

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

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Prelims

NATIONAL

Deshbhakti Curriculum

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

Context: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched the Aam Aadmi Party government's ambitious Deshbhakti Curriculum to mark Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh's birth anniversary.

Details:

- The Curriculum, launched at the Chhatrasal Stadium here, intended to bring the spirit of patriotism in each citizen to the fore — in this case schoolchildren.
- The curriculum will be rolled out from nursery to Class XII as and when the schools reopen and it will have no textbooks for students but for facilitators teaching it.
- The Deshbhakti Curriculum Framework, the government stated, aims to instil the spirit of patriotism and nationhood among every child studying in the Delhi government schools.
- The curriculum has been prepared by the Delhi government school teachers, with inputs from NGO partners and individual experts.

THE HINDU

Deshbhakti curriculum at a glance

WHAT IS DESHBHAKTI?

- Loving one's shared lands and communities
- Respect for all forms of life and spirit of empathy and peace
- Inclusive of the pluralism and diversity of beliefs, practices, religions, ethnicities, languages etc.
- Conscientious about one's duties, empowered to face challenges and bring about changes to take the country forward

SNIPPETS FROM SYLLABUS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the meaning of being a Deshbhakt? • How did our freedom fighters help us achieve Independence? • What kind of Deshbhakt do we need to meet present needs? • What is the correct meaning of Deshbhakti? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying one's feeling of Deshbhakti and critically assessing oneself as a Deshbhakt • Familiarising with aspects, reasons and facilities that every Indian is proud of • Deeply understanding the feeling of pride in one's family, school and city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on the factors and reasons that has kept India away from being a developed country even after 75 years of Independence • Envisioning the country of our dreams • Understanding one's own role in creating the India of one's dream
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TEACHING

Deshbhakti Dhyana: First activity of every Deshbhakti class where students will reflect on their gratitude for the country, freedom fighters and any five persons they consider Deshbhakti. Pledge their respect for the country every day

Class activity: Includes visualisation, self-introspection and other creative exercises

Homework: Students will ask the key questions of the chapter learnt to three people older than them and keep a diary

Classroom discussion: Encourage and nudge the students to think and reflect deeply, hone skill of communication and make them aware of their responsibility towards the country.

Evaluation: 360° evaluation through self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment by the teacher. No formal examination or grading system to be followed

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT

The airspace map of India for drones

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched an airspace map of India for drone operations — allowing civilian drone operators to check the demarcated no-fly zones or where they need to undergo certain formalities before flying one. This map has been developed by MapMyIndia and IT services firm Happiest Minds and is put up on the Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) digital sky platform.*

What does this map show?

- The interactive map shows red, yellow and green zones across the country. Green zone is the airspace up to 400 feet that has not been designated as a red or yellow zone, and up to 200 feet above the area located between 8-12 km from the perimeter of an operational airport.
- Yellow zone is the airspace above 400 feet in a designated green zone, and above 200 feet in the area located between 8-12 km from the perimeter of an airport, and above ground in the area located between 5-8 km from the perimeter of an airport.
- The Yellow zone has been reduced from 45 km earlier to 12 km from the airport's perimeter. Red zone is the 'no-drone zone' within which drones can be operated only after a permission from the Central government.

What are the rules for each of these zones?

- In green zones, no permission is required for operating drones with an all-up weight of up to 500 kg, while drone operations in yellow zone require permission from the concerned air traffic control authorities — which could be either the Airports Authority of India, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Navy, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, etc as the case may be.

Proportion of all cancer cases higher in men: study

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The proportion of all cancer cases was higher in men (52.4%) than women (47.4%), noted the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) 'Clinicopathological Profile of Cancers in India: A Report of the Hospital Based Cancer Registries, 2021'.*

Details:

- In women, gynaecological cancers, including breast cancer, comprised over half of all cancers. Childhood (0-14 years) cancers constitute 7.9% of all cancers.
- The report said that cancers of the head and neck region accounted for nearly one third (31.2%) of the cancers among men.
- The highest proportion of cancer from all sites was reported in the 45 to 64 years age group, except for prostate cancer in men, which was higher in those over 65 years.
- A total of 13,32,207 cancer cases were registered from 96 hospitals under the National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP) during 2012-19.
- Of these, 6,10,084 cases were included for analysis, based on the completeness and quality of data.

Site-specific cancer



- The report further states that out of the 6,10,084 cancers, 3,19,098 (52.4%) cancers were reported in men, and 2,90,986 (47.6%) in women. Cancers in sites associated with tobacco use comprised 48.7% of cancers among men and 16.5% among women.
- “The relative proportion of site-specific cancers was higher in men than women, except for thyroid cancer (2.5% in women versus 1% in men) and gallbladder cancer (3.7% in women versus 2.2 % in men),” the report said.
- The report stated that over one-third of patients with cancers of the tongue, larynx, thyroid, corpus uteri, kidney, bladder and retinoblastoma had localised disease at the time of presentation.
- “Chemotherapy was the most typical treatment modality for many cancers regardless of the clinical extent of disease at presentation, including cancers of the liver, gallbladder, stomach, lung and childhood cancers. Regardless of the organ site and clinical extent, most cancer patients were initiated on cancer-directed treatment within 8 to 30 days of diagnosis,” stated the report.

Cancer prevalence

Leukaemia (cancer of the blood and bone marrow) accounted for nearly half the cases of cancer among children aged zero to 14 from 2012 to 2019

(ALL FIGURES IN %)

Type of cancer	Boys	Girls
Leukaemia	47.4	45.1
Malignant bone tumours	7.1	9.5
Lymphomas and reticuloendothelial neoplasms	16.6	7.8
Central nervous system and miscellaneous intracranial and intraspinal neoplasms	6.2	7.3
Soft-tissue sarcomas	5.9	6.9
Renal tumours	3.7	4.7
Sympathetic nervous system tumours	3.4	3.9

Cartels and Cartelisation

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

Context: Recently, the Competition Commission of India found that **three beer companies** — United Breweries Ltd (UBL), Carlsberg India Pvt Ltd (CIPL) and Anheuser Busch InBev India — had colluded to fix beer prices for a full decade — between 2009 and 2018. As a result, the CCI slapped a penalty of Rs 873 crore on the companies as well as the All India Brewers Association (AIBA) and 11 individuals for cartelisation in the sale and supply of beer in 10 states and Union Territories.

What is a cartel?

- Cartels can be difficult to define. According to CCI, a “Cartel includes an association of producers, sellers, distributors, traders or service providers who, by agreement amongst themselves, limit, control or attempt to control the production, distribution, sale or price of, or, trade in goods or provision of services”.
- The International Competition Network, which is a global body dedicated to enforcing competition law, has a simpler definition. The three common components of a cartel are:
 - an agreement;
 - between competitors;
 - to restrict competition.
- The agreement that forms a cartel need not be formal or written. Cartels almost invariably involve secret conspiracies.
- The term competitors most often refers to companies at the same level of the economy (manufacturers, distributors, or retailers) in direct competition with each other to sell goods or provide services.



- The aspect of a restriction on competition distinguishes conduct that targets open competition from benign, ordinary course of business agreements between firms,” it states.

How do cartels work?

- According to ICN, four categories of conduct are commonly identified across jurisdictions (countries). These are:
 - price-fixing;
 - output restrictions;
 - market allocation and
 - bid-rigging

How do cartels hurt?

- While it may be difficult to accurately quantify the ill-effects of cartels, they not only directly hurt the consumers but also, indirectly, undermine overall economic efficiency and innovations.
- According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “A successful cartel raises the price above the competitive level and reduces output. Consumers choose either not to pay the higher price for some or all of the cartelised product that they desire, thus forgoing the product, or they pay the cartel price and thereby unknowingly transfer wealth to the cartel operators”.
- In other words, by artificially holding back the supply or raising prices in a coordinated manner, companies either force some consumers out of the market by making the commodity (say, beer) more scarce or by earning profits that free competition would not have allowed.

How might cartels be worse than monopolies?

- It is generally well understood that monopolies are bad for both individual consumer interest as well as the society at large.
- That’s because a monopolist completely dominates the concerned market and, more often than not, abuses this dominance either in the form of charging higher than warranted prices or by providing lower than the warranted quality of the good or service in question.
- Unlike a monopolist, who may be forced to undertake product innovation — lest some new firm figures out a more efficient way of providing the good/service — members of a cartel sit pretty because they know that while none of them may be individually dominant in the market, by synching their pricing or productive actions they not only act as a monopolist but also rule out the possibility of allowing some new firm from upstaging the whole arrangement.
- Apart from the whole issue of charging higher prices, cartels (as against monopolists) neither have any incentive to invest in research aimed at improving their product nor do they see any reason why they should boost investments towards making the methods of production more efficient.
- The end result is that both the individual consumer as well as the society at large suffers.

Cultural mapping

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Having made little progress since its launch in 2017, the National Mission on Cultural Mapping (NMCM) has now been handed over to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), which is gearing up for a trial run in 75 villages in October.*

Details:

- The Culture Ministry had approved the mission in 2017 with a ₹469 crore budget from 2017-18 to 2019-20, according to the administrative approval for the project. However, officials said the project had been slow to take off.
- While the entire project would take five years and a budget of ₹89 crore had been approved for it, the IGNCA would aim to complete mapping in 5,000 villages by the end of financial year 2021-2022.

What is the Mission?

- National Mission on Cultural Mapping is a mission mode project of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
- It is aimed to address the necessity of preserving the threads of rich Indian Art and Cultural Heritage, convert vast and widespread cultural canvas of India into an objective Cultural Mapping while creating a strong “Cultural Vibrancy” throughout the nation.
- It can create a database that anybody can plug into, thus becoming a resource for the media, researchers and funders.
- Born in 2015, the National Mission on Cultural Mapping was created with an outlay of ₹3,000 crore
- It will identify, collect and record cultural assets and resources. It correlates this to planning and strategizing.
- A portal and a database listing organisations, spaces, facilities, festivals and events will be created.
- This database can be used to preserve culture and provide or ameliorate livelihoods.

Objectives of the Mission:

- To envision and address the necessity of preserving the threads of rich Indian Art and Cultural Heritage.
- To Convert vast and widespread cultural canvass of India into an objective Cultural Mapping.
- To Design a mechanism to fulfill the aspirations of the whole artist community of the nation.
- To Preserve the rich cultural heritage of this country for future generations.
- To create a strong “cultural vibrancy” throughout the nation.

Mumbai civic body’s 3D mapping initiative

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has completed the first 3D (three-dimensional) mapping of an administrative ward in Mumbai which largely covers Worli area. The corporation has said that the project will help the city in better urban governance, upgradation of infrastructure, disaster management, etc.*

What is the 3D mapping that has been done by BMC in Mumbai?

- The 3D or three-dimensional mapping is the process of preparing a map of the city’s natural areas like water bodies, open spaces, trees and man-made features like roads, buildings and infrastructure facilities in digital format.
- This is the first time that a 3D city model in Mumbai has been prepared.
- The 3D map will be uploaded on BMC’s private cloud from where it can be accessible to different departments of the corporation on web application.
- The pilot project was taken up by Genesys International Corporation Ltd, a company which provides advanced mapping, survey and geospatial service.

What are the benefits of this project?

- The BMC has said that the 3D model of the ward will help at various fronts, like development plan and master plan creation, detection of unauthorised changes, building plan approval system, detailed

infrastructure planning of roads, bridges, flyover planning in 3D, analysis and comparison of two alternative designs, urban flooding modelling.

- Currently, the planning takes place in two-dimensional maps and its accurate modeling for infrastructure developments or disaster management is difficult
- But to meet the demands of cities in the 21st century, it is important that urban bodies are able to visualise their cities in 3D where they can get 360 degree views, undertake simulations and conduct detailed analysis on the data.
- Experts said these three dimensional maps have potential to assist city planners in reaching local climate resilience, economic development and housing goals.

Which technology and tools were used in mapping?

- For the 3D mapping, Geospatial Technology was used which is a combination of Global Positioning System (GPS), Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS).
- Along with this, drones were flown for capturing high definition imagery of the entire area and mobile street imagery vehicles mounted with Light Detection & Ranging (LiDAR) sensors were part of the creation of the virtual model.
- The geospatial technology further helps in analysis, simulation, visualisation and modelling.

The Karnataka Police Act amended

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Karnataka legislature has passed a Bill to amend the Karnataka Police Act, 1963 in order to ban all forms of gambling in the state, including online gambling.*

Details:

- The Karnataka Police (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was passed by the legislature despite a similar law — the Tamil Nadu Gambling and Police Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 — passed in February in Tamil Nadu being struck down by the Madras High Court this August as being ultra vires.
- The new Karnataka law aims to strengthen the Karnataka Police Act to make gambling a cognisable and non-bailable offence and “curb menace of gaming through the Internet, mobile apps”.

Why has the Karnataka government amended the Karnataka Police Act, 1963 to ban gambling?

- Among the reasons cited by the Karnataka government for a new law to ban all forms of gambling are a Dharwad High Court Bench order of December 2019 which ruled that the police cannot raid gambling dens without a formal written order from a magistrate since gambling is a non-cognisable and bailable offence.
- The order passed by Justice P G M Patil in the Vageppa Gurulinga Jangaligi vs the Kagwad police case on December 10, 2019 set out a series of guidelines for the police and magistrates to follow when a non-cognisable offence is taken up.
- The order said that the “SHO of the police station has no authority of law unless the jurisdictional magistrate permits the police officer for investigation of the non-cognizable offence”.
- Recent public interest litigations seeking a ban on online gaming and betting – where the high court has sought the state government’s stand on imposing a ban on gambling – have also served as a catalyst for the introduction of the amendments to the Karnataka Police Act, 1963.
- According to the statement of objects and reasons provided with the amendments to the police act the new law is needed to make gambling a cognisable and non-bailable offence other than gaming in public streets which is cognisable and bailable.

- The new law has also been introduced to “include the use of cyberspace including computer resources or any other communication device as defined in the Information Technology Act 2000 in the process of gaming to curb the menace of gaming through internet, mobile app”.
- The amended law covers all forms of wagering or betting “in connection with any game of chance” with the exception of horse races and lotteries. The amended law also puts betting on the skills of others in the category of gambling and also states that “any act of risking money or otherwise on the unknown result of an event including on a game of skill” is an offence.
- This February, the Tamil Nadu government brought about a law to impose a comprehensive ban on all forms of gambling including online gaming. In August, the law was however struck down by the Madras High Court as being ultra vires and unnecessary after it was challenged by an online gaming firm.
- The partial inclusion of games of skill as acts of gambling in the amended Karnataka Police Act is likely to come under scrutiny.

DRDO tests Akash Prime missile

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully tested a new version of the Akash surface-to-air missile Akash Prime from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur, Odisha.*

Details:

- In comparison to the existing Akash System, Akash Prime is equipped with an indigenous active Radio Frequency (RF) seeker for improved accuracy. Other improvements also ensure more reliable performance under low temperature environment at higher altitudes.
- A modified ground system of the existing Akash system had been used for the flight test, the statement further said.
- In its maiden flight test after improvements, the missile intercepted and destroyed an unmanned aerial target mimicking enemy aircraft, the DRDO noted.

The Akash missile

- The development of the Akash SAM was started by the DRDO in the late 1980s as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.
- The initial systems trials and field trials along with the target neutralisation trials were conducted in the late 1990s and 2000s. These were followed by extensive user trials by the Indian Air Force and Indian Army.
- Named after the original Sanskrit term for sky or space, Akash is primarily a Short Range Surface to Air Missile built to provide air defence cover to the vulnerable areas.
- The Akash weapon system can simultaneously engage multiple targets in group mode or autonomous mode. It has built-in Electronic Counter-Counter Measures (ECCM) features, which means that it has mechanisms on-board that can counter the electronic systems that deceive the detection systems
- The entire weapon system has been configured on a mobile platform. A full Akash missile system comprises a launcher, set of missiles, a control centre, an built-in mission guidance system and a C4I (command, control communication and intelligence) centres and supporting ground equipment along with a radar named Rajendra which accompanies each of the missile batteries.
- Following the induction of the earlier version of Akash in the 2010s, the Indian Air Force and Indian Army currently operate multiple squadrons and groups of the missile respectively, with some more in the pipeline. According to the Ministry of Defence, the Akash Missile system is 96 per cent indigenised, one of the highest proportions of the indigenisation.



- In December 2020, the cabinet approved the Akash missile for exports after many friendly foreign countries showed interest in it during various international exhibitions.

The advanced versions of Akash — Akash Prime and Akash NG

- The initial version of the Akash has an operational range of 27-30 km and a flight altitude of around 18 km. The Akash Prime, which underwent its maiden flight test from Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha, has the same range as that of the earlier version but has a crucial new addition — that of an indigenous active Radio Frequency (RF) seeker for improved accuracy to hit aerial targets.
- Other improvements in the system ensures more reliable performance under low temperature environments at higher altitudes.
- These new additions have been made after receiving feedback from the IAF and the Army for deployment of the system to provide air defence cover for vital installations and sensitive areas in high-altitude regions.
- Earlier this year, on January 25, the DRDO conducted the successful maiden launch of Akash-NG or New Generation Missile from ITR. Akash-NG is a new generation SAM, primarily designed for the IAF with an aim of intercepting high maneuvering aerial threats that have low Radar Cross Section (RCS), which is the electromagnetic signature of the object.
- Along with the increased lethality of striking threats with significantly small electromagnetic signature, the NG version has an extended range of up to 70 km, is sleeker, lighter and has much smaller ground system footprint.
- The RF seeker of the NG version operates in the Microwave Ku-band, the missile has a propulsion system of solid-fueled dual-pulse motor. In July DRDO conducted two back-to-back trials of the Akash NG system, one with the RF seeker and one without it.
- As an additional feature, Akash NG is canisterised, which means that it is stored and operated from specially designed compartments. In the canister, the inside environment is controlled thus along with making its transport and storage easier, the shelf life of weapons also improves significantly.
- The beginning of the development of Akash Prime and Akash-NG coincides with the time when the earlier version was being inducted in the IAF and Army in the mid-2010s

Zojila tunnel

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

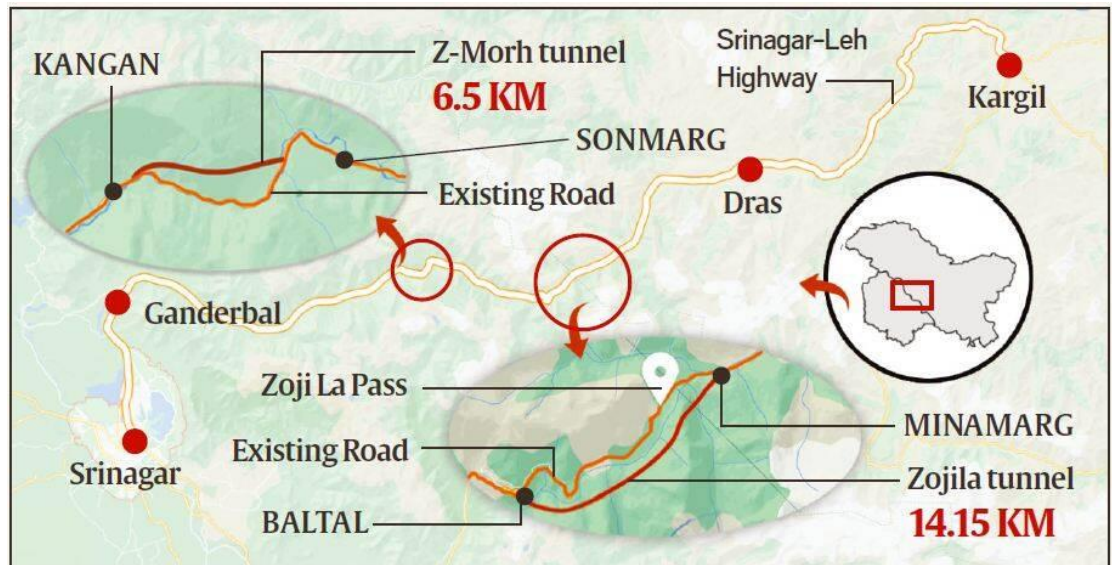
Context: Government is pushing to complete the massive Zojila tunnel, its showpiece infra project in Kashmir and Ladakh, before Republic Day, 2024. Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari inspected the west portal of the tunnel in Baltal.

LONGEST ROAD TUNNEL

- At 14.15 km, the Zojila tunnel will be India's longest road tunnel, and Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel.
- A connecting tunnel from Z-Morh on NH1 to the Zojila tunnel will be built in the Zojila Ghats between Sonmarg and Kargil. The work on the entire 33-km span is divided into two divisions.
- The first part involves development and expansion of the 18.475-km highway between Z-Morh to Zojila. A 3-km stretch will be expanded; the rest will be newly developed. The highway will have 2 twin-tube tunnels, 5 bridges, and 2 snow galleries.



- The second part is building the 14.15-km Zojila tunnel itself — 9.5 m wide, 7.57 m high, 2 lanes, in shape of a horseshoe.
- In addition, a 2,350-m concrete ‘cut and cover’ tunnel will be built, along with 3 ventilation caverns/shafts. Works also include construction of portals, control buildings, ventilation buildings and muck disposables along the route.



Works also include construction of portals, control buildings, ventilation buildings and muck disposables along the route.

TWO UTs CLOSER TOGETHER

- When complete, the Zojila tunnel will allow travel between Srinagar and Ladakh throughout the year.
- The distance from Baltal to Minamarg will come down to 13 km from the present 40 km, travel time is expected to be cut by an hour and a half, and the journey is expected to be less strenuous.
- The project is expected to lead to integrated development of both Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

How the PLI scheme for textiles works

Context: The government has notified the Rs 10,683-crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for textiles, specifically aimed at boosting the production of man-made fibre (MMF) fabric, MMF apparel and technical textiles. We examine the details of the scheme which is set to provide incentives from FY25 to FY29.

Which product lines are being incentivised by the scheme?

- The scheme is incentivising production of 14 categories of MMF fabrics, 10 categories of technical textiles and MMF apparel. The MMF fabrics for which production is being incentivised include woven fabrics containing nylon, polyester and other manmade fibres.
- Technical textiles that are set to be covered under the scheme include defence textiles such as bulletproof vests, fighter aircraft and submarine clothing and tents, mobile textiles such as safety airbags and tyre cords and protective textiles such as personal protective equipment and fire-retardant fabrics and clothing.
- The scheme also incentivises the production of smart textiles embedded with active devices for medical, defence, and special purposes.

Which producers are eligible for incentives under the scheme?

- The first phase of the scheme will be open to producers that invest at least Rs 300 crore in plant, machinery, equipment and civil work (excluding land and administrative building cost). Such producers will receive incentives under the scheme once they achieve a turnover of at least Rs 600 crore.

- In the second phase of the scheme, producers investing Rs 100 crore and generating a turnover of at least Rs 200 crore will receive incentives.
- Projects that enhance the value of integrated fibre or yarn by at least 60 per cent in processing to fabric, garments or technical textiles will be selected under the scheme.
- Independent processing houses, however, will have to meet a lower value enhancement threshold of 30 per cent to be eligible for selection under the scheme.

What are the incentives for producers under the scheme?

- Participating companies are expected to achieve the minimum turnover requirements after a gestation period of two years and starting FY25 are entitled to 15 per cent incentive on attaining the required turnover in the first phase of the scheme.
- Incentives in subsequent years will be contingent on turnover being increased by at least 25 per cent each year up to FY29, with incentives falling by 1 per cent each year to 11 per cent in the final year of the scheme.
- In the second part of the scheme, in which producers with lower investment and turnover thresholds will be selected, incentives will start at 11 per cent for the achievement of the required turnover and fall by 1 per cent each year to 7 per cent in FY29, with incentives after year one being subject to a similar condition of 25 per cent annual growth in turnover.

White shipping information exchange

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The signing of the MoU between the Royal Navy of Oman and the Indian Navy would facilitate information exchange on merchant shipping traffic, through IFC-IOR, India and MSC, Oman and contribute to enhanced maritime safety and security in the region.*

Details:

- White Shipping Agreement is a technical term related to the exchange agreement between the navies of countries on the commercial ships on each others' oceanic territories.
- The white shipping information refers to the exchange of prior information on the movement and identity of commercial non-military merchant vessels.
- Recently, India and the U.S had signed the White Shipping Agreement (WSA) as it establishes an information network protocol that allows the navies of both countries to exchange information about ships in their oceanic territories. Ships would be classified into white (commercial ships), grey (military vessels), and black (illegal vessels).
- As the entire world is connected through the stretches of oceans, it becomes very important to understand that there can be a threat to the security as there can be any sort of possible movement from one location to another. This also gives information regarding the maritime traffic.
- Information regarding the identity of the vessels is very important to tackle any potential threat from sea routes. This particularly helps in the development of a proper regional maritime domain awareness.
- This will also help in the identification of those vessels which can be illegal as this provides us with the prior information about the destination of the vessel, the route which has been planned for it, etc.



Dismantling the Ordnance Factory Board

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), the first of whose industrial establishments was set up in 1801, will cease to exist from October 1, and the assets, staff, and operations of its 41 ordnance factories will be transferred to seven defence public sector units (DPSUs).*

Details:

- Also in the OFB tent are nine training institutes, three regional marketing centres, and five regional controllers of safety.
- The government has gone through with the corporatisation in the face of strong opposition from workers' federations, including the one affiliated to the RSS.
- A large chunk of the weapons, ammunition, and supplies used by the armed forces, and paramilitary and police forces, come from OFB-run factories.
- Their products include civilian and military-grade arms and ammunition, explosives, propellants, and chemicals for missile systems, military vehicles, armoured vehicles, optical and electronic devices, parachutes, support equipment, troop clothing, and general store items for the armed forces.

For-against corporatisation

- The restructuring of the Kolkata-headquartered OFB into corporate entities was recommended in one or the other form by at least three expert committees on defence reforms set up in the last two decades — the TKS Nair Committee (2000), Vijay Kelkar Committee (2005), and Vice Admiral Raman Puri Committee (2015).
- A fourth committee, constituted by former Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and chaired by Lt Gen D B Shekatkar, did not suggest corporatisation, but recommended regular audits of all ordnance units considering past performance.
- The central argument has been that corporatisation, which will bring these entities under the purview of
- The Companies Act, would lead to improvements in efficiency, make products cost-competitive, and enhance their quality.
- It has been argued that OFB's monopoly has led to innovation drying up, apart from low productivity, high costs of production, and lack of flexibility at the higher managerial levels.
- Functioning directly under the Ministry of Defence, the OFB and its factories could not retain profits, and thus had no incentive to work towards increasing them, many have argued.
- Discussions on restructuring with workers' federations had failed to produce results on several occasions previously. Employees argued that corporatisation was a "move towards privatisation".
- They expressed fears of job losses, and said a corporate entity would not be able to survive the unique market environment of defence products with its unstable demand-supply dynamics.
- The federations have insisted the factories have been innovative, and have repeatedly proven their worth as a "war reserve". Many OFB products are exported, they have argued.

INTERNATIONAL

Landsat 9

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: A NASA satellite was successfully launched on September 27 from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California. The **earth monitoring satellite, Landsat 9**, is a joint mission of NASA and the US Geological Survey (USGS).

Details:

- The first Landsat satellite was launched in 1972 and since then, Landsat satellites have collected images of our planet and helped understand how land usage has changed over the decades.
- In 2008, it was decided that all Landsat images will be free and publicly available and the policy has helped scores of researchers, farmers, policy analysts, glaciologists, and seismologists.
- Landsat images have been used to study the health of forests, coral reefs, monitor water quality and melting glaciers.



What is new about Landsat 9?

- The Landsat 9 joins Landsat 8 that was launched in 2013 and the satellites together will collect images of Earth's surface. It takes 8 days to capture the whole Earth.
- Landsat 9 carries instruments similar to the other Landsat satellites, but it is the most technologically advanced satellite of its generation.
- It can see more colour shades with greater depths than the previous satellites, helping scientists capture more details about our ever-changing planet.
- The instruments aboard Landsat 9 are the Operational Land Imager 2 (OLI-2) and the Thermal Infrared Sensor 2 (TIRS-2). They will measure different wavelengths of light reflected off the Earth's surface.
- OLI-2 can see the light that we can't see too. It captures sunlight reflected off Earth's surface and studies the visible, near-infrared, and short wave infrared portions of the spectrum.
- TIRS-2 has a four-element refractive telescope and photosensitive detectors that capture thermal radiation and help study the Earth's surface temperature.
- As the satellite orbits, these instruments will take pictures across 185 kilometers and each pixel will represent an area of about 30 meter X 30 meter.
- Landsat 9 will provide data that can help make science-based decisions on key issues such as impacts of wildfire, coral reef degradation, the retreat of glaciers, and deforestation.

Dark Energy

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context” *Dark energy, the mysterious form of energy that makes up about 68% of the universe, has intrigued physicists and astronomers for decades. Dark energy has been noted as “the most profound mystery in all of science”. With advanced technologies and newer experiments, scientists have found certain clues about it and, recently, an international team of researchers made the first putative direct detection of dark energy.*

Details:

- They noticed certain unexpected results in an underground experiment and write that dark energy may be responsible for it.
- The XENON1T experiment is the world’s most sensitive dark matter experiment and was operated deep underground at the INFN Laboratori Nazionali del Gran Sasso in Italy.
- The finding also suggests that experiments like XENON1T, which are designed to detect dark matter, could also be used to detect dark energy.

Dark energy Vs Dark matter

- Everything we see – the planets, moons, massive galaxies, you, me, this website – makes up less than 5% of the universe. About 27% is dark matter and 68% is dark energy.
- While dark matter attracts and holds galaxies together, dark energy repels and causes the expansion of our universe.
- Despite both components being invisible, we know a lot more about dark matter, since its existence was suggested as early as the 1920s, while dark energy wasn’t discovered until 1998
- Large-scale experiments like XENON1T have been designed to directly detect dark matter, by searching for signs of dark matter ‘hitting’ ordinary matter, but dark energy is even more elusive.



Mains

GS II

Will AUKUS upset the Indo-Pacific balance?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On September 15, U.S. President Joe Biden, along with Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Boris Johnson of Australia and the U.K. respectively, announced the formation of a new trilateral security partnership called AUKUS (Australia-U.K.-U.S.). Its stated aim is to “update and enhance our shared ability to take on the threats of the 21st century just as we did in the 20th century: together,” according to Mr. Biden.

What are the terms of the grouping?

- The summit announcement specifically referenced its intent for AUKUS to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific in the long term.
- Unsurprisingly, it drew a sharp response from China, whose territorial ambitions across the Indo-Pacific may well have been a key factor behind the formation of this group.
- Beijing’s consternation that AUKUS will “undermine” regional peace and “intensify” an arms race likely stems from the cornerstone of AUKUS: a proposal whereby the U.S. and the U.K. will transfer technology to build a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia within 18 months.
- A parallel development in the submarine deal was the rupture in diplomatic relations between France and the members of AUKUS because Canberra cancelled a lucrative \$90-billion conventional submarine purchase order placed with Paris and opted instead for the nuclear-powered, but not nuclear-armed, submarine fleet.

Will AUKUS be a game changer?

- The short answer is that it is unlikely, and the reasons are several. First, the U.S., as a leading global military power, already has a strong presence in the Indo-Pacific, especially in a grouping that includes Australia, India, and Japan — the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad.
- This involves joint military presence, and a wide array of war games and more in the region. Similarly, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are members of Five Eyes, an intelligence-sharing alliance, which also has regional security implications.
- It is unclear what additional signalling could be achieved through the new trilateral security arrangement that does not fall within the ambit of the Quad, or in the economic realm by deepening the close ties between Washington and ASEAN.
- This assessment is consistent with India’s response to the creation of AUKUS, which saw Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla say, “From our perspective, this is neither relevant to the Quad nor will it have any impact on its functioning.”
- Secondly, AUKUS will not likely deter Beijing’s strategic calculus across the region, particularly relating to its maritime ambitions and territorial expansionism.
- The one element of AUKUS that has potential to cause a recalibration of China’s plans in this realm is the nuclear-powered submarines.
- The countries that have such submarines operational are the U.S. (68), Russia (29), China (12) the U.K. (11), France (8) and India (1). Given this balance, which implies Chinese dominance across the Indo-

Pacific, the effect of AUKUS facilitating the development of a nuclear fleet for Australia may tip the scales the wrong way, perhaps by heightening Beijing's anxiety over its nuclear-powered submarine fleet.

- Should this fuel an arms race in the region, it will raise the stakes over strategic flashpoints such as the South China Sea and Taiwan.

Does India stand to gain from this development?

- Notwithstanding its professed indifference towards AUKUS and stronger reliance on the Quad, New Delhi may indeed derive secondary benefits from having three advanced nations with arguably the most sophisticated military know-how in the world coming together to support a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- Given the inroads that Beijing has made in recent decades with its Belt and Road Initiative, including through projects or proposals for infrastructure development in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and beyond into Central Asia, fears in South Block over 'encirclement' by China may be partially mitigated by AUKUS.
- The catch, however, is that it would likely be well over a decade before the submarine construction plans in Adelaide come to fruition and Australia operationalises a nuclear-powered fleet.
- To what extent and in what direction the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific would have shifted by then remains to be seen.
- From New Delhi's perspective, the business-as-usual approach is the best answer to such ambiguities: it implies that India will work with the transnational institutional arrangements in place, roping in like-minded nations into symbiotic partnerships, and calibrate future alliance plans to evolving security situations across one of the most complex strategic ecosystems in the world.

Stopping short of social justice

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The one unequivocal finding in the 165-page Justice Rajan Committee report is that the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) has adversely impacted the chances of less privileged students in gaining admission to government medical colleges in Tamil Nadu.*

Details:

- Several parameters have been used by the Committee to assess privilege (or the lack of it), such as studying in a Tamil medium school, studying in a government school, being a first-generation graduate, and belonging to a household with an income of less than ₹2.5 lakh.
- Every one of these criteria demonstrate that the already abysmal share of the less privileged in medical education became even more abysmal after NEET was introduced.
- One needs no other reason to accept that admission based on higher secondary marks serves the cause of equity better.

School education is inequitable

- But a caveat is necessary here: admission based on higher secondary marks is by no means equitable.
- The number of government school students who were able to gain admission to government medical colleges in the pre-NEET era was around 38 per year. This came down to three or four post-NEET till the 7.5% quota for government school students was introduced. The number then rose to 336 in 2020-21 (page 55).
- The repeated assertion by the Committee that NEET coaching skews the results of the medical exam is true, but the Committee ignores the fact that the results of the State Board examinations can also be



skewed through coaching. The domination of medical admissions from coaching schools in Rasipuram in the pre-NEET area clearly demonstrated this.

- The blunt truth is that school education in India, including in Tamil Nadu, is grossly inequitable.
- There is a spectrum of inequity in education with the government schools catering to the most underprivileged and a range of private schools catering to various strata of the privileged. Unless this inequity is addressed, all talk of coaching is empty.

Logical fallacies

- If one were to delve into the report for answers to questions that the Committee engages with, such as what type of student should be selected for medical education, what mode of selection will ensure that such students are selected, and how we can best reconcile the perceived social needs of medical education with the aspirations of individual students, one will be deeply disappointed.
- Furthermore, one can appreciate the descriptive statistics, but the inferential statistics are terribly flawed.
- The entire document is peppered with logical fallacies. For example, on page 26, the report says: “The analytical section of this report, in the later pages, also vindicates that the ever present socio economic disadvantages and other educational, geographical and linguistic backwardness facing the students of the Tamil Nadu state do not favour the practice of a common entrance exam as it causes injustice to the disadvantaged majority people of the state.”
- Do these disadvantages not cause “injustice” in the result of the 12th Standard exam?
- Further, on pages 83 and 84, the Committee compares the Higher Secondary School marks with the marks obtained in NEET and says, “Now, the question remains before us is who is meritorious (in terms of percentage marks) - those who secured ‘98.16 % (HSc)’ or those who secured ‘89.05% (HSc)’ and simultaneously 49.65% (NEET)’?”
- Surely, it is 98.16% is the answer.” Recognising that this argument sounds rather silly, the Committee then says, “Comparison between the HSc and the NEET scores is like comparing orange with apple, but it is not in the wisdom of this Committee to compare this way, however, the Committee has to do so in response to the arguments of the critics of HSc who argue that NEET is the best assessor of students’ standard and abilities, because of its assessment and syllabus superiority.” To refute one logical fallacy with another is hardly good policy.
- The greatest disappointment with the report comes from its failure to engage with the most inequitable of all factors in medical education: the insurmountable barrier placed by the very high financial commitment required in private medical education, said to be in the order of ₹1 crore and more.
- The opaque admission methods and extremely high charges incurred in private medical education was the cause for repeated challenges in the courts, which finally resulted in the NEET. Abolishing NEET without addressing this problem will be a farce, with little real benefit.
- The statistical prowess of the Committee does not extend to revealing the fees and other charges being collected by these institutions, the background of the students in these institutions, how many of them serve in rural areas, and so on — all of which are criteria that the Committee uses to say that NEET will be detrimental to social justice.
- Private medical education now accounts for around 50% of seats. The remarkable silence of a Committee, whose terms of reference included “advancing the principles of social justice”, is deeply disappointing.

The way forward

- The experience of the NEET has highlighted the grossly inequitable school system in Tamil Nadu. The number of government schools has greatly increased but learning outcomes are very poor.
- An article in this paper by Kalaiyarasan A. (“Dravidam 2.0 as a time to reflect, for action”) pointed out that Tamil Nadu scored the lowest among the southern States in the Performance Grading Index in 2019-20.
- Using the higher secondary marks for admission to medical colleges will help a few of the most disadvantaged students get admission to government medical colleges.

- But it will do nothing to advance the cause of social justice which requires, in the short term, access to the 50% of medical seats in the private sector which are now reserved for the extremely wealthy, by virtue of the high financial commitments required, and in the long term, a vast improvement in the quality of education imparted in government schools.
- Anything short of this is mere window-dressing.

Identity and public policy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Some political parties have demanded that caste be enumerated in the Census.*

Details:

- Actually, the demand amounts to one of counting the Other Backward Classes, for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes are already counted.
- The demand has been accompanied by the argument that the efficacy of public policy for enhancing well-being across the population is tied to the enumeration of Indians by their caste.
- One approach to assessing this argument would be to compare development outcomes in States where political parties have adopted caste-based mobilisation with those in States where political programmes for ending deprivation have taken the social democratic route, without resorting to identity politics.
- Tamil Nadu would be an example of the former, while Kerala would be an example of the latter. A comparison of the developmental experience of these States would therefore be instructive.

Findings along three variables

- As the availability of data across social groups is limited, we focused on three variables. These were adult literacy, infant mortality and consumption. Each of these indicators is related to one of the three components of the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index.
- Having chosen the development indicators of interest, there are two ways in which we may assess the difference made to the condition of the least well-off in a population, in this case the SCs, by differently driven social programmes.
- For any indicator, we may focus on either the impact made in terms of its distribution among groups or the absolute level achieved by a cohort.
- In a comparison of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, for consumption — a proxy for income — the gap between the general population and the SCs is greater in Kerala than it is in Tamil Nadu but smaller when it comes to the other two indicators.
- However, when it comes to the absolute level achieved, the SCs of Kerala are better-off than the SCs of Tamil Nadu on all the three indicators. Interestingly, they are also better off than the general population of India, i.e., they have superior consumption, literacy and infant mortality outcomes.
- This is striking. At the same time, the exercise also revealed a hazard when focusing on relative standing alone.
- We found that for more than one indicator, the distance between the SCs and the general population is far lower for the country as a whole than it is in at least one of the two States considered, even though the State concerned registered a superior level for the same indicator.
- This leaves us veering towards the maximin principle in evaluation, according to which that policy is preferred which maximises the position of the worst off in a society. Now, Kerala will be chosen as better performing, for the most disadvantaged have higher indicators there.
- Though we could do with more analysis and the use of controls to arrive at a definite conclusion, this evidence at least suggests that identity-based public policy may not be as effective as one based on an identity-less or universalist approach that is the hallmark of a social democracy.

Women's empowerment

- Though we are already in a position to say something about the potential of information on the caste status of individuals in the elimination of deprivation, we take our investigation to another field before concluding.
- It has been known for decades that gender inequality exists in India. Knowledge of low literacy and high infant mortality among females has, however, done little to spur counteracting public policy that will ensure women's empowerment.
- Returning to the two States of our study, Kerala greatly disappoints when it comes to women's empowerment, and lags behind Tamil Nadu on labour force participation, the proportion of female legislators and judges, and crimes against women.
- Counting the number of women through a census has proved insufficient to eliminate the deprivation and inequality they face. Politics and not the availability of information drives public policy.

The Angela Merkel era and India

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Germany has voted for a change, but with a mandate that requires a lot of negotiations before the next government is formed.*

How are the economy, society, and politics of Germany different today from what they were when Merkel became Chancellor?

- A number of political, economic, and social developments in Europe and the world had their impact on Germany. Merkel benefitted from economic reforms initiated by her predecessor Gerhard Schröder — including a reduction in taxes, merging of unemployment and welfare benefits, and increasing the flexibility of the labour market.
- As a strong export-based economy, Germany under Merkel outperformed France, the UK, Spain, and Italy in Europe, and posted robust exports behind only China and the US.
- During her tenure, unemployment in Germany came down by an order of 3 million, and 5 million more people got jobs.
- The innovative “kurzarbeit” short-time work scheme saved thousands of jobs, and prevented layoffs by giving firms subsidies to keep workers on the rolls during the financial crisis and the pandemic.
- However, Germany has been slow to adapt to digitalisation — and OECD data show it ranks 34th out of 38 industrialised countries in Internet speeds.
- As Germany has seen demographic change, Merkel remains popular among the baby boomers, the generation born from the time World War II ended to the mid-1960s.
- Thirty years after reunification in 1990, the memories of World War II are receding — but the East-West divide continues despite the pumping of money into the erstwhile East by successive German governments.
- Unemployment figures are still higher in the new states as compared to the rest of Germany. And a significant percentage of the population (about 10%) thinks that the country should leave the European Union.
- All these developments have had an impact on the political landscape. The traditional two-and-a-half-party system of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Socialist Union (CDU/CSU), SPD, and FDP has changed.
- The Greens have risen as a major force, and more recently, the AfD has sought to offer radical solutions, creating a fractured political field.

- Some analysts link the strengthening of the AfD — which became the third largest party in the German Parliament in 2017 — to the influx of large numbers of refugees in 2015 following Merkel’s decision to open the country’s doors to them. The AfD’s rise is also in line with the trend seen elsewhere in Europe, and the emergence of right wing governments in Poland and Hungary.

What impact has Germany under Merkel had on Europe and the world?

- The financial crisis of 2008 was followed by the Eurozone crisis. Germany paid the largest amount in the EU’s first bailout of Greece in 2010. Merkel’s push for an austerity-based approach to the crisis made her very unpopular in Greece and other European countries struggling with balancing budgets and pushing a growth agenda.
- In 2015, the refugee crisis swamped Europe, and Merkel pushed to take in the swelling numbers who landed on European shores. Her famous line “Wir schaffen das” — “We can manage this” — drew criticism from far right groups in Germany, as well as from her European allies who complained they were not consulted. Poland, Hungary, and Austria refused to admit refugees as per the quotas decided by the European Union, while Germany took in a million of those who arrived in Europe.
- Merkel has been seen as the crisis manager of the EU — a role that was evident in Europe’s Brexit negotiations with the United Kingdom. She has also been called the “climate chancellor” for her role in pushing a low-carbon future for Germany and Europe. Although Germany adopted the “Energiewende” transition to a more renewable and sustainable economy, the reinvention of its large industrial economy in a competitive environment has not been easy — three-fourths of Germany’s energy requirements still come from oil, coal, and gas.
- At the political level, neither she nor the EU could come up with stronger action against Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014 — and Germany subsequently chose to go ahead with the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline to supply gas to Europe.
- After the 2016 US elections that put Donald Trump in the White House, Merkel came to be seen as the new “leader of the free world”. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, Germany led the European effort to address the impact of the pandemic in a timely manner with solidarity.

In what areas and directions did India’s bilateral relationship with Germany evolve under Merkel?

- Since the inauguration of the India-Germany strategic partnership in 2001, relations have grown in a robust manner. India is one of the few countries with which Germany holds Cabinet-level Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC).
- Five IGC meetings have been held so far; they signal growing political engagement and economic partnership that has led to strong institutionalised arrangements to discuss bilateral and global issues.
- At the fifth IGC held in 2019, for which Merkel visited India, the focus was on sustainable growth and a reliable international order.
- Although trade and investment have been at the heart of the bilateral engagement, the IGC has expanded its scope to artificial intelligence and digital transformation, and pushed forward the ‘Make in India Mittelstand’ programme.
- The other areas of cooperation include science and technology, sustainable energy, smart cities, and circular economies.
- At the political level, India and Germany have been at the forefront of the push for UN Security Council reform.
- At the cultural level, there has been joint investment in higher education to enable greater people-to-people contact and collaboration in education.

What are the unfinished tasks that India must now take up with Merkel’s successor?

- It will be a while before a stable ruling coalition comes into being and a new government takes office in Germany. What assumes priority on the political agenda will be decided in part by the nature of the coalition.
- Broadly, however, there will be continuity in the previously agreed agenda, and a focus on bilateral trade will dominate the economic side of the partnership.



- Germany has put out its own strategy for the Indo-Pacific, which has to be read with the EU's approach. New Delhi has to engage Berlin on enhancing this aspect of the equation.
- There is scope to scale up defence cooperation. A focus on high-end technology transfers and sustained research and development hubs being created in India, will provide a boost to infrastructure creation and scientific cooperation.
- A major area of cooperation relates to climate change and building more sustainable energy solutions in India, and offering it to third countries with co-branding.
- Another would be investment in higher education and fast-tracking high-skilled Indian employment in Germany.

The Quad could end up running out of steam

Context: *Coming on the eve of the first in-person Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) summit in Washington DC, the new Australia-U.K.-U.S. (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership appears to be sending a subtle message to the Quad: shape up or become irrelevant. The announcement of the AUKUS and the recent outcome of the Quad summit indicate that AUKUS will go on to form a key security arrangement of the Indo-Pacific region, thereby potentially forcing the Quad to recede to the background in a struggle for attention, political will, and resources. But before we get to the implications of AUKUS on the Quad, let us briefly examine how AUKUS is also useful to the Quad.*

A reassurance to allies

- Still reeling under intense international criticism in the way the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan resulting in a humanitarian disaster, AUKUS seeks to unambiguously signal U.S. President Joe Biden's commitment to U.S. allies especially in the Indo-Pacific.
- In some ways, AUKUS helps reassure its allies of the U.S.'s security commitments and underlines Washington's pivot to the Indo-Pacific.
- Second, the deal and particularly the sharing of American nuclear submarine technology with Australia will help Canberra overcome past hesitations about taking on China with more conviction.
- Third, notwithstanding the point that AUKUS may set alarm bells ringing for the Quad, AUKUS is still a shot in the arm for the larger Indo-Pacific agenda of which India, the U.S., Japan, Australia, among others, are key partners.
- In other words, AUKUS will help the Quad's declared aim of keeping the Indo-Pacific region free, open and inclusive thereby contributing to its core agenda.

No replacement, but...

- AUKUS may not replace the Quad and yet it appears that AUKUS has ventured where the Quad has been reluctant to make forays into — the military domain.
- More so, AUKUS also exposes the inherent, also self-imposed, limits of the Quad, i.e., its inability and lack of desire to give itself any military role.
- The focus of the recently-held Washington summit, on challenges ranging from COVID-19 to climate shows that the Quad is unlikely to take a security-dominated turn; that is precisely the vacuum AUKUS seeks to fill.
- The larger question then is whether the Quad is losing its steam. For sure, the Quad seems to offer no clear purpose which, as a result, leads to too many items crowding the agenda.
- It neither has a secretariat or a charter, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), nor a clear set of activities such as AUKUS. The ever-growing list of focal areas of the Quad will eventually make it a less than useful deliberative forum.
- Put differently, with too many items on its agenda, the Quad faces the danger of becoming a talk shop with very little actual work. What is ironic is that all the Quad members have security/military

considerations in mind vis-à-vis China while engaging the Quad platform, but no one seems to be keen on framing it in such a manner, as is evidenced by the summit's joint statement (North Korea and Myanmar find mention in the statement though, not China).

- There is little interest in properly institutionalising the Quad nor has the objective for 'Quad Plus' been purposefully pursued.
- Indo-Pacific remains a grand strategic vision, AUKUS has the potential to become a major military/security arrangement in the Indo-Pacific, and the Quad/Quad Plus could end up becoming a talk shop within the Indo-Pacific.

New Delhi's hesitations

- New Delhi has taken the stand that "there is no link between the AUKUS and the Quad" just as it had argued earlier that there is no link between the Malabar naval exercises and the Quad even though the Quad membership is replicated in the Malabar exercises and two-thirds of the AUKUS form 50% of the Quad.
- Technically, New Delhi's stand is accurate — just because there is a striking similarity in the membership of these forums, they are not the same institutional architecture.
- And yet, if one were to go beyond such technicalities, it is evident that these groupings share a larger vision about the Indo-Pacific, i.e., addressing the challenge from China, and the desire for an open and free Indo-Pacific.
- Be it AUKUS, which enables Australia to stand up to Chinese bullying or provides the United Kingdom — its aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, the flagship of the U.K.'s Carrier Strike Group, is in the region — with a more prominent, and desirable, role in the Indo-Pacific or the annual Malabar exercises which focus on the Indo-Pacific or the Quad, their common geopolitical theatre is the Indo-Pacific.
- So while they are not technically related to each other, there is a broader reality that unites them all. There is no point in refusing to accept that self-evident reality.
- There is also little doubt today that the Indo-Pacific is of great importance to India for a number of reasons.
 - For one, given the continental challenges it faces including from the new developments in Afghanistan, New Delhi would do well to shift some attention to the maritime sphere.
 - Second, at a time when India is continentally pressed against a rock and a hard place, an opportunity has presented itself for India — in the form of growing global interest in the Indo-Pacific — to be at the centre of a new geopolitical churning which it must make use of for its own security and prosperity.
 - Third, it is also a major way of bringing together like-minded states to check Chinese hegemony in the region.
- Given this context, if AUKUS potentially overshadows the enthusiasm around the Quad, it would be disadvantageous to India's interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Other Quad counties are either on the AUKUS or are alliance partners; India is neither. Eventually, therefore, the Quad faces the potential challenge of becoming a talking shop without an actionable mandate.
- More so, bereft of any defence arrangement, the material returns from the Quad over time would also be minimal.

Indo-Pacific engagement

- This situation is made worse by India's hesitation about joining major regional economic frameworks. India, for instance, is neither a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership nor can its trade relations with the Indo-Pacific countries rival those of China.
- So, given our rather weak economic influence and performance in the Indo-Pacific region, what might help the country is being part of a security arrangement which can take care of its regional defence/security concerns.
- Even before AUKUS, India's current engagement of the Indo-Pacific was neither capable of contributing to its national security nor promoting its economic influence in the region. And now, AUKUS may have

further shrunk the potential space available for the Quad, and India, to play a serious role in the region's security architecture.

Sources of India's hesitations

- Even though it is not just New Delhi which is hesitant about the Quad venturing into the security/military domain, India has been hesitant about the Quad moving beyond the non-military issues.
- So, what are the sources of New Delhi's hesitation regarding a robust role for the Quad in the security/military domain? One could advance two hypotheses in this regard.
- One, India's traditional reluctance about military alliances and the desire to maintain strategic autonomy. New Delhi fears that militarising the Quad could undo this jealously guarded tradition.
 - It is, however, possible to explore military utility for the Quad without making it a formal military alliance.
 - More so, exploring mutually beneficial military and security cooperation within the Quad framework need not contradict the principles of strategic autonomy. The operative part of 'strategic autonomy' is autonomy, not strategic
- The second hypothesis has to do with domestic political considerations: The Narendra Modi government is keen to avoid any military overtones for the Quad due to potential Chinese reactions to it. Recall how India and Australia had for many years soft-peddled the forum for fear of provoking China.
- Australia seems to have overcome its hesitation, but has India done so? For the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government, any heat on the Line of Actual Control with China in the run-up to crucial State elections next year and then the 2024 parliamentary election would be unwelcome.
- This seems, therefore, to be a case of domestic political considerations trumping the pursuit of strategic necessities.

Reading Gandhi as a lesson of political maturity

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Nearly 74 years after his death, Gandhi remains the most widely known political leader of modern India. Gandhi's stature as a major historical figure was confirmed by his successful non-violent movement against British rule in India. Yet, what makes Gandhi so relevant and meaningful for our world is that his political legacy and his philosophical significance continue to inspire millions of people around the globe — to fight against inequality, injustice and historical wrongs.*

An imperative

- Accordingly, what distinguishes Gandhi from all politicians in today's world is not only his simplicity and honesty — which have become rare characteristics for many men and women who pretend to represent our wills and wishes around the globe — but also his belief in the moral growth of humanity.
- In a world such as ours which suffers from an immaturity of politics and politicians, either in tyrannical situations such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, etc. or in democracies such as the United States, Spain, Poland, India, etc. reading Gandhi as a lesson of political maturity is an ethical imperative.
- As such, and not strangely, Gandhi believed in no divorce between politics and ethics.
- For Gandhi, politics was essentially an ethical mode of conduct. He never pretended to be a teacher of truth.
- However, others took him to be a guru, and there is no doubt that his attempts to encourage people to experiment with the truth were both philosophical and pedagogical.

Culture of patience



- Therefore, as a practitioner of empathetic humanism and a pluralist thinker, Gandhi was an exemplar of a lifelong process of listening and learning.
- He actually played the role of an exemplar in prescribing “patience” as a means to understand and approach the other.
- The dialogical nature of Gandhi’s culture of patience finds its roots in the idea of epistemic humility as a necessary methodology in approaching and understanding other cultures and religions.
- As such, the entire Gandhian thought in the realm of religion and politics revolves around this concept of epistemic humility. That is why Gandhi had a profoundly ethical view of religions.
- In other words, he recognised neither the infallible authority of prophetic texts nor the sanctity of religious traditions.
- At the same time, he was the foremost critic of the epistemological arrogance of modern rationality and its authoritarian practices in terms of colonial thinking and imperialistic domination.
- It is on account of his overriding concern for the self-respect of individuals and nations that Gandhi joined the two notions of truth and non-violence to that of the term Swaraj.
- Gandhi believed that all individuals irrespective of their religion, race and culture had the right to self-governance. Accordingly, what we can call the Gandhian moment of Swaraj was actually for him a constant experimentation with modes of cross-cultural and inter-faith understanding and dialogue.
- In other words, the capacity to engage constructively with conflicting values was an essential component of Gandhi’s practical wisdom and empathetic pluralism.
- As a matter of fact, Swaraj as a space of self-realisation was where the ethical and the political joined in the Gandhian political philosophy. For Gandhi, politics, like spirituality, was a space to examine and experience Truth, which he considered not as a given process, but as an effort of re-evaluation and reformulation of reality.

A self-transcendence

- In this sense, Gandhi did not consider freedom as a mere political act, but he defined it primarily as an ethical enterprise.
- That is why Gandhi argued, “I am but a seeker after Truth. I claim to have found a way to it. I claim to be making a ceaseless effort to find it. But I admit that I have not yet found it. To find Truth completely is to realize oneself and one’s destiny, i.e., to become perfect. I am painfully conscious of my imperfections, and therein lies all the strength I possess, because it is a rare thing for a man to know his own limitations.”
- We have here a process of individual self-transcendence that Gandhi also applied to the idea of civilisation, since he considered civilisation as an exercise of human maturity.
- Gandhi firmly believed that the anthropological and ethical origins of such a state of maturity resided in the spiritual capacity of human beings. But he also underlined this move towards maturity as a process of learning to be responsible towards oneself and the others.
- As a result, everything Gandhi did and wrote during his lifetime was an attempt to bring into the open his own journey of intellectual and political maturity.
- He, therefore, used the concept of maturity not only in the social context, but also as an expression of character building which he distinguished from literary training.
- As he asserted, “Literary training by itself adds not an inch to one’s moral height and character-building is independent of literary training.” Therefore, according to Gandhi, character-building was an art of developing a sense of autonomy and having authority over one’s self.
- In other words, maturity for Gandhi was a state of mind and a mode of being, where one had the capacity to form one’s life in a social sphere. It was on the basis of this act of maturity that Gandhi established his political anthropology and pedagogical premises.
- He believed that an autonomy formed by a mature judgment prepared a life according to morality. Gandhi, therefore, approached pragmatic politics as a form of character-building and not necessarily a struggle for getting elected or grasping power.
- Gandhi’s acknowledgment of the moral imperative of maturity and his devotion to democratic transparency continues to distinguish his political psychology from most of the other discourses in

Indian and world politics. As such, Gandhi's suggestion to us in relation to moral excellence and spiritual maturity presents itself at the same time as an invitation to self-respect and self-restraint.

A continuing relevance

- As he argued, "Where there is egotism, we shall find incivility and arrogance. Where it is absent, we shall find a sense of self-respect together with civility... He who holds his self-respect dear acts towards everyone in a spirit of friendship, for he values others' self-respect as much as he values his own.
- He sees himself in all and everyone else in himself, puts himself in line with others. The egotist keeps aloof from others and, believing himself superior to the rest of the world, he takes [it] upon himself to judge everyone and in the result enables the world to have the measure of his smallness."
- Therefore, it goes without saying that by reading Gandhi closely and correctly, we can get to the conclusion that, despite all his shortcomings, his appeal to mature and conscientious politics and nobility of spirit continues to be a strong ethical response to the political issues and challenges of our time. Maybe, that is why, Gandhi remains our contemporary, while he belongs to our future.

Measuring regional diversity

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) is a methodology adopted by the Ministry of Education to rank higher educational institutions in India. On September 9, the Education Minister released the sixth edition of the NIRF rankings. The NIRF formulates the ranking on the basis of five parameters. Each of these has one to five sub-parameters. This article discusses one of the sub-parameters (Region Diversity) of the parameter named Outreach and Inclusivity.*

Problematic formula

- The NIRF calculates regional diversity inaccurately because it takes into account only the percentage of students enrolled from other States and countries at that particular institution.
- The formula that it applies is this: $RD = 25 \times \text{fraction of total students enrolled from other States} + 5 \times \text{fraction of students enrolled from other countries}$.
- This formula calculates the regional diversity of States not on the basis of State-wise representation by students at the institution, but on the basis of the percentage of total students enrolled from all States except the State the institution is located in. This is problematic.
- Let's say that there are 100 students in total at an institution in New Delhi of whom 99 belong to Uttar Pradesh.
- The formula will show that the institution is extremely diverse because 99% of the students are from 'other' State(s), which is misleading.
- To improve accuracy, the NIRF should ask two questions. One, from how many States have students come to study at the institution? The answer to this will give us what we can term as horizontal regional diversity.
- Here, we take a bird's-eye view of the geographical area of India and then we count the States represented by one or more students studying (or enrolled) at the institution. However, this alone will not help comprehensively assess regional diversity.
- Even if all 29 States are represented at the institution, we won't know how many students are from towns and villages, how many are from non-metropolitan big cities, and how many are from metropolitan cities.
- Horizontal regional diversity can be more comprehensively assessed by asking a second question: what is the size of the hometown of the students? This can be termed as vertical regional diversity. Its



calculation will show us how many students have come from Tier I, Tier II, Tier III cities and towns, and villages from within each State.

Comparing two institutions

- For a clearer understanding of horizontal and vertical diversity, let us compare the demographic data of the Faculty of Law, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and of the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru.
- Under 'Region Diversity' in the NIRF rankings, Jamia scored 17.75 out of 30 and NLSIU scored 27.04.
- At Jamia, there were students from 15 States. Of them, 76% came from U.P. (44.7%), Delhi (16.1%) and Bihar (15.25%).
- No student came from Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu or Telangana. Only 1.4% of the students were from south India (comprising five States, Puducherry and Lakshadweep).
- Clearly, horizontal regional diversity is weak. On the other hand, Jamia's performance on vertical regional representation is impressive because 43% of the students came from small cities, towns, and villages, though only from 15 States.
- At NLSIU, only 18% of the students came from small cities, towns, and villages. The institution is primarily accessible to students from metropolitan and non-metropolitan big cities, though the students came from 24 States. Thus, it performs well on the horizontal front but weakly on the vertical.
- How does the NIRF intend to calculate such diverse regional diversities? Even if the concept of vertical and horizontal diversity is incorporated into the parameter, the NIRF cannot brush under the carpet the methodological challenge of determining what place (city, town, village) a student comes from — should it be the place at which the student was born, the place of current residence, the place where high school was completed, or the place at which the student's father/mother was born?
- The NIRF rankings make the positional goods the institutions have to offer more transparent to students, parents, funders, and the government. Incidentally, on the basis of the five parameters, the ranking creates a transparent hierarchy of higher educational institutions in India.
- The least we can therefore ask for is more accurate parameters. The policy questions above must be answered by the NIRF.

Making parties constitutional

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Political parties have extralegal growth in almost every democratic country. The American Constitution does not presume the existence of political parties. In Britain too, political parties are still unknown to the law. Nonetheless, Sir Ivor Jennings, in The British Constitution, opined that "a realistic survey of the British Constitution today must begin and end with parties and discuss them at length in the middle". Similarly, political parties in India are extra-constitutional, but they are the breathing air of the political system.*

A political party is an organised group of citizens who hold common views on governance and act as a political unit that seeks to obtain control of government with a view to further the agenda and policy they profess. They are indispensable links between the people and the representative machinery of government. Political parties maintain a continuous connection between the people and those who represent them either in government or in the opposition.

The German model



- The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949) gives constitutional status to political parties. Article 21 of the Basic Law deals with their status, rights, duties and functions.
- It provides:
 - Political parties shall participate in the formation of the political will of the people. They may be freely established. Their internal organisation must conform to democratic principles. They must publicly account for their assets and for the sources and use of their funds.
 - Parties that, by reason of their aims or the behaviour of their adherents, seek to undermine or abolish the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany shall be unconstitutional...
 - The Federal Constitutional Court shall rule on the question of unconstitutionality...
 - Details shall be regulated by federal laws.
- The German model of constitutionalising political parties is more desirable for India than the U.S. and the U.K. models. Section 29A(5) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 is the only major statutory provision dealing with political parties in India.
- It orders that a political party shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established, and to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy, and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.
- Political parties in developed nations maintain high levels of internal democracy. In the U.K., the Conservative Party has the National Conservative Convention as its top body. It has a Central Council and an Executive Committee.
- The Central Council elects its President, a Chairman and Vice Chairmen at its annual meeting. It also elects an Executive Committee which meets once a month.
- In the U.S., both the Democratic and the Republican Party have the National Committee as their top decision-making body. The National Committee plays an important role in the presidential election and agenda setting.
- The Indian Constitution is the one of the longest Constitutions in the world. It even elaborately deals with the co-operative societies. The right to form co-operative societies is a fundamental right under Article 19 (1)(c), but the right to form political parties is not.
- It is astonishing that such a meticulous Constitution overlooked political parties, the vital players in the political system, for constitutional regulation. Most of the parties are openly caste- or religious-based.
- Their finances are dubious and opaque. Almost all the parties — the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, the Indian Union Muslim League, etc. — are family fiefdoms. The Congress high command is only a euphemism for the Gandhi family. There are no periodical in-party elections in Indian parties except in a few like the CPI(M).
- Political parties are the agents of democracy and safety valves in the political system. They desperately need reform.
- Hence, it is high time to constitutionalise political parties to ensure in-party democracy, to impart transparency in their finances, and to de-communalise them.

institutions and the goals of the New Education Policy — of equity, inclusion and access — are realised.

Revitalising PM-KUSUM

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Union Minister of Power, New and Renewable Energy recently reviewed the progress of the PM-KUSUM scheme and reaffirmed the government's commitment to accelerating solar pump adoption.*

Launched in 2019, PM-KUSUM aims to help farmers access reliable day-time solar power for irrigation, reduce power subsidies, and decarbonise agriculture. But pandemic-induced disruptions, limited buy-in from States, and implementation challenges have all affected the scheme's roll-out. How can we unlock the opportunities it promises?

Barriers to uptake

- PM-KUSUM provides farmers with incentives to install solar power pumps and plants in their fields. They can use one of three deployment models: off-grid solar pumps, solarised agricultural feeders, or grid-connected pumps.
- Off-grid pumps have been the most popular, but the nearly 2,80,000 systems deployed fall far short of the scheme's target of two million by 2022. Barriers to adoption include limited awareness about solar pumps and farmers' inability to pay their upfront contribution.
- Progress on the other two models has been rather poor due to regulatory, financial, operational and technical challenges.
- Only a handful of States have initiated tenders or commissioned projects for solar feeders or grid-connected pumps, according to our study.
- Yet, both models are worth scaling up for they allow farmers to earn additional income by selling solar power to discoms, and discoms to procure cheap power close to centres of consumption.
- Five steps for tackling the myriad challenges linked to PM-KUSUM's implementation.
 - First, extend the scheme's timelines. Most Indian discoms have a surplus of contracted generation capacity and are wary of procuring more power in the short term.
 - Extending PM-KUSUM's timelines beyond 2022 would allow discoms to align the scheme with their power purchase planning.
 - Second, create a level playing field for distributed solar plants. Selling surplus power to discoms is one of the main attractions of grid-connected models.
 - Yet, discoms often find utility-scale solar cheaper than distributed solar (under the scheme) due to the latter's higher costs and the loss of locational advantage due to waived inter-State transmission system (ISTS) charges.
 - To tackle the bias against distributed solar, we need to address counter-party risks and grid-unavailability risks at distribution substations, standardise tariff determination to reflect the higher costs of distributed power plants, and do away with the waiver of ISTS charges for solar plants.
 - Third, streamline land regulations through inter-departmental coordination.
 - Doing so will help reduce delays in leasing or converting agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes such as solar power generation.
 - Fourth, support innovative solutions for financing farmers' contributions.
 - Many farmers struggle to pay 30-40% of upfront costs in compliance with scheme requirements. Further, they cannot access bank loans without collateral.
 - We need out-of-the-box solutions like Karnataka's pilot of a farmer-developer special-purpose vehicle to help farmers install solar power plants on their farms.
 - Fifth, extensively pilot grid-connected solar pumps.
 - Current obstacles to their adoption include concerns about their economic viability in the presence of high farm subsidies and farmers' potential unwillingness to feed in surplus power when selling water or irrigating extra land are more attractive prospects.
 - Further, the grid-connected model requires pumps to be metered and billed for accounting purposes but suffers from a lack of trust between farmers and discoms. Adopting solutions like smart meters and smart transformers and engaging with farmers can build trust.
 - But piloting the model under different agro-economic contexts will be critical to developing a strategy to scale it up.
 - The scheme, if implemented successfully, can generate thousands of jobs, reduce the carbon footprint of agriculture, and result in oil import savings.

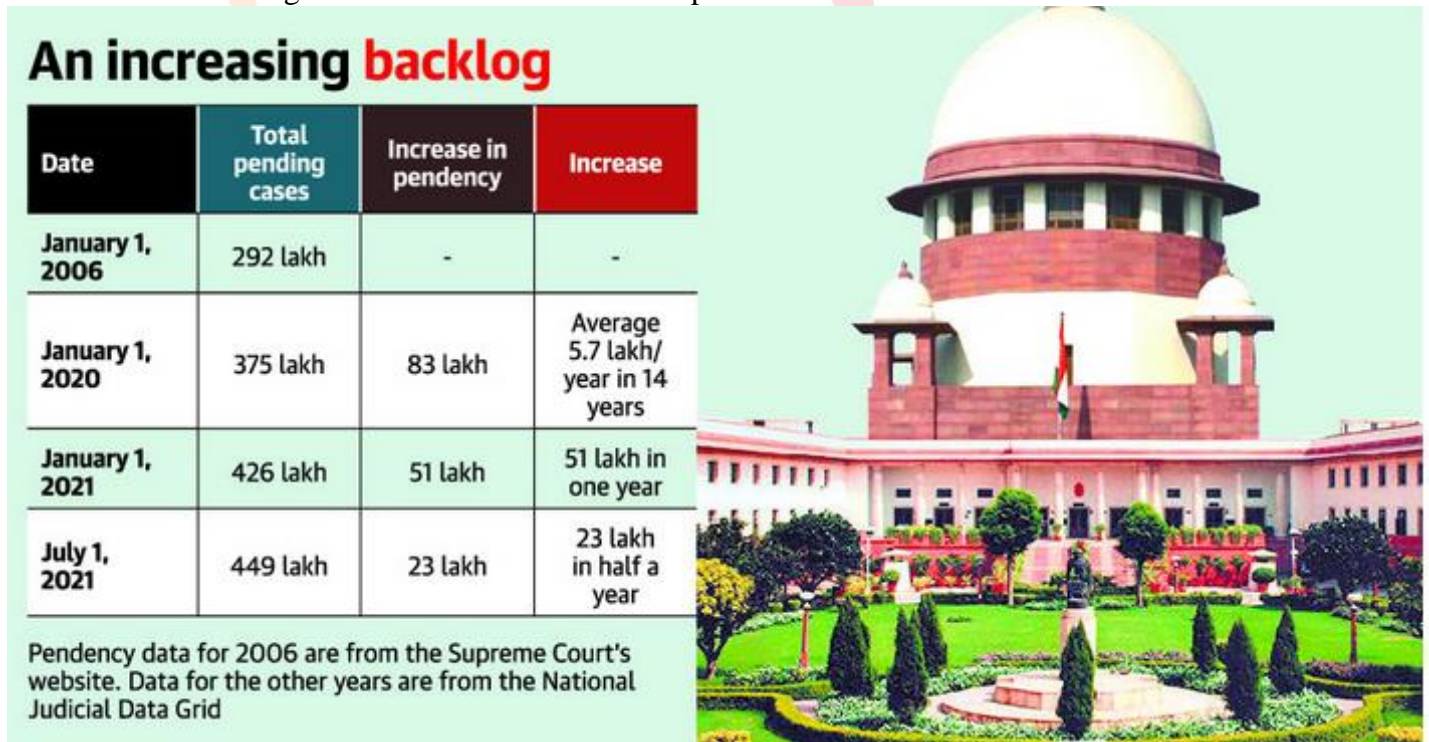
How to grease the wheels of justice

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *At present, despite good intentions, the nation's judiciary is hurtling towards a disaster and needs immediate attention. A measure of the justice delivery system is the pendency of cases in courts across the country.*

Details:

- We have seen a significant deterioration in this aspect as shown in the table.



- More than 40% of cases are decided after three years in India, while in many other countries less than 1% of cases are decided after three years.
- If India does not act decisively and quickly, this percentage will keep increasing. The rich, the powerful and the wrongdoers have a field day by getting their cases expedited or delayed as they wish.
- The increase in corruption and crime is a direct fallout of the sluggish justice delivery system.
- This severely impacts the poor and marginalised. For them, the judicial process itself becomes a punishment. Data show that about 70% of prisoners in India are undertrials and are mostly poor citizens.

Filling vacancies

- Two measures can be implemented within two years to tackle this issue. First, reduce the pendency of cases by filling sanctioned judicial positions.
- Analysis shows that between 2006 and 2019, the average increase in pendency was less than 2% per year whereas the average vacancy in sanctioned judicial positions was about 21%. If the sanctioned positions had been filled, pendency of cases would have gone down each year.
- The nation neither needs 70,000 judges, as claimed by former Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur, nor does it need to double the present number of judges. It needs to add about 20% of judges.



- This is in line with the sanctioned strength. This figure has been endorsed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna, Justice R.C. Chavan and 100 IIT alumni. The responsibility of selecting judges is largely with the judiciary itself.
- The responsibility of appointments in the subordinate judiciary lies with the State governments and their respective High Courts.
- The responsibility of ensuring near-zero vacancies should be with the Chief Justices of the High Courts and the Chief Justice of India and they should be held accountable for the same. Right now, nobody believes that they are accountable, and filling judicial vacancies is not considered a matter of priority.
- Filling all vacancies may result in a requirement of about 5,000 courtrooms. A simple solution would be to run 5,000 courts in two shifts.

Use of technology

- The second is to improve working with the use of technology. The e-Committee of the Supreme Court has been in existence since 2005.
- It has made three outstanding recommendations which are not being followed.
 - One, computer algorithms should decide on case listing, case allocation and adjournments with only a 5% override given to judges. It said all rational reasons and limits should be put on adjournments; case listing should give main weightage to 'first in, first out'; and case allocation should take into account logical criteria. This would be a big step in reducing arbitrariness and the unfair advantage that the powerful enjoy.
 - Two, the courts should focus on e-filing. The e-Committee made detailed SOPs on how petitions and affidavits can be filed and payment of fees can be done electronically without lawyers or litigants having to travel to the courts or use paper. This should be implemented in all seriousness and would also save about three lakh trees annually.
 - Three, it focused on virtual hearings. COVID-19 prompted the courts to adopt virtual hearings. However, virtual hearings were held only in some cases while physical hearings were held in most. In pre-COVID-19 years, the increase in the pendency of cases in all courts used to be about 5.7 lakh cases a year. In 2020 alone, it increased to an astonishing 51 lakh. It appears that if a hybrid virtual hearing model is not adopted, the backlog of cases could cross 5 crore in 2022. The dysfunctional justice system will be perpetually overwhelmed.
- All the courts in the country must switch to a hybrid virtual mode immediately and start disposing cases. Even after the COVID-19 crisis ends, it would be beneficial to continue hybrid virtual courts.
- This will make access to justice easier for litigants, reduce costs, and also give a fair opportunity to young lawyers from small towns. The required hardware is available in all courts.

No change in laws

- All the recommendations — e-filing of petitions, affidavits and payment of fees; algorithm-based computerised listing, roster, case allocation and adjournments with only a 5% override to be given to judges; hybrid virtual hearings; filling judicial vacancies; and holding Chief Justices responsible for ensuring that vacancies in judicial positions are less than 5% — are based on the Supreme Court's various decisions and the e-Committee's recommendations.
- These would require no changes in laws. At a conference, High Court Chief Justices and the Chief Justice of India and the government could make decisions on all of this.
- If all this is done, India's judicial system can rank among the 10 top countries of the world.
- These changes would make India the preferred nation for international investments and also fulfil the fundamental right to speedy justice of citizens.



GS III

A lesson from China on gig workers' rights

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On September 20, 2021, the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers, on behalf of gig workers, filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court demanding that the Union government provide succour to workers affected by the pandemic. The petition has asked for 'gig workers' and 'platform workers' to be declared as 'unorganised workers' so they come under the purview of the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008. In short, the petition demands social security benefits from food delivery platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy and taxi aggregator apps such as Ola and Uber. That same week, China strode ahead in this regard. Owing to public pressure, two of its food delivery platforms, Meituan and Ele.me, committed to end the practice of forcing workers to register as 'independent businesses', which has long helped these platforms evade responsibilities as employers. Both platforms run a duopoly in the sector, capturing over 90% of the market share, and employ millions of gig workers. In a notice to labour aggregator partners, Meituan said it prohibited signing on delivery workers "through deceptive or coercive means".

'Invisible' to 'frontline'

- The one major factor that the pandemic has helped change is the erstwhile 'invisibility' of delivery workers. Through 2020, a trend that spanned China, India, the U.S. and Europe saw 'invisible workers' being propelled to 'frontline workers'.
- In China, this was especially the case in Wuhan, the pandemic's epicentre, where there was a clear transition of social discourse in favour of delivery workers. People's Daily, the largest state-affiliated daily in China, responded to public sentiment by ranking delivery work among the top 10 occupations.
- The media aided this transformation. In the fall of 2020, Renwu, a monthly Chinese magazine, took an exhaustive look at the plight of delivery workers across the two food delivery platforms. Titled 'Delivery Riders, Trapped in the System', the article was shared over 200 million times on the Chinese internet indicating how deeply Chinese social media users connected with the issue.
- One indicator of how seriously an issue is taken by the public is its virality on the Chinese web. In 2015, for instance, a TED-style talk on China's pollution crisis got 100 million views across major video streaming sites within 48 hours of its release, resulting in policy change.
- The Renwu piece highlighted how delivery workers were trapped in a "sophisticated labour control system" that they had unwittingly downloaded onto their phones.
- Simply put, the algorithm that is put in place by platforms is designed to create animosity between app users and workers, where the platform inherently shifts the pressure of receiving orders and maintaining smooth flow of deliveries onto the workers.
- But it is important to note that the pushback against influential platforms had begun long before COVID-19. Over the years, strikes in different parts of China have reflected this growing backlash. As food delivery platforms expanded through the pandemic period, growing massively in revenue and scale, strikes increased in numerous Chinese cities and have continued despite various barriers to collective action.
- In early 2021, in successive strikes spanning over two months, delivery workers protested against poor working conditions.
- In cities such as Shenzhen, Tongxiang and Linyi, delivery workers protested against new company policies that slashed their pay per delivery. A protest in Taizhou saw a delivery worker set himself on fire demanding unpaid wages.



- In 2018, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, Ya-Wen Lei, documented strikes in Chongqing, a municipality in southwest China. She found that workers had mobilised through social media and offline meetings.
- They united to protest against “decreasing piece rates” and “unilateral change of contract terms or platform rules”. At the time of her fieldwork, the Chinese state had not intervened in the market to restrain the monopoly powers of platforms or initiate antitrust investigations. This provided platforms with unrestricted powers to exercise technological control.
- But the pandemic was curious in this regard. It began with the Chinese state indicating that platforms should help soak up the devastating effects of the pandemic on the workforce.
- And it ended with the state asserting “increased control” over major tech companies, including Meituan for allegedly abusing its dominant market position, via the new anti-monopolistic guidelines.
- In China, where the government is now focused on “common prosperity”, which seeks to narrow a widening wealth gap that threatens the country’s economic rise, the government’s scrutiny over food delivery platforms has increased.
- The authoritarian context, a weak civil society and the absence of independent labour unions leaves gig workers in China with very little option but to go on strike or protest, despite the risks, to affect change.
- In April, Caixin reported that a government official disguised himself as a Meituan driver and worked a 12-hour shift barely making RMB 41 (\$6.32) for a day’s work. He was featured in a television programme in Beijing and stated that the experience left him feeling humiliated.
- In July, seven government agencies jointly passed guidelines directing online food delivery platforms that they should not set evaluation criteria based on optimisation algorithms, must respect the rights of delivery workers and ensure that they earn at least a minimum wage with social insurance.
- Many of these government initiatives have been public-driven. It was in the government’s interest to intervene when it realised that there was growing discontent not only among the delivery workers but also the public about their plight.

The Indian context

- The situation is vastly different in India. Any reform in this sector is led wholly by delivery workers, not the public. For 27 days in 2020, close to 3,000 delivery workers from Swiggy went on strike in Hyderabad to protest the slash in remuneration from ₹35 to ₹15 per order.
- The strikes disbanded only after the Joint Commissioner of the Labour Department called a hearing with the platform’s operations manager and the workers’ union. It was the first time in India that such a negotiation was taking place, that too on the street.
- This year, in the lead up to Zomato’s July IPO, several anonymous Twitter accounts set up by delivery workers called customers’ attention to what they deem as “exploitative practices” employed by platforms. The PIL in the Supreme Court is another major step in this regard.
- The biggest lesson from China is the swell of public opinion that has partly led to government regulation and change in company policy.
- In the U.S., a gig workers collective has urged customers to delete the Instacart app as a show of solidarity until demands for better working conditions are met.
- Indians could make an effort to be better informed about the way platforms work by seeking out delivery workers and asking about their work conditions and the pressures they face. We will then be aware of the price that a person, who we only see as a miniature bike on our apps, pays for our convenience.

Flood management that cannot be watered down

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Over the years, many of Bihar's districts have been facing serious challenges with recurrent and massive flooding. This year too, it has been a double whammy — of flooding and the novel coronavirus pandemic. It is the right time to look at some of the key aspects of India-Nepal flood management under the existing arrangements of India's federal system that offers enough room for better coordination between the Centre and State governments.*

The background: some of Nepal's biggest river systems originate in the Himalayan glaciers which then flow into India through Bihar. During the monsoons, these river systems flood causing many problems for Bihar. It is a necessity that there is process-driven coordination between the Centre and the Government of Bihar to handle the flooding in Nepal's Terai and North Bihar (largely the Mithilanchal region).

Still pending

- As part of the long-term measures to address the problem of massive and recurrent floods in Bihar, the Joint Project Office (JPO), Biratnagar, was established in Nepal in August 2004 to prepare a detailed project report to construct a high dam on the Nepal side (on the Kosi, Kamla and Bagmati rivers).
- The Government of Bihar has raised the matter at regular intervals. The Central Water Commission (CWC), Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS), Government of India, convened a special meeting of the joint team of experts (India side) on February 10, 2020 at New Delhi to ascertain the status of the detailed project report.
- A group of officers formed by the CWC has to work on various aspects of the detailed project report and propose an action plan for its early completion.
- The Water Resources Department, Bihar has repeatedly requested the MoJS (most recently, through Letter no. 295, dated August 2, 2021) to expedite the progress of the detailed project report. Despite the best efforts made by the Government of Bihar, the task remains unaccomplished even after 17 years.
- The Minister of Water Resources Department, Bihar, Sanjay Kumar Jha, met the Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, in September 2020 to highlight long-standing water sharing issues with Nepal.
- The crucial matter of water sharing with Nepal has been flagged by India officially as well. What is evident is Nepal's lack of prompt reciprocation. It is essential that Nepal shows the required will to find a long-term solution with India in ending a perennial disaster.

Flood protection work

- As in the existing India-Nepal Agreement on water resources, the State government is authorised to execute flood protection works up to critical stretches inside Nepal territory along the India-Nepal border.
- In recent years, all such flood protection works have had to be carried out in the face of increasing local resistance. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Water Resources Department, Government of Bihar, was intensively engaged at two levels: with local Nepalese authorities and through appeals to the Central government for carrying out flood protection works in 2020.
- After sustained coordination between the Centre and the State (Bihar) and expedited interventions by India with Nepal, Kathmandu gave its conditional permission for manpower and machinery operation in the Nepal area of Kosi basin. Accordingly, 21 out of the 22 works could be completed.
- Also, some progress was made to facilitate the smooth movement of manpower, machinery and flood control materials across the Gandak and Kamla rivers situated on the Nepal side to carry out flood protection work during the flood period of 2020.

- But despite the requisite permission for movement on the Kosi barrage and associated embankments, the movement of departmental vehicles and work activities did not draw the attention of the Kosi Project Authority, Biratnagar, for various reasons.
- Since bilateral cooperation remains the fulcrum of water sharing and water management between the two countries, Nepal must play its part in ensuring a sustainable way forward.
- As in the figures shared by the Water Resources Department, Government of Bihar, a total of four new flood protection works in the Gandak basin area were proposed before the floods of 2020.
- A request was made on June 22, 2020 by the Water Resources Department, Government of Bihar, to the Government of India for entry into the Nepal region for execution of these flood protection works and for maintenance works of the Gandak Barrage Structure located in Valmikinagar.
- After receiving conditional permission from Nepal, maintenance work of the structure and components of the Gandak barrage (Valmikinagar), top regulator gates, Right Afflux Bund, and three of the proposed works in the Gandak basin were completed.
- During the strengthening work proposed on the right marginal bund on the Lalbekia river, the local Nepali administration claimed that the said bund area fell in no man's land. This is notwithstanding the fact that the embankment was built by India 30 years ago and there has not been any dispute regarding its maintenance all these years.
- Breach closure/protective work of right guide bund of the Kamla weir remains incomplete due to the lack of permission. However, resolution of the impasse is awaited. This is another important matter to be looked at.
- Aware of the operational impasse during the flood season in 2020, Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar visited the Jainagar weir site in Madhubani, and upon sensing the seriousness of the situation, instructed the Water Resources Department to explore converting the weir on the India-Nepal border into an efficiently operated barrage.
- It is evident that Nepal's attitude towards mutual issues (water sharing, flood control, etc.) has been short of collaboration, unlike in the past.

An alternative paradigm

- In the best spirit of friendship, Nepal and India should restart the water dialogue and come up with policies to safeguard the interests of all those who have been affected on both sides of the border.
- It is time the two friendly countries come together and assess the factors that are causing unimaginable losses through flooding every year.
- Optimisation of the infrastructure will be decisive in finding an alternative paradigm of flood management. Moreover, it is also linked to how the Himalayan glaciers and the green cover are managed.
- Water cooperation should drive the next big India-Nepal dialogue, and despite the challenges, wisdom should prevail to turn the crisis into an opportunity, for the sake of development and environmental protection.
- Water resources are priceless assets. By controlling the flooding and using the water resources for common developmental uses such as hydroelectricity, irrigation and waterways, India-Nepal relations can be strengthened even further.

GS IV

Bureaucracy's digital challenge

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The biggest challenge today to Indian bureaucracy is the shift from desk to digital. This shift is not limited to a transition towards e-office and e-governance, but includes the organisational and bureaucratic response to digital spaces, especially the use of social media. The focus has been mostly on the former, while the latter has remained largely unaddressed.*

To use or not to use social media

- There are two opinions on the use of social media by civil servants. While there are many people, including former civil servants, who are in favour of civil servants using social media in their official capacity, others argue that anonymity, the defining feature of Indian bureaucracy, gets compromised in the process.
- In fact, as an organisational form, the bureaucracy is incompatible with social media. While bureaucracy is characterised by hierarchy, formal relationships and standard procedures, social media is identified by openness, transparency and flexibility.
- It is true that many civil servants have become accessible to the common people and public service delivery issues have been resolved through the use of social media.
- Social media has also created a positive outlook towards an institution long perceived as opaque and inaccessible. Social media has increased awareness among people about government policies and programmes.
- But social media also does more. It provides an opportunity to bureaucrats to shape the public discourse and engage with the public while being politically neutral.
- At a time when the tendency among the political executive is to receive the very remarks or advice from bureaucrats that they want to hear, social media ensures that blind obeying is minimised and bureaucrats serve the people.
- Anonymity has been a hallmark of Westminster bureaucracies, including in India. But there is a basic contradiction in remaining habitually anonymous while governance in public is now the new normal.
- Further, values are becoming more dominant than facts in public policymaking. And both values and facts are getting reshaped due to fake news and systematic propaganda within public policy circles as well. In such a scenario, the bureaucracy, which is expected to be the epitome of public values and a storehouse of facts, shouldn't be expected to govern in private.
- The use of social media is gradually getting institutionalised in many Westminster system-based countries. During the Brexit debate in the U.K., many civil servants shaped public debate through the use of social media even while remaining politically neutral.
- In India, civil servants haven't reflected on this aspect of digital bureaucracy. Anonymity and opaqueness have already been watered down through the Right to Information Act of 2005. But they continue to be prominent features.

Accessibility and accountability

- In India, the role of social media in bureaucracy has taken a different direction. Social media is getting used by civil servants for self-promotion. Through their selective posts and promotion of these posts by their social media fans, civil servants create a narrative of their performance.



- All this is justified in the name of accessibility and accountability. There is a wrong notion getting entrenched in the public consciousness that social media is the way to access civil servants and make them accountable.
- Social media may have improved accessibility and accountability, but it is important to note that civil servants are at an advantage to share the information they want and respond to those they want. It is not a formal set-up where accessibility and accountability are based on uniformity of treatment.
- Social media accountability is no alternative to institutional and citizen-centric accountability. It is, in fact, partly unethical to use social media during office hours and justify it when some people who have travelled long distances are waiting outside the office.
- Bureaucrats should use social media to improve public policies. If they don't use social media appropriately, their role as independent advisers stands threatened.





Current Affairs Quiz

1) Select the correct statement with respect to Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana :

- It is a scheme launched by Ministry of Commerce.
- Under this, Insured Persons will be given a relief after retirement amounting to 25% of the average per day earning.
- The relief will be paid up to a maximum of 90 days of unemployment, as a once-in-lifetime measure.
- None of the above

Answer : c

2) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Judima?

- It is a rice wine made from sticky rice, which is steamed and mixed with traditional herbs.
- The wine is brewed by the Dimasa tribal community of Assam and is traditionally made by women.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

3) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to LiFi technology?

- It is a wireless communication technology that uses light rather than radio frequencies to transmit data.
- LiFi can be up to 100 times faster than Wi-Fi.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

4) The objective of XENON1T Experiment is:

- To search for Dark Matter
- To search for Extra Terrestrial Life
- To search for Gravitational Waves
- All of the above

Answer : a

5) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Akash Missile?

- It is a part of five major missile developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
- It is primarily a Short Range Surface to Air Missile built to provide air defence cover to the vulnerable areas.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

6) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)?

1. NDMA is not a statutory body and derives its powers from the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
2. It is the apex body for Disaster Management in India, headed by the Union Defence Minister.
3. Setting up of National, State and District level disaster management authority is mandated by the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

It is a statutory body established through the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

It is headed by the Prime Minister of India.

7) Consider the following statements with respect to Dark Matter different and Dark Energy:

1. Dark energy attracts and holds galaxies together whereas dark matter repels and causes the expansion of our universe.
2. Despite both components being invisible, dark energy is even more elusive than dark matter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

While dark matter attracts and holds galaxies together, dark energy repels and causes the expansion of our universe.

8) Which of the following is not the disqualification on ground of defection?

- a. If a member elected on the ticket of a party voluntarily gives up membership of the party or votes in the House against the party's wishes
- b. When a legislator who has won his or her seat as an independent candidate joins a political party after the election
- c. If a nominated member joins a party during the first six months of his/her nomination
- d. If a member goes out of his/her party as a result of a merger of the party with another party

Answer : c

9) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Rabies?

1. It is a zoonotic, viral disease spread to people from the saliva of infected animals.
2. It is one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases that predominantly affects poor and vulnerable populations of remote rural locations.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

10) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Suvarnamukhi River?

1. It is an east flowing river originated in the Chota Nagpur Plateau and flows through Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha.



2. It has no major tributaries and thus depends only on rainfall in its upper catchment.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer : b

Swarnamukhi River

The Swarnamukhi is an East Flowing river basin originated in the Eastern Ghats.

11) SACRED Portal is-

- a. Employment Exchange for Elderly
- b. Training portal for Health workers
- c. Indian Temples Information Portal
- d. National Database for Unorganised Workers

Answer : a

12) The statement which is not correct regarding PM POSHAN Scheme is -

- a. It is a central sector scheme which aims to provide one hot cooked meal
- b. The earlier name of the scheme was National Scheme for Mid Day Meal in Schools popularly known as Mid Day Meal Scheme
- c. The scheme is proposed to be extended to students studying in pre-primary schools in addition to children from elementary classes
- d. Social Audit of the scheme is made mandatory in all the districts

Answer : a

This is a Centrally-Sponsored Scheme which covers all school children studying in Classes I-VIII of Government, Government-Aided Schools.

13) C.K. Mishra Committee was constituted for-

- a. To recommend an approach towards development of a Sustainable Finance Hub
- b. To inquire hardships faced by journalists and to improve their condition of services
- c. To study the impact of journalism in daily lives and recommend a foundation for ethical journalism
- d. All of the above

Answer : a

14) Haiti is located in-

- a) Mediterranean Sea
- b) Baltic Sea
- c) Black Sea
- d) Caribbean Sea

Answer: d)

15) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS)?

- 1. HAPS are advanced unmanned flying systems that operate in the stratosphere.
- 2. They are intended to replace the conventional Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).
- 3. It has been developed by DRDO for the defence forces.

Select the CORRECT answer code:

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

Answer: a)

Developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)

The solar energized system is designed to **act as a bridge between Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and conventional satellites.**

16) Consider the following statements with respect to tropical storms:

1. The northern Indian Ocean experiences a quarter of world's tropical storms.
2. The impact of tropical storms on the Indian subcontinent is severe due to a dense population and poor capacity to absorb large quantities of rainfall in a short period.

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)

The northern Indian Ocean, of which the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal are a part, experiences only a minority of tropical storms annually, at about 7% of worldwide events.

17) Which of the following is/are the applications of High-Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS)?

1. Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief
2. Telecommunication
3. Remote sensing for both defence and civilian purposes

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: d)

18) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Dark energy?

1. Dark energy is the mysterious form of energy that makes up less than 1% of the universe.
2. While dark matter attracts and holds galaxies together, dark energy repels and causes the expansion of our universe.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: b)

Dark energy, the mysterious form of energy that makes up about 68% of the universe.

19) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Right to Information Act 2005?

1. Under the provisions of Right to Information Act 2005, any citizen of India may request information from a public authority which is required to reply within thirty days.
2. The Act protects the Right to Life and Personal Liberty under Article 21 guaranteed by the Constitution.
3. The Act completely exempts information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship from disclosure.

Select the correct answer code:

- a) 1 and 2 only

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

Answer: a)

Section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act 2005 exempts information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship from disclosure unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information.

- 20) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)?
1. State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) is a primary fund available with State Governments as part of their response to notified disasters.
 2. SDRF shall be used only for meeting the expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims.
 3. Central Government contribute 50% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer: b)

Central Government contribute 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States.