

May (Week 2)

INDEX

Contents

Prelims	3
NATIONAL	3
La Nina.....	3
Medication abortions are increasing	3
Punjab promoting green manure.....	4
SC puts colonial sedition law on hold.....	5
Punjab's DSR.....	9
The grim forewarnings of a global study on birds.....	10
Shigella	11
Andaman to get gas-based power plant	12
Operation Dudhi.....	13
Integrated Battle Groups	13
Tomato flu.....	14
What is FCRA?	15
On the question of notifying minorities	16
The India hypertension control initiative.....	18
The Protected Mobility Vehicles	19
What is the 'onset' of the monsoon	20
INSACOG.....	21
The Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation report	22
INTERNATIONAL	24
Event Horizon reveals true colours of SgrA*	24
Marsquake.....	24
Monkeypox	25
How and why are cyclones named?.....	27
Mains	29
GS II	29
Still a long way for termination as an unconditional right.....	29
The bitter dispute over India's pandemic mortality	30
India's judiciary and the slackening cog of trust	32
Food labelling	34
Why are reproductive rights under threat?.....	35



The importance of emigrants	37
A dissonance in India-German ties	38
With delimitation over, a look at the slate for J&K	40
GS III	43
What are India's plans to avert a wheat crisis?	43
Who should govern our data?	45
Control inflation by acting on liquidity	48
Shallow and deep ecologism.....	50
GS IV	52
Actions that corrode the steel frame of India.....	52
Current Affairs Quiz	54





Prelims

NATIONAL

La Nina

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *In most years, meteorologists consider the La Nina to be a friend of India. This year, however, the La Nina is being blamed for worsening perhaps the longest spell of heatwaves from March to April in north, west and Central India.*

What is La Nina

- The phenomenon associated with below normal sea surface temperatures in the eastern and central Pacific Ocean, makes the summer monsoon wetter and the winter colder unlike its evil twin, the El Nino, or a warming phenomenon that frequently dries up monsoon rains over India.
- Formally known as the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO), the La Nina-El Nino phenomenon follows a periodic pattern that roughly lasts three years.
- During a La Nina winter, a north-south pressure pattern sets up over India and normally this influences the trade winds that bring rains to India. However, because the La Nina didn't peak, the sea surface temperatures continued to be cold and this drove hot westerly winds and blasts of hot air from the Middle East into Pakistan and India.
- While land temperatures over India begin rising in March, they are usually punctuated by western disturbances, or moisture from the Mediterranean region that fall as rain over north and western India. For these currents to make it as far as India, they need a significant difference in temperature between Europe and the latitudes over India.
- Partly due to La Nina, this temperature difference was absent and so the western disturbances that came to India were weak with hardly any rain.
- According to a 2021 report by the Ministry of Earth Sciences, 'Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region', all India averaged frequency of summer heatwaves is expected to rise to about 2.5 events per season by the mid-21st century, with a further slight rise to about 3.0 events by the end of 21st century under current trajectory of greenhouse gas emission.

Medication abortions are increasing

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Taking pills to end a pregnancy accounts for a growing share of abortions in the United States, both legal and not. If the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade as expected, medication abortion will play a larger role, especially among women who lose access to abortion clinics.*

What is medication abortion?

- It is a regimen of pills women can take at home, a method increasingly used around the world.
- The protocol approved for use in the United States includes two medications.
 - The first one, mifepristone, blocks a hormone called progesterone that is necessary for a pregnancy to continue.

- The second, misoprostol, brings on uterine contractions.

When can it be used?

- The Food and Drug Administration has approved medication abortion for up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. World Health Organization guidelines say it can be used up to 12 weeks at home and after 12 weeks in a medical office.

Who prescribes abortion pills?

- Doctors with a special registration required by the FDA.
- But it recently lifted rules that required an in-person appointment. That means more providers are offering medication abortions through telemedicine.
- The doctor and patient meet online, then the doctor sends pills to the patient's home through the mail. (Some brick-and-mortar pharmacies have become certified to fill prescriptions for the pills, but this is not yet common.)
- If Roe is overturned, about half of states are expected to ban abortion altogether. Those laws will affect all abortion methods, including procedural abortions and pills.

Punjab promoting green manure

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The state agriculture department is promoting the cultivation of green manure these days as Punjab Agro is providing subsidy on the seed at the rate of Rs 2,000 per quintal, which costs Rs 6,300 per quintal without subsidy. The farmers can avail its seed from the block level offices of the agriculture department as limited stock is available with the department and farmers can avail it on first-cum-first-served basis.*

What is green manure?

- Green manures are crops grown specifically for maintaining soil fertility and structure. They are normally incorporated back into the soil, either directly, or after removal and composting.
- There are three main varieties of green manure, including Dhaincha, Cowpea, Sunhemp. Also some crops such as summer moong, mash pulses and guar act as green manure.
- Around 11,000 quintals of subsidised seed, which is provided by Punjab Agro, is available with the department. Green manure varieties are incorporated into the soil when the crop is 42-56 days old.
- Pulses crops are incorporated in soil after plucking of beans after 60 days. Experts said that green manure must be leguminous in nature, bear maximum nodules on its roots to fix large amount of atmospheric nitrogen in the soil.
- Experts have also said that seeds of green manure should be easily available to the farmers at a low price.

Why is sowing of green manure important in Punjab?

- Punjab's per hectare fertiliser consumption, which is around 244 kg, is one of the highest in the country and is also higher than the national average.
- Growing green manure can curtail this consumption to a large extent by 25 to 30% and can save huge input cost for the farmers.
- Experts said that in Punjab high-intensity agricultural practices are prevalent as farmers take two-three crops in a year, which requires lots of chemical fertilisers such as urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) etc.

- And this leads to deficiencies of micronutrients like iron and zinc, especially in the soils where rice is cultivated thus affecting productivity.
- In such a situation, green manuring helps improve soil health and enhance the productivity of the crops.
- Also, even the PH level of the soil in several parts of the state is more than 8.5 and 9 per cent and green manure is beneficial to maintain it at the required level which is 7 per cent.

What is its sowing time?

- These can be sown immediately after harvesting the wheat crop. In Punjab, it can be sown from April 15 to the first week of May.
- Experts said that after wheat harvesting apply rauni irrigation and then pre-soaked seed in water for 8 hours of dhaincha are sown. Around 20 kg dhaincha seed is required per acre.
- The fields are vacant in the state for 45 to 60 days after wheat harvesting and that is the best period to sow it because these varieties of green manure can be buried in soil when they are 42-56 days old.

How does it benefit the soil and crop?

- Experts said that it helps in enhancing the organic matter in the soil, meets the deficiency of the micronutrients and reduces the consumption of the inorganic fertilisers etc.
- It is a good alternative to the organic manure and it conserves the nutrients, adds nitrogen and stabilises the soil structure
- It decomposes rapidly and liberates large quantities of carbon dioxide and weak acids, which act on insoluble soil minerals to release nutrients for plant growth.
- Also, it contains 15 to 18 quintals of dry matter, which also contains phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, iron and manganese, per acre and 20 to 40kg per acre of nitrogen, Dr Gupta said.

SC puts colonial sedition law on hold

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

Context: *The Supreme Court suspended pending criminal trials and court proceedings under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code, while allowing the Union of India to reconsider the British-era law.*

No new FIRs

- The court also made it clear that it “hopes and expects” the Centre and States to restrain from registering FIRs, continuing investigations or take coercive measures under Section 124A while the “reconsideration” of the colonial provision was on.
- Adding a fail-safe to protect civil liberties against any future misuse of Section 124A while it was under the Union’s microscope, the court ordered that the persons accused in fresh cases were free to approach courts, which would consider their cases taking into account the order of the Supreme Court and the “clear” stand of the Union that the provision was abused and needed “re-examination”.
- The court, meanwhile, gave the Union of India liberty to issue a directive to States and authorities to prevent the continued misuse of the sedition law.



Hair-trigger cases | National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report says 356 cases of sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code had been registered and 548 people arrested between 2015 and 2020, with just six convictions. **A look at a few recent cases:**



Voice of reason: A protest in Karnataka against a sedition case slapped on a school in January 2020 over a play performed by students. ■ AP

Disha Ravi: The 21-year-old Bengaluru-based environment activist was arrested by the Delhi Police on February 14, 2021 for allegedly creating and disseminating a 'toolkit' on the farmers' protests. Granting her bail on February 23, 2021, a Delhi court said "the offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments"

Kashmiri students: Three of them studying in Agra were arrested on October 28, 2021 for allegedly posting a WhatsApp status praising Pakistani players after their victory against India in a T20 cricket match. They were

languishing in prison till April 26 this year even after securing bail on March 30 from the Allahabad High Court due to the non-availability of local guarantors, a high security amount and police verification

Sharjeel Imam: The JNU student leader had allegedly made inflammatory speeches at Jamia Millia Islamia on December 13, 2019, and at Aligarh Muslim University on December 16, 2019 during the anti-CAA stir. A court has framed charges against Imam, who has been in judicial custody since 2020,

for sedition and other charges



Kanhaiya Kumar:

In 2016, a group of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University held a poetry session to mark the third anniversary of the hanging of 2001 Parliament attack case convict Afzal Guru. The Delhi Police later charged the then JNU student union president Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid and others with sedition

What is the sedition law?

- Section 124A defines sedition as: "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life, to which fine may be added..."
- The provision also contains three explanations:
 - The expression "disaffection" includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity;
 - Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section;
 - Comments expressing disapprobation of the administrative or other action of the Government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.

What are the origins of the sedition law?

- Although Thomas Macaulay, who drafted the Indian Penal Code, had included the law on sedition, it was not added in the code enacted in 1860. Legal experts believe this omission was accidental. In 1890, sedition was included as an offence under section 124A IPC through the Special Act XVII.
- The punishment prescribed then, transportation “beyond the seas for the term of his or her natural life”, was amended to life imprisonment in 1955.
- The provision was extensively used to curb political dissent during the Independence movement. Several pre-independence cases involving Section 124A of the IPC are against celebrated freedom fighters, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Shaukat and Mohammad Ali, Maulana Azad and Mahatma Gandhi. It is during this time that the most notable trial on sedition — Queen Empress v. Bal Gangadhar Tilak — took place in 1898.
- Courts largely followed a literal interpretation of the provision holding that “... the disapprobation must be ‘compatible’ with a disposition to render obedience to the lawful authority of the Government and to support the lawful authority of the Government against unlawful attempts to subvert or resist that authority.”
- The Constituent Assembly debated including sedition as an exception to the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, guaranteed in the Constitution, but several members vehemently disagreed and the word is not included in the document.

Legal challenges to IPC Section 124A

- As early as 1950, the Supreme Court in *Romesh Thapar v State of Madras* held that “criticism of the government exciting disaffection or bad feelings towards it, is not to be regarded as a justifying ground for restricting the freedom of expression and of the press, unless it is such as to undermine the security of or tend to overthrow the state.”
- Justice Patanjali Shastri cited the Constituent Assembly’s deliberate omission of the word sedition from the Constitution for the liberal reading of the law.
- Subsequently, two high courts — the Punjab and Haryana High Court in *Tara Singh Gopi Chand v. The State* (1951), and the Allahabad High Court in *Ram Nandan v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (1959) — declared that Section 124A of the IPC was primarily a tool for colonial masters to quell discontent in the country and declared the provision unconstitutional.
- However, in 1962, the issue came up before the Supreme Court in *Kedarnath Singh v State of Bihar*.

The Kedar Nath ruling on sedition

- A five-judge Constitution Bench overruled the earlier rulings of the high courts and upheld the constitutional validity of IPC Section 124A.
- However, the court attempted to restrict its scope for misuse. The court held that unless accompanied by an incitement or call for violence, criticism of the government cannot be labelled sedition.
- The ruling restricted sedition only insofar as seditious speech tended to incite “public disorder”- a phrase Section 124A itself does not contain but was read into it by the court.
- The court also issued seven “guidelines”, underlining when critical speech cannot be qualified as sedition.
- In its guidelines on using the new, restrictive definition of sedition law, the court said not all speech with “disaffection”, “hatred,” or “contempt” against the state, but only speech that is likely to incite “public disorder” would qualify as sedition.
- Following the Kedar Nath verdict, “public disorder” has been considered a necessary ingredient for the commission of sedition. The court has held that mere sloganeering unaccompanied by any threat to public order would not qualify as sedition.
- This ruling in *Balwant Singh v. State of Punjab* (1995), reiterated that the real intent of the speech must be taken into account before labelling it seditious. The petitioners were accused of sedition for raising



slogans of “Khalistan Zindabad, Raj Karega Khalsa, Hinduan Nun Punjab Chon Kadh Ke Chhadange, Hun Mauka Aya Hai Raj Kayam Kar” (Hindus will leave Punjab and we will rule) etc. in a public space.

- In subsequent rulings — Dr. Vinayak Binayak Sen v. State of Chhattisgarh (2011), — the court also held that a person can be convicted for sedition even if she is not the author of the seditious speech but has merely circulated it.
- In 2016, in Arun Jaitley v State of Uttar Pradesh, the Allahabad High Court held that criticism of the judiciary or a court ruling — former Union minister Arun Jaitley in a blog post had criticised the Supreme Court’s 2016 ruling declaring the National Judicial Appointments Commission unconstitutional — would not amount to sedition.
- Successive reports of the Law Commission of India and even the Supreme Court, have underlined the rampant misuse of the sedition law. The Kedar Nath guidelines and a textual deviation in law puts the onus on the police who register a case to distinguish between legitimate speech from seditious speech.
- Just last year, in Vinod Dua v Union of India, the Supreme Court quashed FIRs with charges of sedition against the journalist for criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s handling of the Covid-19 crisis and cautioned against unlawful application of the provision.

What is the fresh challenge to sedition law?

- The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a fresh challenge against the provision after a batch of petitions were filed by journalists, Kishorechandra Wangkhemcha, Kanhaiya Lal Shukla; and Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, among others.
- This would involve a seven-judge bench considering whether the Kedar Nath ruling was correctly decided.
- Although the government initially defended the provision arguing that “isolated incidents of misuse” do not necessitate removal of the provision itself, it has now told the court that it is mulling a fresh review of the colonial law.
- The petitioners have argued that the restricted Kedar Nath definition of sedition can be addressed through several other laws, including stringent anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.
- The court’s intervention is crucial because in case it strikes down the provision, it will have to overrule the Kedar Nath ruling and uphold the earlier rulings that were liberal on free speech.
- However, if the government decides to review the law, either by diluting the language or repealing it, it could still bring back the provision in a different form.

Sedition laws in other countries

- In the **United Kingdom**, the sedition law was officially repealed under Section 73 of the Coroners and Justice Act, 2009, citing a chilling effect on freedom of speech and expression. The common law on sedition, which is traced to the Statute of Westminster, 1275, when the King was considered the holder of Divine right, was termed “arcane” and “from a bygone era when freedom of expression wasn’t seen as the right it is today.”
- In the **United States**, sedition is a federal felony under the Federal Criminal Code, Section 2384, and is now being used against rioters involved in the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Despite the First Amendment that forbids any restrictions on free speech, “conspiracy to interfere directly with the operation of the government” and not just speech is considered sedition.
- **Australia** repealed its sedition law in 2010, and last year, **Singapore** also repealed the law citing that several new legislations can sufficiently address the actual need for sedition law without its chilling effects.



Punjab's DSR

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The Punjab government recently announced Rs 1,500 incentive per acre for farmers opting for Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR), which is known for saving water. Last year, 18% (5.62 lakh hectares) of the total rice area in the state was under DSR against government target of bringing 10 lakh hectares under it.*

How much area in Punjab is under rice crop?

- According to Punjab Agriculture Department data for last Kharif season (2021-22), 31.45 lakh hectares (over 3.1 million hectares) was under paddy and basmati, including 26.60 under non-basmati rice and 4.85 lakh hectares under basmati.
- The figure was 31.49 lakh hectares in 2020-21 and 31.42 lakh hectares in 2019-20.

How much water is required to grow one kg rice?

- Paddy is non-shelled rice that farmers grow and sell in mandis and then after milling paddy rice is prepared.
- According to the studies by Punjab Agriculture university (PAU), Ludhiana, around 3,600 litres to 4,125 litres of water is required to grow one kg rice depending upon the paddy variety. Long duration varieties consume more water.
- In Punjab, 32% area is under the long duration (around 158 days) paddy varieties, and the rest comes under paddy varieties that take 120 to 140 days to grow.
- So, on an average 3,900 to 4,000 litres water is required to grow one kg rice in the state.

How much water is used in Punjab every year to grow rice?

- In 2020-21, Centre procured 203 lakh tonnes of paddy from Punjab. After milling, this procured paddy resulted in 135.98 lakh tonnes of rice.
- Since PAU studies put average water required to produce one kg rice at 4,000 litres, so in one year – based on last year's estimate – Punjab needed 5,4000 billion litres of water to produce 135 lakh tonnes rice.

How much water can DSR help save?

- According to an analysis by the PAU, DSR technique can help save 15% to 20% water. In some cases, water saving can reach 22% to 23%.
- With DSR, 15-18 irrigation rounds are required against 25 to 27 irrigation rounds in traditional method.
- Since area under rice in Punjab is almost stagnant around 3 million hectares for the last three to four years, DSR can save 8100 to 1,0800 billion litres water every year if entire rice crop is brought under the technique, said experts.

Are there any other benefits of DSR tech?

- According to experts, DSR can solve labour shortage problem because as like the traditional method it does not require a paddy nursery and transplantation of 30 days old paddy nursery into the main puddled field.
- With DSR, paddy seeds are sown directly with machine.
- PAU experts said that DSR offers avenues for ground water recharge as it prevent the development of hard crust just beneath the plough layer due to puddled transplanting and it matures 7-10 days earlier than puddle transplanted crop, therefore giving more time for management of paddy straw.
- A PAU study said that results from research trials and farmers' field survey have also indicated that yield, after DSR, are one to two quintals per acre higher than puddled transplanted rice.



- Experts said that with DSR technique, which is called ‘tar-wattar DSR’ (good soil moisture), farmers must sow paddy only after pre-sowing (rauni) irrigation and not in dry fields.
- Further, the field should be laser levelled. They said that spraying of herbicide must be done simultaneously along with sowing, and the first irrigation, which is done at 21 days after sowing.

When should farmers sow paddy using DSR?

- Though government has said that farmers can sow paddy with DSR after May 20, but PAU experts say that DSR varieties must not be sown before May 25 or yield will get impacted.
- According to them, June 1-15 is best time to sow DSR-friendly paddy varieties and second fortnight of June is optimum time for direct sowing of basmati.
- Experts said that under agricultural extension services, farmers must train extensively at every stage from pre-sowing to harvesting so that they can develop confidence to adopt DSR without any hesitation.

The grim forewarnings of a global study on birds

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The State of the World’s Birds, an annual review of environmental resources published on May 5 by nine natural sciences and avian specialists across the globe, has revealed that the population of 48% of the 10,994 surviving species of birds is declining. The report led by the Manchester Metropolitan University gives an overview of the changes in the knowledge of avian biodiversity and the extent to which it is imperilled.*

What are the key findings of the study?

- The study found that 5,245 or about 48% of the existing bird species worldwide are known or suspected to be undergoing population declines.
- While 4,295 or 39% of the species have stable trends, about 7% or 778 species have increasing population trends.
- The trend of 37 species was unknown. The study draws from BirdLife International’s latest assessment of all birds for the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List that shows 1,481 or 13.5% species are currently threatened with global extinction.
- These include 798 species classified as vulnerable, 460 as endangered and 223 as critically endangered while 52 species were considered to be data deficient.
- About 73% species are estimated to have fewer than 10,000 mature individuals, 40% have fewer than 2,500 mature individuals, and almost 5% have fewer than 50 mature individuals.
- The bird species are non-randomly threatened across the avian tree of life, with richness of threatened species disproportionately high among families such as parrots, pheasants and allies, albatrosses and allies, rails, cranes, cracids, grebes, megapodes, and pigeons.
- The more threatened bird species (86.4%) are found in tropical than in temperate latitudes (31.7%), with hotspots for threatened species concentrated in the tropical Andes, southeast Brazil, eastern Himalayas, eastern Madagascar, and Southeast Asian islands.

What is the importance of birds to ecosystems and culture?

- Birds are a truly global taxon, with one or more species occupying all habitats across the earth’s terrestrial surface including urban environments with no natural analogues.
- Birds contribute toward many ecosystem services that either directly or indirectly benefit humanity. These include provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services.



- The functional role of birds within ecosystems as pollinators, seed-dispersers, ecosystem engineers, scavengers and predators not only facilitate accrual and maintenance of biodiversity but also support human endeavours such as sustainable agriculture via pest control besides aiding other animals to multiply.
- For instance, coral reef fish productivity has been shown to increase as seabird colonies recovered following rat eradication in the Chagos archipelago. Wild birds and products derived from them are also economically important as food (meat, eggs).
- Approximately 45% of all extant bird species are used in some way by people, primarily as pets (37%) and for food (14%).
- The cultural role of birds is perhaps more important than any other taxonomic group, the study says.
- Beyond its symbolic and artistic values, birdwatching is a global pastime practised by millions of people. Garden bird-feeding is valued at \$5-6 billion per year and growing by four per cent annually.

What are the threats contributing to avian biodiversity loss?

- The study lists eight factors, topped by land cover and land-use change. The continued growth of human populations and of per capita rates of consumption lead directly to conversion and degradation of primary natural habitats and consequent loss of biodiversity, it says.
- Although global tree cover increased between 1982 and 2016, including by 95,000 sq. km in the tropical dry forest biome and by 84,000 sq. km in the tropical moist deciduous forest biome, this has been driven by afforestation with plantations (often of non-native species) plus land abandonment in parts of the global North, with net loss in the tropics.
- The other factors are habitat fragmentation and degradation, especially in the tropics; hunting and trapping with 11 to 36 million birds estimated to be killed or taken illegally in the Mediterranean region alone; the impact of invasive alien species and disease (971 alien bird species introduced accidentally or deliberately to 230 countries over the centuries have affected the native species); infrastructure, energy demands and pollution; agrochemical and pharmaceutical usage (pesticide ingestion kills an estimated 2.7 million birds annually in Canada alone); global trade teleconnections; and climate change.

Can the avian biodiversity loss be stemmed?

- Yes. The study says ornithologists have a good understanding of the spatio-temporal patterns of avian diversity compared to many other taxa and the measures needed to slow down and ultimately reverse avian biodiversity loss.
- “The growing footprint of the human population represents the ultimate driver of most threats to avian biodiversity, so the success of solutions will depend on the degree to which they account for the social context in which they are implemented, and our ability to effect changes in individual and societal attitudes and behaviours. Emerging concepts of conservation social science can inform efforts to address biodiversity loss and to achieve more effective and sustainable conservation outcomes, linking birds to human well-being, sustainability, climate resilience, and environmental justice,” it says.

Shigella

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: The Kerala health department identified *Shigella* bacteria as the cause for the food poisoning incident in Kasaragod, which claimed the life of a 16-year-old girl and led to 30-odd others being admitted to hospital.

What is Shigella?

- Shigella is a bacterium that belongs to the enterobacter family — a group of bacteria that reside in the intestine, not all of which cause disease in humans.
- It mainly affects the intestine and results in diarrhoea, sometimes bloody, stomach pain, and fever.
- The infection spreads easily as it takes only “a small number of bacteria to make someone ill”, says the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- It is a food- and water-borne infection, and can happen when someone consumes contaminated food — like in the case from Kerala — unwashed fruit or vegetables.
- The disease is easily spread by direct or indirect contact with the excrement of the patient. You can get the infection if you swim or take a bath in contaminated water.

How widespread is Shigella infection?

- Shigella outbreaks appear to be exacerbated during pregnancy and in children under five years of age, and in those with weakened immune systems.
- There are four types of Shigella bacteria that affect humans — Shigella sonnei, Shigella flexneri, Shigella boydii, and Shigella dysenteriae. The fourth type causes the most severe disease because of the toxin it produces.

Is it common for people to die of the infection?

- It is not. Doctors say that the infection does not generally kill, unless the patient has a weak immune system or the pathogen is resistant to the antibiotics that are prescribed.
- The problem though, occurs when the antibiotics do not work because the bacteria are resistant to it.
- This, however, does not happen in most cases, Dr Singh said. “The mortality of the infection is less than 1%,” he said.

What precautions should you take?

- The measures to prevent a Shigella infection are the same as that of any other food- and water-borne infection. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after a meal.
- Wash your hands properly after a bowel movement. Ensure the water that you drink is clean and the fruits and vegetables are fresh.
- Products such as milk, chicken, and fish can get infected easily and must be kept at a proper temperature. They must also be properly cooked.

Andaman to get gas-based power plant

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Union Environment Ministry has approved an exemption to the laws governing the regulation of coastal zones and has paved the way for gas-powered plants to be set up on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The Island Coastal Zone Regulation (ICRZ), 2019, limits infrastructure development on vulnerable coastal stretches.*

Enabling provision

- In the aftermath of a proposal from the Andaman and Nicobar Coastal Zone Management Authority (ANCZMA), an expert body of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, called the National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA), recommended in August 2021 that it was necessary to provide an “enabling provision in the ICRZ notification” to meet the energy requirement of the islanders while

reducing the dependence on highly polluting energy sources such as conventional diesel generator (DG) sets.

- The NCZMA has recommended that gas-based power plants be permitted within the Island Coastal Regulation Zone area only on islands with geographical areas greater than 100 sq. km.
- The Central government, following this, invited comments from the public on modifications to the ICZR, and on May 5, issued a notification accepting the National Coastal Zone Management Authority recommendation.
- The Andaman and Nicobar administration is expected to commission a 50-MW power project running on liquefied natural gas at Hope Town, Port Blair, to be developed by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC).
- Following visits by the NTPC personnel, a dual-fuel power plant that runs on both diesel and LNG is expected to be commissioned.

Back-up clause

- Diesel is necessary, the Andaman administration authorities argued, as a back-up fuel when the region faced inclement weather.
- There has been an increased interest in the development of the Andaman region following a policy push by the NITI Aayog.
- A proposed project plans to develop the Greater Andaman region or the southernmost stretch of the island group.
- Proposals include a 22-sq.km airport complex, a transshipment port (TSP) at South Bay at an estimated cost of ₹12,000 crore, a parallel-to-the-coast mass rapid transport system and a free trade zone and warehousing complex on the southwestern coast.

Operation Dudhi

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The paramilitary Assam Rifles on Monday felicitated the surviving soldiers of Operation Dudhi, marked in the country's defence history as India's most successful counter-insurgency operation more than 30 years ago.*

Details:

- A team of 15 soldiers of the Assam Rifles' 7th Battalion led by Naib Subedar Padam Bahadur Chhetri had on May 5, 1991, gunned down 72 Pakistan-trained extremists and captured 13 others at 14,000 ft in J&K.
- Two Assam Rifles soldiers — riflemen Kameshwar Prasad and Ram Kumar Arya — died during the six-hour gun battle.

Integrated Battle Groups

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Army has identified a holding formation on the Western front and a Strike formation on the Northern borders to be converted into agile Integrated Battle Groups (IBG), Army chief Gen. Manoj Pande said while stating that consultations are complete and is now in the process of final compilation.*

Details:

- The concept of IBG has already been test-bedded by the Army's 9 Corps and was later validated by the 17 Mountain Strike Corps in its exercises.
- Each IBG would be tailor made based on Threat, Terrain and Task and resources will be allotted based on the three T's. The idea is for them to be light with centralised logistics and be able to mobilise within 12 -48 hrs based on the location.
- While a Command is the largest static formation of the Army spread across a defined geography, a Corps is the largest mobile formation. Typically, each Corps has about three Divisions.
- The idea is to reorganise them into IBGs which are Brigade sized units but have all the essential elements like infantry, armoured, artillery and air defence embedded together. The IBGs will also be defence and offensive in nature.
- After the terrorist attack on Parliament in 2001, the Indian military undertook massive mobilisation but the Army's formations which were deep inside took weeks to mobilise losing the element of surprise.
- Following this, the Army formulated a proactive doctrine known as 'Cold Start' to launch swift offensive, but its existence was denied in the past.

Tomato flu

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Tamil Nadu has ramped up surveillance at its borders in the wake of "tomato flu" cases being detected in Kerala. The flu that gets its name because of the red blister it causes, has raised concern in Coimbatore, with a team of officials deployed at the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border screening people coming from the neighbouring state.*

What is tomato flu? Who does it affect?

- Dr Aruna informed that the flu affects children below five years of age. The symptoms of this flu, also called Tomato fever, include rashes, skin irritation and dehydration.
- According to several reports, the flu can also cause tiredness, joint pain, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, high fever, and body ache. In some cases, it may also change the colour of the legs and the hands.
- This flu is a self-limiting one and there is no specific drug for this
- This means that the symptoms will resolve overtime on their own if supportive care is given.

How can tomato flu be treated?

- Like other cases of flu, tomato fever is also contagious.
- If someone is infected with this flu, they need to be kept in isolation as this could spread rapidly from one person to another.
- It is essential to prevent children from scratching the blisters caused by the flu. Proper rest and hygiene is also advised. Utensils, clothes and other items used by the infected persons must be sanitised to prevent the flu from spreading.
- Fluid intake would also help counteract dehydration. Most importantly, it is important to seek your doctor's advice if you notice the above-mentioned symptoms.

What is FCRA?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *The CBI carried out searches at 40 places and questioned six officials of the Foreigners Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for allegedly accepting bribes to give clearances under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010 to certain NGOs.*

Details

- Earlier this year, in a petition filed by the NGO Global Peace Initiative, the Supreme Court had asked thousands of NGOs to go back to the government for redressal of their grievances on non-renewal of their FCRA registrations.
- The registrations of about 5,900 NGOs had ceased to be active after December 31, 2021, owing to either the NGOs not applying for renewal before the due date, or the MHA refusing their renewal for alleged violation of the FCRA.
- On December 25 last year, the MHA refused to renew the FCRA registration of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, based on "adverse inputs".
- The registration was, however, restored on January 6, and Missionaries of Charity's FCRA certificate was made valid until the end of 2026.

What is the FCRA?

- The FCRA was enacted during the Emergency in 1976 amid apprehensions that foreign powers were interfering in India's affairs by pumping money into the country through independent organisations.
- These concerns were, in fact, even older — they had been expressed in Parliament as early as in 1969.
- The law sought to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations so that they functioned "in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic".
- An amended FCRA was enacted under the UPA government in 2010 to "consolidate the law" on utilisation of foreign funds, and "to prohibit" their use for "any activities detrimental to national interest".
- The law was amended again by the current government in 2020, giving the government tighter control and scrutiny over the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds by NGOs.
- Broadly, the FCRA requires every person or NGO seeking to receive foreign donations to be (i) registered under the Act, (ii) to open a bank account for the receipt of the foreign funds in State Bank of India, Delhi, and (iii) to utilise those funds only for the purpose for which they have been received and as stipulated in the Act.
- They are also required to file annual returns, and they must not transfer the funds to another NGO.
- The Act prohibits the receipt of foreign funds by candidates for elections, journalists or newspaper and media broadcast companies, judges and government servants, members of legislature and political parties or their office-bearers, and organisations of a political nature.

How is FCRA registration granted?

- NGOs that want to receive foreign funds must apply online in a prescribed format with the required documentation. FCRA registrations are granted to individuals or associations that have definite cultural, economic, educational, religious, and social programmes.
- Following the application by the NGO, the MHA makes inquiries through the Intelligence Bureau into the antecedents of the applicant, and accordingly processes the application.
- Under the FCRA, the applicant should not be fictitious or benami; and should not have been prosecuted or convicted for indulging in activities aimed at conversion through inducement or force, either directly or indirectly, from one religious faith to another.



- The applicant should also not have been prosecuted for or convicted of creating communal tension or disharmony; should not have been found guilty of diversion or misutilisation of funds; and should not be engaged or likely to be engaged in the propagation of sedition.
- The MHA is required to approve or reject the application within 90 days. In case of failure to process the application in the given time, the MHA is expected to inform the NGO of the reasons for the same.

For how long is approval granted?

- Once granted, FCRA registration is valid for five years. NGOs are expected to apply for renewal within six months of the date of expiry of registration.
- In case of failure to apply for renewal, the registration is deemed to have expired, and the NGO is no longer entitled to receive foreign funds or utilise its existing funds without permission from the ministry.
- The FCRA registration of close to 5,900 NGOs, including Oxfam India Trust and Indian Medical Association, lapsed on December 31 last year.
- According to sources, the registration of as many as 5,789 NGOs had lapsed after they failed to apply for renewal before the due date.
- The rest, who had applied for renewal, were refused as the MHA found their operations or accounts to be in violation of the FCRA, sources had said at the time.
- According to the MHA, NGOs failing to apply before the due date can petition the ministry with cogent reasons within four months of the expiry of registration, following which their applications can be reconsidered.
- Many NGOs do not apply for renewal for a variety of reasons, which include either completion of the project for which the FCRA registration had been taken or the NGO itself folding up.

On what basis is approval cancelled?

- The government reserves the right to cancel the FCRA registration of any NGO if it finds it to be in violation of the Act.
- Registration can be cancelled if an inquiry finds a false statement in the application; if the NGO is found to have violated any of the terms and conditions of the certificate or renewal; if it has not been engaged in any reasonable activity in its chosen field for the benefit of society for two consecutive years; or if it has become defunct.
- It can also be cancelled if “in the opinion of the Central Government, it is necessary in the public interest to cancel the certificate”, the FCRA says.
- Registrations are also cancelled when an audit finds irregularities in the finances of an NGO in terms of misutilisation of foreign funds.
- According to FCRA, no order of cancellation of certificate can be made unless the person or NGO concerned has been given a reasonable opportunity of being heard. Once the registration of an NGO is cancelled, it is not eligible for re-registration for three years.
- The ministry also has powers to suspend an NGO’s registration for 180 days pending inquiry, and can freeze its funds.
- All orders of the government can be challenged in the High Court.

On the question of notifying minorities

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A public interest litigation (PIL) under the consideration of the Supreme Court of India challenges the power of the Centre to notify minority communities at a national level.



Who is a minority and who decides that?

- The PIL specifically questions the validity of Section 2(f) of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions or NCMEI Act 2004, terming it arbitrary and contrary to Articles 14, 15, 21, 29 and 30 of the Constitution.
- Section 2(f) says “minority ,”for the purpose of this Act, means a community notified as such by the Central Government.” Section 2(c) of the of National Commission for Minorities (NCM) Act, 1992 also gives the Centre similar powers.
- In 2005, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) at the Centre notified five communities — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis — as minorities at the national level. In 2014, the Manmohan Singh government notified followers of Jainism as a minority community, making them the sixth on the national list.

What does the PIL argue?

- The petitioner argues that the Centre’s decision was arbitrary since the SC had held, in the T. M. A. Pai Foundation vs State Of Karnataka case of 2002 that, “for the purpose of determining minority, the unit will be State and not whole India.”
- The petitioner argued that the Centre’s notification has created an anomalous situation in which the communities declared as minorities by the Centre enjoy the status even in States/UTs where they are in majority (Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir and Christians in Nagaland for instance) while followers of Hinduism, Judaism and Bahaism who are minorities are not accorded the same status under the Act.
- The petition seeks the SC to curtail the Centre’s power to notify national minorities or direct the Centre to notify followers of Hinduism, Bahaism and Judaism as minorities in States/UTs where they are actually fewer in numbers; or direct that only those communities that are “socially, economically and politically non-dominant” besides being numerically smaller in States/UTs be allowed the status of minorities.

How has the Centre responded?

- The Centre filed two affidavits in the case, the second one on May 9, suppressing its first affidavit that was filed on March 25.
- In both, the Centre said it had the power to notify minority communities. In the first, the Centre categorically defended the concept of minorities at the national level; in the second, it remains silent on that specific question.
- In other words, the Centre has not taken a position, one way or the other, about continuing the national list of minorities while it reiterated its power to notify communities as minorities under Central Acts. In the first affidavit, the Centre had pointed out that it had concurrent powers with States to take measures for the welfare of minorities.
- States could have minorities notified as such within their jurisdiction, and it even cited the examples of Maharashtra recognising Jews as a minority community and Karnataka recognising speakers of several languages as linguistic minorities. In the second affidavit there is no such elaboration.
- While it says the power is vested in it, the affidavit does not go as far as questioning the powers of the State on this question.
- In the first affidavit, the Centre said the pleas made by the petitioner must be rejected; in the second, the Centre said the PIL dealt with ‘vital’ issues and sought time to consult with all stakeholders before it could take a position.
- In the first instance, the Centre went on to defend the constitution of the new Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Sachar Committee that studied the backwardness of Muslims in India — both UPA measures, criticised by the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party then. In the second affidavit on May 9, the Centre did not defend these decisions of the previous Congress regime.
- The May 9 affidavit, in fact, leaves all questions open, other than the emphatic claim that the Centre has the power to notify minorities under the two Acts.

The India hypertension control initiative

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A project called the India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI) finds that nearly 23% out of 2.1 million Indians have uncontrolled blood pressure.

What is the IHCI?

- Recognising that hypertension is a serious, and growing, health issue in India, the Health Ministry, the Indian Council of Medical Research, State Governments, and WHO-India began a five-year initiative to monitor and treat hypertension.
- Hypertension is defined as having systolic blood pressure level greater than or equal to 140 mmHg or diastolic blood pressure level greater than or equal to 90 mmHg or/and taking anti-hypertensive medication to lower his/her blood pressure.
- India has committed to a "25 by 25" goal, which aims to reduce premature mortality due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by 25% by 2025. One of the nine voluntary targets includes reducing the prevalence of high blood pressure by 25% by 2025.
- The programme was launched in November 2017. In the first year, IHCI covered 26 districts across five States — Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra.
- By December 2020, IHCI was expanded to 52 districts across ten States — Andhra Pradesh (1), Chhattisgarh (2), Karnataka (2), Kerala (4), Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (13), Punjab (5), Tamil Nadu (1), Telangana (13) and West Bengal (5).

What has the IHCI found so far?

- Its most important discovery so far is that nearly one-fourth of (23%) patients under the programme had uncontrolled blood pressure, and 27% did not return for a follow-up in the first quarter of 2021. There were an estimated 20 crore adults with hypertension in the country.
- To achieve India's target of a 25% relative reduction in the prevalence of raised blood pressure, approximately 4.5 crore additional people with hypertension need to get their blood pressure under control by 2025.
- Of a million patients registered in five phase I and three phase II States till Dec 2020, 7.4 lakhs were under care between April 2020 to March 2021. Nearly half (47%) of the registered patients under care had blood pressure under control during the most recent visit in the first quarter of 2021.
- Drug availability improved in all phase I States with at least one-month refills for key blood pressure drugs. Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana had stocks for nearly six months for protocol drugs. Kerala had only one month stock and Maharashtra had two months stock available in May 2021.
- Availability of drugs was a challenge in most phase II States and procurement process took nearly one year from planning.
- There weren't enough validated high-quality digital blood pressure monitors in several health facilities, which affected accuracy of hypertension diagnosis.
- In phase I States, dedicated nurses were insufficient except in Telangana and Maharashtra. In phase II States, most districts did not have dedicated NCD nurses at public health care centres level except Chennai.

How prevalent is the problem of hypertension?

- Southern States have a higher prevalence of hypertension than the national average, according to the latest edition of the National Family Health Survey.



- While 21.3% of women and 24% of men aged above 15 have hypertension in the country, the prevalence is the highest in Kerala where 32.8% men and 30.9% women have been diagnosed with hypertension.
- Kerala is followed by Telangana where the prevalence is 31.4% in men and 26.1% in women.
- About one-fourth of women and men aged 40 to 49 years have hypertension. Even at an earlier age, one in eight women and more than one in five men aged 30 to 39 years have hypertension.
- The prevalence of hypertension is higher among Sikhs (37% for men and 31% for women), Jains (30% for men and 25% for women), and Christians (29% for men and 26% for women) than the rest.

The Protected Mobility Vehicles

(Source: [Explained](#))

Context: *The Army has floated a Request for Information (RFI) to purchase Protected Mobility Vehicles (PMV) for high-altitude areas and for deserts and plains. What are PMVs, how are they utilised and who manufactures them?*

What is the operational role of PMVs?

- The PMV is essentially a wheeled armoured personnel carrier. It provides protection to the soldiers travelling inside the vehicle from mine blasts and sudden attack by small arms.
- The troops in these vehicles could be members of any quick reaction team heading to a point of conflict, or members of patrolling parties heading to border areas.
- They could also be members of a reconnaissance squad operating behind enemy lines or in forward positions of own troops.

What kind of vehicles does the Army intend to procure?

- The Army floated an RFI on May 12 for information from vendors for PMV to deploy in areas above the height of 4000 metres and for deserts and plains.
- The detailed instructions given by the Army along with the RFI specifies that these vehicles should be wheeled, 4X4 drive mode and should have automatic transmission.
- These vehicles should be able to carry ten personnel excluding the driver and co-driver with each person carrying a combat load of not less than 30 kg.

What are the technical specifications for such vehicles?

- The PMVs must have ballistic protection and should be able to protect the vehicle from grenade and mine blasts.
- It should have a maximum speed of 90 km on road and 40 km per hour on cross country terrain. They should be able to operate in temperature range of 40 degree centigrade to minus 15 degree in high-altitude areas.
- The vehicles are required to have a weapon mount to enable a 7.62 mm Light Machine Gun (LMG) to be fitted and a turret with 360 degree rotation for a LMG.
- It is also required to have 11 firing ports with five each on the starboard and port side of the vehicle and one at the rear. The PMV should be able to ford in water with depth of 1000 mm without any special preparation.

When will these vehicles be procured?

- After going through the responses of the RFI, the Army is expected to float a Request for Proposal (RFP) in the month of November which will be followed by trials at areas above 17,000 feet and in the plains and deserts.

- These trials will be held within a period of six to nine months of issuing of the RFP.

Does India produce such vehicles?

- India has the capability of producing PMVs. In April this year, the Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) handed over the first of such Infantry Protected Mobility Vehicles (IPMVs) to the then Chief of Army Staff, Gen MM Naravane.
- The TASL is now the first private sector company in the country to produce such wheeled armoured personnel carriers and has developed the IPMV in collaboration with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- These vehicles are produced at the TASL's Pune establishment and have been built on the strategic 8X8 wheeled armoured platform jointly developed by TASL with Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (VRDE) of DRDO.

What is the 'onset' of the monsoon

Context: *The southwest monsoon is likely to set in over Kerala on May 27, well ahead of its normal date of June 1, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) announced on Friday (May 13). If the forecast turns out to be accurate, this will be the earliest onset of the monsoon over Kerala since at least 2009. There can be "a model error of four days on either side", the IMD said.*

What does the "onset of monsoon" mean?

- The onset of the monsoon over Kerala marks **the beginning of the four-month, June-September southwest monsoon season over India**, which brings more than 70 per cent of the country's annual rainfall. The onset of the monsoon is a significant day in India's economic calendar.
- According to the IMD, the onset of the monsoon marks a significant transition in the large-scale atmospheric and ocean circulations in the Indo-Pacific region, and the Department announces it only after certain newly defined and measurable parameters, adopted in 2016, are met.
- Broadly, the IMD checks for the consistency of rainfall over a defined geography, its intensity, and wind speed.
- Rainfall: The IMD declares the onset of the monsoon if at least 60% of 14 designated meteorological stations in Kerala and Lakshadweep record at least 2.5 mm of rain for two consecutive days at any time after May 10. In such a situation, the onset over Kerala is declared on the second day, provided specific wind and temperature criteria are also fulfilled.
 - The 14 enlisted stations are: Minicoy, Amini, Thiruvananthapuram, Punalur, Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Thalassery, Kannur, Kasaragod, and Mangaluru.
- Wind field: The depth of westerlies should be upto 600 hectopascal (1 hPa is equal to 1 millibar of pressure) in the area bound by the equator to 10°N latitude, and from longitude 55°E to 80°E. The zonal wind speed over the area bound by 5-10°N latitude and 70-80°E longitude should be of the order of 15-20 knots (28-37 kph) at 925 hPa.
- Heat: According to IMD, the INSAT-derived Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR) value (a measure of the energy emitted to space by the Earth's surface, oceans, and atmosphere) should be below 200 watt per sq m (wm²) in the box confined by 5-10°N latitude and 70-75°E latitude.
- In general, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands start receiving monsoon rainfall between May 15 and May 20 every year, and it usually starts raining along the Kerala coast in the last week of May. However, the onset is not officially declared until the prescribed conditions (above) are met.

Does an early onset foretell a good monsoon?

- No, it does not — just as a delay does not foretell a poor monsoon. The onset is just an event that happens during the progress of the monsoon over the Indian subcontinent.

- A delay of a few days, or perhaps the monsoon arriving a few days early, has no bearing on the quality or amount of rainfall, or its regional distribution across the country, during the four-month monsoon season.
- In a recent year, the onset of the monsoon occurred two days in advance of the normal date, and it rained heavily for about 10 days after that — however, the season as a whole ended with 14% less rain than normal.
- On April 14 this year, the IMD released its first Long Range Forecast (LRF) for this year, in which it predicted a “normal” monsoon — which means rainfall is likely to be in the range of 96% to 104% of the long period average (LPA) of the 1971-2020 period.
- The average annual rainfall for the country as a whole in the southwest monsoon season during this period was 87 cm.

And does a delayed onset mean cascading delays across the country?

- A delay in onset over Kerala can potentially delay the arrival of the monsoon in other parts of the country, especially in the southern states, which normally start getting rain within days of the monsoon reaching the Kerala coast.
- But again, a delayed onset over Kerala does not automatically or invariably mean delays in the arrival of the monsoon over the entire country.
- The northward progression of the monsoon after it has hit the Kerala coast depends on a lot of local factors, including the creation of low pressure areas. It is possible that despite a late onset over Kerala, other parts of the country start getting rain on time.
- After its onset over Kerala, the monsoon spreads over the entire country by July 15.

INSACOG

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Thursday (May 12) that the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) would be extended to India's neighbouring countries.

The network

- INSACOG was established in December 2020 as a joint initiative of the Union Health Ministry of Health and Department of Biotechnology (DBT) (under the Ministry of Science and Technology) with the Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to expand the whole-genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes the Covid-19 disease, across India with the aim of understanding how the virus spreads and evolves.
- INSACOG started out with the participation of 10 national research laboratories of the central government, and gradually expanded to a network of 38 labs, including private labs, operating on a hub-and-spoke model.
- The 10 INSACOG Genome Sequencing Laboratories handhold the new laboratories, and the pan-India consortium works to monitor genomic variations in SARS-CoV-2 by a sentinel sequencing effort which is facilitated by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), involving the Central Surveillance Unit (CSU) under the central government's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).

How it helps

- The data from the genome sequencing laboratories is analysed as per the field data trends to study the linkages, if any, between the genomic variants and epidemiological trends.
- This, the INSACOG website says, helps to understand super spreader events and outbreaks, and strengthen public health interventions across the country to help break chains of transmission.



- Linking this data with IDSP data and the patient's symptoms helps to better understand viral infection dynamics, and trends of morbidity and mortality. The data can be linked with host genomics, immunology, clinical outcomes, and risk factors for a more comprehensive outlook. Sequencing assumes added significance as the incidence of reinfections and vaccine breakthroughs increases.
- INSACOG is also working to establish a systematic correlation between genome sequencing and clinical outcomes.
- The consortium is working towards establishing a hospital network across the country with the aim to study clinical correlations in mild vs severe cases of Covid-19, and to carry out a longitudinal study to understand long-term post-Covid complications and change in immunity.
- INSACOG is also looking to expand to sewage surveillance as an early detection tool, and to assess the spread of variants in hotspot localities.

The Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation report

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: After multiple objections and extensions, the J&K Delimitation Commission submitted its final report on May 5, 2022, two years after it was appointed to redraw the electoral boundaries in Jammu and Kashmir as per the mandate set by the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. In its order, a notification of which was published in the Gazette of India, the three-member panel carved out additional six Assembly seats for the Jammu region and one for the Kashmir valley as per the Act. The final order of the Commission has set the stage for elections in the erstwhile State that last held Assembly polls in 2014.

What is delimitation?

- Delimitation is the process of redrawing boundaries of the Lok Sabha or Assembly constituencies, the Election Commission of India states.
- The process is carried out in accordance with changes in the demographic status of a State or Union Territory. Delimitation is done by a Delimitation Commission or Boundary Commission.
- The orders of the independent body cannot be questioned before any court. In the past, Delimitation Commissions were set up in 1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002. Before the abrogation of Article 370 that accorded a special status to J&K, delimitation of its Assembly seats was carried out by the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and the Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.
- The delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies, meanwhile, was governed by the Constitution.

What is the J&K Delimitation Commission?

- The last time a delimitation exercise was carried out in Jammu and Kashmir was in 1995, based on the 1981 Census.
- Jammu and Kashmir was under President's rule at that time. There was no Census in 1991 in J&K due to the tense situation in the valley. In 2001, the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly passed a law to put the delimitation process on hold till 2026.
- The Centre set up a Delimitation Commission in March 2020, six months after the State of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated and reorganised as the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.
- The Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, was tasked with delimiting the Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies in the UT of J&K based on the 2011 Census and in accordance with the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 and the Delimitation Act, 2002.
- The panel was given a year to complete the delimitation plan but was given two extensions. After considering submissions and considering factors like "geographical features, communication means,

public convenience and contiguity of areas”, the Delimitation Commission released its final report on May 5.

What are the key takeaways from the final report?

- First, J&K is split into two divisions, with Jammu having 37 Assembly seats and Kashmir 46. After the Commission’s final draft, six additional Assembly seats are earmarked for Jammu (revised to 43) and one for Kashmir (revised to 47). The total number of Assembly seats in the UT will increase from 83 to 90.
- Second, the Commission has recommended the Centre to nominate at least two Kashmiri Pandits to the Legislative Assembly.
- Third, the panel has proposed nine seats for the Scheduled Tribes (STs). These will include six in Jammu (Budhal, Gulabgarh, Surankote, Rajouri, Mendhar, Thanamandi) and three in the valley (Gurez, Kangan, Kokernag). Seven seats have been reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the Jammu region.
- Fourth, the Commission has also recommended that the government consider giving displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir representation in the Assembly through nomination.
- Fifth, in its final order, the Commission has noted that it has considered the “Jammu & Kashmir region as one single Union Territory”, and merged Rajouri and Poonch (from Jammu division) with the Anantnag constituency in the Kashmir region. The new constituency has been renamed as Kishtwar-Rajouri.
- Sixth, the Commission has said it renamed 13 constituencies considering public sentiment in the region. The order shows that in Kashmir, the names of Gulmarg (from Tangmarg), Hazratbal, Zadibal, Lal Chowk, Eidgah have been restored. In the Jammu region, the name of the Gulabgarh constituency has been restored.
- The final order of the Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir holds a lot of political significance. The completion of the delimitation exercise will pave the way for Assembly elections — a crucial step in the possible restoration of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had stated earlier this year that the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir will be restored “once the situation becomes normal”.
- The Commission has added seven more Assembly seats, keeping the 2011 census as the basis. With this, Jammu with a population of 53 lakh (43% of the total population of 122 crore) will have 47% seats, while Kashmir which has a population of 68 lakh (56%) will have 52% of the seats.
- The new constituency has five ST Assembly segments from the Jammu region. In J&K, Gujjar and Bakarwals form the ST community which is 11.9% of the total population, as per the 2011 census. This restructuring is likely to have an electoral impact.

INTERNATIONAL

Event Horizon reveals true colours of SgrA*

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Scientists from the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) facility, at press conferences held simultaneously at several centres around the world on Thursday, revealed the first image of the black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. The image of Sagittarius A* (SgrA*) gave further support to the idea that the compact object at the centre of our galaxy is indeed a black hole, strengthening Einstein's general theory of relativity.

Details:

- In 2019, the Event Horizon Telescope facility, a collaboration of over 300 researchers, made history by releasing the first-ever image of a black hole, M87* — the black hole at the centre of a galaxy Messier 87, which is a supergiant elliptic galaxy.
- The ring-shaped image of SgrA*, which looked a lot similar to the one of M87*, occupied 52 microarcseconds in the field of view, which is as big a span of our view as a doughnut on the moon.
- The whole exercise was possible because of the enormous power of the Event Horizon Telescope, an ensemble of several telescopes around the world, which together were like a giant eye on the earth with a sight that is 3 million times sharper than the human eye. Sagittarius A* is 27,000 light years from us.
- At the press conference, the researchers said that imaging Sagittarius A* (SgrA*) was much more difficult than imaging M87* for the following reasons:
 - first, SgrA* is only one-thousandth the size of M87*;
 - second, the line of sight is obscured by a lot of matter; and as SgrA* is much smaller than M87*, the gas swirling around it takes only minutes to complete an orbit around SgrA* as opposed to taking weeks to go around M87*.
 - The last gives a variability that makes it difficult to image. A clear imaging requires long exposure of eight to 10 hours, where ideally the object should not change much.
- In this relation, Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, a postdoctoral researcher at Aalto University Metsahovi Radio Observatory, a member of the calibration and imaging team, says since the physics of plasma flows around SgrA* changes on an hourly time-scale, getting a coherent image with all relevant information from photons corresponding to one orbit is difficult.
- This requires higher sensitive observations, which comes with the addition of telescopes to the EHT and with advanced image reconstruction algorithms.

Marsquake

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: NASA has reported that on May 4, its InSight Mars lander detected the largest quake ever observed on another planet.

What are marsquakes, and why do they happen?

- On Earth, quakes are caused by shifts in tectonic plates. Mars, however, does not have tectonic plates, and its crust is a giant plate.
- Therefore, NASA notes, ‘marsquakes’ are caused due to stresses that cause rock fractures or faults in its crust.

What is InSight doing on Mars?

- InSight is not looking for life on Mars, but is studying what Mars is made of, how its material is layered, and how much heat seeps out of it.
- This is important because Earth and Mars used to be similar — warm, wet and shrouded in thick atmospheres — before they took different paths 3-4 billion years ago. Mars stopped changing, while Earth continued to evolve.
- With InSight, scientists hope to compare Earth and Mars, and better understand how a planet’s starting materials make it more or less likely to support life.
- There are other missions to Mars that are looking for life on the planet, which makes InSight’s mandate unique.
- It mostly boils down to the possibility that the atmosphere of Mars was once warm enough to allow water to flow through its surface, which could mean life existed there too.
- In fact, what makes scientists curious about Mars is the “defining question” of the existence of life on the planet, because of the possible presence of liquid water on it, either in the past or preserved in its subsurface.
- This question makes the planet more intriguing for scientists since “almost everywhere we find water on Earth, we find life,” as NASA puts it.
- Further, if Mars harboured a warmer atmosphere enabling water to flow in its ancient past (3.5-3.8 billion years ago), and if microbial life existed on it, it is possible that it exists in “special regions” even today.
- But regardless of life having existed on Mars or not, there is the idea that humans themselves might be able to inhabit the planet one day.
- Some missions studying the possibility of life on Mars include UAE’s Hope, China’s Tianwen-1, and NASA’s Perseverance.

Monkeypox

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: Health authorities in the United Kingdom have confirmed a case of monkeypox, a rare viral infection similar to smallpox, in an individual who recently travelled to that country from Nigeria.

Monkeypox virus

- The monkeypox virus is an orthopoxvirus, which is a genus of viruses that also includes the variola virus, which causes smallpox, and vaccinia virus, which was used in the smallpox vaccine.
- Monkeypox causes symptoms similar to smallpox, although they are less severe.
- While vaccination eradicated smallpox worldwide in 1980, monkeypox continues to occur in a swathe of countries in Central and West Africa, and has on occasion showed up elsewhere.
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), two distinct clade are identified: the West African clade and the Congo Basin clade, also known as the Central African clade.

Zoonotic disease

- Monkeypox is a zoonosis, that is, a disease that is transmitted from infected animals to humans.
- According to the WHO, cases occur close to tropical rainforests inhabited by animals that carry the virus. Monkeypox virus infection has been detected in squirrels, Gambian poached rats, dormice, and some species of monkeys.
- Human-to-human transmission is, however, limited — the longest documented chain of transmission is six generations, meaning the last person to be infected in this chain was six links away from the original sick person, the WHO says.
- Transmission, when it occurs, can be through contact with bodily fluids, lesions on the skin or on internal mucosal surfaces, such as in the mouth or throat, respiratory droplets and contaminated objects, the WHO says.

Symptoms and treatment

- According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), monkeypox begins with a fever, headache, muscle aches, back ache, and exhaustion.
- It also causes the lymph nodes to swell (lymphadenopathy), which smallpox does not.
- The WHO underlines that it is important to not confuse monkeypox with chickenpox, measles, bacterial skin infections, scabies, syphilis and medication-associated allergies.
- The incubation period (time from infection to symptoms) for monkeypox is usually 7-14 days but can range from 5-21 days.
- Usually within a day to 3 days of the onset of fever, the patient develops a rash that begins on the face and spreads to other parts of the body.
- The skin eruption stage can last between 2 and 4 weeks, during which the lesions harden and become painful, fill up first with a clear fluid and then pus, and then develop scabs or crusts.
- According to the WHO, the proportion of patients who die has varied between 0 and 11% in documented cases, and has been higher among young children.
- There is no safe, proven treatment for monkeypox yet. The WHO recommends supportive treatment depending on the symptoms. Awareness is important for prevention and control of the infection.

Occurrence of disease

- The CDC's monkeypox overview says the infection was first discovered in 1958 following two outbreaks of a pox-like disease in colonies of monkeys kept for research — which led to the name 'monkeypox'.
- The first human case was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a period of intensified effort to eliminate smallpox.
- According to the WHO, 15 countries on four continents have so far reported confirmed cases of monkeypox in humans.
- Locally acquired cases have been confirmed in the DRC (which has the largest incidence of the infection in the world), Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- Imported cases have been found in South Sudan and Benin in Africa, and in the United States, UK, Israel, and Singapore.

How and why are cyclones named?

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Whenever a cyclone hits a country, the first thing that strikes the minds of most is what these names mean.*

How are the cyclones named?

- In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP (World Meteorological Organisation/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), which comprised Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, decided to start naming cyclones in the region. After each country sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalised the list.
- The WMO/ESCAP expanded to include five more countries in 2018 — Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- The list of 169 cyclone names released by IMD in April 2020 were provided by these countries — 13 suggestions from each of the 13 countries.

Why is it important to name cyclones?

- Adopting names for cyclones makes it easier for people to remember, as opposed to numbers and technical terms.
- Apart from the general public, it also helps the scientific community, the media, disaster managers etc.
- With a name, it is also easy to identify individual cyclones, create awareness of its development, rapidly disseminate warnings to increase community preparedness and remove confusion where there are multiple cyclonic systems over a region.

What are the guidelines to adopt names of cyclones?

- While picking names for cyclones, countries need to follow some rules. If those guidelines are followed, the name is accepted by the panel on tropical cyclones (PTC) that finalises the selection. The guidelines are:
 - The proposed name should be neutral to (a) politics and political figures (b) religious beliefs, (c) cultures and (d) gender
 - Name should be chosen in such a way that it does not hurt the sentiments of any group of population over the globe
 - It should not be very rude and cruel in nature
 - It should be short, easy to pronounce and should not be offensive to any member
 - The maximum length of the name will be eight letters
 - The proposed name should be provided with its pronunciation and voice over
 - The names of tropical cyclones over the north Indian Ocean will not be repeated. Once used, it will cease to be used again. Thus, the name should be new.
- Some of the names picked by India were suggested by the general public. An IMD committee is formed to finalise the names before sending it to the PTC.
- Here is the list of 104 names.
- The first cyclone name which was chosen was the one in the first row of the first column — Nisarga by Bangladesh.
- Next, India's choice, Gati, was chosen, and so on. Subsequent cyclones are being named sequentially, column-wise, with each cyclone given the name immediately below that of the previous cyclone. Once the bottom of the column is reached, the sequence moves to the top of the next column (in the second image). We are now on Cyclone Asani, as marked in red.



WMO/ESCAP Panel Member countries	Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4	
	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'
Bangladesh	Nisarga	Nisarga	Biparjoy	Biporjoy	Arnab	Ornab	Upakul	Upokul
India	Gati	Gati	Tej	Tej	Murasu	Murasu	Aag	Aag
Iran	Nivar	Nivar	Hamoon	Hamoon	Akvan	Akvan	Sepand	Sepand
Maldives	Burevi	Burevi	Midhilli	Midhilli	Kaani	Kaani	Odi	Odi
Myanmar	Tauktae	Tau'Te	Michaung	Migjaum	Ngamann	Ngaman	Kyarthit	Kjathi
Oman	Yaas	Yass	Remal	Re-Mal	Sail	Sail	Naseem	Naseem
Pakistan	Gulab	Gul-Aab	Asna	As-Na	Sahab	Sa-Hab	Afshan	Af-Shan
Qatar	Shaheen	Shaheen	Dana	Dana	Lulu	Lulu	Mouj	Mouj
Saudi Arabia	Jawad	Jowad	Fengal	Feinjal	Ghazeer	Razeer	Asif	Aasif
Sri Lanka	<u>Asani</u>	Asani	Shakhti	Shakhti	Gigum	Gigum	Gagana	Gagana
Thailand	Sitrang	Si-Trang	Montha	Mon-Tha	Thianyot	Thian-Yot	Bulan	Bu-Lan
United Arab Emirates	Mandous	Man-Dous	Senyar	Sen-Yaar	Afoor	Aa-Foor	Nahhaam	Nah-Haam
Yemen	Mocha	Mokha	Ditwah	Ditwah	Diksam	Diksam	Sira	Sira

WMO/ESCAP Panel Member countries	Column 5		Column 6		Column 7		Column 8	
	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'	Name	Pron'
Bangladesh	Barshon	Borshon	Rajani	Rojoni	Nishith	Nishith	Urmi	Urmi
India	Vyom	Vyom	Jhar	Jhor	Probaho	Probaho	Neer	Neer
Iran	Booran	Booran	Anahita	Anahita	Azar	Azar	Pooyan	Pooyan
Maldives	Kenau	Kenau	Endheri	Endheri	Riyau	Riyau	Guruva	Guruva
Myanmar	Sapakyee	Zabagji	Wetwun	We'wum	Mwaihout	Mwei'hau	Kywe	Kjwe
Oman	Muzn	Muzn	Sadeem	Sadeem	Dima	Dima	Manjour	Manjour
Pakistan	Manahil	Ma-Na-Hil	Shujana	Shu-Ja-Na	Parwaz	Par-Waaz	Zannata	Zan Naa Ta
Qatar	Suhail	Es'hail	Sadaf	Sadaf	Reem	Reem	Rayhan	Rayhan
Saudi Arabia	Sidrah	Sadrah	Hareed	Haareed	Faid	Faid	Kaseer	Kusaer
Sri Lanka	Verambha	Ve-Ram-Bha	Garjana	Garjana	Neeba	Neeba	Ninnada	Nin-Na-Da
Thailand	Phutala	Phu-Ta-La	Aiyara	Al-Ya-Ra	Saming	Sa-Ming	Kraison	Krai-Son
United Arab Emirates	Quffal	Quf-Faal	Daaman	Daa-Man	Deem	Deem	Gargoor	Gar-Goor
Yemen	Bakhur	Bakhoor	Ghwyzi	Ghwayzi	Hawf	Hawf	Balhaf	Balhaf

Mains

GS II

Still a long way for termination as an unconditional right

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The issue of abortion is in the news again, internationally. This, therefore, appears to be a good time to pen down a summary and analysis of the legal status of abortions in India. Under the general criminal law of the country, i.e. the Indian Penal Code, voluntarily causing a woman with child to miscarry is an offence attracting a jail term of up to three years or fine or both, unless it was done in good faith where the purpose was to save the life of the pregnant woman. A pregnant woman causing herself to miscarry is also an offender under this provision apart from the person causing the miscarriage, which in most cases would be a medical practitioner.*

Amendments and expansion

- In 1971, after a lot of deliberation, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act was enacted.
- This law is an exception to the IPC provisions above and sets out the rules — of when, who, where, why and by whom — for accessing an MTP.
- This law has been amended twice since, the most recent set of amendments being in the year 2021 which has, to some extent, expanded the scope of the law. However, the law does not recognise and/or acknowledge the right of a pregnant person to decide on the discontinuation of a pregnancy.
- The law provides for a set of reasons based on which an MTP can be accessed: the continuation of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or result in grave injury to her physical or mental health.
- The law explains that if the pregnancy is as a result of rape or failure of contraceptive used by the pregnant woman or her partner to limit the number of children or to prevent a pregnancy, the anguish caused by the continuation of such a pregnancy would be considered to be a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman.
- The other reason for seeking an MTP is the substantial risk that if the child was born, it would suffer from any serious physical or mental abnormality.
- The existence of one of these circumstances (at least), along with the medical opinion of the medical practitioner registered under the MTP Act is required. A pregnant person cannot ask for a termination of pregnancy without fitting in one of the reasons set out in the law. The other set of limitations that the law provides is the gestational age of the pregnancy.
- The pregnancy can be terminated for any of the above reasons, on the opinion of a single registered medical practitioner up to 20 weeks of the gestational age. From 20 weeks up to 24 weeks, the opinion of two registered medical practitioners is required.
- This extended gestational limit is applicable to certain categories of women which the rules define as either a survivor of sexual assault or rape or incest, minors, change of marital status during the ongoing pregnancy, i.e. either widowhood or divorce, women with major physical disabilities, mentally-ill women including mental retardation, the ground of foetal malformation incompatible with life or if the child is born it would be seriously handicapped, and women with pregnancy in humanitarian settings or disaster or emergency situations as declared by the government.
- Any decision for termination of pregnancy beyond 24 weeks gestational age, only on the ground of foetal abnormalities can be taken by a Medical Board as set up in each State, as per the law.



- No termination of pregnancy can be done in the absence of the consent of the pregnant person, irrespective of age and/or mental health.
- The law, as an exception to all that is stated above, also provides that where it is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman, the pregnancy can be terminated at any time by a single registered medical practitioner.
- This, as stated, is the exception and is understood to be resorted to only when the likelihood of the pregnant woman dying is immediate.

Seeking judicial permission

- While India legalised access to abortion in certain circumstances much before most of the world did the same, unfortunately, even in 2020 we decided to remain in the logic of 1971.
- This, despite the fact that by the time the amendments to the MTP Act were tabled before the Lok Sabha in 2020, just before the lockdown following the novel coronavirus pandemic, courts across the country (over the preceding four years) had seen close to 500 cases of pregnant women seeking permission to terminate their pregnancy (broadly on reasons of either the pregnancy being as a result of sexual assault or there being foetal anomalies incompatible with life).
- In a number of these cases, the courts had articulated the right of a pregnant woman to decide on the continuation of her pregnancy as a part of her right to health and right to life, and therefore non-negotiable.
- Similarly, a number of courts had also viewed the cases at hand in the realm of the facts of the case and decided not to set the interpretation of the law straight.
- This was also after the landmark right to privacy judgment of the Supreme Court of India in which it was held that the decision making by a pregnant person on whether to continue a pregnancy or not is part of such a person's right to privacy as well and, therefore, the right to life.
- The standards set out in this judgment were also not incorporated in the amendments being drafted. The new law is not in sync with other central laws such as the laws on persons with disabilities, on mental health and on transgender persons, to name a few.
- The amendments also did not make any attempts to iron out the confluences between the MTP Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act or the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, to name a few.
- While access to abortion has been available under the legal regime in the country, there is a long road ahead before it is recognised as a right of a person having the capacity to become pregnant to decide, unconditionally, whether a pregnancy is to be continued or not.

The bitter dispute over India's pandemic mortality

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *How many people died in India as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? This question has become the subject of a heated argument after the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated India's pandemic excess deaths at around 4.7 million. The Government of India issued a strongly worded response, and media houses and editors waded in. It is almost as though life and death themselves are now matters of opinion.*

The background

- Here are some basic observations.
 - First, we will never know precisely how many excess deaths occurred in India during the novel coronavirus pandemic.



- Second, all mortality studies, including the latest from WHO, involve choices about what data to include, how to fill gaps, and how to deal with uncertainty; there is always room for debate and disagreement about these choices.
- Third, uncertainty does not mean total ignorance: even the most optimistic reading of the data puts excess deaths at six or seven times official COVID-19 deaths.
- The current dispute has been noisier than usual, but is not new. Several studies, most putting India's pandemic excess deaths at between three and five million, have been met by strident Government "rebuttals".
- These rebuttals have highlighted the uncertainties (which is valid), and then jumped — without justification — to claiming that there are no excess deaths beyond recorded COVID-19 deaths. The rebuttals are also littered with irrelevant, confused and absurd points.
- The latest response is well summarised in its title: "India strongly objects to the use of mathematical models for projecting excess mortality estimates in view of the availability of authentic data".
- The "authentic data" in question is mortality data from the Civil Registration System (CRS), and there are two implications: that CRS data has been ignored by the researchers; that CRS data does not support estimates of high pandemic mortality.
- Both are false. Estimates of pandemic mortality, including those of WHO, are largely data-driven, and the main data-source is — you guessed it — the CRS. This data strongly supports estimates of high pandemic mortality.
- The "modelling" that the Government objects to is largely simple data analysis and techniques for filling gaps in the data, entirely unavoidable if we are to use CRS data to estimate excess mortality.

Civil registration data

- To make sense of all this, we need to consider what data is available and what it shows. In 2021, journalists managed to obtain monthly death registrations at the State or city level; these crucial efforts led to the first hard evidence that official COVID-19 deaths were only the tip of the iceberg.
- Although valuable, the data is patchy: not all States and regions are covered; it often comes from online systems which do not capture all registrations; and it often misses the latter part of India's devastating second wave.
- Nevertheless, a clear picture emerges: there was a gradual surge in deaths during the second half of 2020, which subsided and was followed by a tsunami of deaths during April-June 2021.
- Although the data comes from local government records, the Health Ministry objects that it is "non-official". However, there is no official CRS report for 2021, and only very recently (on May 3, 2022) was the 2020 CRS report made available.
- This report does not give monthly registrations, so it is hard to cross-check with earlier data. In yearly totals, there are some discrepancies; but, nevertheless, we found that the gross estimates for 2020 were broadly aligned across the States whose data we ourselves had used in our estimates.
- With everyone in agreement on the value of CRS data, how does the Government propose to explain away the pandemic surge in deaths? We find the answer in a bizarre assertion: during 2020, the Government claims, 99.9% of all deaths in India were registered.
- The message is: what appears like a rise in mortality in 2020, actually reflects a sharp improvement in registration. Note that this could never explain the bulk of excess deaths which came later, during 2021. But is the claim of complete death registration in 2020 plausible?
- On the contrary, it is absurd. Consider the data from Uttar Pradesh. The government Sample Registration System tells us to expect around 1.5 million deaths in Uttar Pradesh every year. But during 2020 only 0.87 million deaths were registered, around 60% of the expected toll. If registration was complete, then 2020 saw a huge, unexplained, drop in deaths in the State!
- Consider, also, Andhra Pradesh, where freely available CRS data tells a startling story: during 15 months from April 2020 to June 2021, over 50% more deaths were registered than expected. Could this reflect an improvement in registration? No. According to the 2019 CRS report, there was no room for improvement as death registration in the State was already complete before the pandemic.



- This is probably an overstatement; but however we look at it, Andhra Pradesh's huge mortality surge cannot be explained via increased registration coverage.
- It is possible that in some States, registration coverage improved during the pandemic. But, overall, registration probably dropped during 2020. Data from the Government's latest National Family Health Survey suggests that deaths that occurred in 2020 were less likely to be registered than deaths in 2019.
- Birth registration data from the CRS points in the same direction: after increasing by 5% during 2017-18 and 7% during 2018-19, birth registrations fell by 2.5% in 2020.
- Disruption to registration could have been especially severe in marginalised communities and in States where registration is anyway weak.
- In Uttar Pradesh, for example, both birth and death registrations fell sharply during 2020. Assuming that registration held steady during the pandemic, as we and many others have done, risks underestimating the mortality surge.

Some conclusions

- India was badly hit. A year ago, tragic stories of overflowing hospitals and oxygen shortages filled the news as the virus swept through the country.
- There is now a weight of evidence — not just from the CRS, but from surveys too — telling us that many millions died. Data is still emerging, and estimating pandemic mortality will be an ongoing effort; but this effort is undermined by the shrill, incoherent response from the Government following each study.
- All the estimates come with uncertainty and depend on choices. For example, the WHO estimate drops from 4.7 million to 4.4 million if we consider the pandemic period to span April 2020-July 2021 rather than January 2020-December 2021.
- Acknowledging the uncertainties and debating the choices is natural, but is very different from dismissing the estimates.

Strengthen the CRS

- The tragedy has been huge; but in the global context, India is not an outlier. Parts of the developing world and eastern Europe saw similarly high pandemic mortality.
- Historical weaknesses and deliberate dishonesty, well-documented by journalists, mean that India recorded only 10%-15% of its pandemic deaths. In this too, India is not alone.
- India's all-cause mortality data is imperfect — but in many Asian and African countries, the data is even sparser. The current state of affairs highlights both the value of India's CRS data, and the need to strengthen the CRS.
- What is most troubling — and makes India stand out — is the relentless Government hostility towards every attempt to understand the pandemic.
- If the objections were made in good faith, the Government could accelerate the release of data, for example from the CRS for 2021 or from the Sample Registration System.
- Ultimately, the rift is not about science, data or methodology; the basic question is whether we wish to pursue the truth or not.

India's judiciary and the slackening cog of trust

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Centrality of justice in human lives is summed up in a few words by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle: "It is in justice that the ordering of society is centred." Yet, a vast majority of countries have highly corrupt judiciaries.*

A distinction

- Judicial corruption takes two forms: political interference in the judicial process by the legislative or executive branch, and bribery.
- Despite accumulation of evidence on corrupt practices, the pressure to rule in favour of political interests remains intense.
- And for judges who refuse to comply, political retaliation can be swift and harsh. Bribery can occur throughout the chain of the judicial process: judges may accept bribes to delay or accelerate verdicts, accept or deny appeals, or simply to decide a case in a certain way.
- Court officials coax bribes for free services; and lawyers charge additional “fees” to expedite or delay cases.
- Our focus here is on the functioning of and erosion of trust in the lower judiciary comprising high courts, and district and sessions courts. A distinction between substantive and procedural justice is helpful.
- Substantive justice is associated with whether the statutes, case law and unwritten legal principles are morally justified (e.g., freedom to pursue any religion), while procedural justice is associated with fair and impartial decision procedures.
- Many outdated/dysfunctional laws or statutes have not been repealed because of the tardiness of legal reform both at the Union and State government levels.
- Worse, there have been blatant violations of constitutional provisions. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (December 2019) provides citizenship to — except Muslims — Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis and Christians who came to India from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014.
- But this flies in the face of secularism and is thus a violation of substantive justice. A striking example of tortuous delay in the delivery of justice is the case of Lal Bihari. He was officially declared dead in 1975, struggled to prove that he was alive (though deceased in the records) and was finally declared alive in 1994 (Debroy, 2021).
- Thus, both departures from substantive and procedural justice need deep scrutiny. Alongside procedural delays, endemic corruption and mounting shares of under-trial inmates with durations of three to five years point to stark failures of procedural justice and to some extent of substantive justice.

Under the different regimes

- All was not well with the lower judiciary under the United Progressive Alliance regime. According to Transparency International (TI 2011), 45% of people who had come in contact with the judiciary between July 2009 and July 2010 had paid a bribe to the judiciary. The most common reason for paying the bribes was to “speed things up”.
- There were “fixed” rates for a quick divorce, bail, and other procedures (Banerjee, 2012). The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (April 2013) estimates that for every ₹2 in official court fees, at least ₹ 1,000 is spent in bribes in bringing a petition to the court.
- There is a scarcity of evidence on bribes and malfeasance under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).
- A few broad-brush treatments are, however, worrying. Freedom House’s ‘Freedom in the World 2016 report for India’ states that “the lower levels of the judiciary in particular have been rife with corruption” (Freedom House 2016).
- The GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal reports that, “[t]here is a high risk of corruption when dealing with India’s judiciary, especially at the lower court levels. Bribes and irregular payments are often exchanged in return for favourable court decisions” (GAN Integrity 2017).
- Allegations of corruption against High Court judges abound. For example, Tis [Tiz] Hazari District Court Senior Civil Judge, Rachna Tiwari Lakhanpal, was arrested in September 2016 for allegedly accepting a bribe to rule in favour of a complainant in a case. Such examples are indicative of the widespread malaise of corruption in the lower judiciary.



- Worse, there are glaring examples of anti-Muslim bias, often followed by extra-judicial killings by the police. Anti-Muslim bias alone may not result in erosion of trust but if combined with unprovoked and brutal violence against them (e.g., lynching of innocent cattle traders) is bound to.

Case pendency

- According to the National Judicial Data Grid, as of April 12, 2017, there are 24,186,566 pending cases in India's district courts, of which 2,317,448 (9.58%) have been pending for over 10 years, and 3,975,717 (16.44%) have been pending for between five and 10 years.
- As of December 31, 2015, there were 4,432 vacancies in the posts of [subordinate court] judicial officers, representing about 22% of the sanctioned strength.
- In the case of the High Courts, 458 of the 1,079 posts, representing 42% of the sanctioned strength, were vacant as of June 2016.
- Thus, severe backlogging and understaffing persisted, as also archaic and complex procedures of delivery of justice.
- Extreme centralisation of power in the Centre and a blatant violation of democratic values under the NDA have had disastrous consequences in terms of violent clashes, loss of lives, religious discord, assaults on academic freedom, and suppression and manipulation of mass media.
- Exercise of extra-constitutional authority by the central and State governments, weakening of accountability mechanisms, widespread corruption in the lower judiciary and the police, with likely collusion between them, the perverted beliefs of the latter towards Muslims, other minorities and lower caste Hindus, a proclivity to deliver instant justice, extra-judicial killings, filing first information reports against innocent victims of mob lynching — specifically, Muslim cattle traders while the perpetrators of violence are allowed to get away — have left deep scars on the national psyche.
- It may seem far-fetched but it is not, as these are unmistakable signs of abject failure of governance.
- Our analysis reinforces this concern. While trust in the judiciary is positively and significantly related to the share of undertrials for three to five years under total prisoners, it is negatively and significantly related to the square of share of under-trials.
- However, the negative effect nearly offsets the positive effect. So, while trust in the judiciary marginally rises with the proportion of undertrials until the threshold (0.267) is reached, it decreases beyond that point as the proportion of under-trial inmates rises.
- In sum, erosion of trust in the judiciary could severely imperil governance.

Food labelling

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is expected to issue a draft regulation for labels on front of food packets that will inform consumers if a product is high in salt, sugar and fat. It is expected to propose a system under which stars will be assigned to a product, which has earned the ire of public health experts and consumer organisations who say it will be misleading and ineffective. Health experts are demanding that the FSSAI instead recommend the “warning label” system which has proven to have altered consumer behaviour.*

Why do we need front-of-package labelling?

- In the past three decades, the country's disease patterns have shifted. While mortality due to communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases has declined and India's population is living longer, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries are increasingly contributing to the overall disease burden. In 2016, NCDs accounted for 55% of premature death and disability in the country.

- Indians also have a disposition for excessive fat around the stomach and abdomen which leads to increased risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-2021), 47.7% of men and 56.7% of women have high risk waist-to-hip ratio.
- An increased consumption of packaged and junk food has also led to a double burden of undernutrition and overnutrition among children.
- Over half of the children and adolescents, whether under-nourished or with normal weight, are at risk of cardiovascular diseases, according to an analysis by the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey in India (2016-2018).
- Reducing sugar, salt, and fat is among the best ways to prevent and control non-communicable diseases. While the FSSAI requires mandatory disclosure of nutrition information on food packets, this is located on the back of a packet and is difficult to interpret.

What decision has FSSAI taken?

- At a stakeholder's meeting on February 15, 2022, three important decisions were taken on what would be the content of the draft regulations on front-of-package labelling.
- These included threshold levels to be used to determine whether a food product was high in sugar, salt and fat; that the implementation will be voluntary for a period of four years before it is made mandatory; and that the health-star rating system would be used as labels on the basis of a study commissioned by the FSSAI and conducted by IIM-Ahmedabad.
- The food industry agreed with the FSSAI's decision on the issue of mandatory implementation and use of ratings, and sought more time to study the issue of thresholds. The World Health Organization representative said the thresholds levels were lenient, while the consumer organisations opposed all three decisions.
- The biggest contention is over the use of a health-star rating system that uses 1/2 a star to five stars to indicate the overall nutrition profile of a product. Despite objections, FSSAI CEO Arun Singhal told The Hindu that he stands by the IIM-A study as it is based on a survey of 20,500 people.
- He said stakeholders could share their comments once the draft regulations were made public. The FSSAI's scientific panel will then take that into consideration.

Why is there opposition to the rating system?

In a health-star rating system, introduced in 2014 in Australia and New Zealand, a product is assigned a certain number of stars using a calculator designed to assess positive (e.g., fruit, nut, protein content, etc) and risk nutrients in food (calories, saturated fat, total sugar, sodium). Scientists have said that such a system misrepresents nutrition science and the presence of fruit in a fruit drink juice does not offset the impact of added sugar. Experts say that so far there is no evidence of the rating system impacting consumer behaviour. The stars can also lead to a 'health halo' because of their positive connotation making it harder to identify harmful products. Over 40 global experts have also called the IIM-Ahmedabad study flawed in design and interpretation.

There are many other labelling systems in the world, such as "warning labels" in Chile (which uses black octagonal or stop symbols) and Israel (a red label) for products high in sugar, salt and fat. The 'NutriScore', used in France, presents a coloured scale of A to E, and the Multiple Traffic Light (MTL), used in the U.K. and other countries depict red (high), amber (medium) or green (low) lights to indicate the risk factors. Global studies have shown a warning label is the only format that has led to a positive impact on food and beverage purchases forcing the industry, for example in Chile, to reformulate their products to remove major amounts of sugar and salt.

Why are reproductive rights under threat?

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3744444.ece))



Context: *The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has privately voted to strike down the constitutional right to abortion as determined by the landmark Roe vs Wade case in 1973, according to a leaked draft opinion from February 2022. The leak, by news outlet Politico on May 2, has itself become a subject of profound criticism and a likely criminal inquiry within the highest court in the land. The content has provoked dismay among liberals and pro-choice advocates and jubilation on the part of anti-abortionists. While the opinion is not surprising given that a SCOTUS majority of 6-3 leans and votes conservative, it will likely set off a lengthy series of judicial battles at the state level given that it will, if it formally becomes the law of the land, leave the decision on whether to outlaw abortions to state legislators.*

What is the Roe vs Wade case?

- Roe, short for Jane Roe, is the pseudonym for a Texas woman named Norma McCorvey who in 1970 sought to have an abortion when she was five months pregnant, notwithstanding Texas' ban on abortions except to save a mother's life. Wade refers to Henry Wade, the district attorney in Dallas County, Texas, at the time, who was the defendant in the case.
- The 7-2 majority opinion of the SCOTUS was written on January 22, 1973, by Justice Harry Blackmun, paving the way for the recognition of abortion as a constitutional right in the U.S., effectively striking down a wide range of state-level abortion limitations applied before foetal viability.
- Foetal viability is the point at which a foetus can survive outside the womb, at the time considered to be around 28 weeks, but today is closer to 23 or 24 weeks owing to advances in medicine and technology.
- Based on the Roe vs Wade case, the framework of regulations that applied towards the right to abortion required that in the first trimester, almost no limitations could be placed on that right; in the second trimester, only limitations to abortion rights that were aimed at protecting a woman's health were permitted; and in the third trimester, state governments had greater leeway to limit the right to abortion except for cases in which the life and health of the mother were endangered.
- However, Roe vs Wade was not the last word on abortion rights in the U.S. even before the latest SCOTUS opinion. In the 1992 Planned Parenthood vs Casey case, the SCOTUS threw out the so-called trimester framework yet retained the Roe vs Wade case's "essential holding," which established women's constitutional right to abortion until foetal viability.

Why is there a possibility of the judgment being overturned?

- The overturning of the Roe vs Wade case has not yet been formally announced and thus not yet a part of settled law, although most legal experts believe it is only a matter of time before it becomes so.
- It remains to be seen whether the leaked text of the private opinion of the SCOTUS, believed to be authored primarily by Justice Samuel Alito, will be the same as the final version that enters the statute books.
- Nevertheless, the conservative majority of the court, to which former President Donald Trump successfully nominated three justices, regarded Roe vs Wade to lack any jurisprudential basis within the U.S. Constitution. Hence in the first draft of their opinion, dated February 2022, the justices of the SCOTUS said, "We hold that Roe and Casey must be overruled. The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision... It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives."

What impact will the opinion have if it passes into law?

- Based on analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reports have shown that the typical patient seeking an abortion in the U.S. is already a mother, is in her late 20s, has obtained some college education, is relatively poor, is unmarried, is in her first six weeks of pregnancy, is seeking a first abortion, and lives in a Democratic Party-ruled state.
- At a broad level, therefore, the SCOTUS opinion will disproportionately affect poorer women if it becomes law. For example, in 2014, nearly 50% of women who went in for abortions were below the poverty line, with another 25% said to be relatively close to the poverty line.

- Reports quoted researchers saying that the growing share of poorer women in the abortion demographic “reflects improved access to effective contraception among higher-earning women, and a recognition of the growing costs of raising children among poorer women. It may also reflect the growing presence of charities that help poor women pay for abortions in states where public programs don’t.”
- However, all is not lost for the pro-choice side of the debate, because even if the SCOTUS successfully strikes down Roe vs Wade U.S. President Joe Biden has called upon Congress to pass legislation codifying the right to abortion, which lawmakers have every right to do.
- Yet, given the 50-50 split of Democratic and Republican Senators on Capitol Hill, it is near impossible to rally together the requisite 60-member supermajority required to defeat a filibuster and pass abortion rights into law in the face of lock-step opposition from conservatives.
- Democrats are likely pinning their hopes on the November mid-term election sweeping more of their members into the Senate and thus restoring a constitutional right to abortion.

The importance of emigrants

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Though the phenomenon of Indian-origin executives becoming CEOs of top U.S. companies highlights the contribution of Indian talent to the U.S. economy, the role played by Indian semi-skilled migrant labour in the global economy is no less illustrious. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, there are over 13.4 million Non-Resident Indians worldwide. Of them, 64% live in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the highest being in the United Arab Emirates, followed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Almost 90% of the Indian migrants who live in GCC countries are low- and semi-skilled workers, as per International Labour Organization estimates. Other significant countries of destination for overseas Indians are the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Canada.*

High remittances

- Every year, about 2.5 million workers from India move to different parts of the world on employment visas. Besides being involved in nation-building of their destination countries, Indian migrant workers also contribute to the homeland’s socioeconomic development, through remittances.
- According to a report by the National Statistical Office, urban and rural households receiving remittances (both international and domestic) have approximately 23% and 8% better financial capacity, respectively, than non-remittance-receiving households.
- As per a World Bank Group report (2021), annual remittances transferred to India are estimated to be \$87 billion, which is the highest in the world, followed by China (\$53 billion), Mexico (\$53 billion), the Philippines (\$36 billion) and Egypt (\$33 billion).
- In 2021, remittances transferred to India had seen an increase of 4.6% compared to 2020. Remittances in India have been substantially higher than even Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the flow of remittances is much less fluctuating than that of FDI.
- Still, remittances’ contribution of 3% in GDP is lower than that of countries such as Nepal (24.8%), Pakistan (12.6%), Sri Lanka (8.3%) and Bangladesh (6.5%), as per a World Bank report.
- Besides being a win-win situation for both the destination and source country, labour migration is good hedging strategy against unsystematic risks for any economy. Human capital should also be invested in a diversified portfolio akin to financial capital.
- For many countries, remittances have been of vital support to the domestic economy after a shock. For example, after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, overseas Nepalese increased remittances to an estimated 30% of GDP.



- Can India increase remittances to say 10% of GDP? Can the Philippines' model of promoting labour mobility be replicated in India? Both the cost of recruitment of such workers and the cost of sending remittances back to India should come down.
- The safety and well-being of migrant labour is of top priority for the government. Reducing informal/undocumented migration and formalising all remittances is being given due focus. Recruitment agencies should also be regulated leveraging information technology for ensuring protection of migrant workers leaving India.
- An integrated grievance redressal portal, 'Madad', was launched by the government in 2015. Of the approximately 78,000 grievances registered so far by the Indian migrants, more than 95% have been resolved.

Provisions of the Emigration Bill

- The Indian government proposed a new Emigration Bill in 2021 which aims to integrate emigration management and streamline the welfare of emigrant workers.
- It proposes to modify the system of Emigration Check Required (ECR) category of workers applying for migration to 18 notified countries. The ECR category mainly comprises those who have not passed Class 10 and face the challenge of risky informal emigration and subsequent hardships abroad.
- The Bill makes it mandatory for all category of workers to register before departure to any country in the world to ensure better protection for them, support and safeguard in case of vulnerabilities.
- The proposed Emigration Management Authority will be the overarching authority to provide policy guidance.
- The number of migrant workers need not go up for remittances to increase if the skill sets of workers are improved. Provisions of the Bill such as registration of all emigrants, skill upgradation and training, and pre-departure orientation will enhance protection measures.
- Besides workers, as about 0.5 million students also migrate for education from India every year, the Bill also covers such students. This will provide a comprehensive data set for the efficient management of Indian migrants.
- Skilling of migrant workers has the potential to boost the domestic economy and low-cost interventions such as foreign language training can be of great help for such workers.

A dissonance in India-German ties

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Germany on May 2 came at a critical time, shaped by the ongoing Ukraine war. In recent times, New Delhi has been at its assertive best. Even as the United States and the European nations have applied sanctions on Moscow and provided military aid to Ukraine, New Delhi has refused to play ball. It has not only avoided condemning Moscow by abstaining in the United Nations (UN) on critical votes on the war but has also continued to engage with Moscow to increase its import of cheap crude. Its long-standing and traditional defence links with Russia remain intact. Such moves have raised eyebrows and attracted some amount of criticism from the West. New Delhi, however, insists that its position on the war is non-partisan and should be appreciated by its allies and friends.

For a nuanced stance

- However, assertive media and conference statements by India's External Affairs Minister notwithstanding, there is growing recognition in India's strategic circles that New Delhi has to bring in more nuance to its approach with Europe. Given India's stature, being completely isolated by the West is certainly not a best-case scenario.



- However, with an assertive China on the world stage and in particular, at the border with India, New Delhi needs to manage a delicate balancing act while asserting its right to pursue its national interests and strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Mr. Modi's three-nation Europe tour (May 2-4) needs to be contextualised with these factors in the backdrop.
- There is a clear, albeit delayed, move toward a unified response vis-à-vis Russia in Europe. Its significant reliance on Russian gas and crude notwithstanding, condemnation of Moscow's moves in Ukraine is near unanimous in Europe.
- Not surprisingly, India's abstention in the UN votes and its continuation of its relationship with Russia have raised quite a few hackles in Germany. In private as well as public discussions, India's role as a major power and largest democracy are being brought to the forefront and there is a growing expectation that India needs to make a shift from its position on Russia and join hands with the European countries and the U.S. in protecting democracy in need.
- Amidst these expectations and pressure tactics, whether the Prime Minister's visit to Germany helped change the perception and bridge the gap that has been growing, assumes critical importance.
- Mr. Modi's visit took place during the first term of the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz. Prior to Mr. Modi's visit, the Chancellor had visited Japan, in his first visit to Asia. This is construed as a sign of Germany reaching out to other Asian powers and building on democratic alliances as an outcome of its Indo-Pacific guidelines.
- These two meetings had raised, albeit mistakenly, expectations among some analysts here in Germany of a democratic dividend that may lead to a convergence of views and possibly policies on Russia between the two countries. As proved by the Ukraine war, however, New Delhi has chosen to prioritise its interests over pursuing a policy that is shaped by common democratic values that define Germany, Japan and India.

The China factor

- In fact, for several years now, Indian policies have resisted promoting democracy in the neighbourhood and have instead opted to deal with de facto powers. Afghanistan, where India is still reluctant to do business with the Taliban, is probably an aberration.
- On the other hand, India's policy towards Myanmar's junta is defined by this pragmatism. Therefore, the democratic rationale of a convergence of interests to protect democratic values is hardly a strong binding chord between India and Germany.
- The geopolitical convergence of countering the rise of China particularly in the Indo-Pacific seems to be a more compelling necessity rather than the ideational and normative aspects of protecting democratic norms and values.

Engagement with Europe

- New Delhi's objective is multifaceted as far its relations with Europe in general and Germany in particular is concerned.
- So far, it has not revised its position on Russia and Ukraine, by continuing to underline its unequivocal condemnation of the violence.
- However, unlike the West, India makes it clear that irrespective of its position on a solitary issue of geopolitical relevance, which the former may find difficult to reconcile with, the bilateral engagement with countries such as Germany, France and Denmark remains at the top of its priority.
- The purpose of such a policy is clearly to present itself as not being isolated but as a swing power that can move deftly on the geopolitical and diplomatic chessboard.
- Towards this direction, the holding of the sixth India-Germany Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC), a biennial format which India conducts with Germany, assumed critical importance. India attaches significant importance to the 'long-standing commercial ties' with Germany, an important pillar of the 'Strategic Partnership', which the two nations entered into in 2000.



- The idea, therefore, is to highlight a convergence of issues of economics, technology and climate change (low hanging fruits), in spite of the intensifying dissonance on democratic and strategic issues. That remains the crux of the Indian approach.

Room for full ties

- It remains a fact that India-Germany relations have yet to achieve their full potential. One of the factors for that, possibly, is the lack of understanding of each other's strategic cultures and domestic politics.
- It is doubtful that Mr. Modi's visit changed any of that, particularly in the absence of any media interaction and strategic communication. Germany has invited Mr. Modi to the G-7 meeting in June this year, construed as a bid to wean India away from its position on Russia.
- However, while the attempt may not be successful, it is certainly a pointer to the emerging multipolarity in the international system, which provides space for major powers such as Germany and India to play a greater role in bringing peace and stability in other theatres, particularly in Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific.
- In times of shifting geopolitical alliances and realignments, India and Germany can emerge as important poles in shaping the new world order.

With delimitation over, a look at the slate for J&K

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Delimitation Commission's redrawn map for Jammu and Kashmir's Assembly election was notified a few days before the Supreme Court of India's judgment on sedition. As expected, Kashmir's political parties oppose its results. Though they had raised critical queries on the commission's draft during its consultation phase, most of their concerns were not addressed. Instead, the commission's final report speaks glowingly of the enthusiasm and the support members received. Apart from Justice (retired) Ranjana Prakash Desai, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra and J&K State Election Commissioner K.K. Sharma were ex-officio members of the commission.*

There is a chasm

- Perhaps the commission members did not read the innumerable news stories detailing criticism of their draft. Or, perhaps, they concluded that erstwhile legislators do not represent public opinion.
- Either way, the gap between the commission's self-projection in the report, and the views of the Valley's political leaders, is as wide as a chasm.
- The commission's establishment was controversial from the start. Initially, the Union Home Ministry had notified five States and/or Union Territories for immediate redrawing of constituencies while the remainder would undergo fresh delimitation after 2026.
- After protests, four of the five States were dropped from the list, leaving only Jammu and Kashmir. Fresh delimitation was necessary for Jammu and Kashmir, the Narendra Modi administration said, since the State had been divided into two Union Territories and elections could only be held under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019
- The decision placed the Valley's regional political parties in an impossible situation. Over 5,000 people, including three former Chief Ministers, had been taken into preventive detention days before the reorganisation act was passed, many of them charged with unlawful activities tantamount to sedition. The State's Assembly had been dissolved a year earlier and it was under President's rule.
- Four parties were in the Supreme Court of India challenging the act. If they cooperated with the delimitation commission, they would be seen as tacitly watering down their court challenge. If they did not cooperate, they risked their concerns being ignored.
- Given that non-cooperation might radically shift power balances within and between districts, most of Kashmir's regional parties chose to submit written representations to the commission.



Gaps in the report

- As it turns out, they must be wondering why they bothered. The commission's report appends a long list of people who made representations and/or objections, but it does not summarise the objections nor address them point by point.
- The central question of why Jammu has gained six Assembly seats and the Valley only one has been brushed under general remarks on methodology with no explanation of how that methodology was applied.
- For example, the commission claims to have taken plus 10% of the average population at the patwari or ward level as a measure for redrawing constituencies in flat areas and minus 10% in hilly areas. But that does not answer the question of why Jammu province has more seats relative to its population than the Valley does, with a differential of as much as 20,000 people per seat. Nor does it explain why Jammu's Muslim-majority seats now comprise less than a quarter of the province's total seats, though Muslims comprise over a third of the province's population.
- What is more, as analysts point out, the majority of the six new constituencies that Jammu has acquired are Hindu-majority. One has a population of just over 50,000 people, but shares the same physical features as a Muslim-majority constituency of close to four times its population.
- The commission's recommendations further complicate the issue. They propose that the President nominate Pandit migrants to two Assembly seats — why is there no reference to Pandits who remain in the Valley? — and West Pakistani refugees to another, along the lines of reservation for Anglo-Indians in Parliament. But the reservation for Anglo-Indians lapsed in 2020 since it was not extended by the 126th amendment to the Constitution.
- Indeed, the only overarching guideline which the report does describe in some detail is the commission's desire to match the boundaries of Assembly and parliamentary constituencies. Why this is so important is unclear.
- There is certainly a logic to ensuring that Assembly and parliamentary constituencies match local administrative and police boundaries. But what is the logic of ensuring that no Assembly constituency falls under two parliamentary constituencies? How many local legislators found that a problem?
- Most of these questions were addressed to the commission during its consultation phase. Its members, therefore, had the opportunity to answer doubts in their final report. By choosing not to do so they lost a valuable opportunity to display transparency and dispel suspicion of bias. Instead, and breathtakingly, the CEC, Mr. Chandra, commented in his preface that the redrawing will overcome long-standing divisions between Jammu and the Kashmir Valley. How can seeming bias do anything other than exacerbate division?

Court hearing is next

- So, what happens now? Perhaps the Supreme Court will start hearing the challenges to the reorganisation act after the summer recess. If the Court decides the challenges are valid, then the delimitation exercise will be nullified, as Justice Desai remarked when she undertook the task of chair.
- In the meantime, with the redrawn constituencies now notified, there is no reason for the Election Commission to delay announcing dates for the long overdue Assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir.
- However unhappy Valley political parties might be, they will have no choice but to participate. The former State desperately needs an elected leadership after having been under the administration of non-local and inimical bureaucrats for four years.
- Whenever it happens, this election will be as polarised as the last election over seven years ago. Indeed, with the redrawn constituencies, it is likely to be even more polarised. In the short term, the risk of violence will be high, unless armed groups yield to the unspoken consensus in the Valley that a smooth election is in their best interest.
- The real challenge will come after. If, as anticipated, the election results reflect a sharp divide between Jammu and the Valley, it will be even more difficult to put together a coalition administration with the Bharatiya Janata Party as partner.

- The breakaway factions from the National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party might, with the aid of dirty tricks, win enough seats to help the BJP helm a coalition. But they must by this time be well aware that while they will have little influence in a BJP coalition, they might have to shoulder all the blame.

Focus on freedoms

- The only hope for a peace process in Jammu and Kashmir is if there is a clean election, statehood is speedily restored, and the new Assembly determines whether or in which form special status is required. But the cards are already heavily stacked against either, and the delimitation report has further tilted them in favour of further conflict.
- A wise leader would hold elections for existing constituencies and let the new assembly approve or query the delimitation report.
- In fact, the commission itself proposed that the report be placed before the legislative assembly, a recommendation that makes sense only if new delimitation comes into force after and not before elections.
- Urgent as elections are, attention to fundamental freedoms is even more important. There are over a thousand Kashmiris in prison under charges that the Supreme Court has questioned in relation to sedition.
- Most of them have been denied bail or asked to furnish punitive sureties. The three Kashmiri students arrested in Uttar Pradesh for celebrating a Pakistani cricket victory had to deposit ₹1 lakh each for bail, whereas Jignesh Mewani paid the far more appropriate sum of ₹1,000 for a similar non-offence.
- Applying the Supreme Court's interim orders to cases under similarly draconian legislation would be a true confidence-booster for elections.

GS III

What are India's plans to avert a wheat crisis?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On May 4, the government lowered its wheat production estimates by 5.7% to 105 million tonnes (MT) from the projected 111.32 MT for the crop year ending June. The production is expected to fall on account of unusually warm weather conditions that persisted during March to April in most parts of the key grain-producing States of Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh as well as Uttar Pradesh. Till May 4, wheat procurement in the ongoing winter (rabi) marketing season too had seen a drop, with the Centre procuring 17.5 MT of wheat, which is likely to touch 19.5 MT when the season ends. In the last marketing year, the government had purchased 43.3 MT of wheat from farmers, and this year it had set a target of 44.4 MT. The announcement came around the same time as a report by the World Food Programme, which said the “unfolding war in Ukraine” was likely to “exacerbate the already severe 2022 acute food insecurity forecasts” in countries.

Why has wheat production dwindled?

- India is the second largest producer of wheat in the world, with China being the top producer and Russia the third largest — Ukraine is the world's eighth largest producer of wheat.
- After five straight years of a bumper wheat output, India has had to revise downwards its estimated production. Unprecedented heatwaves across the north, west and central parts of the country, and March and April being the hottest in over 100 years, have caused substantial loss to the yield at 6%, with 20% of the wheat grain shrivelling up.
- Some estimates have pegged the shrivelling as high as 80% of the crop purchased by the government. For instance, according to crop cutting experiments, conducted by the Punjab Agriculture Department every year, the State's yield per hectare could have fallen 5-10% compared to last year's yield.
- Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey attributed the lower estimates to “early summer” affecting the crop yields in States, especially Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

What about government procurement?

- This year the government's wheat purchase has seen a dip owing to several reasons from lower yield to higher market prices being offered by private traders.
- A large quantity of wheat was being bought by traders at a higher rate than the minimum support price (MSP). Private traders have been prompted to buy more wheat from farmers as the price of wheat at the international level has shot up and is expected to rise due to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.
- In Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, farmers are selling to traders-exporters at prices (₹21-24 per kg), which is better than the MSP (rate of ₹20.15 per kg).
- Also, farmers are holding on to some quantity of wheat, expecting higher prices for their produce in the near future. Mr. Pandey admitted that the substantially low procurement was due to market prices of wheat being higher than the MSP being offered by the government.
- He gave two other reasons for the low procurement: stocks being held by farmers and traders in anticipation of further price rises, and lower production.

How will this impact the public distribution of grain?

- Wheat procurement is undertaken by the state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other agencies at MSP to meet the requirements under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and other welfare schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) introduced during the

pandemic. The government has revised the grain allocation under PMGKAY for May to September 2022.

- According to the new guidelines, the FCI will fill the gap left by wheat with an increased allocation of rice. An additional 5.5 MT rice is being allocated to the States to fill the gap in supplying wheat grain. Mr. Pandey said rice procurement last year was about 60 MT and this year a similar quantity is expected.
- Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), he said the annual requirement is roughly about 35 MT. Pointing out that from next year, fortified rice will be distributed to the entire Public Distribution System (PDS), he said with surplus rice stocks, the country is in a comfortable situation.

Will domestic wheat prices be hit?

- As government wheat procurement has dipped, concerns are being raised about the stability of prices in the country and the availability of grain for internal consumption, which many agri-experts argue should be a priority.
- An agriculture domain expert and a former member of the Uttar Pradesh Planning Commission, Sudhir Panwar, points out that the government has to ensure that the market price for the domestic consumer is not determined by private players — “this can happen if one or two big business houses are buying chunk of the wheat crop.”
- The key question, according to Mr. Panwar, is in a scenario where private traders start dictating the price in the domestic market, will the buffer stock be used under the Open Market Sale Scheme to control the market price or will it be used for the NFSA and other welfare schemes.
- The government has dismissed concerns about both prices and stocks, asserting that India is in a comfortable situation with the overall availability of grains and stocks expected to be higher than the minimum requirement for the next one year.
- Mr. Pandey stated that after meeting the requirement of welfare schemes in the year ahead, on April 1, 2023, India would have stocks of 8 MT of wheat, well above the minimum requirement of 7.5 MT.

Will farmers benefit?

- Farmers will certainly benefit from the scenario as they are being offered a price above the MSP. Amid the Russia-Ukraine crisis, new markets in countries like Israel, Egypt, Tanzania and Mozambique have opened up for India.
- However, on the other hand, if private traders continue to buy above MSP, eventually that could stoke inflation. Dr. M.J. Khan, Chairman of the Indian Chamber of Food and Agriculture, an apex agribusiness services body, opines that more private buying of wheat will help India expand the agri-export basket to new countries, riding the current crisis situation.
- This trade relationship will stay even when the global crisis is over, which means farmers will get about 10%-15% extra price as market prices are ruling above MSP.

What about export plans?

- Till now, 4 MT wheat has been contracted for export and about 1.1 MT has been exported in April 2022. After Egypt, Turkey has also given approval for the import of Indian wheat.
- India has been eyeing deals with new export markets in European Union countries too. Compared to record wheat exports of 7.85 MT in the fiscal year 2021-22, the Centre had estimated exports of 12 MT for 2022-23, to cash in on the market rally in global prices following the Ukraine crisis. Global wheat prices rose nearly 50% since the start of this year as supplies from Russia, the number one wheat exporter, and Ukraine, number six, were hit.
- Despite the crop loss and revision of the output estimate, the Centre maintained that no curbs would be placed on wheat exports and that it was facilitating traders. Market observers estimate exports will be lower than projected earlier at about 10 MT amid low or damaged output.



How is the global supply situation shaping up?

- In order to meet the gap created by reduced Russian and Ukrainian exports, importers are turning to alternative markets, while wheat-producing countries like India are looking to increase exports.
- According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the export estimates of Brazil, which is traditionally an importer of wheat, is pegged at 2.5 MT, nearly three times its total last year.
- The South American country has even found new markets, with its wheat exports to West Asian nations jumping over 400%, according to Reuters. Argentina, traditionally a big exporter of wheat, too saw a further rise in exports despite lower than usual production.
- The USDA, however, says that these increased exports will not be enough to make up for the nearly 30% of global exports hit by the Ukraine crisis.

WHEAT PROCUREMENT & OFFTAKE (LAKH TONNES)			
	STOCKS (OPENING BALANCE AS OF APRIL 1)	PROCUREMENT (APRIL-JUNE)	OFFTAKE (APRIL-MARCH)
2005-06	40.66	147.87	167.08
2006-07	20.09	92.26	118.75
2007-08	47.03	111.28	122.47
2008-09	58.03	226.89	148.85
2009-10	134.29	253.82	223.84
2010-11	161.25	225.13	230.67
2011-12	153.64	283.34	242.67
2012-13	199.52	382.15	332.42
2013-14	242.07	250.72	306.15
2014-15	178.34	281.31	271.59
2015-16	172.21	280.88	315.73
2016-17	145.38	229.61	292.47
2017-18	80.59	308.24	253
2018-19	132.31	357.95	316.47
2019-20	169.92	341.32	271.89
2020-21	247	389.92	363.9
2021-22	273.04	433.44	505.55
2022-23	189.9	185.00*	

*Likely
Source: Food Corporation of India

Who should govern our data?

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: When the Internet was just about taking off, techno-enthusiasts ushered in hopes of a world where knowledge and information would be abundant and free from the hands of the elite. The Internet would be democratic, giving everyone open and equitable access.

Details:

- Yet almost two decades later, this dream is barely alive. The Internet and its data, almost exclusively, lie in the hands of very large tech companies. The ownership of data has become the currency of the future. Many governments and inter-regional entities have been trying to undo this indiscriminate accumulation of data as well as protect data privacy by conceptualising different forms of data governance systems.
- The authors of the paper, “Governing the Resource of Data: To what end and for Whom?”, analyse the different approaches to data governance. They argue that data needs to be fundamentally understood as a form of social commons and that there should be thorough re-structuring of the data economy.
- They propose a semi-commons approach as the most pragmatic way to govern data in order to foster innovation and ensure equitable access.

Platform capitalists

- A handful of ‘platform capitalists’ now control the Internet. Platform capitalists are those who take advantage of their first mover privilege by rapidly expanding across the digital landscape.
- They then offer themselves as a platform for third party players for a price (Meta, Amazon, Microsoft, etc.). These companies retain and expand their control through data accumulation and extraction.
- The importance of data accumulation in the digital economy cannot be overstated. With the advent of the Internet of Things (IoT), ‘smart’ devices and related technologies, the possibility of data goes beyond that of the virtual to even the physical and social.
- Control over such data can even predict behavioural patterns. Platform capitalists have unbridled control over the data economy leading to exclusion and under-optimisation of the data for common good. It forestalls the prospects of smaller businesses and data communities.
- Additionally, since most of these companies are based in the West, it leaves developing countries to fend for themselves, left out of their own data’s immense possibilities and uses. The commodification of data has led to a finders-keepers logic which undermines human rights, encourages illegal data mining and profiling.
- State regulators have been trying to find a solution to better re-distribute and govern data structures. An approach which is currently in vogue, is the European Union’s individualist policy where individuals have ownership rights of their own personal data (for concerns on privacy) but their non-personal data (data that does not have any personal identifiers) is seen as the property of the data processors/collectors. There are multiple issues within this approach.
- First of all, assuming that there is no privacy risk with non-personal data is flawed. To quote the authors’ example, the data collected by smart energy systems, temperature and motion sensors seem harmless.
- But when they move up the data value chain, they hold the potential for smart home manufacturers to infer a lot of socio-behavioural insights that can profile individual households when clubbed with other data sets.
- Again, by letting data collectors have ownership rights over non-personal data keeps data within the bounds of the finders-keepers logic. It also does not offer an answer to how data can be equally redistributed.
- Another approach is that of data stewardship. Data stewardship “refers to any institutional arrangement where a group of people come together to pool their data and put in place a collective governance process for determining who has access to this data, under what conditions, and to whose benefit.”
- It can also take the model of a public-private partnership where private data can be used for governance issues and policies. The EU’s proposal for “data altruism organisations” which will enable the pooling of non-personal data for non-profit, “general interest” purposes and the World Economic Forum’s ‘Data for Common Purpose’ initiative are plausible examples of such an arrangement.
- By creating such privacy-focused data forums, the goal is to increase data-based value creation for optimum use.
- While it would be a marked improvement from platform capitalism, it remains to be seen whether these collectives can really unlock data’s potential. For one, such initiatives would need proper state-of-the-art infrastructure.

- Most countries in the Global South would then be at a huge disadvantage as they do not have the adequate equipment or resources. Data stewardship remains, therefore, an ideal solution while not exactly pragmatic.

The semi-commons approach

- Data has three layers. The semantic layer which has the encoded information. The syntactic layer which represents the information as machine-readable datasets and the physical layer which is the infrastructure through which one extracts data.
- An ideal data governance structure should prevent the possessors of the syntactic and physical layers from having exclusive rights over the semantic layer.
- A semi-commons approach to data governance seeks to balance public and private claims to data. It fundamentally recognises data as social commons where first movers do not get exclusive rights.

Data holders and seekers

- Data holders — be it private, public, or altruistic organisations can only have non-exclusive rights over the base layer of data (raw non-processed data). They can use and generate profit through it but are required to share data as other data seekers are entitled to accessibility in a semi-commons approach.
- Data seekers can have access to raw non-personal data and aggregate non-personal data (after due safeguards are met for irreversible anonymisation). However, this access is not an unconditional right.
- Different data seekers have different rights over the kind of data being sought.
 - For example, individual data subjects can access their personal data and non-personal data. Public agencies have an ‘authority access’ in the raw non-personal data and aggregate non-personal data held by other private players. Authority access refers to “entitlements of public agencies to access data on the grounds of fulfilling legitimate public policy functions, backed by specific legislation”. Private organisations can conditionally access raw and aggregate non-personal data. These conditionalities will have to be streamlined with the larger economic and social policies of a country.
- A semi-commons approach would need a thorough re-ordering of the current way in which data is hoarded and kept under the exclusive ownership of platform capitalists.
- One would need to build an equitable data market which encourages production through co-operation. The authors give the example of the Barcelona municipality which is building a smart city by creating a public-funded data infrastructure.
- Here, the public is equipped with smart contracts and cryptographic tools which allow them to directly contribute data to the city data commons on their own terms. Local companies and co-operatives are also given access to the city data commons.
- It also mandates data to be in machine readable format with open-source APIs. Furthermore, a semi-commons approach would help foster data-driven solutions and innovation in sectors which desperately need it.
- For example, NITI Aayog had commented that the agriculture sector, which desperately needs more data-driven innovation, would only have a mellow response from private AI players due to low profitability in comparison to other sectors.
- Therefore, a semi-commons approach, in order to be actualised, calls for a thorough change of perspective wherein data should not be thought of the exclusive property of one person or company but a form of social commons which needs to be properly regulated and redistributed.



Control inflation by acting on liquidity

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The recent action of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to raise the repo rate by 40 basis points and cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points is a recognition of the serious situation with respect to inflation in our country and the resolve to tackle inflation.*

Details:

- Inflation has assumed a menacing proportion in almost all countries.
- The situation is the worst in the United States where the consumer price inflation stood (in March 2022) at 8.56%, a level not reached for several decades. Consumer price index (CPI) inflation in India stood (in March 2022) at 6.95%.
- It is expected to rise further in April. India's CPI inflation has been fluctuating around a high level. As early as October 2020, it had hit a peak of 7.61%. It had remained at a high level of over 6% since April 2020.
- It did come down after December 2020 but has started rising significantly from January 2022.
- On the other hand, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation had remained in double digits since April 2021. The GDP implicit price deflator-based inflation rate for 2021-22 is 9.6%.

Impact on production

- Even though the RBI's mandate is with respect to CPI inflation, policymakers cannot ignore the behaviour of other price indices.
- In the 2008-09 crisis, central banks of developed countries, particularly the Fed, had been blamed for overlooking the sharp rise in asset prices, even though CPI inflation was modest.
- After the advent of COVID-19, the major concern of policymakers all over the world was to revive demand. This was sought to be achieved by raising government expenditure. This is the standard Keynesian prescription. The severe lockdowns imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 restricted the mobility of people, goods and services.
- Thus, the expansion in government expenditure did not immediately result in increased production in countries where the lockdown was taken seriously. India belongs to this category. As V.K.R.V. Rao pointed out in the 1950s, the Keynesian multiplier did not work when there were supply constraints as in developing countries.
- That is why he argued that the multiplier operated in nominal terms rather than in real terms in such countries. Something similar has happened in the present case where the supply constraint came from a non-mobility of factors of production.

Issue of inflation

- Nevertheless, the prescription of enhanced government expenditure is still valid under the present circumstances. Perhaps the increase in output could happen with a lag and also with the relaxation of restrictions.
- Initially, the focus of monetary policy in India has been to keep the interest rate low and increase the availability of liquidity through various channels, some of which have been newly introduced. However, the growth rate of money was below the growth rate in reserve money.
- This is because of lower credit growth which also depends on business sentiment and investment climate. Thus the money multiplier is lower than usual. The Government's borrowing programme which was larger went through smoothly, thanks to abundant liquidity.
- Even as the economy picked up steam in 2021-22, inflation also became an issue. As mentioned at the beginning, this is a worldwide phenomenon. In the U.S., the explanation has been quite simple. There has been a balance sheet explosion of the Fed.



- On January 1, 2020 the total assets (less some items) of the Fed stood at \$4.17 trillion and in April 2022, at \$8.96 trillion. This massive expansion in assets is the result of quantitative easing which essentially means liquidity support provided by the Fed.
- The Fed Chairman has made strong statements expressing the need to reduce the size of the assets. The Fed is planning to shrink its balance sheet by \$95 billion a month. It raised the policy rate by 50 basis points a few days ago.
- In India too there is a shift in monetary policy. The latest monetary policy reiterates the stance as one of “to remain accommodative while focusing on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth”. Without efforts to curtail liquidity, inflation will not come down.
- While discussing inflation, analysts including policymakers focus almost exclusively on the increases in the prices of individual commodities such as crude oil as the primary cause of inflation.
- The Russian-Ukraine war is cited as a primary cause. True, in many situations including the current one, they may be the triggers.
- Supply disruptions due to domestic or external factors may explain the behaviour of individual prices but not the general price level which is what inflation is about. Given a budget constraint, there will only be an adjustment of relative prices.
- Besides the fact that any cost-push increase in one commodity may get generalised, it is the adjustment that happens at the macro level which becomes critical.
- A long time ago, Friedman said, “it is true that the upward push in wages produced inflation, not because it was necessarily inflationary but because it happened to be the mechanism which forced an increase in the stock of money”. Thus, it is the adjustment in the macro level of liquidity that sustains inflation.

Inflation and growth

- The possible trade-off between inflation and growth has a long history in economic literature. The Phillip’s curve has been analysed theoretically and empirically. Tobin called the Phillip’s curve a ‘cruel dilemma’ because it suggested that full employment was not compatible with price stability.
- The critical question flowing from these discussions on trade-off is whether cost-push factors can by themselves generate inflation.
- Tobin said at one place that inflation ‘is neither demand-pull nor cost-push or rather it is both’, even though he did not agree with Friedman’s extreme position that there would be no pure cost-push inflation.
- In the current situation, it is sometimes argued that inflation will come down, if some part of the increase in crude prices is absorbed by the government. There may be a case for reducing the duties on petroleum products for the simple reason that one segment of the population should not bear excessive burden.
- The same consideration applies to food prices. But to think that it is a magic wand through which inflation can be avoided is wrong.
- If the additional burden borne by the government (through loss of revenue) is not offset by expenditures, the overall deficit will widen. The borrowing programme will increase and additional liquidity support may be required.

Concomitant decisions

- Commenting on the increase in repo rate and a rise in CRR, some have commented that this is double whammy. No, these are concomitant decisions. Central banks cannot order interest rates. For a rise in the interest rate to stick, appropriate actions must be taken to contract liquidity.
- That is what the rise in CRR will do. In the absence of a rise in CRR, liquidity will have to be sucked by open market operations. As the RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das put it in his statement, “Liquidity conditions need to be modulated in line with the policy action and stance to ensure their full and efficient transmission to the rest of the economy.”



- Inflation in India cannot be described just as ‘cost-push’. Abundance of liquidity has been an important factor. The April Monetary Policy statement talked of a liquidity overhang of the order of ₹8.5 lakh crore.
- Beyond a point, inflation itself can hinder growth. Negative real rates of interest on savings are not conducive to growth. If we want to control inflation, action on liquidity is very much needed with a concomitant rise in the interest rate on deposits and loans.

Shallow and deep ecologism

Context: *Heat waves are known to have been a reality for hundreds of years. But the long-term effects of climate change have exacerbated them, making the waves more extreme, frequent and prolonged. As India continues to grapple with the unrelenting waves, it becomes pertinent to unpack two strands of environmental philosophy that reinvent the relationship between nature and humans — shallow and deep ecologism.*

Two styles of ecologism

- The concepts emerged in the 1970s, when Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss sought to look beyond the popular pollution and conservation movements of his milieu to address environmental degradation.
- In his study of ecological concerns, Næss is more preoccupied with the role of the individual in nature.
- He believes that owing to increased anthropocentrism, humans have cut themselves off from nature, viewing nature and themselves as competing entities and establishing a master-slave dynamic.
- By placing humans at the heart of the environmental crisis, Næss outlines the difference between the two styles of ecologism. He terms the powerful and fashionable fight against pollution and resource depletion as shallow ecologism or environmentalism.
- Exponents of this philosophy believe in continuing our present lifestyle, but with specific tweaks aimed at minimising the damage to the environment.
- Also referred to as weak ecologism, it may include the use of vehicles that cause less pollution or air conditioners that do not release chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). This branch of ecologism primarily serves to maintain the lifestyle of those dwelling in developed countries.
- On the other hand, deep ecologism believes that humans should radically change their relationship with nature. Its proponents reject shallow ecologism for prioritising humans above other forms of life, and subsequently preserving the environmentally destructive way of life in modern societies.
- Deep ecologism maintains that by sustaining this lifestyle, shallow ecologism further widens the inequalities between countries. For instance, despite constituting only five per cent of the world’s population, the U.S. accounts for 17% of the world’s energy consumption and is the second largest consumer of electricity after China.
- Similarly, while low and middle-income countries have recorded lower cumulative and per capita carbon dioxide emissions over the past two centuries, it is the wealthier countries which are most responsible for a majority of carbon emissions.

Objectives of deep ecologism

- Deep ecologism aspires to sustain nature by making large-scale changes to our lifestyle. These may include limiting the commercial farming of meat to preserve forest areas and reduce the artificial fattening of animals, or the reshaping of transport systems which involve the use of internal combustion engines.

- However, besides advocating these lifestyle changes, deep ecology shifts the attention from pollution and conservation narratives to robust policy formulation and implementation.
- According to Næss, policy-making must be aided by the reorientation of technical skills and inventions in new directions that are ecologically responsible.
- In fact, Næss recommends that ecologists reject work that is supervised by authorities with limited ecological perspectives.
- As irreplaceable informants, ecologists should not submit to power which does not recognise critical ecological priorities.
- Additionally, to recognise the complex richness of different lifeforms, deep ecology calls for a re-evaluation of the 'survival of the fittest' doctrine. Survival of the fittest should be understood through the human ability to cooperate and coexist with nature, as opposed to exploiting or dominating it. Deep ecology thus prioritises a 'live and let live' attitude over an 'either you or me' approach.

The political potential of ecology

- Both strands of ecology draw from different frameworks, including socialism, anarchism, feminism, conservatism and sometimes even fascism. Deep ecology in particular borrows from socialism. In his writings on deep ecology, Næss argues that a narrow focus on pollution and conservation movements is counterproductive.
- He believes that when projects are only implemented to solve pollution, it generates evils of a different kind. For instance, the installation of pollution control devices may increase the cost of living, leading to an increase in class difference. An ethically responsible ecology is one which operates in the interest of all economic classes.
- The environment may also become more vulnerable when decisions are strongly influenced by majority rule, without taking local interests into consideration. According to Næss, a solution to this can be found in decentralising the decision-making process and strengthening local autonomy.
- Næss claims that a chain consisting of a local board, a municipal council, a state-wide institution, a national government institution, a coalition of nations, and a global institution can be reduced to one made up of a local board, a nation-wide institution, and a global institution. A lengthy decision-making chain is unfavourable as it is prone to excluding local interests.
- In all, Næss cautions humans against adopting a 'vague, global' approach to the environmental crisis.
- A holistic perspective to the crisis is one which acknowledges regional differences and the disparities between under and over-developed nations.
- Næss stresses that the political potential of the movement be realised, and that those in positions of power be held accountable. The responsibility of solving the climate crisis falls on policy-makers as much as it does on scientists and ecologists.

GS IV

Actions that corrode the steel frame of India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: A letter war between two sets of retired public officials (civil servants, judges and army officers), concerning the prevailing political and social situation in the country, has been widely reported in the media.

Details:

- In the last week of April 2022, a group of these retirees, calling themselves as the Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG) sent an ‘open letter’ to the Prime Minister. In the letter, they appealed to him to call for an end to the politics of hate and violence against the minorities, particularly Muslims.
- Very soon thereafter, another rival group of Concerned Citizens (CC) surfaced and rubbished the allegations as a ‘false narrative’, inspired by western and international lobbies.
- Unfortunately, in neither of the formulations, is there any reference to the role of the civil service (of which they all were distinguished members in the past) in whatever is happening or not happening in the country, concerning law and public order and the security of citizens.
- It is the police and magistracy, judicial courts and other regulatory agencies — not politicians — which have been authorised and empowered by law to take preventive action against potential troublemakers, enforce the laws relating to criminal, economic and other offences, and maintain public order.
- In mature democracies, self-respecting public officials normally discharge their constitutional and legal responsibilities with honesty, integrity and their own conscience, firmly resisting the dictates of the vested interests.

Lessons from Partygate

- Perhaps, a reference to the recent events in Great Britain will serve to clarify things, as the main features of our governance system — the cabinet system with accountability to Parliament and a permanent civil service with political neutrality as its hallmark — are patterned on the English constitutional model.
- Recently, Britain’s two top Ministers, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister), Rishi Sunak, were accused of violating their own lockdown regulations for COVID-19 by attending Christmas and other parties at 10, Downing Street, London (Prime Minister’s residence) in the months of November to December 2020.
- A career civil servant, Sue Gray, was asked to inquire into the veracity of the charges. Of Ms. Gray, it was said that she would never want to tarnish her reputation by claims of a cover-up or a shoddy investigation.
- She came to the finding that against the background of the restrictions on all citizens, the gatherings held were inappropriate and represented a serious failure to observe the high standards expected from top public functionaries. The public and the political establishment accepted the integrity of the exercise.
- Then, another wing of the civil service, the London Metropolitan Police, imposed fines on the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of Exchequer for their misdemeanour, and again both the top Ministers accepted the penalty.

An erosion in India

- Can this happen in India? It might have been possible in the early years when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel created independent India's civil services, but no longer. The deterioration in standards was very visible during the National Emergency declared in 1975.
- The civil services, like other institutions including the judiciary, just caved in; the trend might have accelerated over the years; now, no one even talks of civil service neutrality, although there is the rare purist who could be sticking to the old standards of behaviour.
- Earlier, during communal or caste riots, the Administration focused on quelling the disturbances and restoring peace in the affected locality, without ever favouring one group over the other. Now, there are allegations of local officers taking sides in a conflict.
- For civil servants who work with ruling politicians directly, following a political master's diktats and identifying with his interests, anticipating his views in official work and acting on them and pandering to his narrow political interests, often become easy options that put them out of harm's way.
- The politician, lacking the vision and intellectual grasp of a Sardar Patel, could also reward a compliant bureaucrat by offering prized and lucrative assignments both within and outside the country. He could also have him placed in an inconvenient position or even punish him if he does not follow his line.
- This can happen despite the protection and safeguards in Article 311 of the Constitution. That a civil servant's pliant and submissive behaviour means an end to civil service neutrality and the norms and values that this trait demands, does not seem to bother either the political or bureaucratic leadership.

Non-negotiable values

- The norms that define neutrality are: independence of thought and action; honest and objective advice; candour and 'speaking truth to power' even if it is done in the privacy of a Minister's chamber.
- Associated with these norms are the personal values that a civil servant cherishes or ought to cherish, namely, self-respect, integrity, professional pride and dignity. All these together contribute to the enhancement of the quality of administration that benefits society and the people.
- This objective may, however, be at a discount when politicians are eager to serve their personal and party interests, and overzealous and ambitious officials dance to their tune, thereby leading to a dilution of standards. It could also create favourable conditions for both political and bureaucratic corruption.
- "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment," wrote B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution and added, "It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic."

Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements:

1. Monkeypox is a zoonosis and is commonly found close to evergreen forests.
2. Monkeypox virus is an orthopoxvirus, which is a genus of the variola virus, which causes smallpox.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Cases occur close to tropical rainforests inhabited by animals that carry the virus.

2) Consider the following statements:

1. A virtual private network masks the IP address of the user by rerouting the data.
2. In India, it is mandatory for VPN service providers to maintain all customer data for a period of five years.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

3) Consider the following about the Sawa Lake:

1. It is located in the western field of the Mesopotamian Plains, in Syria and is only fed by the groundwater that originates from the desert areas.
2. The lake is formed over limestone rock and is isolated by gypsum barriers surrounding the lake.

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

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

Answer : b

It is located in the country of Iraq.

4) Consider the following statements about coastal zone management authority:

1. The Island Coastal Zone Regulation (ICRZ), 2019, does not permit any infrastructure development on Indian coastal stretches.
2. The National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA) permits gas-based power plants only in islands with geographical areas greater than 1000 sq. km.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : c

The Island Coastal Zone Regulation (ICRZ), 2019, limits infrastructure development on vulnerable coastal stretches.

The NCZMA has recommended that gas-based power plants be permitted within the Island Coastal Regulation Zone area only in islands with geographical areas greater than 100 sq. km.

5) Consider the following statements with reference to ancient Indian history:

1. Mayiladumparai belonged to the Mesolithic age, indicating the beginning of Iron technology in India.
2. Black-and-red ware was introduced for the first time during the megalithic period in India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : d

Excavations carried out by the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology at Mayiladumparai in Krishnagiri district have placed the beginning of the Iron Age in Tamil Nadu 4,200 years Before the Present (BP) or 2200 BCE (Before Common Era).

The black-red-red ware was introduced in the late Neolithic phase itself, in contrast to the wider belief that the black-and-red ware was introduced in the Iron Age.

6) Consider the following statements:

1. Interest that is accrued from the MP's local area development fund could be used for the development projects in the respective constituency.
2. Each MP is allocated 5 Crore annually under the Scheme and is released to the district authority.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

Under the revised rules, the interest that the fund accrues from the MPLADS scheme will be deposited in the Consolidated Fund of India.

7) Consider the following statements regarding (UNTC):

1. United Nations Tax Committee is a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council.
2. It offers guidance on current issues such as double taxation treaties, transfer pricing, taxation of the extractive industries, and taxation of services.
3. India is the first country to make a voluntary contribution to the UN tax fund.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : d

8) Consider the following statements with respect to Tomato Flu:

1. It is caused by the bacteria which is also responsible for causing cholera.
2. It affects only children below the age of five years and causes blisters in various parts of the body.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer : a

Tomato Flu is a common kind of viral infection in India, wherein children below five years of age experience fever, usually accompanied by rashes, skin irritation, and dehydration.

9) Consider the following statements with respect to State of the World's Birds:

1. The report states that 50% of the extant species show trends of population decline.
2. The most threatened species were those living in forests and grasslands.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

The review found that 5,245 or about 48% of the existing bird species worldwide were known or suspected to be undergoing population decline.

10) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding W Bosons?

1. Together with the Z boson, it is responsible for the vital force that governs the behavior of matter in our universe.
2. It is electrically charged and switches protons into neutrons and vice versa and it triggers nuclear fusion and helps stars burn.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : b

Together with the Z boson, it is responsible for the weak force, one of four fundamental forces that govern the behavior of matter in our universe.

11) Consider the following statements:

1. Association of Asian Election Authorities provides a non-partisan forum in Asia to promote open and transparent elections in the member countries.
2. India is the founding member and current chair, it has both signed and ratified the charter of the Association.
3. Non-Asian countries such as Papua New Guinea are also part of the association.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

Papua New Guinea is part of Maritime Southeast Asia and is a member.

12) Consider the following statements:

1. Single-celled protozoans interact with microplastics in the ocean and cause gastrointestinal and immunocompromised diseases in humans.
2. Infections in pregnant women also cause miscarriage or blindness and neurological disease in the baby.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only



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

Answer : c

13) Consider the following statements with respect to section 375:

1. Section 375 of IPC defines rape and lists seven notions of consent that, if vitiated, would constitute the offense of rape by a man.
2. Under the section, Sexual act by a man with his own wife, without the consent of the wife is considered rape and is punishable.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

Exemption: Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age, is not rape.

14) Consider the following statements:

1. There are no tectonic plates on Mars and its crust is a giant plate.
2. Marsquakes are caused due to stresses that cause rock fractures or faults in their crust.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

15) Consider the following statements with respect to science and technology:

1. The photon is a particle of spin equal to one unit that mediates the electromagnetic interaction or force.
2. Gauge bosons mediate other interactions such as strong interactions, weak interactions, etc.
3. If an object or particle enters the event horizon surrounding a black hole, it cannot escape the gravitational pull of the black hole.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : d

16) Consider the following statements about cyclones:

1. Twin tropical cyclones are caused by equatorial Rossby waves, which are huge waves with wavelengths around 4,000-5,000 Kms.
2. Twin cyclones always move into different hemispheres, the northern hemisphere cyclone will move north and east, while the southern one will move south and west.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : a

The northern hemisphere cyclone would go North and West, while the southern one would go South and West.

17) Which of the following statements is/are correct about Black Widow Binary System?

1. It refers to a system where a rapidly spinning neutron star is being consumed by the brighter companion star.
2. Black widow binaries are powered by pulsars that emit flashes of high-energy gamma and X-rays.

Select the correct answer code:

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

Answer : b

It is a unique system that consists of a pulsar (rapidly spinning neutron star) that is circling and slowly consuming a smaller companion star, just like the female black widow spider does to its mate, hence the name.

18) Consider the following statements with respect to fundamental rights:

1. Fundamental rights given under the Indian constitution in case of violation can only be enforced against the public authorities and not against private individuals.
2. In *Shamdasani vs Central Bank of India*, the SC laid down that, violation of rights by the private individuals gives the aggrieved person a right to seek remedy under general laws only.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer : c

19) Consider the following statements:

1. The original structure of the Lepakshi Temple was built by Agastya and was rebuilt by the Chalukyas.
2. It is one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. None

Answer : d

The Veerabhadra Swami temple here has found a place on UNESCO's tentative list of world heritage sites in India for 2022. It is situated atop the Kurmasailam (tortoise-shaped) hill in the state of Andhra Pradesh and is a glorious example of the much-celebrated Vijayanagara architecture.

The entire temple complex was believed to be re-built by Virupanna, and his brother Veeranna under the rule of Vijayanagara king Achyuta Devaraya. The original structure is said to have been built by Sage Agastya and finds itself mentioned in the Skanda Purana as one of the 108 Saivaite pilgrimage centers of ancient India.

20) It is a waterfall on the Sharavati river in the Western Ghats. It is the second-highest plunge waterfall in India. The falls are fed by the water released from the Linganamkki Dam. Lepakshi Temple. This is most likely the description of:

- a. Dudhsagar Falls

- b. Old Courtallam Falls
- c. Jog Falls
- d. Kempty Falls

Answer : c

