subject matter experts from both navies were also held.

Electricity amendment bill 2021

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Central government is facing opposition to the Electricity Amendment Bill 2021 even before it is introduced in Parliament. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has written to the Prime Minister requesting that the Bill not be brought before Parliament claiming it was “anti-people” and would promote crony capitalism. We examine key provisions of the Electricity Amendment Bill 2021 and why they are raising key concerns.*

What are the key changes in the Electricity Act that the amendment seeks to bring?

- The Amendment is bringing in provisions to de-license power distribution allowing private sector players to enter the sector and compete with state-owned power distribution companies (discoms). The move would allow consumers to choose between power distribution companies.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in the union budget that the government would bring a framework to allow consumers to choose between power distribution companies.
- Power distribution in most of the country is currently controlled by state-owned distribution companies with some cities including Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad being exceptions where private players operate power distribution.
- Discoms are however struggling with high levels of losses and debt. The government has brought out a number of schemes to restructure the outstanding debts of discoms while incentivising them to reduce losses.
- However, such schemes have only brought short term financial space for discoms which have tended to continue to accumulate losses and debts post restructuring schemes such as the UDAY scheme launched by the government in 2015.

What are the objections to delicensing of power distribution?

- States have highlighted concerns that allowing the entry of private players could lead to “cherry-picking”, with private players providing power to only commercial and industrial consumers and not residential and agricultural consumers.

- Tariffs for power currently vary widely in India with commercial and industrial players cross subsidise the power consumption of rural residential consumers and agricultural consumers by paying far higher tariffs.
- Mamata Banerjee said in her letter to the Prime Minister that the amendment would lead to “a concentration of private, profit-focussed utility players in the lucrative urban-industrial segments while poor and rural consumers would be left to be tended by public sector discoms.”
- Experts also said there is the possibility that the move could lead to cherry picking by the private sector, especially till the time the tariff structure builds in cross subsidies.

What are other key concerns?

- Other key concerns that states have raised are higher penalties for failure to meet Renewable energy Purchase Obligations (RPOs) and the requirement that Regional Load Dispatch Centres and State Load Dispatch Centres follow instructions by the National Load Dispatch Centre.
- Mamata Banerjee said in her letter to the Prime Minister that the proposed amendment “strikes at the roots of federalism”.
- States have also thus far failed to meet earlier RPOs and had also requested a rationalisation of penalties for not meeting RPO requirements.

Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment revised the Scheme for RVY to cover all the districts in the country.*

About the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana:

- It is a scheme for providing physical aids and assisted-living devices for **senior citizens belonging to the BPL category**.
- Aids such as walking sticks, elbow crutches, walkers, tripods, quadpods, hearing aids, wheelchairs, artificial dentures, spectacles, etc. are provided.
- It is fully funded by the Central Government.
- The scheme is implemented through the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO), which is the sole implementing agency.

The commission for air quality management in NCR

(Source: [Indian express](#))

Context: *The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Bill, 2021, was recently introduced by the Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate, Bhupender Yadav, in Parliament and passed by both Houses amid ongoing protests. While the Bill received overwhelming support, many members had raised concerns on the provision that allowed the commission to collect environmental compensation from farmers over pollution.*

What is the Bill all about?

- The monitoring and management of air quality in the Delhi-NCR region has been done in pieces by multiple bodies, including the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the state pollution control boards, the state governments in the region, including Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) of the National Capital Region.



- They, in turn, are monitored by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEF), and the Supreme Court which monitors air pollution as per the judgment in 'M C Mehta vs Union of India' case in 1988.
- The Bill, however, seeks to create an overarching body to consolidate all monitoring bodies, and to bring them on one platform so that air quality management can be carried out in a more comprehensive, efficient, and time-bound manner.
- The Centre also seeks to relieve the Supreme Court from having to constantly monitor pollution levels through various cases.
- Both the central, as well as state governments, stand on the receiving end every winter as air pollution levels start rising in the National Capital region. While the commission will concentrate on improving air quality during winter in particular, it has also been asked to suggest measures to mitigate pollution throughout the year.
- An ordinance was introduced by the environment ministry and signed by the President in October last year, within days of the hearing of the 'Aditya Dubey vs Union of India' case where Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had indicated the setting up of such a commission.

What will the new commission replace?

- Apart from consolidating all agencies that monitored, investigated and planned mitigation of air pollution in the region, the commission has replaced the Supreme Court-appointed Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) which had been running for 22 years.
- Over the years, the EPCA's powers had been waning. While dissolving the body, the Centre felt that the EPCA had become redundant and had been ineffective in addressing issues related to air pollution. The EPCA also did not have penal provisions that the commission will now have
- The ordinance that had been introduced by the Ministry in October 2020 lapsed in March this year, as it was unable to introduce the Bill during the Budget session in the absence of the Union Cabinet's approval. A second ordinance was introduced by the Ministry in April.
- The Bill, now that it has been passed by both Houses of Parliament, will replace both ordinances.

What are the powers of the commission?

- The Commission is the most powerful air pollution monitoring body set up by the Centre to date. The rulings by the commission on air pollution will override anything contained in any other law.
- The powers of the commission will also supersede that of any other body in matters of air pollution.
- Therefore, in cases where conflict may arise between orders or directions issued by the other state governments, state pollution control boards or even the Central Pollution Control Board, the orders of the commission will prevail.
- The Commission will have the power to take measures, issue directions and entertain complaints "for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of air in the National Capital Region".
- It will also coordinate action taken by states on air pollution and will lay down parameters for air quality and emission or discharge of environmental pollutants.
- It will also have powers to restrict industries in any area, carry out random inspections of any premises including factories and be able to close down an industry or cut its power and water supply in case of non-compliance.
- It will also be monitoring the measures taken by the states to prevent stubble burning.

What will be the composition of the commission?

- The Commission will be headed by a full-time chairperson with experience of not less than 15 years in the field of environmental protection and pollution control or having administrative experience of not less than 25 years.
- The members of the commission will also comprise of an official from the Environment Ministry, five ex-officio members who are either chief secretaries or secretaries from Delhi, Punjab, Haryana,

Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, one full-time member who is or has been a joint secretary, three full-time independent technical members who are experts in air pollution, one technical member each from the Central Pollution Control Board and Indian Space Research Organisation, three members from non-governmental organisations who deal in air pollution and one representative of the National Institution for Transforming India.

- The commission will also have three members, being stakeholders from sectors such as agriculture, industry, transport or construction apart from representatives of several ministries, including Road Transport and Highways, Power, Housing and Urban Affairs, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Commerce and Industry. There will also be representatives of any association from the commerce or industry sector.
- The commission will have at least three sub-committees —monitoring and identification, safeguarding and enforcement, and research and development.

What are the concerns from environmentalists?

- Environmentalists have raised concerns over the concentration of power with the Central Government. They have also criticized the overwhelming number of bureaucrats in the commission, with “only a token representation” of environmental bodies and non-governmental groups.
- The Act further says that no civil court will have jurisdiction to entertain any suit, proceeding or dispute pertaining to or arising out of the actions taken or directions issued by the commission and that orders of the commission can only be contested before the National Green Tribunal.
- Environmentalists believe that this restricts legal action that can be taken on environmental matters as citizens so far could approach the Supreme Court and other courts directly with these issues.

‘Seekho Aur Kamao’ Scheme

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Seekho Aur Kamao is a skill development scheme for youth of 14 - 35 years age group and aiming at providing employment and employment opportunities, improving the employability of existing workers, school dropouts etc.*

About the ‘Seekho Aur Kamao’ Scheme:

- Seekho Aur Kamao Scheme has been implemented since 2013-14 for the skill development of minorities. It is under the Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- Seekho Aur Kamao is a skill development scheme for people of the 14 – 35 years age group and aiming at providing employment and employment opportunities, improving the employability of existing workers, school dropouts, etc.
- The scheme ensures 75% placement, out of which 50% should be in the organized sector.
- As per scheme guidelines, the implementing organizations will be required to establish linkages with placement services, and for the candidates interested in self-employment after availing the training, the organization shall arrange easy micro finance/loans for them through financial institutions, National Minority Development Finance Corporation (NMDFC), banks, etc.
- Post placement support of Rs. 2000/- per month is provided to placed trainees for two months as placement assistance.

Deep Ocean Mission

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Deep Ocean Mission to be implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences at a total budget of Rs. 4077 Cr for 5 years during the period 2021-2026 – Union Minister (MoS Science & Technology).*

What is India's Deep Ocean Mission?

- The Government of India has decided to launch the Deep Ocean Mission – DOM, with an aim to explore the marine diversity in our country, which is still unexplored. This ambitious project will be managed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- Through this mission, the Government aims to conduct the exploration of the underwater world on similar lines as ISRO does for space.
- The mission has been laid on similar terms as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) performs space research
- However, India's Deep Ocean Mission will solely focus on studying and exploring the deepwater bodies in our country for undiscovered minerals, stones, living or non-living entities
- Both, man force and robotic machines will be used for the mission
- Tasks like deep-sea mining, energy exploration, survey of the objects found, and off-shore desalination will be taken up rigorously
- The technological developments done for the Deep Ocean Mission will be funded by the Government scheme "Ocean Services, Technology, Observations, Resources Modelling and Science (O-SMART)"
- Study and research on the climatic changes in the Ocean and other advisory services will be done through this mission
- The focus will also be given on underwater technologies for convenient research
- Two key projects have been included in the Deep Ocean Mission
 - A Desalination Plant
 - Submersible Vehicle, which can explore upto 6000 metres in depth
- The parts of the ocean which are yet to be explored and are hidden and undiscovered will all be covered through this mission.
- It is a central sector scheme.
- The major objectives of the Deep Ocean Mission are as follows:
 - Development of technologies for deep sea mining, underwater vehicles and underwater robotics;
 - Development of ocean climate change advisory services;
 - Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deepsea biodiversity;
 - Deep ocean survey and exploration;
 - Proof of concept studies on energy and freshwater from the ocean; and
 - Establishing advanced marine station for ocean biology

'No-patrol' zones in eastern Ladakh

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

Context: *As Indian and Chinese troops disengage from Patrolling Point (PP) 17A near Gogra Post, the two sides have followed the template for disengagements from previous points since last year. However, the details of a temporary no-patrol zone differs from location to location.*

What is a no-patrolling zone?

- When two forces disengage from a face-off point where they had been eyeball-to-eyeball or in close proximity to each other, one way to prevent new face-offs is to create a zone in which troops from neither side are allowed for a certain length of time.

- As the name ‘no-patrolling zone’ suggests, the area becomes a zone where neither side is allowed to patrol.
- Between India and China, the idea of the no-patrolling zone can be traced back to the border war of 1962.
- After China declared a unilateral ceasefire on November 21, 1962, it pulled its troops back 20 km from what it perceived was the location of the LAC on November 7, 1959.
- China, therefore, created a sort of buffer zone extending from where its forces were to where the LAC was, according to it.
- More recently, the concept was used by India in 2013. Chinese troops had pitched tents in an area known as the Bottleneck in the Dapsang Plains, and India was negotiating to end the face-off.
- As part of the understanding to end the Dapsang standoff, India temporarily suspended patrolling in an area further south, but within eastern Ladakh, called Chumar. Patrolling was suspended temporarily in 2014 as well, again in Chumar, to resolve another standoff.

Where are the no-patrol zones?

- Since last year, PP17A will become the third region where Indian troops used to patrol before the standoff began in May 2020, and will, at least temporarily, not do so now. The first such no-patrol zone since last year had come up in Galwan Valley.
- On June 15, 2020, some Indian troops had gone to remove an observation post of China that had come up near PP14. This led to an altercation that turned violent.
- While India lost 20 soldiers in the hand-to-hand combat that ensued, China, after initially saying nothing on the casualties on its side, ultimately claimed to have lost four troops.
- Soon after that, to prevent another flare-up in the Galwan Valley where tensions were still high, both sides agreed to step back. On each side, the forces were allowed to have around 30 troops at a distance of about 1.7 km from PP14, and another 50 troops each a kilometre further behind.
- In February, India and China agreed to disengage from the north and south banks of Pangong Tso where, at some locations, troops and tanks had been barely a few hundred metres apart. The region had seen an unprecedented winter deployment.
- On the south bank, in the Chushul sub-sector, the two sides were sitting on previously unoccupied peaks of the Kailash Range. On the north bank of Pangong Tso, China had come in the deepest, and Chinese troops were sitting on peaks above the spur known as Finger 4, which is 8 km west of India’s perception of the LAC at Finger 8.
- As part of the disengagement, Indian troops went back to their Dhan Singh Thapa Post, just west of Finger 3, while China dismantled all its infrastructure between Finger 8 and Finger 4, and went to its traditional post east of Finger 8. The area between Finger 3 and Finger 8 has since then been a no-patrol zone.

Indian Institute of Heritage

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The Government has decided to set up ‘Indian Institute of Heritage’ at Noida.*

Details:

- The Indian Institute of Heritage would offer Masters and Ph.D. courses in History of Arts, Conservation, Museology, Archival Studies, Archaeology, Preventives Conservation, Epigraphy and Numismatics, Manuscriptology, etc. as well as conservation training facilities to in-service employees and the students of the Indian Institute of Heritage.



- This will impact higher education and research in fields related to the rich Indian heritage and its conservation.
- The Institute is being set up as a Deemed to be University by integrating the Institute of Archaeology (Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya Institute of Archaeology), School of Archival Studies under National Archives of India, New Delhi, the National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLC), Lucknow, National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museology (NMICHM) and Academic Wing of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. These shall become the various schools of the Institute.

Vehicle Scrappage Policy

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: Vehicle Scrappage Policy launched recently.

About Vehicle Scrappage Policy

- The policy has provisions to scrap private vehicles that are over 20 years old and commercial vehicles that are more than 15 years old.
- The policy will start with commercial vehicles first and then be expanded to private vehicles later.
- Old vehicles will have to pass a fitness test before re-registration.
- Old vehicles will be tested at the Automated Fitness Centres and the fitness test of the vehicles will be done in conformity with international standards.
 - The vehicles will undergo emission testing, safety components' testing, braking system tests, etc.
 - The criteria for a vehicle to be scrapped is chiefly based on the fitness of vehicles through Automated Fitness Centres in case of commercial vehicles and Non-Renewal of Registration in case of private vehicles.
 - The criteria have been adapted from international best practices after a comparative study of standards from various countries like Germany, the UK, the USA and Japan.
 - Automated fitness centres will be set up under PPP mode.
- To incentivize the scrapping of old vehicles, the policy proposes a lesser GST of 5% or a complete waiver on replaced commercial vehicles instead of 28% levied currently on commercial vehicles and on those carrying 10 or more persons.
- All government vehicles and those owned by PSUs will be de-registered after 15 years.
- Those opting for the scheme will get scrap value of the old vehicle at the scrappage centre, which is about 4-6 percent of the ex-showroom price of new vehicles and will get a road tax rebate of up to 25 percent on personal vehicles and up to 15 percent on commercial vehicles.
- They can also avail of a 5 per cent manufacturer discount against the scrapping certificate and also a waiver in the registration fee while buying new vehicles.
- The government (Dept. of Heavy Industries) will open vehicle scrapping centres to create an ecosystem for the policy to take off.
 - Clusters would be developed for this purpose close to the ports under the Sagarmala initiative.
 - It is expected that the clusters will cater to the global scrapping demands as well.
- The policy will kick in for government vehicles from April 1, 2022.
- Mandatory fitness testing for heavy commercial vehicles will start on April 1, 2023.
- For all other categories of vehicles, including personal vehicles, it will start in phases from June 1, 2024.



Inland Vessels Bill

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Parliament passed a new law that will bring in uniformity in the rules and regulation governing the inland waterways and navigation on them in India. The new law is aimed at developing India's inland waterways as viable, thriving mode of transport, especially for cargo.*

Details:

- The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 replaces the century-old Inland Vessels Act, 1917. One of the key things the new legislation seeks to do is bring all inland waterways in India and movement of vessels on them for any purpose under a central regulatory regime.
- India has close to 15,000 km of inland waterways network comprising rivers, channels, backwaters, creeks etc.
- The Inland Vessels Act of 1917, which got replaced by the new legislation, was conceived to be a pure consolidating legislation having limited applicability and purposes, the government says. The Act had undergone several amendments with the last major amendments enacted in 1977 and 2007.
- The new law defines mechanically propelled vessels as ships, boats, sailing vessels, container vessels, and ferries. The Centre will, empowered by the new law, frame classification, standards of design, construction, and crew accommodation, and the type and periodicity of surveys, for these vessels.
- Construction or modification of such vessels will require prior approval of a designated authority, as prescribed by the central government. All such vessels are to be registered with respective states or Union Territories. The movement and the identities of the vessels will be logged in a central database.
- The NDA government in 2016 notified 111 inland waterways as National Waterways of India under the National Waterways Act, 2016. Of these, 13 National Waterways are operational for shipping and navigation and cargo/passenger vessels are moving on them, according to the government (see box).
- The Inland Waterways Authority of India under the Ministry of Shipping is developing the National Waterways for commercial navigation, including with assistance from World Bank.
- One of the criticisms from the opposition that the Bill has received is that it takes away a lot of rights of the states and vests them with the Centre.
- The new law passed now prescribes certain dos and don'ts. For example the rules of operations.
- To operate in inland waters, vessels must have a certificate of survey, and registration. Those with Indian ownership must be registered with the Registrar of Inland Vessels (appointed by the state government). Once registered, it will be valid across India.
- While the state government will issue the certificate, the form will be prescribed by the Centre, much like in the case of motor vehicles. Like motor vehicles, the vessels must be insured. The certificate will also mention the inland water zones (areas of operation to be demarcated by states) for such vessels.
- The mechanical vessels must adhere to certain specifications for signals and equipment to ensure navigation safety, as specified by the central government.
- The new Act mandates that in case of any distress or SOS signal sent out by the master of a vessel, any other vessel nearby must respond to the it— much like maritime custom and rules on sea.
- If the master of a nearby vessel fails to come for help, he or she will be penalised with a fine up to Rs 10,000 unless they failed to provide such assistance on some specified grounds.
- In case of accidents, the nearest police station is to be involved for inquiry and action. The local District Magistrate may also hold a probe and recommend action.
- The Act says that the Centre will prescribe the minimum number of people that vessels must carry for various roles and what the qualification of the personnel must be. Non-compliance of this will attract a penalty of up to Rs 10,000 for the first offence, and Rs 25,000 for subsequent offences.

- The Act empowers the Central government to prescribe what kind of pollutants and sewage vessels and can discharge and how much. Like in the case of motor vehicles, the Act empowers the Centre to prescribe the format in which states can issue pollution-under-control certificates.
- Looking at future development of inland waterways, since this is a new sector, the Bill also envisages maintaining a fund, which will be used for emergency preparedness, checking of pollution and boosting navigation.
 - The fund will source from schemes of the state governments, sale of cargo and wreck and contribution from stakeholders.
- The new law also covers the future developments and technological advancements in vessel construction and usage. Regulating the technologically advanced vessels of the present and future identified as 'Special Category Vessels'.
- The government wants to promote inland waterways especially as a supplement to movement of freight across India.
 - This is because the mode has been recognised across the world as environmentally friendly and economical, especially for cargo that do not depend on speed of delivery.
- According to a government study conducted by RITES, one litre of fuel moves 24 tonne-km on road; 95 tonne-km on rail and 215 tonne-km on inland waterways.
- On railways it takes about Rs 1.36 to move a tonne of cargo over a km, on highways it takes Rs 2.50, whereas the same takes Rs 1.06 on inland waterways.
- Highly under-utilised right now, the inland waterways of India move about 55 million tonnes of cargo every year.
 - The movement is currently restricted to a Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly rivers, the Brahmaputra, the Barak, the rivers in Goa, the backwaters in Kerala, inland waters in Mumbai and the deltaic regions of the Godavari – Krishna rivers.

PM-KISAN

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: PM released the 9th instalment of PM-KISAN.

PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi is a central sector scheme under the government of India which provides income support to the farmers and their families.
- PM-KISAN scheme was first implemented as the Rythu Bandhu scheme by the Government of Telangana where a certain amount was handed directly to the eligible farmers.
- Later, on 1 February 2019, during the 2019 Interim Union Budget of India, Piyush Goyal announced the implementation of this scheme as a nationwide project.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the PM-KISAN scheme on 24 February 2019 in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.
- Under this scheme, all small and marginal farmers will be provided with income support of Rs.6,000 per year in three instalments which will be deposited directly to their bank accounts.
- The total annual expenditure for this scheme is expected to be Rs.75,000 crore which will be financed by the Union Government.

Ujjwala 2.0 scheme

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the second phase of the Ujjwala gas connection scheme for the poor, and said that it would provide the biggest relief to lakhs of migrant worker families in the country.

Details:

- Under Ujjwala 2.0 (Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana), migrant workers would no longer have to struggle to get address proof documents to get the gas connections.
- Now migrant workers would only be required to submit a self-declaration of their residential address to get the gas connection.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana is a scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas for providing LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.



Target beneficiaries

- Under the scheme, an adult woman belonging to a poor family not having LPG connection in her household, is an eligible beneficiary under the expanded scheme.
- Release of LPG connection under this Scheme shall be in the name of the women belonging to the BPL family.
- Initially, the Government covered the following categories under the Scheme :-
 1. Beneficiaries listed in the SECC 2011 list
 2. All SC/STs households beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana(PMAY) (Gramin)
 3. Antyoday Anna Yojana (AAY)
 4. Forest dwellers
 5. Most Backward Classes (MBC)
 6. Tea & Ex-Tea Garden Tribes



7. People residing in Islands
8. People residing in river islands.

Benefits to the citizens

- Under the scheme, five crore LPG connections are to be provided to BPL households.
- The Scheme provides a financial support of Rs 1600 for each LPG connection to the BPL households, interest free loan to purchase stove and refill by Oil Marketing Companies. The administrative cost of Rs. 1600 per connection, which includes a cylinder, pressure regulator, booklet, safety hose, etc. would be borne by the Government.

Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *Government notifies the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021.*

Details:

- The manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of the following single-use plastic, including polystyrene and expanded polystyrene, commodities shall be prohibited with effect from 1st July, 2022:
 - ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene [Thermocol] for decoration;
 - plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays, wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards, and cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than 100 micron, stirrers.
- From 30 September 2021, the thickness of plastic carry bags will be increased from 50 microns to 75 microns and 120 microns, the statement said adding that this will also allow the reuse of plastic carry bags.
- The plastic packaging waste, which is not covered under the phase out of identified single use plastic items, shall be collected and managed in an environmentally sustainable way through the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) of the Producer, importer and Brand owner (PIBO), as per Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.
 - For the effective implementation of the EPR, the guidelines for the same have been given legal force through the amendment Rules.

The following steps have also been taken to strengthen implementation of Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 and also to reduce the use of identified single use plastic items:

1. States/UTs have been requested to constitute a Special Task Force for the elimination of single use plastics and effective implementation of Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.
2. A National Level Taskforce has also been constituted by the Ministry for taking coordinated efforts to eliminate identified single use plastic items and effective implementation of Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Rana Punja Bhil

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *A dispute in Rajasthan's Udaipur district over hoisting of a flag on August 9 on the statue of Rana Punja Bhil, a historical figure considered as a hero by the tribal Bhil community, has triggered tensions*



between Adivasi groups and BJP members. After the Amargarh fort dispute, this is the second issue in Rajasthan within a month when Adivasi groups and Hindu outfits are at odds over tribal history.

Who was Rana Punja Bhil?

- According to historians, Punja Bhil was a contemporary of 16th century ruler of Mewar, Maharana Pratap. While tales of Pratap's bravery are synonymous with Rajasthan, Punja is considered to be a significant character who bolstered the strength of Pratap during his battles with Mughal emperor Akbar.
- When Maharana Pratap was readying for the battle with Akbar, the tribal Bhil community voluntarily came to his assistance and at the time the Bhil army was commanded by Punja. Owing to his status as a commander, he was bestowed the title of Rana.
- Punja was highly respected and there are still awards and scholarships named after him.
- Bhils are an ancient tribe, whose history goes back to even mythologies. Due to their unmatched knowledge of the hills and forests of Mewar, the community has always exercised a strong influence in the region.

What is the present dispute about?

- On the occasion of World Tribal Day on August 9, when members of the Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Mahasabha gathered near a statue of Rana Punja Bhil in Udaipur, they objected to a flag hoisted on it.
- Tribal leaders have alleged that a saffron flag was put up by the BJP and Sangh Parivar on the statue, which is against the culture and identity of the community.
- An FIR has been lodged in the matter by members of the Adivasi Mahasabha, with the accused including a former BJP councillor.
- The BJP has denied that the saffron party or the RSS was involved in any way and it has said that the flag in question was not saffron but kesariya, the sigil of Maharana Pratap and the flag of Mewar.
- Tribal groups along with outfits such as the Bhim Army protested on Monday against the hoisting of the flag, following which it was taken down after the intervention of the administration.

SonChiraiya

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *MoHUA launched brand - 'SonChiraiya' – for Urban SHG products.*

Details:

- The 'SonChiraiya' brand and logo was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for marketing urban Self-Help Group (SHG) products.
- This initiative will prove as a step in the right direction towards increased visibility and global access for the products made by urban SHG women.
- The Ministry expects to link many more such SHG members, with a variety of professionally packaged, hand-crafted ethnic products, reaching the doorsteps of the customers globally.

Sovereign right to taxation

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Seven years after coming to power, the BJP-led government recently decided to withdraw the retrospective taxation amendment in the I-T Act introduced in March 2012, by Pranab Mukherjee, the then*

Finance Minister in the UPA government. While scrapping the retrospective levy is believed to provide clarity to investors by removing a major source of ambiguity on taxation laws, the government has stressed the need to establish its “sovereign right to taxation”.

What is the ‘sovereign right to taxation’ in India?

- In India, the Constitution gives the government the right to levy taxes on individuals and organisations, but makes it clear that no one has the right to levy or charge taxes except by the authority of law.
- Any tax being charged has to be backed by a law passed by the legislature or Parliament.
- A document on the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation website quotes the definition of tax as a “pecuniary burden laid upon individuals or property owners to support the government, a payment exacted by legislative authority”, and that a tax “is not a voluntary payment or donation, but an enforced contribution, exacted pursuant to legislative authority”.
- Taxes in India come under a three-tier system based on the Central, State and local governments, and the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution puts separate heads of taxation under the Union and State list.
- There is no separate head under the Concurrent list, meaning Union and the States have no concurrent power of taxation, as per the document.

Delhi government’s ‘faceless’ transport initiative

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

Context: *The Delhi government has launched an ambitious “faceless” initiative by locking down four Regional Transport Offices (RTO), the one-stop destination for all transport department services ranging from driving licences to transfer of ownership of vehicles.*

What is the initiative about?

- The RTO offices, where crucial transport-related services are offered, had over the years turned into dens of corruption as the nexus of middlemen and officials covered everything, ranging from issuance of learner’s licenses to change of address in registration certificates (RC).
- The “faceless services” scheme seeks to eliminate any scope of corruption by ending the need for people to visit the RTOs.

How will it work?

- The guidelines developed by the Delhi government say that Aadhaar-based verification will be relied upon in dispensing the services online.
- A separate provision for those not having or willing to share their Aadhaar details has also been kept. For example, an applicant for a learner’s licence will have to file an online application using an Aadhaar number by visiting the portal – transport.delhi.gov.in.
- Upon entering the Aadhaar number, an OTP will be sent to the Aadhaar-linked mobile number of the applicant.
- The verification of the documents will be done automatically as the application developed by the government will draw details from the central Aadhaar database.
- There will be separate provisions for making payments and making digital signatures. In case of learner’s license, e-licenses will be issued instantly after taking the test online.

What are the services that are not being offered as part of the “faceless” initiative?

- The two services for which a person will have to visit the RTO are the driving test for getting a licence and vehicle fitness certificates.

- Driving tests in Delhi are carried out at 13 fully automated centres. Meanwhile, the pilot of the “faceless services” was launched in February.
- Between February 19 and August, 3.42 lakh service requests have already been processed.

Amendment to the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: More than a year after the Union Cabinet approved a proposal to amend the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, Parliament last week passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill 2021. The Bill seeks to amend the nomenclature of certain tribes from Arunachal Pradesh mentioned in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

What does the Bill amend?

- The Bill seeks to modify Part-XVIII of the Schedule to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. Part-XVIII lists 16 tribes of Arunachal, in order: Abor, Aka, Apatani, Nyishi, Galong, Khampti, Khowa, Mishmi [Idu, Taroon], Momba, Any Naga tribes, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Hrusso, Tagin, Khamba and Adi. The Bill corrects the names of tribes spelt incorrectly, and adds names of a few tribes that were either named ambiguously or had their parent group named only.
- It makes five changes — deleting ‘Abor’ (tribe) at serial No. 1; changing ‘Khampti’ at serial No. 6 to ‘Tai Khamti’; including ‘Mishmi-Kaman (Miju Mishmi)’, ‘Idu (Mishmi)’ and ‘Taraon (Digaru Mishmi)’ at serial No. 8 in lieu of Mishmi [Idu, Taroon]; including ‘Monpa’, ‘Memba’, ‘Sartang’, ‘Sajolang (Miji)’ at serial No. 9 in place of ‘Momba’; and finally, replacing ‘Any Naga Tribes’ at serial No. 10 with names of four tribes: ‘Nocte’, ‘Tangsa’, ‘Tutsa’, and ‘Wancho’.



NAMING THE TRIBES CORRECTLY		
Name in 1950 Order	What's being changed	Districts inhabited by tribe
Abor	Being deleted because Adi, also listed in the order, is the same as Abor	East Siang, Siang, Upper Siang, Shi Yomi, Lower Dibang Valley
Khampti	Being corrected to Tai-Khamti	Namsai
Mishmi [Idu, Taroon]	Mishmi-Kaman (Miju Mishmi), Idu (Mishmi) and Taraon (Digaru Mishmi) being named as separate tribes	Anjaw, Lohit, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley and parts of East Siang and Upper Siang
Momba	Being replaced with names of four tribes: Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Sajolang (Miji)	Monpa: Tawang, W Kameng Memba: Upper Siang and West Siang Sartang: West Kameng; Sajolang: E & W Kameng
Any Naga tribe'	Being replaced with names of four Naga tribes (Nocte, Tangsa, Tutsa and Wancho) that live in Arunachal	Nocte: central part of Tirap Wancho: Longding Tusta: Changlang Tangsa: Changlang

Why is it significant?

- Indigenous nomenclature of tribes has been a long-standing demand in Arunachal Pradesh for two reasons: for the recognition of individual identity and to do away with the ambiguity as a result of errors in their names.
- For long, communities — whether civil society members or student leaders — have demanded that they must be known by their respective names.
- Most of the names for tribes in the Schedule were “colonial interpretations”. The move is historic because now communities will be known by the name they identify with and not something that is imposed on them.
- Self-identification is an essence for much needed respect for small indigenous communities in the Northeast.
- This mattered especially in Arunachal, made up of many diverse communities.

IndiGau

Context: India's first Cattle Genomic Chip IndiGau released.

About IndiGau:

- IndiGau is India's first Cattle Genomic Chip for the conservation of pure varieties of indigenous cattle breeds like Gir, Kankrej, Sahiwal, Ongole, etc.

- This indigenous chip was developed by the concerted efforts of scientists of the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NAIB), Hyderabad, an autonomous institution under the aegis of the Department of Biotechnology.
- According to the statement released, IndiGau is the largest cattle chip of the world.
- It has 11,496 markers (SNPs) more than that placed on 777K Illumina chip of US & UK breeds.
- IndiGau will have practical utility in the government schemes to achieve the goal of conservation of the indigenous breeds with better characteristics.



INTERNATIONAL

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: A study published recently in *Nature Climate Change* notes that this circulation, known officially as the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), is losing its stability.

What is AMOC?

- The AMOC is a large system of ocean currents. It is the Atlantic branch of the ocean conveyor belt or Thermohaline circulation (THC), and distributes heat and nutrients throughout the world's ocean basins.
- AMOC carries warm surface waters from the tropics towards the Northern Hemisphere, where it cools and sinks.
- It then returns to the tropics and then to the South Atlantic as a bottom current. From there it is distributed to all ocean basins via the Antarctic circumpolar current.

What happens if AMOC collapses?

- Gulf Stream, a part of the AMOC, is a warm current responsible for mild climate at the Eastern coast of North America as well as Europe. Without a proper AMOC and Gulf Stream, Europe will be very cold.
- Modelling studies have shown that an AMOC shutdown would cool the northern hemisphere and decrease rainfall over Europe. It can also have an effect on the El Nino.
- A 2016 paper in *Science Advances* noted: "AMOC collapse brings about large, markedly different climate responses: a prominent cooling over the northern North Atlantic and neighbouring areas, sea ice increases over the Greenland-Iceland-Norwegian seas and to the south of Greenland, and a significant southward rain-belt migration over the tropical Atlantic."
- The study team suspected that the previous models overestimated the AMOC's stability as they did not look at freshwater influence. Freshwater from melting Greenland ice sheets and the Arctic region can make circulation weaker as it is not as dense as saltwater and doesn't sink to the bottom.

Why is the AMOC slowing down?

- Climate models have long predicted that global warming can cause a weakening of the major ocean systems of the world.
- Last month researchers noted that a part of the Arctic's ice called "Last Ice Area" has also melted. The freshwater from the melting ice reduces the salinity and density of the water. Now, the water is unable to sink as it used to and weakens the AMOC flow.
- A 2019 study suggested that the Indian Ocean may also be helping the slowing down of AMOC. The researchers said: As the Indian Ocean warms faster and faster, it generates additional precipitation.
- With so much precipitation in the Indian Ocean, there will be less precipitation in the Atlantic Ocean, leading to higher salinity in the waters of the tropical portion of the Atlantic. This saltier water in the Atlantic, as it comes north via AMOC, will get cold much quicker than usual and sink faster.
- This would act as a jump start for AMOC, intensifying the circulation.
- On the other hand, we don't know how long this enhanced Indian Ocean warming will continue. If other tropical oceans' warming, especially the Pacific, catches up with the Indian Ocean, the advantage for AMOC will stop.
- If we continue to drive global warming, the Gulf Stream System will weaken further – by 34 to 45 percent by 2100 according to the latest generation of climate models. This could bring us dangerously close to the tipping point at which the flow becomes unstable.

IPCC assessment reports

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Every few years, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produces assessment reports that are the most comprehensive scientific evaluations of the state of earth's climate.*

Details:

- Set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the IPCC does not itself engage in scientific research.
- Instead, it asks scientists from around the world to go through all the relevant scientific literature related to climate change and draw up the logical conclusions.
- So far, five assessment reports have been produced, the first one being released in 1990. The fifth assessment report had come out in 2014 in the run up to the climate change conference in Paris.
- Recently, the IPCC released the first part of its sixth assessment report (AR6). The two remaining parts would be released next year.
- The IPCC reports are created by three working groups of scientists.
- Working Group-I deals with the scientific basis for climate change. Working Group-II looks at the likely impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation issues, while Working Group-III deals with actions that can be taken to combat climate change.

Alarm bells

A look at some of the observations and forecasts made by the panel on climate change

■ Heatwaves and humid heat stress will become more intense and frequent over Southeast Asia during the 21st century

■ Both annual and summer monsoon precipitation will increase, with enhanced interannual variability over Southeast Asia

■ Heat extremes have increased while cold extremes have decreased, and these trends will continue over the coming decades

■ Glacier run-off in the Asian high mountains will increase up to mid-21st century, and subsequently run-off may decrease due to the loss of glacier storage

■ Relative sea level around Asia increased faster than global average, with coastal area loss and shoreline retreat. Regional mean sea level will continue to rise



- The assessment reports are the most widely-accepted scientific opinion about climate change. They form the basis for government policies to tackle climate change, and also provide the scientific foundation for the international climate change negotiations.

Here is what the previous assessments reports had said:

- **First Assessment Report (1990)**

- Emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases.
- Global temperatures have risen by 0.3 to 0.6 degree Celsius in last 100 years. In business-as-usual scenario, temperatures likely to increase by 2 degree Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels by 2025, and 4 degree Celsius by 2100
- Sea-level likely to rise by 65 cm by 2100
- This report formed the basis for negotiation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992.

- **Second Assessment Report (1995)**

- Revises projected rise in global temperatures to 3 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100, sea-level rise to 50 cm, in light of more evidence.



- Global rise in temperature by 0.3 to 0.6 degree Celsius since late 19th century, “unlikely to be entirely natural in origin”.
- This report was the scientific underpinning for Kyoto Protocol in 1997.
- **Third Assessment Report (2001)**
 - Revises projected rise in global temperatures to 1.4 to 5.8 degree Celsius by 2100 compared to 1990. Projected rate of warming unprecedented in last 10,000 years.
 - Rainfall will increase on an average. The report also predicts that by 2100, the sea level is likely to rise by as much as 80 cm from 1990 levels. Glaciers to retreat during the 21st century.
 - Frequency, intensity and duration of extreme weather events to increase.
 - Presents new and stronger evidence to suggest that global warming is mostly attributable to human activities.
- **Fourth Assessment Report (2007)**
 - Greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70 per cent between 1970 and 2004.
 - Atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ in 2005 (379 ppm) the maximum in 650,000 years.
 - In worst case scenario, global temperatures could rise 4.5 degree Celsius by 2100 from pre-industrial levels. Sea-levels could be 60 cm higher than 1990 levels.
 - The report won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for IPCC and was the scientific input for the 2009 Copenhagen climate meeting.
- **Fifth Assessment Report (2014)**
 - More than half the temperature rise since 1950 attributable to human activities.
 - Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide “unprecedented” in the last 800,000 years.
 - Rise in global temperatures by 2100 could be as high as 4.8 degree Celsius from pre-industrial times
 - More frequent and longer heat waves “virtually certain”.
 - “Large fraction of species” face extinction. Food security would be undermined.
 - This report formed the scientific basis for negotiations of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Quad

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Senior officials of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. met in a video conference for the first Quad meeting since March, when the leaders of the grouping had decided on a number of initiatives including cooperation on countering the COVID-19 pandemic.

About Quad

- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn’t move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia’s “**Democratic Security Diamond**” involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).

Ghaznavi ballistic missile

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Pakistan successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile which can strike targets up to 290 kilometres, the Army said in a statement. The successful training launch of ballistic missile 'Ghaznavi' was aimed at ensuring operational readiness of Army Strategic Forces Command, besides re-validating technical parameters of the weapon system, the army said in a statement.*

Details:

- As per the military's media wing, missile Ghaznavi is capable of delivering multiple types of warheads up to a range of 290 km.
- The Army Strategic Forces Command appreciated the excellent standard of training, handling of the weapon system and execution of launch mission in the field by troops, the statement said.
- President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Imran Khan, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Service Chiefs have congratulated all ranks of Army Strategic Forces Command, the scientists and engineers on successful conduct of today's launch, the Army said.

Yasukuni shrine

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Nearly eight decades after Japan's defeat in World War Two, Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine remains a potent symbol of its wartime legacy in East Asia and a flashpoint for regional tension. Here is some background on the shrine for Japan's war dead and its impact on the country's relations with China and both North and South Korea.*

Dying for the emperor

- Established in 1869 in a leafy urban enclave, the shrine is dedicated to 2.5 million Japanese who died in wars beginning in the 19th century and including World War Two.
- Funded by the government until 1945, Yasukuni – its name formed by combining the words for “peace” and “country” – was central to the state religion of Shintoism that mobilised the wartime population to fight in the name of a divine emperor.
- Since 1978 those honoured have included 14 World War Two leaders convicted as “Class A” war criminals by an Allied tribunal in 1948, among them the wartime prime minister, Hideki Tojo.
- Tojo and the others were secretly elevated to the status of gods at the shrine in a ceremony that year, news of which sparked a domestic firestorm when it became public.



Bitter memories

- Many Japanese pay respects to relatives at Yasukuni and conservatives say leaders should be able to commemorate the war dead. Chinese and Koreans, however, resent the honours accorded to the war criminals.
- Koreans still chafe over Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945, while Chinese have bitter memories of Japan's invasion and brutal occupation of parts of China from 1931 to 1945.
- Critics in Japan see Yasukuni as a symbol of a militarist past and say leaders' visits violate the separation of religion and state mandated by the post-war constitution.
- A museum on the shrine's grounds has been criticised as depicting the war as one fought by Japan to liberate Asia from Western imperialism, while ignoring atrocities by Japanese troops.
- The names of thousands of men from Taiwan and Korea killed while serving with imperial forces are also recorded at Yasukuni. Some relatives want their names removed.

Avoided by Emperors

- Emperor Hirohito, in whose name Japanese soldiers fought the war, visited Yasukuni eight times between the conflict's end and 1975. Historians say he stopped due to displeasure over the enshrined convicted wartime leaders.
- His son, Akihito, who became emperor in 1989 and abdicated in 2019, never visited, nor has current Emperor Naruhito.



Mains

GS I

Misinformation through a feminist lens

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The online world amplifies the social norms of the physical world. Women face aggressive and offensive trolling on the Internet, designed to undermine and discredit them professionally and shame them into silence. A perfect example is the 'Sulli Deals' app recently created on GitHub that auctioned Muslim women. The active participation of vocal women, especially from minority communities, is resisted by those who do not wish the social order to be disrupted. This isn't to say that men are not targeted online, but the attacks faced by both sexes are vastly different. Misinformation/disinformation also targets men and women differently and unsurprisingly so, especially in India where gender disparity among Internet users is high.*

Gendering misinformation

- Take, for instance, the type of misinformation used against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi who come from the same socio-economic and political background. Mr. Gandhi is referred to as 'Pappu' by his critics.
- The usual misinformation targeting him questions his intellect. But the same cannot be said for his mother.
- Whether it's Hollywood actresses sporting bikinis misidentified as Ms. Gandhi or a morphed photo that shows her sitting on a man's lap, she is portrayed to be an 'indecent' woman to undercut her politics. Ms. Gandhi's position of power does not shield her from vulgar misinformation.
- A report by Amnesty International last year said that 95 female politicians out of 724 received nearly one million hateful mentions on Twitter between March and May, one in five of which was sexist or misogynistic.
- But misinformation like other forms of abuse has inter-sectional challenges. While actor Swara Bhaskar receives some of the most sexist troll attacks, activist Safoora Zargar is targeted for being a woman as well as a Muslim.
- After her arrest for participating in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, pornographic videos were shared in Ms. Zargar's name on social media. Organised disinformation and sexism intersect with Islamophobia, casteism, religious bigotry and other forms of discrimination to threaten vocal women from minority communities.
- The harassment is so rampant that more often than not, women are asked to either ignore the abusers or block such handles.
- As always, women are expected to take precautionary measures instead of men being asked to behave. We also seldom question Twitter on its failure to stop the spread of pornographic content.
- The women of Shaheen Bagh were targeted in a similar fashion. Surely a social media giant has the ability to detect and purge nudity, especially when shared with hateful captions?
- Gendering misinformation should be a part of the feminist discourse. The world has drastically changed after the advent of the Internet and the digital space has the power to impact democracies.
- But women do not get an equal opportunity to make themselves heard because they are shut down with sexism or, worse, the threat of sexual violence. Former Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union

leader Shehla Rashid was forced to delete her Facebook account after receiving rape threats for speaking in favour of interfaith marriage.

- Journalist Rana Ayyub has also complained several times of rape threats making their way into her Twitter messages.
- But while on the one hand women are targeted with sexist attacks, on the other, their sexuality is used to further misinformation. Some men hide behind female pseudonyms to get attention.
- Last year, the Chhattisgarh Police arrested a 31-year-old man for running multiple fake Facebook accounts posing as a woman and “posting provocative comments that could hurt social harmony”.
- Men are at the centre of the disinformation ecosystem in India — an ecosystem created by them and for them. While women also share false news, the number of men disseminating misinformation is higher for the simple reason that they are greater in number on the Internet (almost double the female population).
- Men manufacture false news and also fall for such news. They are proof that ‘women gossip more’ is a gender stereotype. Even if we look at this phenomenon from a greater perspective, there are more men in politics and they rely on disinformation to keep propaganda alive.
- A recent report by UNESCO on online harassment faced by women journalists says that political actors instigate and fuel online violence campaigns against women journalists. India is privy to such abuse — women journalists and activists are targeted not only by troll armies but also by office-bearers of political parties.
- One of the most recent incidents that exposes gendered disinformation in India is the Rhea Chakraborty saga. Actor Sushant Singh Rajput was hailed as a self-made man without faults but Ms. Chakraborty was trashed on television and on social media — both spaces dominated by men — as a ‘gold-digging seductress’.
- The whole episode was a reminder of deep-rooted internalised misogyny in the country. Women also participated in propagating Ms. Chakraborty as the ‘culprit’ and rejoiced when she was arrested.
- Why did they not show solidarity? Because patriarchal norms, while subordinating women, also give them the power to oppress women more vulnerable than them.

A symbiotic relationship

- Misinformation and sexism have a symbiotic relationship. Misinformation piggybacks on sexism to discredit vocal women and sexism uses misinformation to reinforce patriarchal norms.
- While organised misinformation and trolling affect women on a personal level, the issue that is often ignored is the effect they have on democracy.
- A healthy democracy is participatory and promotes gender inclusiveness. Sexism and misinformation intimidate women from taking vocal stands and are antithetical to a progressive society.
- Historically, feminist movements have led to democratisation. Women empowerment cannot be separated from a modern society. Savitribai Phule could reform modern education in the 1800s because her husband Jotirao Phule, a ‘Shudra’ himself, equipped her with knowledge restricted for the Brahmin community.
- Jotirao was also fortunate to receive education in the first place because of the foresight of his widowed aunt. Menaka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju, the only openly gay women lawyers in India, reformed the LGBTQ movement in the country by winning the landmark case in 2018 that decriminalised gay sex.
- These women went against the social norms of their time to make India more democratically sound. There is no extent to the reforms that women are capable of bringing and progress can happen faster with solidarity.
- But women who don’t conform to social norms are almost never supported and the intersection of sexism and misinformation justifies their abuse.
- While social media gives a platform for women to raise issues, repeated abuse takes away that freedom. Social media, the place that bolstered the #MeToo movement, is the same place used to shut women down.

GS II

The many shades of intolerance

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Pew Research Center report, 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation' (June 2021), has provoked several critical articles, which mostly present its findings as being about Hindu-Muslim relations. The survey, however, presents comparative data pertaining to four other major religions: Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. Its conclusion, according to these articles, broadly confirms the growing influence of Hindutva politics on India's social fabric. According to the report, "India's concept of religious tolerance does not necessarily involve the mixing of religious communities. While people in some countries may aspire to create a 'melting pot' of different religious identities, many Indians seem to prefer a country more like a patchwork of a fabric with clear lines between groups." However, interrogation of the conceptual foundations on which the report is premised could lead to a vastly different understanding of tolerance in India.*

Falling into a trap

- For instance, the notion of tolerance employed primarily relates to inter-religious issues. In Indian debate, the concept of tolerance has earned great presence ever since the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in 2015.
- In recent years, in discussions on prejudices or violence between Hindus and Muslims, the word 'tolerance' seems to have increasingly replaced the word 'communal', which dominated public discussions since the early part of the 20th Century, particularly since the Bengal Partition.
- Despite a considerable overlap in the connotations of these two terminologies, they are not the same. In the noisy political discourse around the Hindu Right, the erstwhile communalists have become the new nationalists — specifically, Hindu nationalists.
- An old communalist now calls himself a nationalist without shedding the skin of prejudices that he has been wearing all along. This has been possible owing to the well-oiled propaganda machine that the Hindu Right has been able to operate since the 1920s.
- Surprisingly, secularists of various shades have fallen into this trap. They have also accepted the deployment of the word 'tolerance' as completely normal.
- India has historically been a tolerant country, it is further argued, and is now increasingly turning into an intolerant one, particularly after 2014. Since Indians were tolerant in the past, they must remain so now and in future.
- According to liberals, this is the most persuasive way to convince Indians about the virtue of tolerance. The Pew Survey endorses this line of reasoning.

Untouchability in India

- But has India been a historically tolerant country? Untouchability has been practised for ages in India and it remains widespread in both urban and rural areas. We may ask: what is the relationship between untouchability and tolerance?
- By all accounts, untouchability is an act of extreme intolerance. That being the case, how can it then be argued that India has been historically tolerant?
- Strangely, the issue of tolerance is not seen in connection with caste and is argued exclusively in the context of inter-religious communities. But the ideas of caste and intolerance are deeply intertwined — empirically, conceptually and historically.



- The socially dominant group in Hindu society that practises intolerance towards Muslims or Christians has been practising the same against Dalits in an organised way as a custom.
- The latter is justified on the ground that Dalits are historically inferior, whereas Muslims are historically oppressive, violent and disloyal. The truth is that caste is the enduring source of intolerance and segregation, and the rest emanates from it.
- So long as this connection is not recognised, any effort to make sense of India's growing intolerance would be shallow and misleading.
- The Pew Survey seems to make this fatal mistake. In the limited space it offers to caste, it neither recognises this connection nor introduces it to its theoretical framework that helps formulate its profound findings. And, strangely, it finds that a majority Indians do not experience widespread caste discrimination.

Why is retrospective tax being scrapped?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Recently, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha to nullify the tax clause provision that allows the government to levy taxes retrospectively. The government has been fighting legal cases against Vodafone and Cairn Energy on taxes it has claimed retrospectively on transactions these entities entered into relating to operations in the country. Both the U.K.-based companies have won international arbitration rulings that held the Indian government in breach of bilateral investment protection agreements with the Netherlands and the U.K. respectively.

What is the genesis of the retrospective tax imbroglio?

- In May 2007, Vodafone bought Hong Kong-based Hutchison Whampoa's controlling stake in Hutchison Essar for \$10.9 billion.
- The transaction took place in the Cayman Islands where Hutchison's HTIL unit owned 100% of CGP Investments (the actual stakeholder in Hutchison Essar), which in turn was acquired by Vodafone's Netherlands-based Vodafone International Holdings.
- That September, India's Income Tax Department served a notice on Vodafone for failing to deduct tax at source from the amount it paid to Hutchison in lieu of the capital gains tax it contended the seller Hutchison was liable for. The case went to court.
- In January 2012, India's Supreme Court backed Vodafone, ruling that indirect transfer of shares to a non-Indian company would not attract tax in India.
- Separately, in 2006-07, Cairn Energy U.K. had reorganised its Indian oil and gas exploration business ahead of a planned IPO in India and subsequently sold part of its stake in Cairn India Ltd., first to Malaysia's Petronas, and then the Vedanta Group during the 2009-11 period.
- In the Union Budget of 2012, the then Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, introduced an amendment to the Finance Act, which allowed the government to retrospectively tax such transactions. In 2014, the Income Tax Department froze Cairn's remaining shares in Cairn India.
- The next year, Cairn initiated international arbitration against the government under the India-U.K. bilateral investment treaty. In 2018, the Income Tax Department also took over the U.K. firm's 5% stake in Vedanta.
- These shares were later sold, while tax refunds amounting to \$223 million were withheld in another transaction. It also seized dividends worth \$159 million due to Cairn Energy U.K.

What are the proposed changes?



- The Bill proposes to do away with retrospective taxation on the sale of assets in India by foreign entities executed before May 2012, with a caveat — the companies that will benefit from the amendment must withdraw all legal cases against the government and forfeit interest, costs and any damages.
- The government, on its part, is willing to refund any tax dues it may have collected or seized. At ₹7,900 crore, the amount transferable to Cairn Energy takes up the bulk of the total ₹8,100 crore of such proposed refunds.

Why did the government decide to rescind the provision?

- Though the government had raised tax demands in 17 such cases, Vodafone and Cairn attracted the most attention. Both initiated international arbitration under bilateral agreements.
- Vodafone got a favourable ruling in September 2020 at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague in the ₹22,000-crore case. In December, an Arbitral Tribunal ruled in favour of Cairn, awarding it \$1.2 billion plus interest and costs in damages, which came to \$1.7 billion in total. India has appealed against both rulings.
- This year, Cairn had applied in courts in the U.S., Canada, Singapore, Mauritius and the Netherlands for seizure of Indian assets such as the state-owned national carrier Air India's aircraft. It also obtained a legal order in France freezing some real estate assets owned by India in Paris, valued at about \$24 million.
- Though the cases are in appeal, the loss of the arbitration cases and Cairn's pursuit of India's assets abroad may have forced the government's hand.
- The Bill says: "It is argued that such retrospective amendments militate against the principle of tax certainty and damage India's reputation as an attractive destination... The country today stands at a juncture when quick recovery of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic is the need of the hour and foreign investment has an important role to play..."

How are global investors likely to react?

- Even after the Bill becomes law, entities such as Cairn Energy must convince its shareholders and accept the caveats.
- Prospective investors, however, may take heart from the fact that the government has shown the intent not to claim tax retrospectively and demonstrated a willingness to undo a measure that was seen as hurting the inflow of foreign investment.

A call for improving civil registration systems

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A working paper for the Center for Global Development, co-authored by former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian, concludes that excess deaths during the pandemic period could be as high as 49 lakh in India as against the 4.14 lakh reported in government data. The Hindu has come out with estimates of excess deaths based on Civil Registration System (CRS) data for many States which showed that the death toll was several times higher than the official death toll due to COVID-19. Such discrepancies have been reported from other countries including the U.S. and Europe though they may not have been of such magnitude.

Capturing excess mortality

- 'Excess deaths' are defined as the difference between the observed number of deaths in specific time periods and the expected number of deaths in the same time periods.

- At the time of a pandemic, when the normal system is disrupted, it is not likely that every person who dies could have been tested for COVID-19 or the death could have been mistakenly assigned to some other cause.
- Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization, has tweeted in this connection: “For every country, it’s important to capture excess mortality – only way to prepare the health system for future shocks & to prevent further deaths. It’s also why we need to invest in strong civil registration and vital statistics, so policies can be adjusted based on real data”.
- Section 19 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, stipulates that the State governments have to “publish for the information of the public a statistical report on the registered births and deaths during the year at such intervals and such form as may be prescribed”. The Act also stipulates that the deaths be registered at the place of occurrence.
- In India, the annual report for 2019 that is based on the data provided by the Chief Registrars has been released though the States themselves have not published the data.
- According to the Rules, these were to be submitted by the Chief Registrars to the State governments by July 31, 2020 and published within five months thereafter.
- Considering that technology enables the States to release data on the number of deaths registered on a monthly, weekly or daily basis, it is shameful that in some States researchers had to use the Right to Information law to obtain data on the number of deaths registered.
- What stands in the way of our ability to record deaths and bring out reports that are of critical importance today?

Complicating factors

- Let us look at the organisational structure of the administrative machinery that is responsible for this task.
- While the Registrar General, India, is the head of the national organisation tasked with the registration of births and deaths, the actual work is carried out by the State and Union Territory (UT) administrations. The heads of the State organisations are called Chief Registrars.
- These officers come from the Health Department in 21 States/UTs and the Department of Planning, Economics and Statistics in 13 States/UTs. In two States/ UTs, they are from the Panchayat/Local Administration Departments.
- We also have Secretaries to the State government functioning as Chief Registrars in a few States. The multiplicity of agencies responsible for the registration of births and deaths is replicated at the district and lower levels with municipalities and panchayats playing a major role in registration.
- This impedes effective oversight. Also, the traditional bureaucratic practice is to function within departmental silos.
- Another complicating factor is that civil registration involves good coordination between different actors. The responsibility to report births and deaths to the Registrar rests with the hospital where the event occurred or with the head of the household if it occurred at home.
- The Registrar then provides them with a legal document (the birth or death certificate) that is the evidence for registration.
- The Registrar could be a full-time government employee, or a medical officer in a hospital or a health centre, or the secretary of a local panchayat or municipality as appointed by the State government.
- In case of deaths occurring in public places, other agencies like the police or the local government would need to be involved. The State governments have not given adequate attention to the CRS. This has resulted in an inadequate budget for carrying out its regular activities including processing of the data.
- The data needed to establish ‘excess deaths’ originates from the processes described briefly above. The information on deaths registered are compiled at regular intervals by the Chief Registrar.
- Dissemination of this data is neglected to such an extent that the Health Departments, including the States where they are in charge of the system, are generally not aware of this data.
- All the agencies involved in the processes of civil registration will need to coordinate their activities seamlessly to ensure that the civil registration work is carried out efficiently.

- Committees established at the State, district and local government levels to ensure coordination meet rarely and the challenges of coordination continue to be a major issue in most parts of the country.

Strengthening the system

- The first step that needs to be taken to address this is to accord high priority to strengthening civil registration and generation of vital statistics.
- The top level of the leadership at the Central and State governments must announce a time-bound commitment to achieve 100% registration of deaths in the country.
- While eleven States register more than 90% of deaths, they do not include several of the larger States including Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Uttar Pradesh registered 63% of the deaths and Bihar registered only 51.6%, according to the 2019 report of the Registrar General, India.
- Vital Statistics Reports that the government is required to publish are expected to meet a standard that is set by the UN Statistics Division, which seeks to ensure that all national reports are produced in a way that they can be internationally comparable.
- Apart from the problem that our reports are overdue, they do not contain all the tables that are prescribed even under our own Rules. Data include deaths that took place in previous years but are registered in the years that the report is published.
- This distorts the accuracy of the report. Some reports do not cover some major areas in the country. For instance, the Kerala report does not include data for Kochi Corporation.
- We need data that fully meets quality standards.
- This is what the pandemic has called on us to do.
- We need to use this as an opportunity to mend matters in this critical area of public concern and swiftly assign resources and give high priority to make the changes that are badly overdue in all States and UTs.

GS III

A circular economy for plastic

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A 2021 report commissioned by Google, *Closing the Plastics Circularity Gap*, suggests that unless large-scale global interventions are made, “we should expect to mismanage more than 7.7 billion metric tonnes of plastic waste globally over the next 20 years... [which is] equivalent to 16-times the weight of the human population...” Among the many applications of plastic, plastic packaging is the largest.

The solution

- For India, the solution must be multi-pronged, systemic, and large scale, to create a visible impact. The Plastics Pacts model offers such a solution and is active in a number of countries including the U.K., South Africa, and Australia. It is now being brought to India by CII and WWF India.
- The Plastics Pacts are business-led initiatives and transform the plastics packaging value chain for all formats and products. The Pacts bring together everyone from across the plastics value chain to implement practical solutions.
- All Pacts unite behind four targets: to eliminate unnecessary and problematic plastic packaging through redesign and innovation; to ensure all plastic packaging is reusable or recyclable; to increase the reuse, collection, and recycling of plastic packaging; and to increase recycled content in plastic packaging.



- The India Plastics Pact, the first in Asia, will be launched in September at the CII Annual Sustainability Summit.
- It can be expected to boost demand for recycled content, investments in recycling infrastructure, jobs in the waste sector, and beyond.
- The first Plastics Pact was launched in the U.K. in 2018, by WRAP, a global NGO based in the U.K., in partnership with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The U.K. Pact helped channel over £120 million worth of investments in recycling infrastructure resulting in 300,000 tonnes of new recycling capacity.
- The Pact will support the Extended Producer Responsibility framework of the government and improve solid waste management as envisioned in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- Integral to the Pact's framework is the involvement of the informal waste sector crucial to post-consumer segregation, collection and processing of plastic waste. The India Plastics Pact is supported by WRAP, which supports many Pacts globally. This association will ensure access to expertise and knowledge from different Pacts worldwide.

The India Plastics Pact

- The India Plastics Pact focuses on solutions and innovation. Members' accountability is ensured through ambitious targets and annual data reporting.
- The Pact will develop a road map for guidance, form action groups composed of members, and initiate innovation projects. While the India Plastics Pact will be active in India, it will link globally with other Plastics Pacts.
- Many Indian businesses and organisations have expressed an interest in signing up to the Pact. Deeper and long-lasting benefits will be felt across the supply chains of these businesses, most of which comprise MSMEs.
- The Pact will encourage development and maturing of the entire plastics production and management ecosystem.
- Apart from benefits to society and economy, delivering the targets will drive circularity of plastics and help tackle pollution. They will lead to significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

The shaky foundation of the labour law reforms

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The National Democratic Alliance government enacted the Code on Wages (<https://bit.ly/3fMrIj>) in August 2019 and the other three Codes, viz., the Industrial Relations Code, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code and Code on Social Security (CSS) in September 2020. Later, it had framed the draft rules albeit incompletely under all the codes — incompletely because the rules have not covered some aspects of the Codes, e.g. rules regarding recognition of central trade unions have not been framed so far.*

A rushed exercise

- Controversies surround the processes of the enactment of codes and the framing of rules. The Government has held only symbolic and partial consultation with the central trade unions.
- The three codes were passed in Parliament even as the Opposition parties, otherwise insignificant, boycotted the proceedings.
- The tearing hurry in which the Government carried out the reforms even during the COVID-19 period gave tremendous hope to employers and potential investors. It announced its intentions of implementing the Codes from April 1, 2021 even as State governments were completely unprepared with the rules.



- Further, the major political parties reallocated their energies to regional elections rather than the implementation of codes.
- Symbolically, labour law reforms have been affected and the government can boast of it. Since the Government has not shown serious intent to implement the codes, the NDA government effected reforms to boast that it has executed the long-pending reforms; simply put, it is more symbolic rather than a meaningful act.

Court directives

- The central government has deferred the possible date of implementation to October 1, 2021, again tentatively.
- In the meanwhile, the Supreme Court of India has exerted pressure on both the central and the State governments to implement a 'one nation, one ration card' (ONOR) scheme and register all the unorganised workers under the National Database for Unorganized Workers (NDUW), which was to have been done by July 31, 2021.
- Government agencies are rushing to comply with both the directives. In ONOR, Aadhaar seeding and the universal availability of an electronic point of sale (EPOS) system are necessary. And for the NDUW, it has to register each of the approximately 400 million workers, a conservative figure.
- Perhaps, the Supreme Court passed such an extraordinary perhaps impracticable order following the hesitancy in early 2020 to provide relief to suffering migrant workers following the national lockdown.
- The governments did not honour the Supreme Court's orders relating to the registration of construction workers for many years. So, it has a bad track record. One is not sure when governments would comply fully and well with the Supreme Court's orders.
- Unorganised workers including migrant workers will continue to be deprived of their promised and extended entitlements.

Government's line vs reality

- The Government said the codes would extend universal minimum wages and social security, enable enhanced industrial safety and the provision of social security to gig workers, among other things.
- The Industrial Relations Code provides for recognition of trade union(s) by employers, a labour right that eluded workers for seven decades.
- On the other hand, employers celebrated the extension of tremendous flexibility to them, even those unasked, such as relief from framing standing orders for most firms. But do they enjoy these benefits?
- On August 3, 2021, I browsed the Simpliance website (a law portal) to assess the record of State governments regarding rules under the codes.
- It was a revelation to find that major States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Haryana and Delhi have not issued the draft rules under any codes. Karnataka, Gujarat and Jharkhand have framed Rules for the Code on Wages and the Industrial Relations Code.
- Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab have framed rules for all the codes. Even though the Code on Wages was enacted in August 2019, it was only in March 2021 that the central government notified the constitution of an advisory committee.
- On June 3, 2021 it also announced an expert committee with a tenure of three years to advise it on minimum wages. Then, on July 12, 2021, it announced that the wage index's base year would be shifted from 1965 to 2019 to use the revised wage index to determine minimum wages. The Government seems to be clueless regarding the implementation of minimum wages.

Poor safety record

- The incidence of major industrial accidents has remained undiminished even during the COVID-19 period.
- For instance, IndustriAll reported that between May to June, 32 major industrial accidents occurred in India, killing 75 workers.



- The media reported four accidents in Vizag during 2020. Safe in India's annual reports, CRUSHED, for 2019 and 2020, provide a disturbing picture of industrial accidents in the automobile industry in the Gurgaon region.
- Industrial safety continues to be a grave concern even after the enactment of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code.
- According to several research reports, COVID-19 intensified informality, led to the withdrawal of workers from the labour market, reduced earnings, increased unemployment and widened inequality.
- The non-statutory floor level minimum wage remains a meagre ₹178 still even as Wholesale Price Index-inflation rates have galloped to 12% in June 2021.
- The Government's relief measures to workers, especially unorganised and migrant workers and even to the so-called organised sector workers, are too meagre to make any difference.
- It did not implement the widely endorsed measure of direct benefit transfer at least for low-income families.

In perspective

- Thus, we see two aspects concerning labour market governance in India.
 - One, the Government has failed to provide legal visibility to millions of unorganised and migrant workers, even after decades, and despite direction by the highest court in the land.
 - Two, despite the gazetting of four Codes, age-old laws are in force.
- Thus, they reflect poorly not only on the governance abilities of the governments but also on the countervailing power of the Opposition parties.
- Were the labour law reforms rushed with little or no debate and consultation whatsoever, only to remain in the gazette books? Employers and workers cannot enjoy the so-called benefits extended by the codes.
- Given the facts mentioned above, the legislative impasse continues; one does not know how long it would be.
- However, India would score impressively on the ease of doing business exercise by any agency including the World Bank by the mere execution of labour reforms without them being implemented: what else then is needed!

IPCC AR6 report & Indian cities

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

Context: *Burgeoning air pollution has reduced the intensity as well as frequency of monsoon rains in India and the rest of south Asia, the Sixth Assessment Report (AR 6) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlined.*

Details:

- The report, *Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis*, for the first time gave cognisance to the role of compound extremes and multiple climate change drivers operating in tandem in maximising disaster impacts in India and elsewhere.
- The IPCC report also spelt out with “moderate confidence” how urbanisation has pushed up intense rainfall in cities across South Asia using several scientific evidences generated on India cities.
- The political leadership in south Asian countries, including India, must keep these findings in mind and act proactively as they plan post-novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) economic recovery.

Heat can push up Indian monsoon

- “Rainfall has been on the decline and monsoon deficits on the rise in different regions in south Asia.



- Agreement among datasets invoke confidence about a decrease in mean rainfall over most parts of the eastern and central north regions of India,” the IPCC report said.
- The report added that “concurrently the frequency of heavy precipitation events has increased over India, while the frequency of moderate rain events has decreased since 1950”.
- It said that the “the dominant cause of the observed decrease of south and southeast Asian monsoon precipitation since mid-20th century is anthropogenic aerosol forcing”.
- Anthropogenic aerosol is a suspension of fine solid particles or liquid droplets in air created mostly by air pollutant like particulate and smoke emitted from vehicles, industries and other sources.
- Incidentally, the level of air pollution, particularly toxic particulate like particulate matter 2.5, has been found to be the highest in Indian sub-continent with Bangladesh, Pakistan and India occupying top three positions respective at global benchmark.
- Air pollution has increased over the Indian subcontinent, and so have aerosol levels; it acts as a barrier and reduces the difference of temperature between sea surface and land. This provides a cooling effect and reduces monsoon intensity.
- While the AR6 report predicted stronger monsoon and fewer droughts in coming years, the finding has been earmarked “low confidence”.
- The report predicted a turnaround in monsoon intensity in India and around linking it with rising temperature: “... models projected for the 21st century a significant increase in temperature over South Asia (high confidence with robust evidence) and in projections of increased summer monsoon precipitation (medium confidence)”.
- While the exact nature of monsoon in near future (2020-2040) looked uncertain due to inherent variability, there was some certainty that the monsoon rainfall would increase beyond 2040.
- The report highlighted that throughout Asia, “intensity and frequency of hot extremes, such as warm days, warm nights, and heat waves; and decreases in the intensity and frequency of cold extremes, such as cold days and cold nights” is on the card.
- But India and Pakistan are expected to suffer more: “More intense heat waves of longer durations and occurring at a higher frequency are projected over India and Pakistan”, the report said.

Cities will be affected by more rain, sea level rise and heat

- AR6 report has predicted with “medium confidence” that the major Indian cities would experience more bursts of intense rainfalls, mainly influenced by urbanisation.
- The report said:
 - There has been new evidence of the effect of local land use and land cover change on heavy precipitation (with) a growing set of literature linking increases in heavy precipitation in urban centres to urbanisation.”
 - It added that “urbanisation intensifies extreme precipitation, especially in the afternoon and early evening, over the urban area and its down-wind region”.
- High intensity of heat released in the major cities, coupled with locally generated air pollution, triggers aerosol load that contributes in cloud formation. Urban structure often trap the wind and act together to bring bursts of intense rainfalls in Indian cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and others.
- The temperature of Kolkata during 1950-2018 increased 2.6 degree Celsius, the highest among all the cities mentioned in the IPCC regional factsheet.
- Aerosol acts in diverse ways — while at a macro scale it imparts a cooling effect and reduces monsoon rain, at a micro scale, especially in urban centres, it contributes to intense bursts of downpour.
- Cities in the South Asia region would experience more intense rainfall, and in absence of adequate infrastructure, may face severe water logging in coming years
- The frequency of major floods in Ganga basin has now increased at least four times compared to earlier decades.
- An analysis by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration predicted that several Asian cities located either on or near the coastline would have to withstand significant sea level rise in 2100.

- It said Mumbai and Chennai have had 0.58 and 0.57 meters of sea level rise, the highest among the metros. This was followed by Kolkata (Khidderpur in report) with 0.15 meter rise.

Compounding climate drivers multiplying disaster

- The report, for the first time, acknowledged the role of compounding extremes — several climate change drivers operating together — in maximising disaster impacts in India and elsewhere.
- Cyclone Yaas a tell-tale example of compound extremes such as high intensity cyclonic wind, rising sea level, more intense rainfall.
- Increasing heat and forest fire is an ideal example of compound extremes.
- Though India's contribution to emissions has been miniscule, it does absolve the country of its need to act. India is not "walking the talk on the issue".
- The South Asian governments, including India, must keep the report findings in mind as they plan future courses of action for economic recovery.

Unpacking the resiliency of global trade

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In the last year, the devastating impact of COVID-19 pandemic has shrunk the world economy by 4.4% and global trade by 5.3%; job losses have been estimated to be to the tune of 75 million. Around the world, countries have responded to pandemic-induced shortages with protectionist reactions and nationalist aspirations with the potential to disrupting complex cross-border supply chains. The blame game on trade openness and trade agreements for widening trade deficits, income inequalities and growing unemployment are all but natural domestic reactions. These trends make projections for the post-COVID-19 world even more dismal and depressing.*

Past trends

- Going by past experiences, historic ruptures often generate and accelerate new global links that lay foundations for institutional changes, seeking enduring cooperation among nations.
- The Second World War created sustaining multilateral institutions; besides the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Trade Organisation (ITO) were created to help rebuild the shattered post-war economy.
- The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was negotiated in 1947 as a means to reducing barriers to international trade.
- The oil shocks of the 1970s led to the establishment of the International Energy Agency (IEA) in 1974 to manage oil supply disruptions and went on to create awareness on the need for global energy security.
- The financial crisis of 2008 led to the G20 Leaders Summit, an elevation from the G20 Finance Ministers forum in 1999, in a bid to take cooperation beyond the G7 in a global quest to control inflation due to fiscal expansion.
- These developments had a consequential impact on global trade, with dramatic surges in volumes; from a mere \$60.80 billion in 1950 to \$2,049 billion in 1980; \$6,452 billion in 2000; \$19,014 billion in 2019 (Source: wto.org).

Future prospects

- The patterns above leave much hope for optimism for global trade in the post-COVID-19 crisis in the collective belief that international trade is vital for development and prosperity, while competition is central to generating competence.
- Stimulus packages and forced savings in several countries in the last year have created financial buffers.



- Global supply chains that have remained dormant for long are expected to be resilient to help revive manufacturing with lower production costs, induce investments and promote technology transfers.
- In a post COVID-19 world, members of the World Trade Organization are expected to stitch trade facilitating rules that may impinge on national sovereign policy space with a collective resolve to discipline errant nations that are known to dumping goods and erecting trade barriers through multilateral rules.
- Mutually beneficial trade arrangements that seek deeper economic integration will be entered into at the bilateral and regional levels to create win-win situations for all stakeholders, including consumers, who tend to benefit from lowered barriers and harmonised standards.
- Countries that harness technology are expected to dominate international trade in future with a transformational impact on the global economy.
- Just as the steam engine in the 19th century and computing power in the 20th century, data will be the main driver of economic growth in the 21st century. Businesses will aim to harness data for innovation to remain ahead of the curve in a post-COVID-19 world.
- However, increasing use of data and automation will make nations vulnerable to job losses. Rapid growth in e-commerce and the virtual world will demand entirely new skills from the workforce.
- Therefore, economic policies are likely to focus on stronger safety nets for workers; income protection, skill training, health care and educational support for families.

India's outlook

- India's challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic have been no different from those faced by other countries: its GDP contracted by 7.3% according to the National Statistical Office; and about 10 million jobs were lost according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd; trade remained subdued at \$493 billion (goods at \$290 billion and services at \$203 billion).
- The projections of the International Monetary Fund for India's economic growth ahead are positive and in line with the general trends world-wide, assuming that the widespread vaccination might limit the COVID-19 agony.
- Unleashing trade potential is expected to have a ripple effect on the economy. Merchandise exports for the second quarter of 2021 from April-June at \$95 billion (+6%), is indeed encouraging, but would need to remain focussed on value added products, beyond the traditional exports basket comprising refined petroleum products, pharma, gems and jewellery, textiles and garments, engineering items, rice, oil meals and marine products (Source: DGCI&S).
- Building an ecosystem that incentivises value-added manufacturing and technology-induced finished products should form a part of our long-term strategy. Plug and play manufacturing units under Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) schemes, if carefully nurtured, could lead the industry on that path.
- Beyond the timely stimulus packages for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), supporting them with cheaper input costs, including raw material and intermediate goods would help sustain them with job creation at the local level.
- Developing a synergistic relationship between the big industry and MSMEs is at the core of a successful Atmanirbhar Bharat; the former should be encouraged to move into technology space and finished products, while the latter feeds them with locally made inputs at competitive prices. Skills upgradation to global standards should form a part of India's strategy in a post-COVID-19 world.



Volcanic Eruption and Global Warming

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

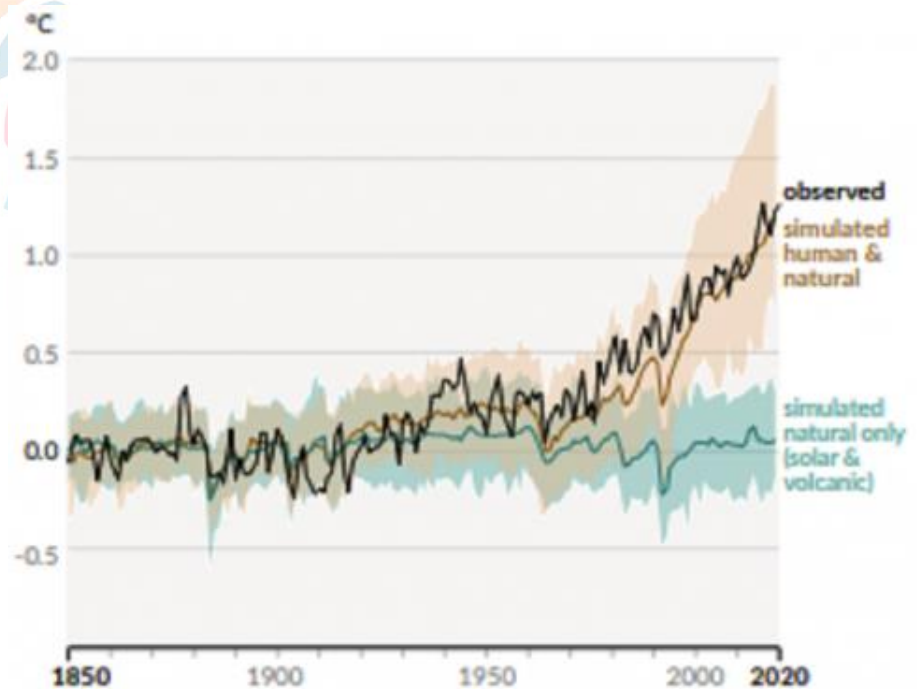
Context: Amid the grim predictions emerging from the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is a ray of hope: A major volcanic eruption can counteract anthropogenic global warming to a small extent.

Details:

- All statements about global warming breaching the 1.5 degree Celsius rise over pre-industrial levels assume that no major volcanic eruption occurs in the near term, the report said.
- Before the end of the century, there will be at least one large volcanic eruption, the scientists predicted based on their study of ancient climates and historical evidence.
- Such an eruption will reduce global surface temperature for several years, decrease land precipitation, alter monsoon circulation and modify extreme precipitation, at both global and regional scales.
- An increased number of volcanic eruptions resulted in a consistent slow cooling in the Northern Hemisphere from 1450 to 1850, the researchers observed.
- The cooling, however, showed regional variations, unlike the global warming that began immediately after.

Change in global surface temperature between 1850 and 2020

- **Black line:** Changes in global surface temperature over the past 170 years from 1850–1900; **brown:** Temperature response to both human and natural drivers; **green:** Temperature response to only natural drivers (solar and volcanic activity).
- The report titled *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* is a part of the sixth assessment report by IPCC and the first since the one released in 2013. Over 230 authors from 65 countries reviewed 14,000 scientific papers on the impact of climate change to collate the report.



Science behind cooling

- Large volcanic eruptions shoot out aerosols (small particles) into the upper atmosphere. These reflect sunlight and induce a long-term cooling effect on the surface, the scientists wrote in the paper.
- Volcanoes are one of the two natural drivers that influence the Earth's climate in the long-term. The other is the variation in solar irradiance.
- The albedo effect (increased reflection of sunlight) produced by the aerosols have shown to partially offset the warming in an atmosphere dense with greenhouse gases, according to some models.
- The combination of these two factors slowed down global warming between 1998-2012 compared to the three preceding decades, the researchers noted.



- A warming of 0.87-1.22°C over the period 1906 to 2005 due to greenhouse gases was partially offset by a cooling of 0.54-0.22°C attributed to aerosols.
- The effect of these natural triggers, however, are negligible in the long-term in comparison to those resulting from human activities, the report stated.
- Volcanism also has an impact on precipitation, the researchers noted. For instance, large volcanoes erupting in one hemisphere can enhance global monsoon precipitation in the other hemisphere, the paper cited.

Assurance for occurrence

- In the past 2,500 years, the average gap between large volcanic eruptions was 43 years. “The period between successive large volcanic eruptions ranges from 3–130 years,” the researchers found.
- The eruption of Mt Pinatubo in 1991 is the latest such example. It cooled the global surface temperature in the Northern Hemisphere by a little over 0.5°C for over a year.
- Centuries that didn’t have a single large eruption came only once every 400 years, historical data showed.
- Hence, the researchers said it is likely another large volcanic eruption may occur before 2100.
- A 1998 study *On the climatic implications of volcanic cooling* assessed how the sea and land temperatures may be affected by a volcanic eruption of the scale of Pinatubo.
- The sea surface temperature showed a perturbation of -0.15 to -0.3°C, lasting over a period of 5-20 years depending on the sensitivity of the climate, the geologists wrote in the paper.
- The perturbations for land surface temperatures was between -0.3 and -0.5°C for the same period, the report added.
- The latest report assessed a series of future simulations and all of them accounted for solar irradiance and mean background forcing from volcanoes, but not for individual volcanic eruptions.

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements with respect to IPCC Assessment Reports:

1. The First Assessment Report led to the setting up of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. The Second Assessment Report was the basis for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.
3. Fifth Assessment Report which came out in 2014, guided the Paris Agreement.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : d

2) Which of the following statement(s) is/ are correct with respect to Tribal Population in Arunachal Pradesh?

1. Nearly 64.2% of the total population of Arunachal Pradesh is Scheduled Tribes (STs) according to the 2001 Census.
2. Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, removes the Abor tribe from the list of identified STs in Arunachal Pradesh.

Codes:

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

Answer : c

3) Which of the following factors are responsible for increase in price of edible oils in India?

1. Increased transportation costs
2. Mismatch in demand & supply
3. Reduction of International prices of edible oils
4. Boost in domestic production owing to favourable weather conditions

Codes:

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

Answer : a

4) Consider the following statements with respect to Capital Expenditure:

1. It is a payment for goods or services recorded or capitalized on the balance sheet instead of expensed on the income statement.
2. It creates employment especially for poor and unskilled due to high multiplier effect.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : c

5) Consider the following statements with respect to Operation Greens



1. It is a price fixation scheme that allows only Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO), Cooperatives, Self-help groups to avail the financial assistance.
2. It provides for short term intervention through value addition projects with Grant-in-aid at 35% to 70% of eligible project cost.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : d

- State Agriculture and other Marketing Federations, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO), cooperatives, companies, Self-help groups, food processors etc. can avail the financial assistance under it.
- The scheme provides for short term intervention by way of providing transportation and storage subsidy @ 50%.

6) Consider the following statements with respect to Mission Innovation (MI)

1. It is a global initiative of 24 countries and UNDP for catalysing energy trade.
2. It aims to demonstrate clean energy affordable, attractive and accessible for all.

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

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

Answer : b

Mission Innovation (MI) is a global initiative of 22 countries and the European Commission (on behalf of the European Union).

7) Consider the following statements regarding UN Human Rights Council.

1. UNHRC was reconstituted from its predecessor organisation, the UN Commission on Human Rights.
2. UNHRC passes binding resolutions on human rights issues through a periodic review called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
3. Member Countries are disallowed from occupying a seat for more than two consecutive terms.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: c)

UNHRC was reconstituted from its predecessor organisation, **the UN Commission on Human Rights** to help overcome the “credibility deficit” of the previous organisation.

Composition:

- The UNHRC has 47 members serving at any time with elections held to fill up seats every year, based on allocations to regions across the world to ensure geographical representation.
- Each elected member serves for a term of three years.
- **Countries are disallowed from occupying a seat for more than two consecutive terms.**

The UNHRC passes **non-binding resolutions on human rights issues** through a periodic review of all 193 UN member states called **the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**.

8) Consider the following statements regarding Cloudbursts.

1. Cloudbursts are very long-duration, intense rainfall events over a small area.

2. During the cloudburst, usually the relative humidity and cloud cover will be at the maximum level with low temperature and slow winds.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b)

Cloudbursts are short-duration, intense rainfall events over a small area.

9) Consider the following statements with respect to the indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1), Vikrant:

- 1. It is India's first indigenous aircraft carrier with the largest and most complex platform so far designed by the Directorate of Naval Design.
- 2. It is being propelled by nuclear reactors which helps it to operate at high speed for long periods of time.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : a

INS VIKRANT

Unlike Vikramaditya, which is steam-propelled, Vikrant is propelled by four gas turbines.

10) Consider the following statements with respect to Carbon Sinks

- 1. Mangroves, seagrass beds and salt marshes store at least ten times more carbon than continental forests.
- 2. According to recent findings, Amazon rainforest, being the best carbon sink in the world, absorbs more carbon than it releases.

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

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

Answer : b

According to recent findings Amazon rainforest is now releasing instead of absorbing carbon dioxide.

11) With reference to Quality of Life for Elderly Index, which of the following statements is correct?

- a. The Index has been created by the NITI Aayog at the request of Ministry of Social Justice Department.
- b. The Index framework includes four pillars namely Financial Well-being, Social Well-being, Health System and Job Security.
- c. According to the index, Puducherry and Ladakh are top-scoring regions in Aged and Relatively Aged States, respectively.
- d. Aged States refer to States with an elderly population of more than 5 million, whereas Relatively Aged States refer to less than 5 million.

Answer : d

12) Consider the following statements with respect to Steel sector in India:

- 1. Steel is a de-regulated sector and the role of the Ministry of Steel is that of a facilitator.
- 2. The modernisation of steel plants is being funded by the respective steel sector company from its internal resources / borrowings.

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

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

Answer : c

13) Teram Shehr Glacier, sometimes seen in the news recently, is a tributary of?

- a. Zemu Glacier
- b. Milam Glacier
- c. Siachen Glacier
- d. Chhota Shigri Glacier

Answer : c

14) Consider the following statements with respect to the indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1), Vikrant:

- 1. It is India's first indigenous aircraft carrier with the largest and most complex platform so far designed by the Directorate of Naval Design.
- 2. It is being propelled by nuclear reactors which helps it to operate at high speed for long periods of time.

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

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

Answer : a

Unlike Vikramaditya, which is steam-propelled, Vikrant is propelled by four gas turbines.

15) Consider the following statements with respect to Rana Punja Bhil

- 1. He was a local chieftain lived in 16th century and was a contemporary of Akbar.
- 2. He participated in the Battle of Haldighati and supported the forces led by Man Singh I of Amber

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : a

16) Which of the following is the nodal agency for landslide studies in India?

- a. Geological Survey of India
- b. National Disaster Management Authority
- c. National Institute of Public Finance and Policy
- d. Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council

Answer : a

17) Ningbo Port, often seen in the news recently, is situated in?

- a. Sea of Japan
- b. East China Sea
- c. South China Sea
- d. Strait of Malacca

Answer : b

18) Consider the following statements with respect to Asiatic Lion

1. Asiatic lions in Gir wildlife sanctuary has low genetic diversity, making it vulnerable to threats of extension from epidemics.
2. Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) created Project Lion to conserve Asiatic lions in Gir forest.

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

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

Answer : a

The Wildlife Institute of India, along with the Gujarat Forest Department, had created a Project Lion.

19) Consider the following statements with respect to the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2021:

1. The Bill empowers the states and union territories to prepare their own list of socially and educationally backward classes.
2. This list must be made by law, and may differ from the central list.

Which of the given statements above is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021

1. It will nullify IT Act to impose tax liability on the income earned from the sale of shares of a foreign company on a retrospective basis.
2. It aims to refund retrospective taxes on offshore transactions involving Indian assets without any interest.

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

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

Answer : a

Offshore transaction involving Indian assets executed after 28th may 2012 are still taxable as there is no retrospective application of the law.