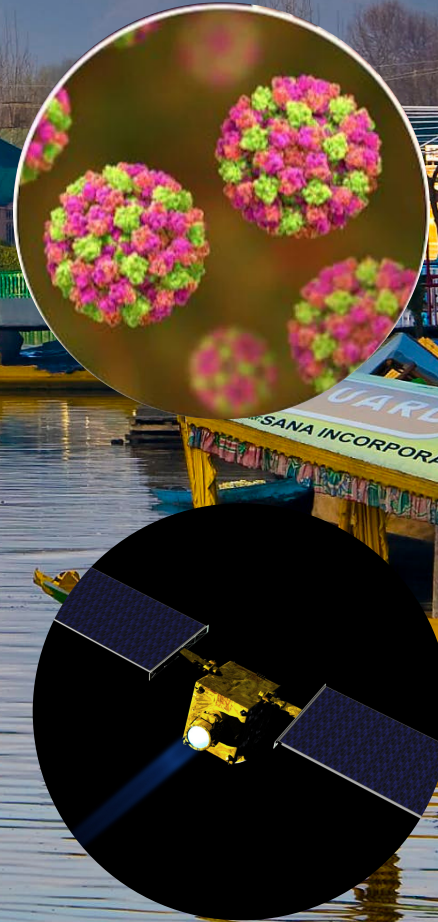


PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

NOVEMBER WEEK 2



November (Week 2)

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Prelims

NATIONAL

UNESCO picks Srinagar as creative city

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has picked Srinagar among 49 cities as part of the creative city network under the Crafts and Folk Arts category.*

Details:

- The network involves folk art, media, film, literature, design, gastronomy and media arts. Srinagar was among one more city from India competing for the coveted recognition this year.
- The dossier for its nomination was filed first in 2019 and then again in 2021.
- Only Jaipur (Crafts and Folk Arts) in 2015, Varanasi and Chennai (Creative city of Music) in 2015 and 2017 respectively have so far been recognised as members of the UCCN for creative cities.

Art & craft of Srinagar

- While the entire central Kashmir is known for its varied craft traditions, the UCCN allows only individual cities to file nominations.
- Srinagar, Ganderbal and Budgam are the main districts of Kashmir that have for ages been involved in making handicrafts products — such as textiles, carpets and rugs, crewel embroidery, silverware, woodwork and papier-mâché. In fact, after tourism, handicraft is a major source of livelihood for many artisans in Kashmir.
- There is already a huge demand for Kashmiri handcrafted products abroad, even as it is not benefiting the artisans directly.
- Papier-mâché is said to have been brought to Kashmir by saint Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani from Persia in the 14th century. It is based primarily on creating colourful utility and decorative objects using paper pulp — vases, bowls, cups, boxes, trays and lamp bases. The art is concentrated mainly around downtown Srinagar and employs around 35,000 artisans — big and small, traders and kaarigars.
- The wood comes from walnut trees, which grow at 7,000 feet above sea level here, and is used to make tables, jewellery boxes and trays. Downtown Srinagar is dotted with shops where one finds craftsmen chiselling and polishing wood. These items are an essential attraction for tourists visiting Kashmir, besides being in great demand locally.
- The best-quality shawls in the world are still made of pashmina, the wool of the wild Asian mountain goat. The region is also the epicentre of high-quality, intricately woven woollen material like shawls, carpets and rugs. This is the only craft — unlike walnut carving and papier-mâché — that sees extensive participation by women artisans as well.

The UCCN tag

- Srinagar had applied in 2018 too, but that application got rejected.
- The successful dossier that made it to the UCCN this time was made by a team from the Srinagar Municipal Corporation, in coordination with INTACH Kashmir.



- The dossier said it is expected that the UCCN tag would not only give global recognition to Srinagar but also help it in getting international funding, making tie-ups with craft universities, and pitching crafts as products.

Union Cabinet brings back MPLAD Scheme

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Citing economic recovery, the Union Cabinet restored the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) that was suspended in April 2020 subsuming the funds for the scheme in the consolidated fund of India. The scheme was suspended for two financial years (2020-21 and 2021-22) but the Government on Wednesday announced a partial rollback. The MPs will get ₹2 crore instead of the annual approved ₹5 crore.*

What is the MPLAD Scheme?

- The MPLAD scheme was formulated in **1993** to enable Members of Parliament (MPs) to **recommend development works** in their constituencies with emphasis on the creation of durable community assets based on the locally felt need.
 - Durable assets of national priorities and community needs viz. drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads, etc.
- Initially, the Scheme was under the control of the Ministry of Rural Development and Planning. In October, 1994, the scheme was transferred to the **Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation**.
- Under this scheme, every MP is **entitled to spend Rs 5 crore annually**.
- Similar to MPLADS, several states have enacted schemes called Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Scheme (MLALADS) where funds are given to MLAs.
- According to the ‘**Guidelines on Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)**’ published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in June 2016, the **MPLAD funds can also be used for** implementation of the schemes such as **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Accessible India Campaign** (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), conservation of water through rain water harvesting and **Sansad Aadarsh Gram Yojana**, etc.

Norovirus

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *At least 13 people have been found infected with Norovirus in Kerala's Wayanad district, according to a report in news agency PTI. The patients, students of a veterinary college in Pookode near Vythiri, tested positive for the infection two weeks ago.*

What is Norovirus?

- Norovirus, which infects people across age groups, is a bug similar to the diarrhoea-inducing rotavirus.
- Disease outbreaks typically occur aboard cruise ships, in nursing homes, dormitories, and other closed spaces.
- The initial symptoms of Norovirus are vomiting and/or diarrhoea, which show up one or two days after exposure to the virus.
- Patients also feel nauseous, and suffer from abdominal pain, fever, headaches and bodyaches. In extreme cases, loss of fluids could lead to dehydration.

What is the treatment for Norovirus?

- The disease is self-limiting — the infection, even though it takes a lot out of the patient, normally lasts only two or three days, and most individuals who are not very young, very old, or malnourished can ride it out with sufficient rest and hydration.

How do you get Norovirus?

- Norovirus is highly contagious, and can be transmitted through contaminated food, water, and surfaces. The primary route is oral-faecal.
- One may get infected multiple times as the virus has different strains. Norovirus is resistant to many disinfectants and heat up to 60°C.
- Therefore, merely steaming food or chlorinating water does not kill the virus. The virus can also survive many common hand sanitisers.
- The basic precaution is also the most obvious — repeatedly washing hands with soap after using the lavatory or changing diapers. It is important to wash hands scrupulously before eating or preparing food.
- During outbreaks, surfaces must be disinfected with a solution of hypochlorite at 5,000 parts per million. Diagnosis is done by real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction.
- No vaccines are available for the disease. It is important to maintain hydration in the acute phase. In extreme cases, patients have to be administered rehydration fluids intravenously.

Landraces

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Among the winners of this year's Padma awards is Rahibai Popere, popularly known as Seedmother, from Akole taluka of Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. Her Padma Shri is a recognition of her work that has helped save hundreds of landraces (wild varieties of commonly grown crops) at the village level.

What is Landrace

- Landraces refer to naturally occurring variants of commonly cultivated crops.
- These are as opposed to commercially grown crops, which are developed by selective breeding (hybrids) or through genetic engineering to express a certain trait over others.
- With hybrid rice and wheat, for example, selective breeding over a period of time has allowed scientists to develop varieties that have higher yield or other desirable traits. Over the years, farmers have adopted these varieties.
- Rajashree Joshi, programme director of Pune-headquartered BAIF Development Research Foundation, said crop improvement through selection and breeding over several decades has narrowed the genetic base of most crops.
- "Biodiversity allows a natural mechanism for crops to develop traits to face challenging situations. However, given the large-scale human interference in crop selection, that ability is now lost in most commercially crops," she said.
- Amid the threat of climate change, a challenge before scientists and policymakers is to develop varieties that can withstand both abiotic and biotic stresses. Naturally occurring landraces have a large pool of still untapped genetic material, which can provide solutions.
- "Genetic diversity is nature's survival mechanism. The wider the gene pool, the more the chance of developing a trait that can help in surviving extreme climate events," Joshi said.
- Sanjay Patil, senior programme executive of BAIF, gave the example of kalbhat, a unique landrace of scented rice.

- Over the years, this variant had almost vanished from cultivators' fields as hybrid variants became popular. It has better climate resilience than popularly grown rice and can withstand flood or drought better, Patil said.
- A common misconception, both Patil and Joshi said, was that landraces have lower yields than hybrids. "With proper agricultural practices, landraces can give better yield with lower input costs."

Community-led conservation

- Since 2008, BAIF has initiated a community-led programme to preserve landraces.
- Today, landraces survive in only a few rural and tribal pockets, but they too are depleting for want of proper conservation.
- Traditional knowledge about the way these need to be grown, or how seeds are to be saved, is also vanishing.
- BAIF's programme involves the community in saving this rich biodiversity in their own backyard.
- In 2008, the project was started in Jawahar taluka of Palghar district; in 2014, it was expanded to Pune, Ahmednagar, Nandurbar, and Gadchiroli districts. At present, it is implemented in 94 villages in Maharashtra and also in Uttarakhand and Gujarat.
- It aims to identify germplasm available and, through community participation, create seed banks. Over the year, the programme has documented 595 accessions of different crops and developed five seed banks for edible crops.
- A morphological study of 259 crop cultivars and a molecular study of 112 crop cultivars have also been undertaken.
- The programme has deposited 150 landraces of paddy, finger millet, and little millet to the National Bureau Plant Genetic Resource, and received registration certificates for five sorghum varieties. A network of 5,000 seed savers has been developed.

RBI Retail Direct Scheme and Integrated Ombudsman Scheme

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched two customer-centric initiatives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — the RBI Retail Direct Scheme and the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme. With this, India has opened up the government bond market for retail investors.

RBI Retail Direct Scheme

- The scheme allows retail investors to buy and sell government securities (G-Sec) online, both in the primary and secondary markets.
- According to details provided by RBI, these small investors can now invest in G-Secs by opening a gilt securities account with the RBI. The account opened will be called Retail Direct Gilt (RDG) Account.
- According to notification issued by the RBI, a retail investor can open the RDG account if they have following — a Rupee savings bank account maintained in India, PAN card, any official valid document such as Aadhaar, Voter ID for KYC purpose, a valid email ID and a registered mobile number.
- Participation and allotment of securities will be as per the non-competitive scheme. Only one bid per security is permitted.
- On submission of the bid, the total amount payable will be displayed. Payment to the aggregator/receiving office can be made through using the net-banking or UPI facility from the linked bank account, whereby funds will be debited at the time of submission of bids on the portal.
- Registered investors can access the secondary market transaction link on the online portal to buy or sell government securities through NDS-OM.



- For buying of government bonds, payment can be made through either of the following ways: before start of trading hours or during the day, the investor should transfer funds to the designated account of CCIL (Clearing Corporation of India NDS-OM). Based on the actual transfer/success message, a funding limit (buying limit) will be given for placing the 'Buy' orders. At the end of the trading session, any excess funds lying to the credit of the investor will be refunded.

RBI Integrated Ombudsman Scheme

- This will help in improving the grievance redress mechanism for resolving customer complaints against RBI's regulated entities. According to the PMO, the scheme is based on "One Nation-One Ombudsman" with one portal, one email, and one address for the customers to lodge their complaints.
- Customers will be able to file complaints, submit documents, track status, and give feedback through a single email address. There will also be a multilingual toll-free number that will provide all relevant information on grievance redress.
- Now, there will be a single point of reference for customers to file their complaints, submit the documents, track status, and provide feedback.
- Under this scheme, there will be a multilingual toll-free number that will provide all relevant information on grievance redress and assistance for filing complaints. The redressal will continue to be cost-free for customers of banks and members of the public.

Delimitation of PMC electoral panels

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Maharashtra state election commission has directed the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to prepare a draft delimitation of electoral panels for the civic body as it is headed for polls in the next few months. The draft has to be submitted to the election commission by November 30 so that further procedures to finalise the jurisdiction of each panel can be completed.*

Need for delimitation

- The state government recently issued an ordinance to amend the Maharashtra Municipal Corporation Act, 1952, **revising the number of corporators** to be elected to civic bodies including the PMC.
- Citing the unavailability of 2021 census data, which has been delayed due to the ongoing pandemic, the state government has increased the number of corporators to be elected to civic bodies.
- Accordingly, the PMC will have 173 corporators for the next five-year term, as against the existing strength of 164.
- Also, the Maharashtra government has decided to hold civic elections on the basis of a three-member electoral panel, instead of the four-member electoral panel on the basis of which the 2017 civic elections were held by the then BJP-Shiv Sena alliance government.
- Besides, the extension of PMC's boundaries by the state government has increased its jurisdiction, making it the largest civic body in Maharashtra.
- The state election commission has stated that 173 corporators would be elected from the 58 electoral panels in PMC – three corporators each would be elected from 57 electoral panels and two corporators from one electoral panel.

Average population per electoral panel

- Dividing the overall city population by the number of corporators to be elected will give the average population of an electoral panel.



- As per the 2011 census, the population of PMC is fixed at 35,56,824, which includes 4,80,017 citizens in the Scheduled Caste category and 41,561 in the Scheduled Tribe category.
- It has to be ensured that the population of each electoral panel is +/-10 per cent of the average population.
- If there are exceptions, with a panel having a population more or less than the given limit, then reasons should be mentioned for the same.
- The only electoral panel consisting of two members should be the last one in the list or, in exceptional cases, if it is in between other electoral panels owing to geographical conditions, then proper reasons have to be given for its positioning.

Panel creation based on directions

- The constitution of electoral panels should begin from the northern part of the city, proceed to the northeast then head towards the east.
- Further, it should move towards the west and finally end in the southern part of the civic jurisdiction. The electoral panels should be numbered accordingly. It should be ensured that each electoral panel has geographical continuity.
- Boundaries of electoral panels should be decided after considering geographical boundaries arising due to large roads, lanes, rivers, nullahs, hills, roads and flyovers.
- It should be ensured that no building, chawl or house gets divided into two electoral panels under any circumstance.
- Also, the entire area of the civic body, including vacant plots, must be included in one electoral panel or the other. There should not be any scope for citizens to raise doubts over the delimitation process. The map of electoral panels should have the names of rivers, nullahs, roads and the city survey number.

Exceptional circumstances

- Though electoral panels have to be constituted considering the population and geographical boundaries, in public interest the localities should not be divided, especially that of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.
- Also, the commutation of citizens of a particular area should be taken into consideration. Primary health centres, hospitals, crematoriums, markets, water supply and sewage treatment facilities should be retained in the electoral panel that includes its beneficiaries.
- Schools and playgrounds too should be retained in the same electoral panel that includes the children of the respective beneficiaries.

Naming electoral panels

- The boundaries of each electoral panel should be defined in such a manner that they give a fair idea of its entire jurisdiction to citizens.
- The numbering of electoral panels can be done, but the possibility of naming it may also be explored.
- However, it is not mandatory and the Municipal Commissioner will take a decision on it.
- The names should be in such a manner that it easily identifies the entire electoral panel area and it can be based on a popular location or the area with the largest population.

Mapping process

- The mapping of an electoral panel has to be done on Google Earth map of the city. It should have a clear identification of important locations, roads, rivers, nullahs, railway lines and other structures.
- The electoral panel boundaries should be in red colour. Also, there should be a separate map for each electoral panel with clear boundaries and precise marking of roads, rivers, nullahs in it.

Avoiding legal tangles

- The state election commission has noted from prior experience that ward officers are prone to making mistakes.



- The constitution of electoral panels is sometimes done under political pressure. This leads to citizens challenging it in the high court and causes delay in the election process.
- Thus, the election commission would verify the delimitation draft and if mistakes are noticed, the concerned authority will have to respond to it. Also, the draft delimitation map would be kept confidential till it is opened during allotment of reserved seats.

Earth's first landmass emerged in Singhbhum: study

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *A new study has challenged the widely accepted view that the continents rose from the oceans about 2.5 billion years ago. It suggests this happened 700 million years earlier — about 3.2 billion years ago — and that the earliest continental landmass to emerge may have been Jharkhand's Singhbhum region. The study, by researchers from India, Australia and the US, has been published in the journal PNAS.*

Sandstones of Singhbhum

- Scientists have found sandstones in Singhbhum with geological signatures of ancient river channels, tidal plains and beaches over 3.2 billion years old, representing the earliest crust exposed to air.
- “We found a particular type of sedimentary rocks, called sandstones. We then tried to find their age and in which conditions they have formed. We found the age by analysing the uranium and lead contents of tiny minerals. These rocks are 3.1 billion years old, and were formed in ancient rivers, beaches, and shallow seas. All these water bodies could have only existed if there was continental land. Thus, we inferred that the Singhbhum region was above the ocean before 3.1 billion years ago,” Chowdhury said.
- Patches of the earliest continental land, however, exist in Australia and South Africa, too, he said.

The analysis

- The researchers studied the granites that form the continental crust of Singhbhum region.
- “These granites are 3.5 to 3.1 billion years old and formed through extensive volcanism that happened about 35-45 km deep inside the Earth and continued on-and-off for hundreds of millions of years until all the magma solidified to form a thick continental crust in the area. Due to the thickness and less density, the continental crust emerged above surrounding oceanic crust owing to buoyancy,” Chowdhury said.
- The researchers believe the earliest emergence of continents would have contributed to a proliferation of photosynthetic organisms, which would have increased oxygen levels in the atmosphere. “Once you create land, what you also create is shallow seas, like lagoons,” Chowdhury said.

India seeks \$1 tn in ‘climate finance’ to meet its targets

Context: *India has demanded a trillion dollars over the next decade from developed countries to adapt to, and mitigate, the challenges arising from global warming, and has kept this as a condition for delivering on climate commitments made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.*

Details:

- India's five-fold plan (see box) aims at reducing the carbon intensity of its economy and eventually achieving net zero by 2070.
- Net zero is when a country's carbon emissions are offset by taking out equivalent carbon from the atmosphere, so that emissions in balance are zero.



- However, achieving net zero by a specific date means specifying a year, also called a peaking year, following which emissions will begin to fall.
- Our NDCs (Nationally Determined Contribution) are conditional, that is, subjected to the availability of this amount [\$1 trillion] in climate finance. NDCs can be submitted with conditions.
- The decision on when to submit revised NDCs has not yet been taken.
- NDCs are voluntary targets that countries set for themselves, which describe the quantum and kind of emission cuts they will undertake over a fixed period to contribute to preventing runaway global warming.
- India's last NDC was submitted following the 2015 Paris deal. Before COP26 began on November 1, nations were expected to provide updated NDCs. India, however, did not furnish one.
- Delivering on climate finance is among the stickiest points of contention between developed and developing countries because developed countries, as a group, have failed to provide \$100 billion annually by 2020, as promised from a decade ago. With the conference scheduled to draw to an end on Friday, nearly 200 countries are yet to finalise an agreement.

Green assurance

India's five-fold plan, as spelt out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 2

- 1 India's non-fossil energy capacity will reach 500 GW by 2030
- 2 The country will meet 50% of its electricity requirements with renewable energy by 2030
- 3 It will reduce its total projected carbon emissions by a billion tonnes by 2030



- 4 India will cut the carbon intensity of its economy to less than 45%
- 5 Country will achieve net zero by 2070

Devasahayam

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

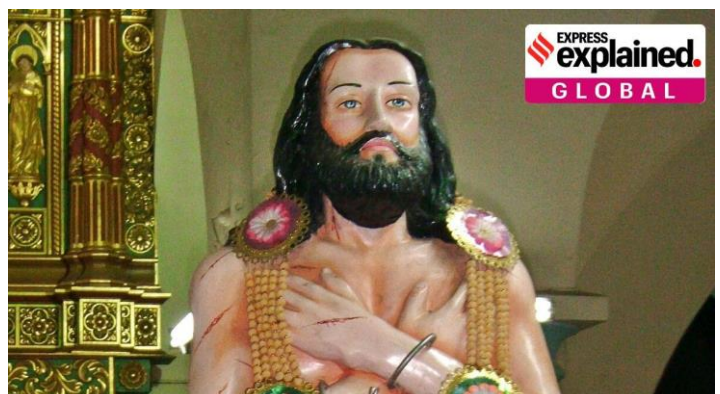
Context: A Hindu man from Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, who converted to Christianity in the 18th century, is set to become the **first Indian layman to be declared a saint** by the Vatican on May 15, 2022.

Details:

- Devasahayam Pillai, who took the name 'Lazarus' in 1745, was first approved for sainthood in February 2020 for "enduring increasing hardships" after he decided to embrace Christianity, the Vatican said.
- Devasahayam is said to have faced harsh persecution and imprisonment after he decided to convert to Christianity, ultimately resulting in his killing in 1752.
- While he was declared eligible for sainthood last year, the Vatican announced the date of the ceremony recently.

So, what do we know about Devasahayam Pillai?

- Born on April 23, 1712 in the village of Nattalam in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari District, Devasahayam went on to serve in the court of Travancore's Maharaja Marthanda Varma. It was here that he met a Dutch naval commander, who taught him about the Catholic faith.
- In 1745, soon after he was baptised, he assumed the name 'Lazarus', meaning 'God is my help'. But he then faced the wrath of the Travancore state, which was against his conversion





- His conversion did not go well with the heads of his native religion. False charges of treason and espionage were brought against him and he was divested of his post in the royal administration. He was imprisoned and subjected to harsh persecution.
- While preaching, he particularly insisted on the equality of all people, despite caste differences. This aroused the hatred of the higher classes, and he was arrested in 1749.
- On January 14, 1752, just seven years after he became a Catholic, Devasahayam was shot dead in the Aralvaimozhy forest.
- Since then, he has widely been considered a martyr by the Catholic community in South India. His body is now at Saint Francis Xavier Cathedral in the Diocese of Kottar.

Why was he approved for sainthood?

- In 2004, the diocese of Kottar in Kanyakumari, along with the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council (TNBC) and the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) recommended Devasahayam for beatification to the Vatican. In February, last year, the Vatican declared that he was eligible for sainthood.
- He was declared blessed by the Kottar diocese in 2012, 300 years after his birth. "In remarks that day during the midday 'Angelus' prayer in the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI recalled Devasahayam as 'faithful layman'.
- He urged Christians to "join in the joy of the Church in India and pray that the new Blessed may sustain the faith of the Christians of that large and noble country," the note from the Vatican stated.

What was the controversy surrounding his name?

- Devasahayam's ascent to sainthood was not without controversy.
- In 2017, two former IAS officers wrote to Cardinal Angelo Amato, who was then the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, urging them to drop Devasahayam's last name 'Pillai' as it was a caste title. However at the time, the Vatican declined their request.
- It was only in February 2020, when the Vatican cleared him for sainthood, that they dropped 'Pillai' from his name, referring to him as 'Blessed Devasahayam'.

E-Amrit Portal

(Source: [PIB](#))

Context: *The Government of India launched the E-Amrit web portal on electric vehicles at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow.*

The Portal:

- The E-Amrit portal acts as the one-stop destination for providing all information about electric vehicles and the myths surrounding them including their adoption, purchase, investment opportunities, policies and subsidies.
- The portal has been developed by NITI Aayog in association with the UK government to boost the UK-India Roadmap 2030. In the upcoming days, more features will be added to this portal to make it interactive.

Objectives:

- The important purpose of the E-Amrit portal is to increase awareness about electrical vehicles and encourage people to switch to such vehicles.
- To ensure the decarbonisation of transport with the introduction of electric mobility that would assist in reducing the carbon footprint.

- As India also celebrates Transport Day at COP26, initiatives like the launch of the E-Amrit portal will play a pivotal role in increasing the pace of zero emission vehicle transition and also address the challenges.



INTERNATIONAL

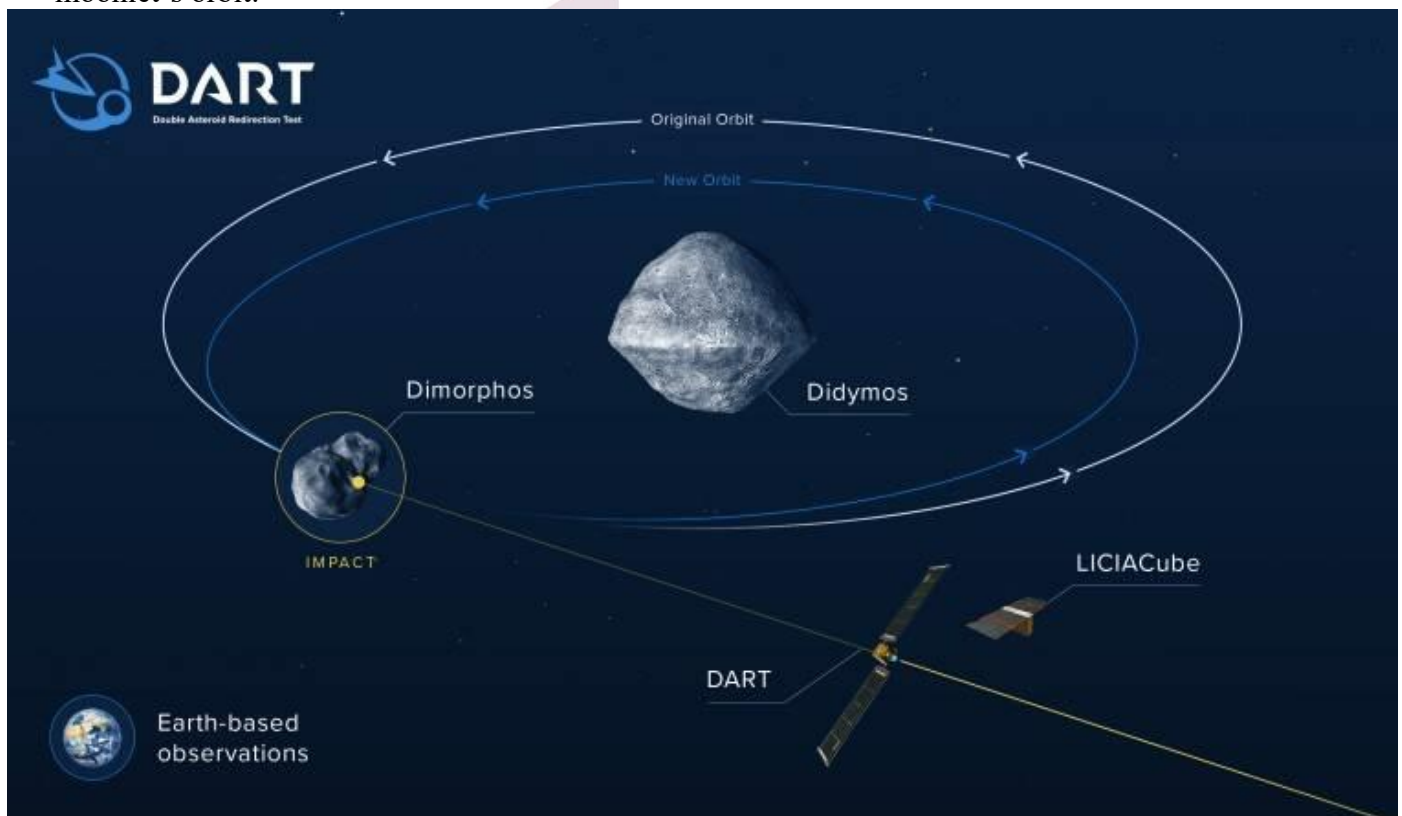
NASA's DART mission

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: On November 24, at around 11.50 am (IST), NASA will launch the agency's first planetary defense test mission named the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART). The main aim of the mission is to test the newly developed technology that would allow a spacecraft to crash into an asteroid and change its course. The spacecraft will be launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

Which asteroid will be deflected?

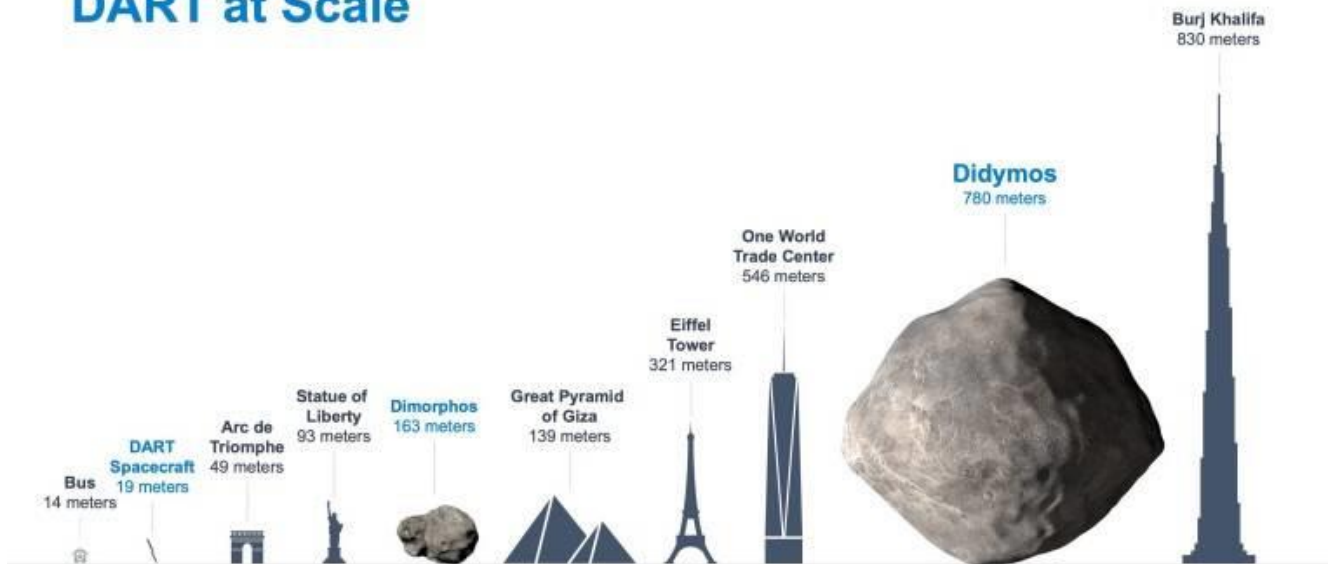
- The target of the spacecraft is a small moonlet called Dimorphos (Greek for “two forms”). It is about 160-metre in diameter and the spacecraft is expected to collide when it is 11 million kilometres away from Earth.
- Dimorphos orbits a larger asteroid named Didymos (Greek for “twin”) which has a diameter of 780 metres. The asteroid and the moonlet do not pose any threat to Earth and the mission is to test the new technology to be prepared in case an asteroid heads towards Earth in the future.
- The spacecraft will navigate to the moonlet and intentionally collide with it at a speed of about 6.6 kilometres per second or 24,000 kilometres per hour. The collision is expected to take place between September 26 and October 1, 2022.
- It is a suicide mission and the spacecraft will be completely destroyed. Across the globe, various telescopes will work together and observe the event and study the impact of DART – changes in the moonlet's orbit.



Why Dimorphos?

- In a podcast with Planetary Radio, Nancy Chabot, DART Mission Coordination Lead and Planetary Scientist for Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab explained that Didymos is a perfect system for the test mission because it is an eclipsing binary which means it has a moonlet that regularly orbits the asteroid and we can see it when it passes in front of the main asteroid.
- Earth-based telescopes can study this variation in brightness to understand how long it takes Dimorphos to orbit Didymos.
- The timing for the DART impact is when the Didymos system is closest to the Earth. So the telescopes can really make the most precise measurement possible.

DART at Scale



How big is the spacecraft?

- NASA states that DART is a low-cost spacecraft, weighing around 610 kg at launch and 550 kg during impact.
- The main structure is a box ($1.2 \times 1.3 \times 1.3$ metres). It has two solar arrays and uses hydrazine propellant for maneuvering the spacecraft.
- It also carries about 10 kg of xenon which will be used to demonstrate the agency's new thrusters called NASA Evolutionary Xenon Thruster–Commercial (NEXT-C) in space.
- NEXT has very high fuel efficiency and flexible operations making it ideal for many classes of science missions.
- The spacecraft carries a high-resolution imager called Didymos Reconnaissance and Asteroid Camera for Optical Navigation (DRACO). Images from DRACO will be sent to Earth in real-time and will help study the impact site and surface of Dimorphos.
- DART will also carry a small satellite or CubeSat named LICIAcube (Light Italian CubeSat for Imaging of Asteroids).
- It will be deployed ten days before the impact on Dimorphos.
- LICIAcube is expected to capture images of the impact and the impact crater formed as a result of the collision. It can also capture images of any dust cloud formed during the impact.

The Sun lights up aurorae in high-latitude countries

(Source: The Hindu)

Context: A solar flare that occurred on the Sun triggered a magnetic storm which scientists from Center of Excellence in Space Sciences India (CESSI), in Indian Institutes for Science Education and Research, Kolkata, had predicted will arrive at the Earth in the early hours of November 4, and they said that the magnitude of this storm would be such as to trigger spectacular displays of aurora (the coloured bands of light seen in the North and South poles) in the high-latitude and polar regions, just in time for the Deepavali celebrations in India. This prediction, which was based on models built by them and data from NASA's observatories, seems to have come true, as people from several countries were tweeting pictures of aurorae.

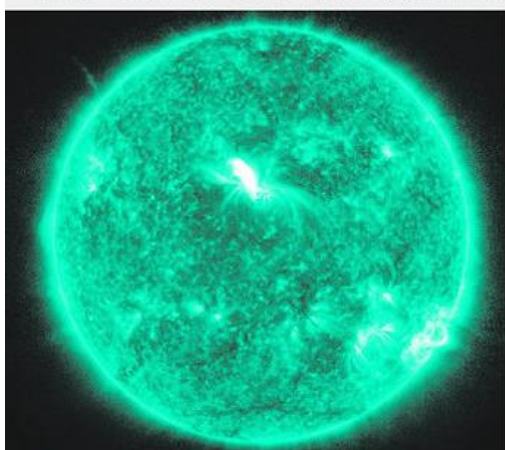
Effect on atmosphere

- Judging by data from the NASA DSCOVR satellite, the scientists observed a steep jump in transverse magnetic fields, density and speeds of the plasma wind that are tell-tale signatures of the arrival of a coronal mass ejection (CME) shock front, according to Dibyendu Nandi of CESSI Kolkata whose team predicted the event.

Sunspots seed storms

- The solar magnetic cycle that works in the deep interior of the Sun creates regions that rise to the surface and appear like dark spots. These are the sunspots. Solar flares are highly energetic phenomena that happen inside the sunspots.
- In a solar flare, the energy stored in the Sun's magnetic structures is converted into light and heat energy. This causes the emission of high energy x-ray radiation and highly accelerated charged particles to leave the Sun's surface.
- Sometimes solar flares also cause hot plasma to be ejected from the Sun, causing a solar storm, and this is called Coronal Mass Ejection (CME). Coronal Mass Ejections can harbour energies exceeding that of a billion atomic bombs.
- The energy, radiation and high-energy particles emitted by the flares can affect Earth-bound objects and life on Earth – it can affect the electronics within satellites and affect astronauts.
- Very powerful Earth-directed coronal mass ejections can cause failure of power grids and affect oil pipelines and deep-sea cables. They can also cause spectacular aurorae in the high-latitude and polar countries.
- The last time a major blackout due to a coronal mass ejection was recorded was in 1989 – a powerful geomagnetic storm that took down the North American power grid, plunging large parts of Canada into darkness and triggering spectacular aurorae beyond the polar regions.

The Sun's contribution to the festival of lights



Storm seed: Image of the November 2 M-class flare captured using the extreme ultraviolet imaging telescope attached to NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) satellite. The flare brightening is clearly visible, near the disc's centre.

■ A solar flare that occurred on the Sun triggered a magnetic storm which came towards the Earth

■ Scientists from Center of Excellence in Space Sciences India (CESSI), in IISER, Kolkata, predicted that the solar storm would arrive at the Earth at 2.14 a.m. IST on November 4, moving at a speed of 768 km/s

■ The storm arrived at 1 a.m. IST on November 4 and with speeds between 750 km/s and 800 km/s as observed by NASA

■ Very powerful Earth-directed coronal mass ejections can cause failure of power grids and affect oil pipelines and deep-sea cables

■ They also cause spectacular aurorae in the high-latitude and polar countries

■ On November 4, people tweeted that aurorae, or brilliant streaks of light in the sky, have been observed in many countries, coinciding with the arrival of the storm

Predicting solar storms

- The process of prediction takes place in two steps: First the researchers analyse the possibility of a strong solar flare from an active region – that is, clusters of sunspots – using a machine learning algorithm which has been developed in CESSI, IISER Kolkata.
- This algorithm needs observations of the sunspot magnetic fields, from which we extract various parameters to train the algorithm. We use data from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory, specifically, the Helioseismic and Magnetic Imager instrument, for this purpose.
- The second step is estimating the time of arrival on Earth of coronal mass ejections and forecasting the geomagnetic storm. The group uses the near-Sun evolution of the coronal mass ejections through European Space Agency's SOHO satellite and NASA's STEREO satellite to extract their speed.
- There is an associated flare, and its position on the Sun is used to extract the location of origin of the CME.
- The location of the source of the CME and the velocity are used as inputs by the group in a publicly available model widely called the Drag Based Ensemble Model to calculate the CME arrival times and speed.

What caused Earth's first mass extinction

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Before the Cretaceous mass extinction known for wiping out non-avian dinosaurs, the Earth had witnessed four other great mass extinctions. A paper published last week in the journal, *Nature Geoscience*, has come up with a new reason behind the first mass extinction, also known as the Late Ordovician mass extinction. The article notes that the cooling climate likely changed the ocean circulation pattern. This caused a disruption in the flow of oxygen-rich water from the shallow seas to deeper oceans, leading to a mass extinction of marine creatures.

Details:

- The Ordovician mass extinction that occurred about 445 million years ago killed about 85% of all species. The other big extinction events were:
 - The Devonian mass extinction (about 375 million years ago) wiped out about 75% of the world's species.
 - The Permian mass extinction (about 250 million years ago) also known as the Great Dying caused the extinction of over 95% of all species.
 - The Triassic mass extinction (200 million years ago) eliminated about 80% of Earth's species, including some dinosaurs.
- Some researchers have pointed out that we are currently experiencing a sixth mass extinction as the result of human-induced climate change.
- There have been several theories behind each mass extinction and with advances in new technologies, researchers have been uncovering more intricate details about these events.
- The team measured iodine concentration in rocks from that period to understand the changes in oceanic oxygen levels. Computer modelling simulations suggested that climate cooling was likely responsible for the Late Ordovician mass extinction. They also noticed a lack of oxygen or anoxia in deep oceans during the period.
- "Upper-ocean oxygenation in response to cooling was anticipated because atmospheric oxygen preferentially dissolves in cold waters. However, we were surprised to see expanded anoxia in the lower



ocean since anoxia in Earth's history is generally associated with volcanism-induced global warming," said the first author, Alexandre Pohl, from the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, the University of California, in a release.

- Their models that used data on the Ordovician climate and marine biogeochemical cycles during that period showed "seafloor and upper-ocean oxygenation in response to ongoing global cooling." This deep-sea anoxia affected ocean circulation. Pohl says that a key point to keep in mind is that ocean circulation is a very important component of the climatic system.
- The paper concludes that climate cooling may have led to changes in nutrient cycling, primary producer communities which ultimately drove the Late Ordovician mass extinction.

A ranking of countries on drug policies and implementation

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The inaugural Global Drug Policy Index, released on Sunday by the Harm Reduction Consortium, ranks Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, the UK and Australia as the five leading countries on humane and health-driven drug policies. The five lowest-ranking countries are Brazil, Uganda, Indonesia, Kenya, and Mexico. India's rank is 18 out of 30 countries

WHAT'S THIS INDEX?

- It is a data-driven global analysis of drug policies and their implementation.
- It is composed of 75 indicators running across five broad dimensions of drug policy: criminal justice, extreme responses, health and harm reduction, access to internationally controlled medicines, and development.
- It is a project of the Harm Reduction Consortium, whose partners include: the European Network of People Who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD), the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA), the Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs (ENPUD), the Global Drug Policy Observatory (GDPO) / Swansea University, Harm Reduction International (HRI), the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), the Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR), the West African Drug Policy Network (WADPN), the Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN), and Youth RISE.

READING THE RANKINGS:

- Norway, despite topping the Index, only managed a score of 74/100. And the median score across all 30 countries and dimensions is just 48/100.
- 48 out of 100 is a drug policy fail in anyone's book. None of the countries assessed should feel good about their score on drug policy, because no country has reached a perfect score. Or anywhere near it.
- India has an overall score of 46/100.
- On the criteria of use of extreme sentencing and responses, it has a score of 63/100, on health and harm reduction, 49/100; on proportionality of criminal justice response, 38/100; on availability and access of internationally controlled substances for the relief of pain and suffering, 33 /100.

RANKINGS OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE
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Top 5

1	Norway	74/100
2	New Zealand	71/100
3	Portugal	70/100
4	UK	69/100
5	Australia	65/100

18	India	46/100
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Bottom 5

26	Mexico	35/100
27	Kenya	34/100
28	Indonesia	29/100
29	Uganda	28/100
30	Brazil	26/100

Issi saaneq: New dinosaur species

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: In 1994, palaeontologists from Harvard University unearthed two well-preserved dinosaur skulls during an excavation in East Greenland. One of the specimens was originally thought to be from a *Plateosaurus*, a well-known long-necked dinosaur that lived in Germany, France and Switzerland. Now, an international team of researchers from Portugal, Denmark and Germany has performed a micro-CT scan of the bones, which enabled them to create digital 3D models. They have determined that the finds belong to a new species, which they have named *Issi saaneq*. They have reported their findings in the journal *Diversity*.

Details:

- The two-legged *Issi saaneq* lived about 214 million years ago in what is now Greenland.
- It was a medium-sized, long necked herbivore and a predecessor of the sauropods, the largest land animals ever to live.
- The name of the new dinosaur pays tribute to Greenland's Inuit language and means "coldbone", Martin Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg said in a press release.
- The new findings are the first evidence of a distinct Greenlandic dinosaur species. The two skulls come from a juvenile and an almost adult individual.
- The dinosaur differs from all other sauropodomorphs discovered so far, but has similarities with dinosaurs found in Brazil, such as the *Macrocollum* and *Unaysaurus*, which are almost 15 million years older, the release said.

Leonids Meteor Shower

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The annual Leonids Meteor Shower has begun. This year's shower is active between November 6 and 30, with peak activity expected on November 17. The peak time of a meteor shower comes when the Earth passes through the densest part of the debris. On November 17, bits of the cosmic debris will appear to viewers from Earth like a display of fireworks in the sky.

Details:

- The debris that forms this meteor shower originates from a small comet called 55P/Tempel-Tuttle in the constellation Leo, which takes 33 years to orbit the sun.
- The Leonids are considered to be a major shower that features the fastest meteors, which typically travel at speeds of 71 km per second, although the rates are often as low as 15 meteors per hour, NASA notes.
- The Leonids are also called fireballs and earthgazer meteors. Fireballs, because of their bright colours, and earthgazer, because they streak close to the horizon.
- The light—which is why a meteor is called a shooting star — is a result of the friction between the meteorite and the molecules present in the Earth's atmosphere because of which it burns.
- Every 33 years, a Leonid shower turns into a meteor storm, which is when hundreds to thousands of meteors can be seen every hour. A meteor storm should have at least 1,000 meteors per hour. In 1966, a Leonid storm offered views of thousands of meteors that fell through the Earth's atmosphere per minute during a period of 15 minutes, NASA notes. The last such storm took place in 2002.



- The showers are visible on any cloudless night when the Moon is not very bright. Ideally, the viewing location should have no light pollution; the farther away from cities the better. According to the website EarthSky, city, state and national parks are often great places to watch meteor showers.
- NASA recommends that one should only look at the constellation Leo to view the Leonids, which are visible throughout the night sky. In fact, they are best viewed at about midnight. The eyes adapt to darkness in about 30 minutes and the meteors are usually visible up until day break.

Abu Dhabi's new law on marriage and divorce

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Abu Dhabi passed a law allowing non-Muslims to marry, divorce and get joint child custody under civil law in the country. Before this, non-Muslims here had to get married in the embassy or consulate of their country.*

What is the Personal Status Law for non-Muslims?

- The law has been issued by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the President of the United Arab Emirates.
- The law is the first civil law passed by the Emirates concerning non-Muslim family matters. As per the Judicial department of Abu Dhabi, the law aims at guaranteeing the right to non-Muslims to adhere to an “internationally acknowledged law” in terms of customs, culture, language and protecting the best interests of their children.
- Being the first of its kind in gulf countries, where marriage and divorce laws are guided through Islamic Sharia law, the new law would apply civil principles in the regulation of all family matters pertaining to non-Muslims.
- Under the new law, courts dedicated to non-Muslim family matters will be set up by the Judicial Department, and will function in Arabic and English “in order to facilitate the understanding of judicial procedures by foreigners and to improve judicial transparency”, the Justice Department said, announcing the set up of the first such court.
- As per Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD), the law comprises 20 articles, which are divided into five chapters relating to civil marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.
- The first chapter of the law amends the marriage procedure for foreigners by bringing in the concept of marriage being held on the will of husband and wife.
- The second chapter lays down laws for divorce procedures for non-Muslims, outlining the rights of divorced partners and financial rights of a wife after divorce. The monetary rights of a wife after separation would be left to the discretion of a judge based on criteria such as “the number of years of marriage, the age of the wife, the economic standing of each of the spouses”.
- The third chapter deals with the custody of a child after divorce. It introduces the concept of joint custody, where a child’s custody is equally shared between mother and father. The law brings in this concept “to safeguard the cohesion of the family after divorce and to preserve the psychological health of the children”.
- The fourth chapter sets up laws for inheritance, registration of wills for non-Muslims and also establishes the right of a foreigner to draw a will and pass on their assets to whomever they choose.
- The fifth chapter of the law addresses the proof of paternity for non-Muslim foreigners, “providing that the proof of paternity of the newborn child is based on marriage or recognition of paternity”.
- Youssef Saeed Al Abri, Undersecretary of the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department, said that the judicial department has been working to “provide innovative solutions to non-Muslims’ personal status issues that are brought before the courts, after studying and analysing them and working to come up with

sophisticated legislative solutions that provide a modern judicial framework for foreigners residing in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi to resolve family disputes in a flexible manner in line with international best practices”.

What has the law changed for non-Muslims in Abu Dhabi?

- For marriages under Sharia law, both bride and groom have to be Muslims, or the groom can be Muslim and the bride can be Christian. While Muslim men are allowed to marry non-Muslim women, vice versa is not permitted.
- The new law doesn't require the consent of the woman's guardian anymore and only requires the marriage to be held on the will of the man and woman.
- Non-Muslims can seek divorce without having to prove that harm was done in the marriage and either of the spouses can file for divorce. According to Khaleej Times, a UAE media organisation, earlier, physical harm had to be proved for divorce.
- Earlier, after filing for divorce, couples had to go to the Family Guidance department and a court-appointed conciliator tried to reconcile the two partners. Now, the divorce can be granted at the first hearing without going through these processes.
- In the case of a child's custody, while the new law allows both parents to have joint custody and equally share the custody after divorce, earlier, the custody would be with the mother and the father used to be a guardian (to financially provide) of the child.
- According to the older law, “Custody and guardianship are two separate issues that must be addressed individually as parents do not share equal responsibilities for a child in the UAE”.

Mains

GS I

The enduring relevance of Nehru's legacy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Four men embodied the vision of free India in the 1940s — Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Ambedkar. Gandhi's moral rectitude, allied to Jawaharlal Nehru's political passion, fashioned both the strategy and tactics for the struggle against British rule. Sardar Patel's firm hand on the administration integrated the nation and established peace and stability. Ambedkar's erudition and legal acumen helped translate the dreams of a generation into a working legal document that laid the foundations for an enduring democracy.*

Setting the way

- While the world was disintegrating into fascism, violence, and war, Gandhi taught the virtues of truth, non-violence, and peace. While the nation reeled from bloodshed and communal carnage, Ambedkar preached the values of constitutionalism and the rule of law.
- While parochial ambitions threatened national unity, Patel led the nation to a vision of unity and common purpose.
- While mobs marched the streets baying for revenge, Nehru's humane and non-sectarian vision inspired India to yearn again for the glory that had once been hers.
- Of the four, Gandhi and Nehru stood out. Despite differences over both tactics (Nehru wanted Independence immediately whereas Gandhi believed Indians had to be made ready for their own freedom) and philosophy (the agnostic Nehru had little patience for the Mahatma's spirituality), the two men proved a formidable combination.
- Gandhi guided Nehru to his political pinnacle; Nehru in turn proved an inspirational campaigner as President of the Indian National Congress, electrifying the nation with his speeches and tireless travel.

Keeper of the flame

- Upon the Mahatma's assassination in 1948, just five months after Independence, Nehru, the country's first Prime Minister, became the keeper of the national flame, the most visible embodiment of India's struggle for freedom.
- Gandhi's death could have led Nehru to assume untrammelled power. Instead, he spent a lifetime immersed in the democratic values Ambedkar had codified, trying to instill the habits of democracy in his people — a disdain for dictators, a respect for parliamentary procedures, an abiding faith in the constitutional system.
- Till the end of the decade, his staunch ally Patel provided the firm hand on the tiller without which India might yet have split asunder.
- For the first 17 years of India's Independence, the paradox-ridden Nehru — a moody, idealist intellectual who felt an almost mystical empathy with the toiling peasant masses; an aristocrat, accustomed to privilege, who had passionate socialist convictions; an Anglicized product of Harrow and Cambridge who spent over 10 years in British jails; an agnostic radical who became an unlikely protégé of the saintly Mahatma Gandhi — was India.
- Incorruptible, visionary, ecumenical, a politician above politics, Nehru's stature was so great that the country he led seemed inconceivable without him. A year before his death a leading American journalist,

Welles Hangen, published a book entitled After Nehru, Who? the unspoken question around the world was: “after Nehru, what?”

- Today, looking back on his 132nd birthday and nearly six decades after his death, we have something of an answer to the latter question.
- As an India still seemingly clad in many of the trappings of Nehruvianism steps out into the 21st century, a good deal of Jawaharlal Nehru’s legacy appears intact — and yet hotly contested. India has moved away from much of Nehru’s beliefs, and so (in different ways) has the rest of the developing world for which Nehruvianism once spoke.
- As India nears its 75th anniversary of Independence from the British Raj, a transformation — still incomplete — has taken place that, in its essentials, has changed the basic Nehruvian assumptions of postcolonial nationhood. Nehru himself, as a man with an open and questing mind, would have allowed his practical thinking to evolve with the times, even while remaining anchored to his core beliefs.

The pillars of his imprint

- In my 2003 biography, *Nehru: The Invention of India*, I sought to examine this great figure of 20th-century nationalism from the vantage point of the beginning of the 21st. Jawaharlal Nehru’s life is a fascinating story in its own right, and I tried to tell it whole, because the privileged child, the unremarkable youth, the posturing young nationalist, and the heroic fighter for independence are all inextricable from the unchallengeable Prime Minister and peerless global statesman. At the same time, I sought to analyse critically the four principal pillars of Nehru’s legacy to India — democratic institution-building, staunch pan-Indian secularism, socialist economics at home, and a foreign policy of non-alignment — all of which were integral to a vision of Indianness that is fundamentally challenged today.
- Of these, it is the edifice of democracy that Nehru constructed that remains the most indispensable pillar of his contributions to India.
- It was by no means axiomatic that a country like India, riven by so many internal differences and diversities, beset by acute poverty and torn apart by Partition, would be or remain democratic.
- Many developing countries found themselves turning in the opposite direction soon after Independence, arguing that a firm hand was necessary to promote national unity and guide development.
- With Gandhi’s death, Nehru could have very well assumed unlimited power within the country. And yet, he himself was such a convinced democrat, profoundly wary of the risks of autocracy, that, at the crest of his rise, he authored an anonymous article warning Indians of the dangers of giving dictatorial temptations to Jawaharlal Nehru.
- “He must be checked,” he wrote of himself. “We want no Caesars.” And indeed, his practice when challenged within his own party was to offer his resignation; he usually got his way, but it was hardly the instinct of a Caesar.

A deference to the system

- As Prime Minister, Nehru carefully nurtured the country’s infant democratic institutions. He paid deference to the country’s ceremonial presidency and even to its largely otiose vice-presidency; he never let the public forget that these notables outranked him in protocol terms.
- He wrote regular letters to the Chief Ministers of the States, explaining his policies and seeking their feedback.
- He subjected himself and his government to cross-examination in Parliament by the small, fractious but undoubtedly talented Opposition, allowing them an importance out of all proportion to their numerical strength, because he was convinced that a strong Opposition was essential for a healthy democracy.
- He took care not to interfere with the judicial system; on the one occasion that he publicly criticised a judge, he apologised the next day and wrote an abject letter to the Chief Justice, regretting having slighted the judiciary.
- And he never forgot that he derived his authority from the people of India; not only was he astonishingly accessible for a person in his position, but he started the practice of offering a daily darshan at home for

an hour each morning to anyone coming in off the street without an appointment, a practice that continued until the dictates of security finally overcame the populism of his successors.

- It was Nehru who, by his scrupulous regard for both the form and the substance of democracy, instilled democratic habits in our country. His respect for Parliament, his regard for the independence of the judiciary, his courtesy to those of different political convictions, his commitment to free elections, and his deference to institutions over individuals, all left us a precious legacy of freedom.
- The American editor, Norman Cousins, once asked Nehru what he hoped his legacy to India would be. “Four hundred million people capable of governing themselves,” Nehru replied.
- The numbers have grown, but the very fact that each day over a billion Indians govern themselves in a pluralist democracy is testimony to the deeds and words of the man whose birthday we commemorate tomorrow.

GS II

NAM at 60 marks an age of Indian alignment

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru this month and the 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement prompt reflection on Nehru’s major contribution to the field of international relations. The concept of not aligning a country’s policy with others can be traced to the Congress of Vienna of (1814-15) when the neutrality of Switzerland, by which that country would keep out of others’ conflicts, was recognised.*

One world and free India

- Mahatma Gandhi, icon of Indian Independence, believed in non-violent solutions and spirituality, with India having a civilising mission for mankind which accorded well with Nehru’s desire to innovate in world politics and his conception of modernity.
- In 1946, six days after Nehru formed the national government, he stated, “we propose... to keep away from the power politics of groups aligned against one another... it is for One World that free India will work.”
- Nehru, the theoretician, saw world problems as interlinked; not a binary of right and wrong, but as a practical person, his instructions to delegates at international meetings were to consider India’s interests first, even before the merits of the case; this was the paradox of a moral orientation in foreign policy and the compulsions of the real world.
- In essence, Indian non-alignment’s ideological moorings began, lived and died along with Nehru’s idealism, though some features that characterised his foreign policy were retained to sustain diplomatic flexibility and promote India while its economic situation improved sufficiently to be described as an ‘emerging’ power.
- Nehru was opposed to the conformity required by both sides in the Cold War, and his opposition to alliances was justified by American weapons to Pakistan from 1954 and the creation of western-led military blocs in Asia.
- Non-alignment was the least costly policy for promoting India’s diplomatic presence, a sensible approach when India was weak and looked at askance by both blocs, and the best means of securing

economic assistance from abroad. India played a lone hand against colonialism and racism until many African states achieved independence after 1960.

- India played a surprisingly prominent role as facilitator at the 1954 Geneva Peace Conference on Indochina, whereafter non-alignment appeared to have come of age.
- The difficulty was always to find a definition of this policy, which caused a credibility gap between theory and practice. In the early years, there was economic dependence on donor countries who were nearly all members of western military pacts.
- Indian equidistance to both Koreas and both Vietnams was shown by India recognising neither; yet it recognised one party in the two Chinas and two Germanies, and the Treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation between India and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of 1971, fashioned with the liberation war of Bangladesh in view, came dangerously close to a military alliance,

NAM's failures

- When Yugoslavia and Egypt became non-aligned by defying the great powers and convened the first Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, Nehru, who never endorsed confrontational methods, became a third but hesitant co-sponsor, because in theory, a coalition or movement of non-aligned nations was a contradiction in terms.
- According to then Defence Minister Krishna Menon's epigram, true non-alignment was to be non-aligned towards the non-aligned.
- Nehru's misgivings were confirmed when only two members, Cyprus and Ethiopia, of the conference supported India in the war with China.
- Among the Non-Aligned Movement's members was a plenitude of varying alignments, a weakness aggravated by not internalising their own precepts of human rights and peaceful settlement of disputes on the grounds of not violating the sacred principle of sovereign domestic jurisdiction.
- Other failures were lack of collective action and collective self-reliance, and the non-establishment of an equitable international economic or information order. The Movement could not dent, let alone break, the prevailing world order.
- The years following Nehru's death saw the atrophy of his idealism, and non-alignment during his successors moved from pragmatism under Indira Gandhi and opportunism after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, to the semi-alignment of today.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, by ideology, inclination and threat perception, is inclined to greater alignment with the United States whether under the nebulous rubric of the Indo-Pacific or otherwise.

Longevity of organisations

- The Centre for Policy Research produced a document in 2012 titled 'Non-alignment Mark 2.0' which left no trace; the same body's paper, 'A rethink of foreign policy', this year elides it altogether.
- Every international organisation has a shelf life, though many survive for years in semi-neglect. The League of Nations was given the coup de grâce after seven years of inactivity only in 1946, even after the United Nations had come into being. The Commonwealth will last only as long as the British find it useful.
- It is hard to see any future for Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) or its various institutional offspring, given the state of India-China relations. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has faded into oblivion.
- Few among even our serving diplomats could tell what transpired at the last Non-aligned Conference or where the next will be held, while the symbolic anniversary, unanimously agreed upon in 1981 of 'The First September, Day of Non-alignment', has come and gone unnoticed.

No quota without quantifiable data

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Madras High Court's recent verdict of quashing the 10.5% special reservation for Vanniyakula Kshatriyas within the overall 20% quota for Most Backward Classes (MBC) and Denotified Communities (DNC) has again highlighted the importance of quantifiable data as a prerequisite for reservation in education and employment.*

Details:

- Adopted on the last day of the previous State Assembly in February when the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) was in power, the special quota law, which envisaged 10.5% special reservation for the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas comprising seven sub-castes; 7% for 25 MBCs and 68 DNCs; and 2.5% for 22 MBCs, triggered controversy from the word go.
- Expectedly, the legislation was challenged before the High Court, which held it unconstitutional for a host of reasons.
- Even though the Court described the submission that the law was enacted only on the basis of “adequate authenticated data on population” of the MBCs and DNCs enumerated by the second Backward Classes (BC) Commission as the “main thrust” of arguments of Tamil Nadu’s Advocate General, it concluded that “there is no data, much less quantifiable data, available with the State government before the introduction” of the law.

No exhaustive study

- It is a fact that no exhaustive study has been done to collect quantifiable data on the representation of different communities in education and employment since the second BC Commission, popularly known after its chairman, J.A. Ambasankar, carried out one during its existence (1982-1985).
- Even the State BC Commission, in its report of July 2011 to the State government in justification of 69% reservation for BC, MBC/DNCs and Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST) under the 1994 Act, did not give any community-wise break up of representation in government services.
- It furnished only the numbers of candidates belonging to the BCs and MBC/DNCs, who were chosen for the State Services and Subordinate Services during 2005-09, quoting the data furnished by the Tamil Nadu Public Services Commission, apart from those from SC/ST and Other Backward Classes selected by the Railway Recruitment Board, Chennai.
- Even though the mandate given to the BC panel was to come out with its defence of the 69% quota, the Commission could have provided the community-wise break up of recruitments made by the State government.
- At least, now, with the High Court pointing to the absence of data as a reason to annul the 10.5% quota law, the State government should commission a study to compile the data on the way the benefits of reservation got distributed among BCs, MBCs and the DNCs.
- The study can be carried out either by the present BC Commission or by an exclusive panel, as decided by the previous AIADMK government in December 2020. When the existing BC Commission was set up in July 2020, one of the terms of reference was to examine the demand for internal reservation within the reservation provided for MBCs and make a recommendation on the matter.
- As made clear by the Court, the quantifiable data are required for providing any form of quota in favour of any community because the Constitutional stipulation of adequate representation in the services has to be met along with that of social and educational backwardness for any community to become eligible for reservation in employment.

Internal reservation

- The need for internal reservation has been felt for more than one reason. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, two BC Commissions found certain sections of the communities more backward than others.

- The situation has got compounded in the absence of application of the creamy layer rule in reservation, a concept that is being opposed by political parties including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the AIADMK.
- Ironically, the first BC Commission (1969-70), headed by A.N. Sattanathan, talked of having a device for “skimming off periodically” top layers of the communities. The Ambasankar Commission advocated compartmental reservation, by grouping the BCs on the basis of backwardness.
- It went to the extent of saying that the words, “any backward class of citizens” in Article 16(4) of the Constitution “contemplates [sic] a plurality of backward classes and consequent separate reservation for these classes.”
- The concept of quota within quota is nothing new to Tamil Nadu. In March 1989, a new category — Most Backward Classes and De-notified Communities — was carved out of the BCs and given 20% exclusively from the then quantum of 50%.
- In September 2007, Muslims in the BCs were provided with 3.5% and in January 2009, 3% for Arunthathiyars out of 18% quota for the SCs.

AUKUS could rock China’s boat in the Indo-Pacific

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The trilateral security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) continues to be in the news. At the COP26 meeting at Glasgow, U.S. President Joe Biden tried to smoothen ruffled feathers when he candidly told his French counterpart, President Emmanuel Macron, that the Australian submarine deal with France had been handled clumsily. An assuaged France is bound to come around eventually since the Trans-Atlantic partnership is important for both sides. In regard to Australia, however, the kerfuffle over the cancelled submarine deal continues to dog relations. A piqued France harbours resentment at the Australian action, going by Mr. Macron’s recent remarks at the G20 press conference on November 1.*

The ASEAN factor

- There is also the matter of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) disunity over the emergence of AUKUS. The South-east Asian nations have been unable to agree on other issues before, such as developments in Myanmar or the strategic threats posed by China.
- While AUKUS is clearly an attempt by the U.S. to bolster regional security, including securing Australia’s seaborne trade, any sudden accretion in Australia’s naval capabilities is bound to cause unease in the region.
- In a statement on September 20, Australia had unambiguously reassured the region of its commitment to ASEAN centrality and its continued support for the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty as well as the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.
- Even though Australia has denied that AUKUS is a defence alliance, this hardly prevents China from exploiting ASEAN’s concerns at having to face a Hobson’s choice amidst worsening U.S.-China regional rivalry.
- True to style, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman has criticised AUKUS as an “exclusive bloc” and “clique” that gravely undermines regional peace and security and reflects a Cold War mentality.
- AUKUS is based on a shared commitment of its three members to deepening diplomatic, security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Even though this has not been stated explicitly, the rise of China, particularly its rapid militarisation and aggressive behaviour, is undoubtedly the trigger.

Decades-old partnership

- As such, there is nothing surprising about the U.S., the U.K. and Australia coming together. The U.S. and the U.K. have enjoyed a special defence partnership for decades.
- The U.S. and the U.K. have fought together as allies, together with Australia, in the Second World War. The U.S. shared nuclear weapons technology with the U.K. following the merging of the latter's nuclear weapons programme with the American Manhattan Project as early as in 1943.
- The first U.K. test was conducted in 1952 in the Montebello Islands in Australia, a country that still regards the British monarch as the head of state, whose powers are exercised constitutionally through her representative, the Governor-General of Australia.
- To suggest that these three nations have come together to forge a new defence pact is stating the obvious. They have been alliance partners all along.

Engagement with China

- For three nations, their relations with China have recently been marked by contretemps. Australia, especially, had for years subordinated its strategic assessment of China to transactional commercial interests.
- Much to China's chagrin, its policy of deliberately targeting Australian exports has not yielded the desired results. Instead of kow-towing, the plucky Australian character has led Canberra to favour a fundamental overhaul of its China policy. The attempt to torment Australia has clearly backfired.
- That China's naval expansion and far-ranging forays in the oceanic space should have compelled Australia to revisit its defence and security policies should also not surprise anyone.
- As early as in 1942, during the Second World War, three Japanese midget submarines, launched from five large submarines that acted as launching platforms, had mounted a sneak attack in Sydney Harbour.
- Though the damage and casualties inflicted by the attack were limited, that brazen episode, combined by the bombing by Japanese warplanes of Darwin, also in 1942, drove home to Australia that its distant geographical location could not guarantee its security against a direct maritime threat.
- In 2017 and 2019, the Talisman Sabre exercises (a biennial exercise that is led by either Australia or the U.S.), conducted by the Royal Australian Navy, were tagged by a Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Dongdiao-class Type 815 auxiliary general intelligence (AGI) vessel. China also used the same type of vessel to monitor the multilateral Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise in 2018.
- These developments, no doubt a portent of things to come, have cast a long shadow on Australia's trade and strategic interests.

'To further' is the key

- The transfer of sensitive submarine technology by the U.S. to the U.K. is a sui generis arrangement based on their long-standing Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958. The AUKUS joint statement clearly acknowledges that trilateral defence ties are decades old, and that AUKUS aims to further joint capabilities and interoperability.
- The word "further" is key, since defence cooperation already exists. The other areas covered are cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, apart from undersea capabilities. The latter is the most visible part of the agreement, and potentially, a game-changer.
- Elements in the broader agenda provide opportunities to the U.S., the U.K. and Australia to engage the regional countries. There are clear indications that New Zealand is open to cooperation with AUKUS in such areas, especially cyber, its nuclear-averse record notwithstanding.
- All three nations will also play a major role in U.S.-led programmes such as Build Back Better World, Blue Dot Network and Clean Network, to meet the challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

A comparison, the reach

- The Quad and AUKUS are distinct, yet complementary. Neither diminishes the other. Whereas the Quad initiatives straddle the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, a Pacific-centric orientation for AUKUS has

advantages. Such a strategy could potentially strengthen Japan's security as well as that of Taiwan in the face of China's mounting bellicosity.

- Shifting AUKUS's fulcrum to the Pacific Ocean could reassure ASEAN nations. It could also inure AUKUS to any insidious insinuation that accretion in the number of nuclear submarines plying the Indo-Pacific might upset the balance of power in the Indian Ocean.
- China's potent military capacities must be taken seriously. China has a large and growing undersea fleet, including attack submarines, both nuclear-powered and diesel-electric. China's naval power is enabling it to challenge U.S. dominance in the Pacific beyond the first island chain.
- A U.S. that still boasts the world's most powerful military is perhaps tempted to look at effective means to militarily counter China. The Quad structure currently has neither the mandate nor the capability to achieve this.
- There are limited options in the economic arena with China already having emerged as a global economic powerhouse. AUKUS, though, provides an opportunity to the U.S. to place proxy submarine forces to limit China's forays, especially in the Pacific Ocean.

A new jurisprudence for political prisoners

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A judgment of the Supreme Court of India on October 28, 2021 has immense potential to reclaim the idea of personal liberty and human dignity. In *Thwaha Fasal vs Union of India*, the Court has acted in its introspective jurisdiction and deconstructed the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) with a great sense of legal realism. This paves the way for a formidable judicial authority against blatant misuse of this draconian law.

The background

- In this case from Kerala, there are three accused. The third among them is absconding. The police registered the case and later the investigation was handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).
- The accused were in their twenties when arrested on November 1, 2019. During the investigation, some materials containing radical literature were found, which included a book on caste issues in India and a translation of the dissent notes written by Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin. There were also leaflets that were allegedly related to Maoist organisations.
- Thus, the provisions of the UAPA were invoked. Against the first accused, Allen Shuaib, offences under Sections 38 and 39 of the UAPA and 120B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) were alleged. Section 38 deals with "offence relating to membership of a terrorist organisation" and Section 39 deals with "offence relating to support given to a terrorist organisation."
- Section 120B of the IPC is the penal provision on criminal conspiracy. Against the second accused, Thwaha Fasal, over and above these charges, Section 13 of the UAPA was alleged — which is the provision about punishment for unlawful activities. Both the accused were students and there were no allegations of any overt act of violence.
- According to the accused, the charges were an attempt to label them as terrorists, based on the intellectual and ideological inclinations attributed to them.

Judicial trajectory



- The case had a curious trajectory. After initial rejection of the pleas, the trial judge granted bail to both the accused in September 2020. By that time, the students had completed more than 10 months in prison.
- The High Court, in appeal, while confirming the bail of Allen, chose to set aside the bail granted to Thwaha. The matter then reached the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court, after a comprehensive examination, upheld the trial judge's finding that the materials, prima facie, do not show any "intention on the part of both the accused to further the activities of the terrorist organisation".
- It found fault with the High Court for not venturing to record, prima facie, findings regarding charges against Thwaha, whose bail was set aside by the High Court. The top court confirmed the bail granted to both the students. Now, they have been set free.
- The Supreme Court was emphatic and liberal when it said that mere association with a terrorist organisation is not sufficient to attract the offences alleged.
- Unless and until the association and the support were "with intention of furthering the activities of a terrorist organisation", offence under Section 38 or Section 39 is not made out, said the Court. Mere possession of documents or books by the accused at a formative young age, or even their fascination for an ideology, does not ipso facto or ipso jure make out an offence, the Court ruled.
- The judgment can act as an effective admonition against a suppressive regime. It also exposes the hypocrisy of the law, the UAPA. Section 43D(5) of the UAPA says that for many of the offences under the Act, bail should not be granted, if "on perusal of the case diary or the report (of the investigation)... there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation ... is prima facie true".
- Thus, the Act prompts the Court to consider the version of the prosecution alone while deciding the question of bail.
- Unlike the Criminal Procedure Code, the UAPA, by virtue of the proviso to Section 43D(2), permits keeping a person in prison for up to 180 days, without even filing a charge sheet.
- Thus, the statute prevents a comprehensive examination of the facts of the case on the one hand, and prolongs the trial indefinitely by keeping the accused in prison on the other.

Presumption of guilt

- Instead of presumption of innocence, the UAPA holds presumption of guilt of the accused. Section 43E of the Act expressly says about "presumption as to the offences". According to Section 43D(5), jail is the rule and bail is often not even an exception.
- The Court, in Thwaha Fasal, refused to construct this Section in a narrow and restrictive sense. This analysis has to some extent, liberalised an otherwise illiberal bail clause. In the process, the Court has also tried to mitigate the egregious error committed by a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in *National Investigation Agency vs Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali* (2019) that interpreted the same provision.
- In *Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali*, the Court said that by virtue of Section 43D(5) of UAPA, the burden is on the accused to show that the prosecution case is not prima facie true.
- The proposition in *Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali* is that the bail court should not even investigate deeply into the materials and evidence and should consider the bail plea, primarily based on the nature of allegations, for, according to the Court, Section 43D(5) prohibits a thorough and deeper examination.
- As such, in several cases, bail pleas were rejected relying on *Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali*, despite the strong indications that the evidence itself was false or fabricated.
- Many intellectuals including Sudha Bharadwaj and Siddique Kappan were denied bail based on a narrow interpretation of the bail provision as done in *Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali*. Stan Swamy was another victim of this provision and its fallacious reading.
- The top court has now altered this terrible legal landscape. For doing so, the Court also relied on a later three-judge Bench decision in *Union of India vs K.A. Najeeb* (2021).

- In K.A. Najeeb, the larger Bench said that even the stringent provisions under Section 43D(5) do not curtail the power of the constitutional court to grant bail on the ground of violation of fundamental rights.
- The text of the draconian laws sometimes poses immense challenge to the courts by limiting the space for judicial discretion and adjudication. This is more evident in the context of bail. The courts usually adopt two mutually contradictory methods in dealing with such tough provisions.
- One is to read and apply the provision literally and mechanically which has the effect of curtailing the individual freedom as intended by the makers of the law. In contrast to this approach, there could be a constitutional reading of the statute, which perceives the issues in a human rights angle and tries to mitigate the rigour of the vicious content of the law.
- The former approach is reflected in Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali and the latter in Thwaha Fasal. In Thwaha Fasal, the Court has asserted the primacy of judicial process over the text of the enactment, by way of an interpretative exercise.

Delhi riots case

- On June 15, 2021, the Delhi High Court granted bail to student activists Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha who were charged under the UAPA for alleged connections with the Delhi riots.
- In an appeal by the Delhi police, unfortunately, the Supreme Court said that the well-reasoned judgment of the High Court shall not be treated as a precedent.
- The Thwaha Fasal judgment has, by implication, legitimised the methodology in the Delhi High Court verdict that ventured to examine the content of the charge instead of swallowing the prosecution's story.
- It is this judicial radicalism that builds an emancipatory legal tool. The judgment should be invoked to release other political prisoners in the country who have been denied bail either due to the harshness of the law or due to the follies in understanding the law or both.

Reservation on quota

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On November 1, the Madras High Court declared unconstitutional a Tamil Nadu government law, enacted in February 2021 when the AIADMK was in power, that reserved 10.5% of jobs in public services and seats in educational institutions for the Vanniyars, a most backward community. The demand for an exclusive quota for the community has been spearheaded for long by the Pattali Makkal Katchi.

What was the reservation eligibility of Vanniyars prior to being given a separate quota?

- The Vanniyars were in the backward classes list for many years. The community, constituting a significant percentage in the State's northern districts, consists predominantly of agricultural labourers.
- In 1987, the Vanniyar Sangham launched an agitation demanding 20% separate reservation. In 1989, the demand was partially conceded. The BC quota was then at 50%. This was sub-divided and a 20% segment was earmarked for 'Most Backward Classes and Denotified Communities'.
- The Vanniyars were included in the Most Backward Classes list. The expectation was that they would be the principal beneficiaries in this 20% segment, though 109 other castes were in the MBC/DNC category (The number has risen to 116 now).
- The Vanniyars have been arguing that they are still not getting enough opportunities in proportion to their population.

How was the separate reservation implemented?

- On February 26, 2021, the Assembly passed a special Act which divided the 'Most Backward Classes/Denotified Communities' category into three parts. Of the total, the largest share of 10.5% was specified as exclusive to the Vanniyakula Kshatriya and its various sub-castes.
- The DNC sub-division was to have 7%, while the remaining 2.5% was meant for the rest of the MBCs.
- The primary justification for the percentage was that the Second Backward Class Commission had put the Vanniyar population at 65 lakh in 1983, or 13.01% of the then total population. In 2012, the then chairman of the State Backward Class Commission recommended that based on this figure, reservation of 10.5% would be appropriate for the Vanniyars.
- Therefore, it was decided to make this internal reservation within the MBC quota. However, critics say the Commission chairman's opinion was not supported by the other members and was, therefore, not acted upon all these years.

What were the reasons for the court's judgment?

- The exclusive quota for one community was criticised on the ground that it was done with an eye on the Assembly election.
- It was also contended that the government acted hastily as it had only a couple of months earlier appointed a commission under a retired High Court judge to compile quantifiable data on all castes so that the State could justify its 69% total reservation, but did not wait for its report.
- The Bench of Justices M. Duraishwamy and K. Murali Shankar ruled that the Act was unconstitutional mainly on the ground that the Assembly had no legislative competence to pass the law on the date of the enactment.
- This was because the 102nd Amendment to the Constitution (which created the National Backward Class Commission and empowered the President to notify the backward classes list for each State) was in force in February 2021.
- The Supreme Court had ruled, again in the Maratha reservation case, that the Amendment took away the power of the States to notify or identify OBCs. Later, the 105th Amendment made it explicit that the States could make changes in their lists.
- The other ground was that the separate reservation for one caste amounted to discrimination against all the other castes in the same MBC category.
- Further, the State had produced no quantifiable data to back its claim that the Vanniyars were so far behind the other communities in the list that they deserved exclusive treatment. In the absence of such data, it amounted to legislation solely on the ground of caste, and not because members of that caste constituted a separate class.

What are the effects of the verdict?

- Being a politically sensitive matter involving a restive community, the State government is planning to appeal to the Supreme Court. Whether the same quota will be upheld without quantifiable data is a moot question.
- The judgment also contains a finding that any law making changes to the distribution of quotas under various categories would require an amendment to the State's 1994 Act protecting the overall reservation level.
- As that Act contains quotas allotted to the SC, ST, BC and MBC/DNC categories, any change would require an amendment to that law, as well as the President's assent. This may create some complications to the existing internal quotas given to the Backward Class (Muslims), who have 2.5% reservation, and the Arundhatiyars, who have a 3% sub-quota among the Scheduled Castes.
- Both these categories were created by stand-alone laws that only got the Governor's assent.
- The High Court had mentioned that these two quotas were backed by census data and valid recommendations, but it did not consider the question whether their introduction without an amendment to the 1994 Act or the President's assent was valid.

GS III

Where does India stand on methane emissions?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: At the ongoing UN Climate Change Conference (the 26th Conference of Parties-COP26) in Glasgow, the United States and the European Union have jointly pledged to cut emissions of the greenhouse gas methane by 2030. They plan to cut down emissions by 30% compared with the 2020 levels. At least 90 countries have signed the Global Methane Pledge, with India and China abstaining so far. Separately, 133 countries have signed a Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use — a declaration initiated by the United Kingdom to “halt deforestation” and land degradation by 2030. China, too, is a signatory to this but India has stayed out.

Why is methane potent as a greenhouse gas?

- Methane accounts for about a fifth of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and is about 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide in trapping heat in the atmosphere.
- In the last two centuries, methane concentrations in the atmosphere have more than doubled, mainly due to human-related activities. Because methane is short-lived, compared with carbon dioxide, but at the same time potent, the logic is that removing it would have a significant positive impact.
- Methane is emitted from a variety of anthropogenic (human-influenced) and natural sources. The human sources include landfills, oil and natural gas systems, agricultural activities as well as livestock rearing, coal mining, stationary and mobile combustion, wastewater treatment, and certain industrial processes.
- Sources of methane can be harnessed for energy and in principle reduce dependence on energy sources that emit high carbon dioxide but the lack of incentives and efficient energy markets to realise this is an impediment to curtailing methane emissions.

Why hasn't India signed the pledge?

- India is the third largest emitter of methane, primarily because of the size of its rural economy and by virtue of having the largest cattle population. India has stated earlier that it plans to deploy technology and capture methane that can be used as a source of energy.
- In a communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, India said approximately 20% of its anthropogenic methane emissions come from agriculture (manure management), coal mines, municipal solid waste, and natural gas and oil systems.
- To tap into this “potential,” the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) claims to have invested heavily in a national strategy to increase biogas production and reduce methane emissions.
- “The biogas strategy includes many policy initiatives, capacity-building, and public-private partnerships. In addition to promoting biogas development, the strategy supports goals for sustainable development, sanitation improvements, and increased generation of renewable energy,” the MNRE notes.

What does the Glasgow Declaration on forest and land use entail?

- The Glasgow Declaration was signed by 133 countries, which represent 90% of the globe's forested land. The declaration is also backed by a \$19-billion commitment, though whether this translates into legally binding flows remains to be seen.
- The Glasgow Declaration is a successor to a failed 2014 New York Declaration for Forests — that for a while saw significant global traction — and promised to reduce emissions from deforestation by 15%-20% by 2020 and end it by 2030.



- However, deforestation has only increased, and is responsible for about 20% of the total carbon emissions.
- One of the goals of the pledge, to halt deforestation, is to ensure that natural forests aren't cleared out for commercial plantations. It also aims to halt industrial logging, though several independent estimates say the demand for wood pellets, which stokes deforestation, is only expected to increase.
- Finally, the declaration seeks to strengthen the rights of indigenous tribes and communities to forestland.

Why hasn't India signed up?

- There is again no official reason accorded but reports suggest that Indian officials are unhappy with the wording that suggests meeting the obligations under the pledge could also mean restrictions in international trade.
- That is unacceptable, they say, as trade falls under the ambit of the World Trade Organization, of which India is a member.
- India is also mulling changes to its forest conservation laws that seek to encourage commercial tree plantation as well as infrastructure development in forestland.
- India's long-term target is to have a third of its area under forest and tree cover, but it is so far 22%.
- It also proposes to create a carbon sink, via forests and plantations, to absorb 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide.

How has RBI tweaked Prompt Corrective Action norms for banks?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The RBI issued a notification on November 2 revising norms for commercial banks to be placed under the regulator's Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework should any of their key metrics fall out of line. The revision takes effect from January 1, 2022.

What is the purpose of the PCA framework?

- In the RBI's own words, "The objective of the PCA framework is to enable supervisory intervention at appropriate time and require the supervised entity to initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner so as to restore its financial health.
- The PCA framework is also intended to act as a tool for effective market discipline. The PCA framework does not preclude the Reserve Bank of India from taking any other action as it deems fit at any time, in addition to the corrective actions prescribed in the framework".
- In the last almost two decades — the PCA was first notified in December 2002 — several banks have been placed under the framework, with their operations restricted. In 2021, UCO Bank, IDBI Bank and Indian Overseas Bank exited the framework on improved performance. Only Central Bank of India remains under it now.

What are banks measured on?

- As per the revised PCA norms issued in 2017, banks were to be evaluated on capital, asset quality, profitability and leverage. The capital adequacy ratio governs the capital that a bank ought to hold as a percentage of its total assets.
- If the ratio is prescribed as 11.5%, a bank must bring its own capital of ₹11.50 for every ₹100 it intends to lend.

- The adequacy measure includes buffers such as the capital conservation buffer (2.5%), which may be used to shore up capital in good times, but which may be relaxed to encourage further lending during economic crises.
- Asset quality tells us what portion of the loans is unlikely to be paid back, reflected in the net non-performing asset ratio — i.e., the portion of total advances tagged ‘non-performing’, after the provisioning for bad loans.
- Return on assets (RoA) measures profitability, derived from net income (profit) as a percentage of total assets. The leverage ratio shows how much a lender has stretched itself in borrowing funds to generate income. The more the leverage, the riskier the turf on which the lender stands.

What curbs do bank face under the PCA?

- Banks move from risk thresholds 1 through 3 with increasing restrictions if they are unable to arrest deterioration.
- First, banks face curbs on dividend distribution/remittance of profits.
- For foreign banks, promoters are to bring in capital. In the second category, banks additionally face curbs on branch expansion.
- In the final category, the bank additionally faces restrictions on capital expenditure with some exemptions.
- The RBI also has the option of discretionary actions across strategy, governance, credit risk, market risk and human resources.

What has changed?

- The notification has removed return on assets as an indicator to qualify for PCA. Further, the 2017 notification applied to scheduled commercial banks but excluded Regional Rural Banks from its purview, while the 2021 version excludes Small Finance Banks and Payment Banks too.
- In the latest set of rules, the RBI has clearly spelt out that exit from the PCA would be based on four continuous quarterly results, with one being Audited Annual Financial Statement as per the new framework apart from Supervisory Comfort of RBI, assessment on sustainability of profitability.
- The risk threshold 3 has been further refined for capital adequacy conditions. It is unclear why the RBI chose to remove the RoA metric.
- One view in the financial sector is that RoA ought to have been retained as it indicates business performance.
- Another view is that the RBI oughtn’t to monitor RoA — and that profitability is the bank’s and its shareholders’ lookout. Controls over capital adequacy indirectly include profitability.
- After all, retained profits become reserves that help shore up capital.

The case of demonetisation in India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Popular narratives play a much bigger role in economic policymaking than economists and policymakers acknowledge. If, indeed, these narratives are grounded more in myth than reality, the impact of such policy can be devastating. The demonetisation of high-value currency in India in 2016 is a classic case of policy based on faulty narratives. Paradoxically, the failure of the policy does not appear to dent the narrative and, consequently, there is very little price to pay for its failure.

Across time, the impact



- Narratives are often intertwined in the cultural belief systems of the society. Thus, the Great Depression of the 1930s came to be associated with the excesses of the “roaring twenties”, though many economic factors were responsible.
- The Weimar hyperinflation of 1921-24 is so deeply embedded in the German consciousness, that even now, nearly 100 years after the event, German society treasures financial stability and distrusts public debt.
- Fiscal conservatism remains the dominant narrative and has inhibited the post-2008 recovery in Europe.
- Though the recent novel coronavirus pandemic crisis has led to Keynesian remedies on steroids in many countries, there is already a murmuring of fiscal imprudence fuelling inflation.
- Indeed, narratives in economics, as in other social sciences, create myths which endure despite rational appeal to facts.
- The demonetisation story in India is also based on popular myth, the folklore of black money and its association with physical cash. The idea of demonetising large denomination currency as a tool to flush out undeclared hoards of cash was not new.
- It was done on two previous occasions, in 1946 and 1978, with poor results. But, unlike the limited impact of the previous events, the demonetisation in 2016 caused widespread disruption in the economy, whose costs are still to be properly reckoned.
- Five years later, most observers have concluded that this policy was a failure. Very little of its declared objectives — of eliminating black money, corruption, moving towards a “less cash and more digital economy”, or increased tax compliance — were achieved. Expectations of windfall gains of some ₹2 trillion-3 trillion failed to materialise as more than 99.3% of the cancelled notes returned to the banks.
- If black money had existed as stockpiles of illegal cash, clearly all of it was very efficiently laundered. If the objective was to register a permanent upward shift in the tax base, it failed miserably.
- Perhaps the most telling evidence of the failure is that the cash-in-circulation has now exceeded pre-demonetisation levels.

Touching a chord

- And, post-COVID-19, reliance on cash is much higher, and with more higher denomination notes in circulation.
- By every measure, demonetisation as economic policy was a gross failure. But, as a narrative, it was presented and received in an altogether different light. Despite its manifest failure, the power of the narrative was such that it succeeded in creating a favourable or positive view of the policy.
- The folklore of black money and the vivid imagery that accompanies it is easily recognised and understood by the common people, who witness corruption in daily life and see it play out in the cinema, newspaper stories or in daily conversation over the years.
- The very term, black money, is a loaded phrase, where the specie itself acquires a symbolic and a substantive form. The wealth, representing ill-gotten gains, is perceived to be accumulated invariably in stacks of currency notes and gold, hoarded in safes, boxes, or ingeniously concealed cupboards.
- The idea of dramatic action and the striking of a powerful blow against this wealth is deeply satisfying psychologically. It is the stuff of epics. The spectre of black money has been invoked frequently in Indian politics, sometimes truthfully and more often cynically. The narrative of black money is almost always couched in deeply moral terms.
- It does not matter, as repeatedly emphasised in several economic studies, there is nothing to distinguish black or white money, except in the way it comes into being. Although income from corruption or criminal activities is by definition black money, most black money is earned through perfectly legal activities though not declared to the tax authorities.
- More importantly, black money is not really kept in cash except in small quantities but mostly accumulated through real estate and other assets. However, the way the narrative was framed made it hard for critics to explain their opposition. To denounce it outright would suggest that they have a vested interest in defending black money and corruption.



- When it became clear that the cancelled currency was being returned to the banks in larger numbers than expected, the narrative changed focus from black money and fake currency to digital/cashless payments, the latter being elevated to some higher purpose than what it actually is, a mere technological change.

Linked sub-themes

- A key point in selling the story was to introduce complementary sub-themes to reinforce the main narrative and, at times, to obscure the facts on the ground. Virtue signalling was key: appeals to nationalism and patriotism are always handy, while modernity and change are implied as means to progress towards some form of technological utopia.
- The call to sacrifice has deep resonance in India, as elsewhere. The act (of demonetisation) was an act of collective sacrifice.
- The people in long queues were reminded of the sacrifices of the soldiers guarding the nation's borders and not to think of their own suffering. Indeed, there was satisfaction in being told that the rich had it worse. In reality, the sacrifice called for was somewhat skewed in its impact, and the suffering of the poor was disproportionately greater.
- The real irony lies in the fact that the moral high ground claimed by the demonetisation narrative worked better than contesting narratives of observed reality. It worked because it understood the nature of the moral economy of the poor.
- For the poor, long used to being at the receiving end of the state and its representatives, the impact of demonetisation would be one more blow in a series of blows with which they had to perforce deal. At least in this instance, there would seem to be a measure of justice if the rich really did suffer more.
- Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, five years after the event, the Government does not acknowledge any failure, or have even a smidgeon of doubt. Noticeably, however, there have been no tall claims of success either.

A self-inflicted shock

- Most of the studies, opinion polls, media reports and anecdotal evidence showed an overwhelming support for the policy. Despite personal hardship, long queues, and the loss of income and savings, there was a degree of ambiguity in criticising the decision.
- Most tended to distinguish the intention from the reality. That the policy was good but perhaps not implemented well seemed to be the main theme. This effectively insulated the original sin — that the very design of the policy ensured its outcome.
- The case of demonetisation demonstrates that popular narratives can trump economic facts.
- It is clear that where narratives succeed there is very little political cost. A failed policy that carries no cost is likely to generate more such policies.
- Unlike most economic shocks, which could be traced to endogenous or exogenous causes, demonetisation was an entirely self-inflicted shock, which was very likely carried out as much in a sincere belief in the narrative as in cynical political calculation.

Does India have a right to burn fossil fuels?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *There has been quite a lot of debate on India's dependence on coal against the backdrop of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) meeting. While the coal lobbyists may have obvious interests in continuing that dependence, it comes as a surprise when the progressive circles also provide theories to justify this. Despite the Environment Minister adopting a similar position on the eve of the COP26, the Government of India has, for the first time, made a commitment to achieve the net zero target by 2070. It*

remains to be seen whether the government will indeed walk the talk since the experience on this count (or other issues) does not necessarily inspire that confidence.

Details:

- The crux of the theoretical argument is that India needs to develop, and development requires energy.
- However, since India has neither historically emitted nor currently emits carbon anywhere close to what the global North has, or does, in per capita terms, it has no reason to commit to declining dependence on coal, at least in the near future.
- If anything, the argument goes, it should ask for a higher and fairer share in the global carbon budget.
- There is no doubt that this carbon budget framework is an excellent tool to understand global injustice but to move from there to our 'right to burn' is a big leap. It is like arguing that since India was colonised, it has a right to do the same and stopping the country from doing that is injustice.
- For development, do the countries in the global South necessarily need to increase their share in the global carbon budget? Thankfully the answer is 'no' and it does not come at the cost of development, even in the limited sense as development is defined generally.

The question of development

- One, there is no doubt that economic development requires energy but that does not translate into energy by burning coal.
 - If there are other cleaner forms of energy available, why persist on the usage of coal? Normally the argument in favour of coal is on account of its cost, reliability and domestic availability.
 - Recent data show that the levelised cost of electricity from renewable energy sources like solar (photovoltaic), hydro and onshore wind has been declining sharply over the last decade and is already less than fossil fuel-based electricity generation.
 - On reliability, frontier renewable energy technologies have managed to address the question of variability of such sources to a large extent and, with technological progress, it seems to be changing for the better. As for the easy domestic availability of coal, it is a myth.
 - According to the Ministry of Coal, India's net coal import went up from ₹782.6 billion in 2011-12 to ₹1,155.0 billion in 2020-21.
 - India is among the largest importers of coal in the world, whereas it has no dearth of solar energy.
- Two, why should the global South be aping the North in the development model it wants to follow?
 - During the debates of post-colonial development in the Third World, there were two significant issues under discussion — control over technology and choice of techniques to address the issue of surplus labour.
 - India didn't quite resolve the two issues in its attempts of import-substituting industrialisation which worsened during the post-reform period. But it can address both today.
 - The abundance of renewable natural resources in the tropical climate can give India a head start in this competitive world of technology.
 - South-South collaborations can help India avoid the usual patterns of trade between the North and the South, where the former controls technology and the latter merely provides inputs.
 - And the high-employment trajectory that the green path entails vis-à-vis the fossil fuel sector may help address the issue of surplus labour, even if partially.
 - Such a path could additionally provide decentralised access to clean energy to the poor and the marginalised, including in remote regions of India. So, it simultaneously addresses the issues of employment, technology, energy poverty and self-reliance.

Types of injustice

- Three, the framework of addressing global injustice in terms of a carbon budget is quite limiting in its scope in more ways than one.



- Such an injustice is not at the level of the nation-states alone; there is such injustice between the rich and the poor within nations and between humans and non-human species.
- A progressive position on justice would take these injustices into account instead of narrowly focusing on the framework of nation-states.
- Moreover, it's a double whammy of injustice for the global South when it comes to climate change.
- Not only is it not primarily responsible, but the global South, especially its poor, will unduly bear the effect of climate change because of its tropical climate and high population density along the coastal lines. So, arguing for more coal is like shooting oneself in the foot.
- It is true that mitigation from the South alone will not make the difference required to stop this catastrophe but burning more coal will not necessarily solve the problem either.
- But none of this answers how the wrongs of the past will be righted, the basic premise we started with.
- We have argued in this very newspaper that one of the ways in which this can be done is by making the global North pay for the energy transition in the South.
- Chalking out an independent, greener path to development may create conditions for such negotiations and give the South the moral high ground to force the North to come to the table, like South Africa did at Glasgow.
- The current lack of action against climate change both in the North and South has been maintained by dividing the working classes of these two regions — the North justifying operating coal mines since the South continues to emit more and the South negotiating for a higher share in carbon budget based on the past emissions of the North. This is a deadlock.
- The need of the hour is a global progressive agenda that does not pit the working class of the North against the South but the working people of the world as a whole resisting the global ruling elite in its aggressive and dangerous model of competitive emissions.
- Even if one is pessimistic about this path of righting the wrongs of the past, at the very least, it is better than the status quo.

US inflation and impact on India

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

Context: *Over the last few days, rising prices have cornered a lot of attention, both globally and in India. On Wednesday, the United States' Labor Department reported that retail inflation had spiked to 6.2 per cent in October. Recently, India's National Statistical Office (NSO) data showed that retail inflation rose to 4.5 per cent for the same month.*

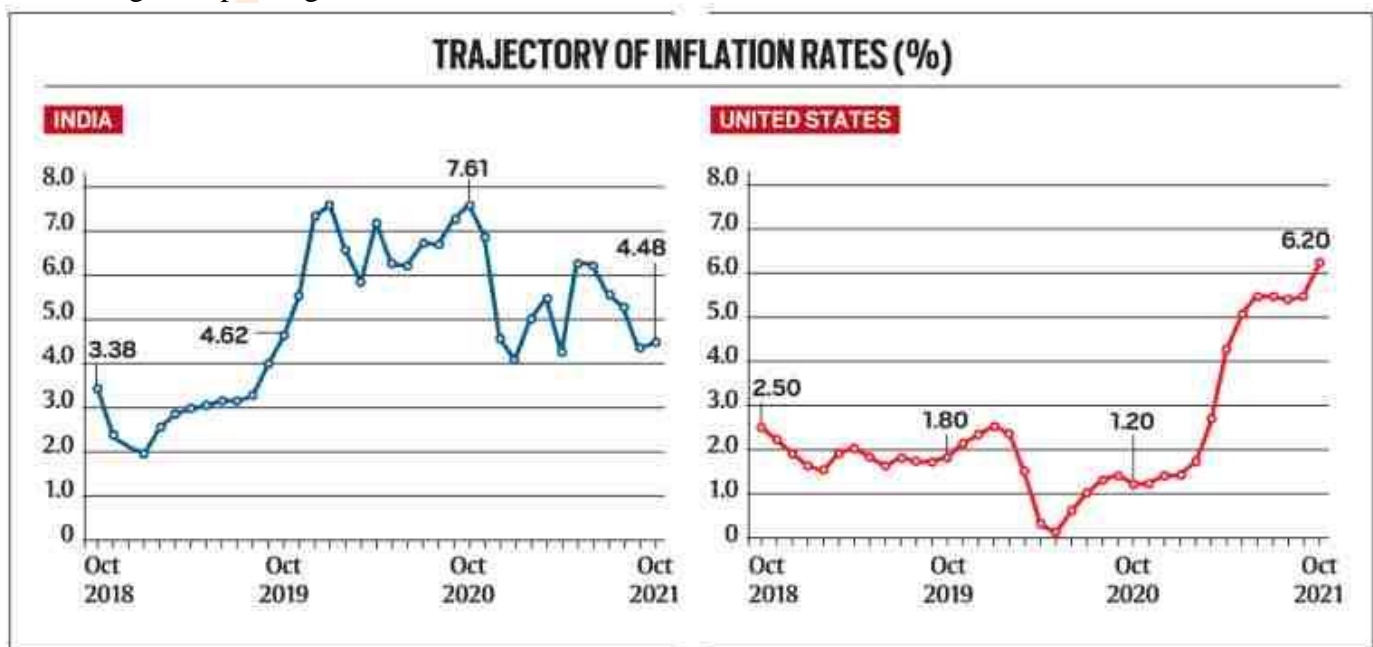
What is inflation rate?

- It is the rate at which prices increase over a given period. Typically, in India, the inflation rate is calculated on a year-on-year basis.
- In other words, if the inflation rate for a particular month is 10 per cent, it means that the prices in that month were 10 per cent more than the prices in the same month a year earlier.
- If in the same month of the coming year, the inflation rate was to go up to 15 per cent, it implies that something that was priced at Rs 100 in the same month last year, and at Rs 110 this year, will be priced at Rs 126.5 next year.
- A high inflation rate erodes the purchasing power of people. Since the poor have less money to withstand fast-rising prices, high inflation hurts them the hardest.



Why is US inflation a matter of concern?

- On the face of it, Indians may not find a 6.2 per cent inflation rate a very sharp increase in prices. But in the US, this data is the largest year-on-year increase in the last three decades.
- Another way to put this data in perspective is that the Federal Reserve (or Fed), the US central bank, targets an inflation rate of just 2 per cent. Seen in that context, it is clear why the US inflation rate has become a massive concern for its citizens.
- As the chart shows, retail inflation in the US has been rising sharply almost every passing month since May 2020.
- This has been a surprise for most policymakers and economists — all of whom were more focused on staving off a prolonged recession.



What has caused the inflation surge in the US?

- Typically, inflation spikes can be assigned to either an increase in demand or a decrease in supply. In the US, both factors are at play.
- Thanks to a rapid rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination drive, the US economy posted a sharp recovery. Part of the inflationary spike came from this unexpectedly fast recovery in all-round demand from consumers.
- This recovery was further fuelled by billions of dollars pumped by the government to not only provide relief to consumers and those who lost their jobs, but also to stimulate demand.
- Some experts are now wondering if this help from the government is worsening inflation. That's because while demand has recovered swiftly, supply hasn't. The pandemic in 2020 led to widespread lockdowns and disruptions not just in the US, but across the world.
- Companies let go of employees and sharply curtailed production. In essence, the supply chains of production, often spanning several countries and continents, were bent out of shape. Even during normal times, supply chains would have taken some time to recover and start furnishing the global demand.
- But the pace of economic recovery has been much faster than the supply chain recovery, and this has worsened the mismatch between demand and supply, thus triggering a sustained price rise.

Is this a US-specific phenomenon?

- No. While the US has seen the sharpest increase in prices, inflation has surprised policymakers across most of the major economies, be it Germany, China or Japan.
- In Japan, for example, according to Bloomberg, the producer price index is at a 40-year high.

What is happening in India?

- While most other economies were surprised by a spike in inflation in the wake of the pandemic, India was one of those rare major economies where high inflation predates the pandemic.
- As the chart shows, retail inflation had frequently been above the comfort zone of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — between 2 per cent and 6 per cent — for an extended period since late 2019.
- The pandemic did make matters worse because of supply constraints even when in India demand has not yet recovered to pre-Covid levels. It is quite instructive that despite India entering a “technical” economic recession in September 2020, the RBI has not once lowered its benchmark interest rates since May 2020.
- That’s because India’s retail inflation has stayed worrying above or near the RBI’s upper limit for the better part of the last two years. It is only in the last couple of months that the headline retail inflation rate has sobered down to below 5 per cent.

Does that mean India’s inflation worries are over?

- Far from it. This is partly because India’s inflation has stayed high even when demand hasn’t recovered. This means more inflation when it does.
- Moreover, while the overall inflation average appears quite manageable at present, it is the “core” inflation that is worrying observers now. Core inflation rate is the rate of inflation when we ignore the prices of food and fuel.
- Typically, food and fuel prices tend to fluctuate a lot. As such, looking at core inflation gives a more robust measure of what is happening to the general price level.
- The worry for India is that core inflation is now over 6 per cent. It was always high, and now threatens to breach the RBI’s comfort zone.
- What’s worse, India’s inflation may worsen in light of the global increase in prices.

How does this impact happen?

- When prices increase globally, it will lead to higher imported inflation. In other words, everything that India and Indians import will become costlier.
- But there is a bigger worry. High inflation in the advanced economies, especially the US, will likely force their central banks, especially the Fed, to abandon their loose monetary policy.
- A tight money policy by the Fed and the rest would imply higher interest rates. That will affect the Indian economy in two broad ways.
 - One, Indian firms trying to raise money outside India will find it costlier to do so.
 - Two, the RBI will have to align its monetary policy at home by raising interest rates domestically.
 - That, in turn, may further raise inflation because the production costs would go up.

A tax burden that attacks the federal rights of States

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: The Narendra Modi Government reduced excise duty on petrol and diesel on the eve of Deepavali. While the reduction for petrol was ₹5, duty on diesel came down by ₹10. The Finance Ministry ‘dedicated’ the reduction to farmers for keeping “the economic growth momentum going even during the [COVID-19] lockdown phase” and said the reduction “will come as a boost to the farmers during the upcoming Rabi season”. Not only this, soon after announcing the decision, Bharatiya Janata Party workers in Opposition-

ruled States held protests demanding that these Governments decrease Value Added Tax on petrol and diesel.

What else can be more hypocritical than this?

- The Centre has been levying around ₹31 and ₹33 as additional cess on petrol and diesel, respectively, till the beginning of November.
- The Constitution does permit the Centre to levy cess and surcharges beyond the basic taxes and duties in extraordinary situations. But making it manifold higher than the basic taxes is nothing but a misuse of such provisions of the Constitution.
- These additional taxes do not go to a divisible pool and such a high burden of taxes is an attack on the people and the federal rights of States.
- Surcharge is defined as a small amount of tax levied over and above the existing tax. How can it be seven or eight times higher than the basic tax? What is the justification for this? Now the basic excise duty is ₹1.40 and the rest of the tax is made up of special additional excise duty and cess which would not go to divisible pool and to the States.
- Article 271 says: “Notwithstanding anything in articles 269 and 270, Parliament may at any time increase any of the duties or taxes referred to in those articles except the goods and services tax under 246A by a surcharge for purposes of the Union and the whole proceeds of any such surcharge shall form part of the Consolidated Fund of India.” This is a saving clause, which is being misused by the Centre to curtail the rights of all States.

Revenue data

- To make this point clear, let us look at the following estimates. The Union government has collected around ₹3.72-lakh crore in 2020-21 as revenue from petroleum products as per the data published by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC).
- Of this, only around ₹18,000 crore is collected as Basic Excise Duty. Around ₹2.3-lakh crore is collected as cess and the rest ₹1.2-lakh crore is collected as special additional excise duty. Here, three important points emerge to be noted: 1.
- The basic tax component of the entire ₹3.72-lakh crore is merely ₹18,000 crore, which is as low as 4.8% of the total revenue from petroleum products; The divisible pool is only 41% of this ₹18,000 crore; Most importantly, cess and additional excise duty on petroleum products constitute around 95% of the total revenue from petroleum, which are not to be shared with the States at all.
- This is a classic example of undermining federalism prevailing in the country. This has to be subjected to intense discussions including dimensions of constitutional provisions under which the aforementioned duties and cess have been imposed.
- After the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST), States have the right to decide the taxes on just three goods — petrol, diesel and liquor.
- By unilaterally taking away the bulk of the tax revenues on petrol and diesel, the Centre has done injustice to the States. This is obtuse use of fiscal federalism. All States must oppose this in a united manner.

Relevant questions

- The Centre has made lakhs of crores of rupees from these additional taxes and cess. The Centre might have amassed lakhs of crores of rupees from these taxes even amid a pandemic.
- But where has this money gone? Who has received the benefits of this money? Answering these questions will unravel the real crisis of States and the Centre.
- The country is going through an unprecedented crisis. The novel coronavirus pandemic has worsened it. States have to earmark funds to assist the people.



- In a State such as Kerala, we have done our best to protect the people by providing a food kit, monthly financial assistance to Below Poverty Line families who lost their bread-winners due to COVID-19 and other necessary arrangements.

Relevance of RNR

- The promise was that the revenue neutral rate (RNR) will be implemented, which means States would get revenues similar to what they were getting before the implementation of GST. The average taxes on goods was 16% during the initial GST period.
- The average rate of taxes in goods at present is 11.3%. But has any consumer benefited from it? Instead, inflation has also been rising. All essential items are more expensive than the pre-GST price. Neither Governments nor the people have benefited from this.
- On an average, the country collects ₹1-lakh crore a month as GST — ₹12-lakh crore in a year; ₹6-lakh crore each for the States and the Centre. Had RNR been maintained, the total amount would have been ₹18-lakh crore at the rate of 16%. States would have received at least ₹3-lakh crore additionally.
- Kerala would have got ₹12,000 crore as SGST and at least ₹2,500 crore as the State's share from the divisible pool. So when the Centre lost ₹1,80,000 crore just because RNR was not maintained, Kerala lost ₹14,500 crore from its revenues annually.
- This has to be corrected. Democratically decided taxes are essential for any State or the country to survive. The promise at the time of implementing the GST was to maintain RNR. But the facts are different. A detailed analysis must be done on why States are losing revenue. GST has to be streamlined to ensure RNR, but without hurting the common people.
- After fleecing the States, the Centre has now proposed the National Monetisation Pipeline which will impact even the sovereignty of the Republic of India. To meet even daily expenses such as the salary of employees, the Centre is resorting to massive sale of the wealth of the country.
- The real reason for such a crisis is the neoliberal policies followed by governments at the Centre since 1991. As a result, even profitable Navratna companies, national highways and railway stations are up for sale.

Entities that gain

- And who are the beneficiaries of all these steps? A handful of corporate houses. The Centre, which has calculated ₹6-lakh crore as the value of the public wealth that will be monetised, waved off corporate loans worth ₹8.75-lakh crore.
- Now, a bad bank will take care of the non-performing assets created by these corporate houses at the cost of public money deposited primarily in public sector banks.
- On the one hand, public wealth is being handed over on a platter to corporate houses while on the other hand the debt of these houses is being taken care of by the Centre using people's money. Strange, indeed.
- About ₹1-lakh crore worth of corporate taxes were also foregone in the last financial year. The sops given to corporate houses resulted in huge revenue losses for the Centre, and in turn for the States from a divisible pool.
- To compensate for this, the Centre is exploiting people during a pandemic by levying taxes on petrol and diesel to the maximum possible extent.
- Revenues which would have helped the people during a pandemic are flowing towards a group of corporate companies. This has to stop. Collective action by all Opposition parties is needed against these policies at this time.

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements regarding Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA):

1. Under the act a person can only be detained and cannot be given capital punishment.
2. UAPA is effective only in the Indian boundary and only Indian Citizens can be charged under the act.

Which of the above statement is/are correct?

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

Answer : d

UAPA has the death penalty and life imprisonment as the highest punishments.

Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.

2) Consider the following statements with respect to mass extinction of earth:

1. Ordovician-Silurian is the most recent extinction earth has faced.
2. Cretaceous-Paleogene is the first mass extinction that occurred on earth.
3. Permian-Triassic affected the insipid species the most.

Codes:

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

Answer : d

Ordovician-Silurian extinction 485 to 444 million years ago

The Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event is the most recent mass extinction and the only one definitively connected to a major asteroid impact.

3) The parameters used in measuring Air Quality Index (AQI) are:

1. Particulate Matter (PM₁₀)
2. Sulphur Dioxide
3. Carbon dioxide
4. Carbon Monoxide

Choose the correct options.

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

Answer : b

4) Consider the following statements:

1. Zika virus can be transmitted only through the vector *Aedes aegypti*.
2. Infection during pregnancy can cause infants to be born with congenital malformations, known as congenital Zika syndrome.
3. It is also a trigger for Guillain-Barre syndrome, neuropathy and myelitis, particularly in adults and older children.

Codes:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only

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

Answer : c

Zika is a viral infection, spread by mosquitoes, the vector is the Aedes aegypti mosquito, which also spreads dengue and chikungunya.

Additionally, infected people can transmit Zika sexually.

5) Consider the following statements with respect to Financial Inclusion Index in India:

- 1. Financial Inclusion Index is released by the Reserve bank of India bi-annually.
- 2. The Index has been constructed without any base year.
- 3. It aims to capture the extent of financial inclusion across the country.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : a

It will be published annually in July every year.

6) UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) use which of the following fields?

- 1. Crafts and Folk Arts
- 2. Gastronomy
- 3. Film
- 4. Design
- 5. Literature and Music

Codes:

- a. 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- b. 3, 4 and 5 only
- c. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- d. 2, 4 and 5 only

Answer : c

7) Which of the following is/are Pelagic species?

- 1. Olive Ridley
- 2. Pond slider
- 3. Diamond back Terrapin
- 4. Herrings

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

8) National Parks located on the shores of Brahmaputra River are:

- 1. Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary
- 2. Manas Wildlife Sanctuary
- 3. Kaziranga National Park
- 4. Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary

Codes:

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



- c. 3 and 4 only
- d. 1 and 4 only

Answer : c

9) Consider the following statements with respect to Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act:

- 1. It is implemented by ministry of finance.
- 2. Under the act NGOs can accept foreign contributions without the permission of ministry of finance.
- 3. Organisations should register themselves every five years under the act.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : d

Foreign funding of persons in India is regulated under FCRA Act and is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Individuals are permitted to accept foreign contributions without permission of MHA. However, the monetary limit for acceptance of such foreign contributions shall be less than Rs. 25,000.

10) Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Paris Accord is not legally binding on the member nations.
- 2. Objective is to develop mechanisms to help and support countries that are very vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

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

The treaty is legally binding on the member nations.

11) Consider the following statements with respect to Meteor showers:

- 1. Meteor showers are named after the constellation they appear to be coming from.
- 2. Leonid meteor shower does not originate from a comet and is believed to be an asteroid.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

The Leonids originate from the constellation Leo the Lion– the groups of stars which form a lion's mane. They emerge from the comet Tempel-Tuttle, which requires 33 years to revolve once around the Sun.

12) Consider the following statements:

- 1. The term of presidency of International Solar Alliance (ISA) is three years.
- 2. France is the president and India is the vice-president of ISA.
- 3. According to Ease of Doing Solar Report, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique are potential markets.

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

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

d. 1 only

Answer : b

India and France have been re-elected as the President and Co-President of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) for a term of two years at the third Assembly of ISA.

13) Consider the following statements:

1. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is responsible for policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) Scheme.
2. The funding is shared partially between the central and state government.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : a

The MPLADS is a Central Sector Scheme fully funded by Government of India.

14) Consider the following statements:

1. The target of NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) mission is a small moonlet called Didymos and it orbits around an asteroid named Dimorphos.
2. DART will carry a small satellite to capture the images of the impact and the impact crater formed as a result of the collision.

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

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

Answer : a

The main aim of the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) mission is to test the newly developed technology that would allow a spacecraft to crash into an asteroid and change its course.

15) Consider the following statements:

1. Sedimentary rocks are formed out of existing rocks undergoing recrystallization.
2. Argillaceous rocks have more sand and bigger sized particles and are hard and porous.
3. Arenaceous rocks have more clay and are fine-grained, softer, mostly impermeable.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : d

Sedimentary rocks are formed by lithification - consolidation and compaction of sediments.

16) Consider the following statements:

1. Climate Change Performance Index is published by German watch, the New Climate Institute and the Climate Action Network annually.
2. It aims to enhance transparency in international climate politics and enables comparison of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries.
3. The CCPI looks at four categories, with 14 indicators Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Renewable Energy, Energy Use, and Climate Policy.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : c

17) The taxes levied and collected by the Union but assigned to States are:

- 1. Duties in respect of succession to property other than agricultural land.
- 2. Stamp duties on bills of exchange, cheques, promissory notes, bills of landing, etc.
- 3. Excise duties on medicinal toilet preparation containing alcohol or opium.
- 4. Taxes on the sale or purchase of newspapers and advertisements published therein.

Codes:

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

Answer : a

18) Consider the following statements:

- 1. Diabetes Mellitus type 1 occurs when the pancreas fails to produce sufficient insulin.
- 2. Diabetes Insipidus occurs when the body is unable to respond or produce the Antidiuretic hormone.
- 3. Gestational Diabetes occurs in pregnant women who develop high blood sugar level without a previous history and is permanent.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

Gestational Diabetes: occurs in pregnant women who develop high blood sugar level without a previous history. This condition usually resolves after delivery.

19) Consider the following statements:

- 1. Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) are institutionalized measures to be taken when air quality deteriorates.
- 2. GRAP applies only to New Delhi and works only as an emergency measure.
- 3. Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) is a Supreme Court mandated body responsible for the implementation of GRAP.

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

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Answer : a

The plan requires action and coordination among 13 different agencies in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan.

20) Consider the following statements:

- 1. Zonal Councils are Constitutional bodies.
- 2. Prime Minister of India is the Chairman of the council and the term of Vice Chairman is two years.
- 3. Each state is represented by its Chief Minister and two other ministers as nominated by the Governor of the state.

4. Union Territories does not have any representation in the council.

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

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

Answer : d

They are statutory bodies established under the States Reorganization Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies.

Chairman: Union Home Minister

Vice Chairman: Chief Minister of the States included in each zone act as vice-chairman of the Zonal Council for the zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.

Members: Chief Minister and two other ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.