INSTA CURRENT AFFAIRS

JANUARY 2021
Advanced Prelims Enrichment Course 2021
(APEC-2021)
(Full Fledged Preparation for Prelims 2021)
Online Mode & Offline Mode*

Orientation On 10 Feb 2021
Starts from 11 Feb 2021
Fee: 16,000/- incl. Taxes

Early Bird Offer: 15 % Discount till 10th Feb 2021 | Old Subscriber Offer: 20 % Discount

Takeaways

- Subscribers clearing Prelims will get 50% discount on I-WIL 2021
- Free Textbook Based Prelims Test Series will be available from 1st April 2021
- Timetable is smoothly Integrated with Insta Prelims Revision Plan 2021
- Mentorship Provided till Prelims 2021

Classes

- Subject wise Classes: completely oriented towards Prelims Exam
- Current Affairs: covered in Every Class of respective topics
- Extended CSAT Classes: with full syllabus completion to tackle any unconventional paper
- Economic Survey & Budget: integrated with the Classes
- 3hrs of classes per day for each subject

Tests

- Daily Revision Class Tests for GS as well as CSAT
- Home Assignments to be followed for more Practice & to Improve your skills
- Full Length Prelims Test after every Subject
- Full Length Prelims Test on Economic Survey & Budget
- Full Length Prelims Test on Agriculture theme

Special Sessions

- Motivational Sessions
- Strategy classes to improve your accuracy
- Previous year Questions’ Discussion

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TIME TABLE

* (Offline mode in Bangalore only. Depending on ease of Govt. Restrictions in Delhi, Classes will be LIVE STREAMED in Delhi Centre i.e., Students can watch Classes LIVE in Delhi Centre)
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GENERAL STUDIES – 1

Topics: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

1. Foundation stone laid for ‘New Anubhava Mantapa’:

Context:
Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa laid the foundation stone for the ‘New Anubhava Mantapa’ in Basavakalyan, the place where 12th century poet-philosopher Basavanna lived for most of his life.

- The project will showcase the 12th Century Anubhava Mantapa (often referred to as the “first Parliament of the world”) established by him in Basavakalyan, where philosophers and social reformers held debates.
- The building will adopt the Kalyana Chalukya style of architecture.

About Basavanna, his thoughts and contributions:
1. Basavanna was a 12th-century philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet and a social reformer during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka,
2. Basavanna spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas.
3. Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals.
4. He introduced new public institutions such as the Anubhava Mantapa (or, the “hall of spiritual experience”), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
5. As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional movement named Virashaivas, or “ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva”. This movement shared its roots in the ongoing Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Shaiva Nayanars traditions, over the 7th- to 11th-century.
6. Basava championed devotional worship that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins, and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga.
7. Basaveshwara is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms.
8. In November 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.

Basavanna and Sharana movement:
1. The Sharana movement he presided over attracted people from all castes, and like most strands of the Bhakti movement, produced a corpus of literature, the vachanas, that unveiled the spiritual universe of the Veerashaiva saints.
2. The egalitarianism of Basavanna’s Sharana movement was too radical for its times.
3. He set up the Anubhava Mandapa, where the Sharanas, drawn from different castes and communities, gathered and engaged in learning and discussions.
4. Sharanas challenged the final bastion of the caste order: they organised a wedding where the bridegroom was from a lower caste, and the bride a Brahmin.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Shramana tradition?
2. What are Vachanas?
3. What is Anubhava Mantapa?
4. Who are Kalachuris?
5. Who are Nayanars?
6. What is Bhakti Movement?

Mains Link:
Write a note on important contributions made by 12th Century reformer Basavanna to the society.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GC0856IQU.1&imageview=0.

2. Mughal history whitewashed in texts, say two educationists:

Context:
www.insightsonindia.com
At its meeting on textbook reforms, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education heard presentations from right-wing organisations and educationists.

- Few experts at the meeting argued that Mughal history is being whitewashed in Indian textbooks, and crowding out space for history from the Vedic era.

Why this meeting was convened?
1. To remove “references to un-historical facts and distortions about our national heroes”,
2. To ensure “equal or proportionate references to all periods of Indian history” and
3. To highlight the role of great women in Indian history.

The arguments:
1. The amount of space given to the Mughal era versus the reign of Hindu kings needed to be balanced.
2. The Indian history was falsely written as though foreign rule existed only for 200 years of the British Raj, without taking into account the 1,000 years before that.
3. The Mughal era had been whitewashed, and their role as invaders had been muted.
4. There was a need for children to be taught “Indian culture” from the Vedic era onwards.

NCERT revision:
The NCERT is currently in the process of revising textbooks, and is likely to complete the process by 2024. Recommendations have been given to change higher education syllabi as well, to ensure that it aligns with the changes in school textbooks.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link: 4. Contributions to art and architecture.

Mains Link:
1. Write a note on important contributions of Mughals to Indian art and architecture.

3. Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu: pride & politics:

Context:
With Assembly polls round the corner in Tamil Nadu, the Pongal festival and Jallikattu, the traditional bull-taming sport, have caught the attention of political parties.

What is Jallikattu?
- The bull-taming sport is popular in Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul districts known as the Jallikattu belt.
- Jallikattu is celebrated in the second week of January, during the Tamil harvest festival, Pongal.
- A tradition over 2,000 years old, Jallikattu is a competitive sport as well as an event to honour bull owners who rear them for mating.
- It is a violent sport in which contestants try to tame a bull for a prize; if they fail, the bull owner wins the prize.

Why is Jallikattu important in Tamil culture?
Jallikattu is considered a traditional way for the peasant community to preserve their pure-breed native bulls.
- At a time when cattle breeding is often an artificial process, conservationists and peasants argue that Jallikattu is a way to protect these male animals which are otherwise used only for meat if not for ploughing.

Why has Jallikattu been the subject of legal battles?
1. Jallikattu first came under legal scrutiny in 2007 when the Animal Welfare Board of India and the animal rights group PETA moved petitions in the Supreme Court against Jallikattu as well as bullock cart races.
2. The Tamil Nadu government, however, worked its way out of the ban by passing a law in 2009, which was signed by the Governor.
3. In 2011, the UPA regime at the Centre added bulls to the list of animals whose training and exhibition is prohibited.
4. In May 2014, the Supreme Court banned the bull-taming sport, ruling on a petition that cited the 2011 notification.

So, is it legal or banned now?
- In January 2017, massive protests erupted across Tamil Nadu against the ban, with Chennai city witnessing a 15-day-long Jallikattu uprising.
- The same year, the Tamil Nadu government released an ordinance amending the central Act and allowing Jallikattu in the state; this was later ratified by the President.
- PETA challenged the state move, arguing it was unconstitutional (Article 29(1)).
- In 2018, the Supreme Court referred the Jallikattu case to a Constitution Bench, where it is pending now.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Jallikattu.
2. Article 29 of the Constitution.

4. Four indigenous martial art forms included in Khelo India Youth Games:
The Khelo India Youth games were launched in 2018 as a multidisciplinary grassroots event for under-17 years and under-21 years.
- Conducted annually, the best performers are given an annual scholarship of ₹5 lakh for eight years to prepare for international sporting events.

In a recent move, the Sports Ministry inducted four indigenous martial art forms — Kalaripayattu of Kerala, Mallakhamb of Central India, Gatka of Punjab and Thang-ta of Manipur — into the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG).

What is Mallakhamb?
- It is a traditional form of gymnastics performed with a wooden pole (made of wood from sheesham or Indian rosewood and polished with castor oil), a cane, or a rope.
- Though Madhya Pradesh declared Mallakhamb the State sport only in 2013, it had been developed as a competitive sport since 1981, with rules and regulations introduced at the first National Championship that year.

Gatka:
It is a style of fighting with wooden sticks that originated in Punjab in the 15th Century. The bana and chola are worn for ritualistic performances but when performed as a sport, the practitioner wears track pants and T-shirt, and the stick is no longer the size of a man.

Thang Ta:
- It is a Manipuri art form.
- It combines ritual, demonstration and combat and involves a variety of dance forms and warrior drills.

Kalaripayattu:
● It is a Martial art which originated as a style in Kerala during 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD.
● The word kalari first appears in Sangam literature to describe both a battlefield and combat arena.
● It is also considered to be one of the oldest fighting system in existence.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link and Mains Link: 
Discuss the key features of: Kalaripayattu of Kerala, Mallakhamb of Central India, Gatka of Punjab and Thang-ta of Manipur.

Topics: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

1. Subhash Chandra Bose:

Context:
Subhash Chandra Bose had unfurled the Tricolour in Port Blair on 30th December, 1943.

Background:
Bose had arrived in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1943 after Japan handed them over to his Azad Hind government. Japan had captured the islands during the second world war.

About Azad Hind Government:
● Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had announced the establishment of the provisional government of Azad Hind in occupied Singapore in 1943.
● Known as Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind, it was supported by the Axis powers of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, the Italian Social Republic, and their allies.
● He had launched a struggle to free India from British rule under the banner of the provisional government-in exile during the latter part of the Second World War.

Who were part of this?
Under his provisional government, the Indians living abroad had been united. The Indian National Army drew ex-prisoners and thousands of civilian volunteers from the Indian expatriate population in Malaya (present-day Malaysia) and Burma (now Myanmar).
● Under the provisional government, Bose was the head of the state, the prime minister and the minister for war and foreign affairs.
● Captain Lakshmi headed the women’s organisation while S A Ayer headed the publicity and propaganda wing.
● Revolutionary leader Rash Behari Bose was designated as the supreme advisor.

Key Points related to Subhash Chandra Bose:
1. Subhash Chandra Bose was twice elected President of the Indian National Congress, (1938-Haripur and 1939-Tripuri).
2. He resigned from the Congress Presidentship in 1939 and organised the All India Forward Bloc a faction within the Congress in Bengal.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Bose and INA.
2. Bose and the Indian National Congress.

Mains Link:
4. Distribution of various portfolios.

2. Why stakes are high in renaming of Aurangabad as Sambhaji Nagar?

Context:
www.insightsonindia.com
There is a long standing demand of the Shiv Sena for renaming Aurangabad city in Maharashtra as Sambhaji Nagar.

The city and its name:
- Aurangabad was built in 1610 by Malik Ambar of the Nijamshahi dynasty.
- It was renamed Aurangabad by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb when he made it his capital.

Why there is a demand for renaming?
Aurangzeb, who lived in Aurangabad until his death, tortured and killed Chhatrapati Sambahji Maharaj, son of the Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.
Thus, they are demanding that the city be renamed Sambhaji Nagar.

Background:
In 1995, the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) passed a resolution to rename Aurangabad as Sambhaji Nagar.

3. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Context:
The 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, is being organized on 9th January 2021, despite the ongoing Covid pandemic.

About PBD:
Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated on 9th January to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community in the development of India.
- PBD Convention is the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs and provides an important platform to engage and connect with the overseas Indians.
- PBD conventions were held every year since 2003.
- Since 2015, its format has been revised to celebrate the PBD once every two years.

The theme of 16th PBD Convention 2021: "Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat".

Why PBD is celebrated on January 9?
January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India’s freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.

Significance
- These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and people of the land of their ancestors for mutually beneficial activities.
- These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. On which date PBD is celebrated?
2. The reason behind PBD celebration.
3. Significance

www.insightsonindia.com

4. Netaji’s birth anniversary to be celebrated as ‘Parakram Divas’:

Context:
The Union Culture Ministry has announced that January 23, birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose, would be celebrated as “Parakram Divas”, day of courage, every year.
- 2021 will be 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose.

About Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose:
- Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had announced the establishment of the provisional government of Azad Hind in occupied Singapore in 1943.
- Known as Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind, it was supported by the Axis powers of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, the Italian Social Republic, and their allies.
- He had launched a struggle to free India from British rule under the banner of the provisional government-in-exile during the latter part of the Second World War.
- Under his provisional government, the Indians living abroad had been united.
- Under the provisional government, Bose was the head of the state, the prime minister and the minister for war and foreign affairs.
- Subhash Chandra Bose was twice elected President of the Indian National Congress, (1938-Haripur and 1939-Tripuri).
- He resigned from the Congress Presidentship in 1939 and organised the All India Forward Bloc a faction within the Congress in Bengal.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Bose and INA.
2. Bose and the Indian National Congress.
4. Distribution of various portfolios.

Mains Link:
Write a note on Azad Hind Government.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G0U86G6FM.1&imageview=0.

5. Veer Savarkar:

Context:
An MLC in Uttar Pradesh has demanded that the portrait of Hindu Mahasabha leader Vinayak Damodar Savarkar be removed from the picture gallery of the State Legislative Council saying that the installation of his frame next to those of freedom fighters amounted to an “insult” to them. This has stirred controversy in the state.

Who is Veer Savarkar?
Born on May 28, 1883 in Bhagur, a city in Maharashtra’s Nashik.

Nationalism and social reforms:
- Formed a youth organization- Mitra Mela, this organization was put into place to bring in national and revolutionary ideas.
- He was against foreign goods and propagated the idea of Swadeshi.
- He championed atheism and rationality and also disapproved orthodox Hindu belief. In fact, he even dismissed cow worship as superstitious.
- Vinayak Savarkar was a president of Hindu Mahasabha from 1937 to 1943.
- When congress ministries offered resignation on 22nd oct 1939, Hindu mahaasabha under his leadership cooperated with Muslim league to form government in provinces like Sindh, Bengal and NWFP.
- In Pune, Savarkar founded the “Abhinav Bharat Society”.
- He joined Tilak’s Swaraj Party.
- He founded the Free India Society. The Society celebrated important dates on the Indian calendar including festivals, freedom movement landmarks, and was dedicated to furthering discussion about Indian freedom.
- He believed and advocated the use of arms to free India from the British and created a network of Indians in England, equipped with weapons.

Important works:
2. An armed revolt against the Morley-Minto reform.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
www.insightsonindia.com
1. Who founded Mitra mela, Abhinav Bharat Society and Free India society, what are the objectives?
2. Books written by Savarkar?
3. Savarkar’s book which was published by Madam Bikaji Cama?
4. Morley- Minto reforms- key changes.
5. Savarkar’s views on use of arms to free India.

Mains Link:
Discuss Veer Savarkar’s contributions to social reforms in the country.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G8U86K3R4.1&imageview=0.

6. Bhima Koregaon Battle:
Context:
OCHCR has called for release of Bhima Koregaon activists.

What’s the issue?
The Bhima Koregaon case dates back to January 1, 2018, which marked the 200th anniversary of the Bhima Koregaon battle.

- The event was organised to celebrate the victory of the British army, which included a large number of Mahars, against Peshwa Baji Rao II’s army.
- Several human rights activists, including Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao and Gautam Navlakha, were arrested during the course of the investigation.

About the Bhima- Koregaon battle:
- A battle was fought in Bhima Koregaon, a district in Pune with a strong historical Dalit connection, between the Peshwa forces and the British on January 1, 1818.
- The British army, which comprised mainly of Dalit soldiers, fought the upper caste-dominated Peshwa army. The British troops defeated the Peshwa army.

Outcomes of the battle:
- The victory was seen as a win against caste-based discrimination and oppression. Peshwas were notorious for their oppression and persecution of Mahar dalits. The victory in the battle over Peshwas gave dalits a moral victory a victory against caste-based discrimination and oppression and sense of identity.
- However, the divide and rule policy of the British created multiple fissures in Indian society which is even visible today in the way of excessive caste and religious discrimination which needs to be checked keeping in mind the tenets of the Constitution.

Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?
- The battle has come to be seen as a symbol of Dalit pride because a large number of soldiers in the Company force were the Mahar Dalits. Since the Peshwas, who were Brahmans, were seen as oppressors of Dalits, the victory of the Mahar soldiers over the the Peshwa force is seen as Dalit assertion.
- On 1 January 1927, B.R. Ambedkar visited the memorial obelisk erected on the spot which bears the names of the dead including nearly two dozen Mahar soldiers. The men who fought in the battle of Koregaon were the Mahars, and the Mahars are Untouchables.

About OHCHR:
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) is the leading UN entity on human rights.
- It is mandated to, Inter alia protect and promote all human rights and to conduct necessary advocacy in that regard, established pursuant to the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/141.
- It also has to promote adherence to international human rights law and, with this purpose in mind, to support domestic courts, with their constitutional or judicial function, in ensuring the implementation of international legal obligations. This is the basis for seeking intervention.

www.insightsonindia.com
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About the Battle.
2. Participants.
3. Outcomes.
4. Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?

Mains Link: The celebration of Bhima Koregaon Battle Victory not only challenges the conventional narrative of anti-colonialism, it also tells the story of the making of an autonomous culture of Dalits against the inferior culture of caste. Discuss critically.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH872DK1.1&imageview=0.

7. Govind Ballabh Pant:

Context:
A statue of freedom fighter Govind Ballabh Pant that was removed from the Parliament premises recently would be unveiled at its new location.

About Govind Ballabh Pant:
- Pant was born on 10 September 1887 in what is now Uttarakhand, at Almora.
- In Kashipur, he established an organisation called Prem Sabha that started working towards several reforms.
- He also saved a school from shutting down due to non-payment of taxes to the British government.
- He was the first chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in Independent India.
- He served as India’s home minister from 1955 to 1961. It was during his tenure that states were reorganised on linguistic lines.
- Following Gandhi’s footsteps, Pant also organised a massive salt movement in the United Provinces. In May 1930, he was arrested and held at Dehradun jail.
- He also protested against the Simon Commission.
- In 1957, Pant was awarded India’s highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Offices held by GB Pant before independence.
2. Offices held after independence.
3. Awards and honours.
5. Involvement in freedom struggle.

Mains Link: Write a note on GB Pant and his contributions to the freedom movement.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GG68794HB.1&imageview=0.

8. Lala Lajpat Rai:

Context:
Remembering the great Lala Lajpat Rai Ji on his Jayanti.

His contributions, achievements and related key facts:
1. Rai is remembered for his role during the Swadeshi movement and for his advocacy of education.
2. He became a follower of Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj and went on to become one of the society’s leaders.
3. He also helped found the Punjab National Bank.
4. In 1885, Rai established the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School in Lahore and remained a committed educationist throughout his life.
5. Rai, Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal (called Lal-Bal-Pal) fervently advocated the use of Swadeshi goods and mass agitation in the aftermath of the controversial Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon.
6. He founded the Indian Home Rule League of America in New York City in 1917.
7. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress during its Special Session in Kolkata in 1920, which saw the launch of Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-cooperation Movement.
8. The patriot died at Lahore in 1928 after he was attacked by police during a protest rally against the Simon Commission.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who was the Viceroy of India when the partition of Bengal took place?
2. Objectives of Swadeshi movement.

Mains Link:

4. Important literary works of Lala Lajpat Rai.

9. Patharughat: The forgotten peasant uprising of Assam in 1894:

Context:
Patharughat peasant uprising took place on January 28, 1894 in Assam.
- The unarmed peasants were protesting against the increase in land revenue levied by the colonial administration, when the military opened fire.

What led to the Patharughat uprising?
- After the British annexation of Assam in 1826, surveys of the vast lands of the state began. On the basis of such surveys, the British began to impose land taxes, much to the resentment of the farmers.
- In 1893, the British government decided to increase agricultural land tax reportedly by 70-80 per cent. Up until then the peasants would pay taxes in kind or provide a service in lieu of cash.
- In Patharughat, despite these gatherings being democratic, the British perceived them as “breeding grounds for sedition” and opened fire.

Why was the incident significant?
For the larger Assamese community, Patharughat comes second only to the Battle of Saraighat, when the Ahoms defeated the Mughals in 1671.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the battle.
2. Causes.
3. Outcomes.

Mains Link:
4. About the battle of Saraighat.

Topics: Women and women related issues.

1. Last chance to clear stand on same-sex marriages for Center: Delhi HC

Context:
The Delhi High Court on Friday granted the Centre and the Delhi government one last chance to file a response to petitions seeking the recognition and registration of same-sex marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act, the Special Marriage Act and the Foreign Marriage Act.
The court was told that no reply has been filed in the case by authorities despite issuance of notice in October and November.

Background
The petitions filed in Delhi High Court contended that marriages between same sex couples are not possible despite the Supreme Court decriminalising consensual homosexual acts.
Petitioners sought a declaration to recognise same sex marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act (HMA) and Special Marriage Act (SMA).
- The two other pleas are — one filed by two women seeking to get married under the SMA and challenging provisions of the statute to the extent it does not provide for same sex marriages.
• The other plea by two men who got married in the U.S. but were denied registration of their marriage under the Foreign Marriage Act (FMA).

Legality of same-sex marriages in India
The Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code makes sex or marriage with persons of the same gender punishable by law.
• However, on September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalised Section 377 making gay sex legal.
• On 2 July 2009, in Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi, the Delhi High Court held that provision to be unconstitutional with respect to sex between consenting adults, but the Supreme Court of India overturned that ruling on 11 December 2013.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Section 377
2. Legal provisions related to same-sex marriages
3. Decriminalization of Section 377
4. Special Marriage Act (SMA)
5. Foreign Marriage Act (FMA)

Mains Link:
Despite the decriminalising consensual homosexual acts by Supreme Court, it’s not easy for gay people to declare their sexual orientation. Discuss.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is the ‘Sacramental Confession’?
2. fundamental right to freedom of religion
3. article 25

Mains Link:
Link: Court extends Centre last chance to reply to pleas seeking recognition for same-sex marriage - The Hindu

2. SC to hear plea against confessions to priests

Context
The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to consider after three weeks a petition filed by a group of women against the compulsory nature of sacred confessions to priests in Christianity.
• The court will examine the issues in the petition as they came within the ambit of the questions of faith, rights of women and equality.

Background
Five women have moved the Supreme Court against compulsory practice of sacramental confession in certain Churches in Kerala.
• They contended that it violated their fundamental right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution.
• Petitioner—members of the Church – had alleged that the practice was leading to several problems including sexual exploitation of women and blackmailing of both men and women followers.

Prevalent practices
Under the religious practice followed by Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, it’s members are required to undergo ‘Sacramental Confession’ before a priest to relieve themselves of sin.
• According to the practice, it’s a condition precedent for fulfilling the temporal and spiritual needs of being a Christian.
• The one who doesn’t do that would be denied the benefit of such services from the Church.

Earlier interventions of SC
Earlier, The Supreme Court had upheld the validity of the 1934 Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church to govern the parishes under the church.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is the ‘Sacramental Confession’?
2. fundamental right to freedom of religion
3. article 25

3. Task force on marriage age submits report to PMO:

Context:
www.insightsonindia.com
The task force was set up to take a re-look at the age of marriage for women has submitted its report to the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

- It was headed by Jaya Jaitley.

**When was the task force set up?**

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech last year proposed a panel on the “age of a girl entering motherhood” to lower maternal mortality rates and improve nutrition levels.

But when the decision to appoint a task force was announced, its terms of reference included examining “the correlation of age of marriage and motherhood” with health and nutritional status of mothers and infants.

**Criticism:**

Women’s rights activists have opposed the suggestion of raising the age of marriage from 18 to 21 for women and have cited evidence to show that such a move may be used to incarcerate young adults marrying without parents’ consent.

**What the law says?**

Currently, the law prescribes that the minimum age of marriage is 21 and 18 years for men and women, respectively.

The minimum age of marriage is distinct from the age of majority, which is gender-neutral.

1. An individual attains the age of majority at 18 as per the Indian Majority Act, 1875.
2. For Hindus, Section 5(iii) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 sets 18 years as the minimum age for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom. Child marriages are not illegal but can be declared void at the request of the minor in the marriage.
3. In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid under personal law.
4. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.

**Why is the law being relooked at?**

- From bringing in gender-neutrality to reduce the risks of early pregnancy among women, there are many arguments in favour of increasing the minimum age of marriage of women.
- Early pregnancy is associated with increased child mortality rates and affects the health of the mother.
- Despite laws mandating minimum age and criminalising sexual intercourse with a minor, child marriages are very prevalent in the country.
- Also, according to a study, children born to adolescent mothers (10-19 years) were 5 percentage points more likely to be stunted (shorter for their age) than those born to young adults (20-24 years).

**InstaLinks:**

1. Jaya Jaitley committee was constituted for the purpose of?
2. Legal provisions related to minimum age of marriage for men and women in India.

**Link:** [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GIQ86CLFM.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GIQ86CLFM.1&imageview=0).

**4. National Girl Child Day:**

**Context:**


- The objective is to raise awareness on the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR).
- The celebrations will also mark the anniversary of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme.
- Punjab has announced January 2021 to be the "month of the girl child". The scheme Dheeeiyan Di Lohri has also been launched.

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
About BBBP:
- **Launch and expansion:** Launched in January, 2015 at Panipat in Haryana. All India Expansion of BBBP covering all 640 districts (as per Census 2011) was launched at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan on 8th March 2018.
- It is a **tri-ministerial effort** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

**Implementation:**
It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DC/DM’s account for smooth operation of the Scheme.

**Objectives:**
1. Main Objective of the scheme is to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum.
2. The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

**Outcomes of the scheme:**
- As per the Ministry of Health, the sex ratio at birth is showing promising trends of improvement and has improved by 16 points from 918 (2014-15) to 934 (2019-20).
- Health percentage of first trimester Antenatal Care (ANC) has shown an improving trend from 61 per cent in 2014-15 to 71 per cent in 2019-20.
- The education gross enrolment ratio of girls in the schools at the secondary level has also improved from 77.45 per cent (2014-15) to 81.32 per cent (2018-19-provisional figures).

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. About the National Girl Child Day.
2. About BBBP.
3. Objectives.
**Mains Link:**
4. Implementation.

5. Village celebrates its newborn daughters:

**Context:**
Whenever a girl is born, Haridaspur, a remote village in Telangana, celebrates by distributing sweets and lighting lamps.
- This change in attitude is because of the efforts by panchayat president Md. Shafi and secretary Rohit Kulkarni.

**Efforts by the Government:**
All girl children in the village are going to have accounts of **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)**, a savings scheme being implemented by the Union government.

**About Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana:**
- It is a **small deposit scheme** for the girl child launched as a part of the **‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ campaign**.
- A Sukanya Samriddhi Account can be opened any time after the birth of a girl till she turns
10, with a minimum deposit of Rs 250 (Earlier it was Rs 1,000). In subsequent years, a minimum of Rs 250 and a maximum of Rs 1.5 lakh can be deposited during the ongoing financial year.

- The account can be opened in any post office or authorised branches of commercial banks.
- The account will remain operative for 21 years from the date of its opening or till the marriage of the girl after she turns 18.
- To meet the requirement of her higher education expenses, partial withdrawal of 50% of the balance is allowed after she turns 18.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About BBBP.
2. Objectives.
3. Implementation.
4. About SSY.
5. Eligibility.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of SSY.

(Note: Such issues can be used as case studies in ethics as well as GS answers).

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GPT87CCLO.1&imageview=0.

Topics: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location - changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

1. Polar Vortex Threatens To Send US, Europe Into Deep Freeze:

Context:
Meteorologists have predicted that the polar vortex, which is splitting into two and swirling southward, will send the US and European countries into a chilling deep freeze.
- Previously, such vortex Developed in 2014.

Implications:
Polar vortex is losing stability and its splitting causes dramatic, extreme weather implications across the western nations such as the US and Europe. With a 'disrupted' polar vortex in 2021, the colder air is expected to spill out of the Arctic and result in the onset of extremely harsh winters.

What exactly is a polar vortex?
It is described as a whirling cone of low pressure over the poles that is strongest in the winter months due to the increased temperature contrast between the polar regions and the mid-latitudes, such as the US and Europe.

Features:
- The polar vortex spins in the stratosphere.
- Usually, when the vortex is strongest, cold air is less-likely to plunge deep into North America or Europe. In other words, it forms a wall that protects the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air.
- But occasionally, the polar vortex is disrupted and weakens, due to wave energy propagating upward from the lower atmosphere. When this happens, the stratosphere...
warms sharply in an event known as sudden stratospheric warming, in just a few days, miles above the Earth’s surface.

- The warming weakens the polar vortex, shifting its location somewhat south of the pole or, in some instances, ‘splitting’ the vortex up into ‘sister vortices’.

**Effects of Polar Vortex:**
- The split higher up in the atmosphere can give rise to both, sudden and delayed effects, much of which involves declining temperatures and extreme winter weather in the eastern US along with northern and western Europe.
- A sudden stratospheric warming also leads to a warm Arctic not only in the stratosphere but also in the troposphere as well.
- A warmer Arctic, in turn, favours more severe winter weather in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes including the eastern US.

**InstaLinks:**
- **Prelims Link:**
  1. What is Polar Vortex?
  2. Where is it formed?
  4. Impacts.

**Mains Link:**
- What is Polar Vortex? Discuss

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1. **Why lightning still kills so many Indians?**

**Context:**
Lightning strikes have caused 1,771 deaths between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020.

**How can deaths be minimised?**
Every lightning strikes around a fixed period and almost similar geographical locations in similar patterns.

- As per CROPC (Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council), early lightning warning to farmers, cattle grazers, children and people in open areas is the key.
- Then a local lightning safety action plan, like installing Lightning Protection Devices, is also need to prevent deaths.

**What is the impact of lightning?**
The Centre had increased compensation for victims of natural disaster to Rs 4 lakh in 2015.

  - In the last five years there were 13,994 fatalities, which bring the total compensation to around Rs 359 crore.
  - There have been phenomenal losses of animal life also from lightning strike.

**What is lightning?**

- It is a very rapid — and massive — discharge of electricity in the atmosphere, some of which is directed towards the Earth’s surface.
- These discharges are generated in giant moisture-bearing clouds that are 10-12 km tall.

**InstaLinks:**

- **Prelims Link:**
  1. How lightning strikes?
  2. What are megaflashes?
  3. Is earth a good conductor of electricity?
  4. Types of clouds.
  5. Lightning strikes in India.

- **Mains Link:**
  Write a note on how lightning phenomenon.
GENERAL STUDIES – 2

Topics: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

1. How a US President can be impeached?

Context:
Democrats in the House of Republicans introduced an article of impeachment against U.S. President Donald Trump — the “incitement of insurrection” for his role in the attack on the Capitol recently.

What is Impeachment?
Impeachment is a provision that allows Congress to remove the President of the United States.

Under the US Constitution:
● The House of Representatives (Lower House) has the “the sole power of impeachment” while the Senate (Upper House) has “the sole power to try all impeachments”.
● The Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court has the duty of presiding over impeachment trials in the Senate.

Grounds for impeachment:
● The President can be removed from office for “treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors”.
● Essentially, it means an abuse of power by a high-level public official. This does not necessarily have to be a violation of an ordinary criminal statute.
● Historically, in the US, it has encompassed corruption and other abuses, including trying to obstruct judicial proceedings.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Elections- US President vs Indian President.
2. Impeachment.

Mains Link:
How a US President is impeached? Discuss.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GLV85N7CC.1&imageview=0.

2. Question Hour:

Context:
The Question Hour, which had been suspended by the government during the monsoon session, will resume when Parliament meets for the Budget session from January 29.

What is Question Hour?
● The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is termed as Question hour.
● It is mentioned in the Rules of Procedure of the House.
● During this time, the members ask questions and the ministers usually give answers.
● The questions can also be asked to the private members (MPs who are not ministers).

Question Hour in both Houses is held on all days of the session. But there are two days when an exception is made:
1. There is no Question Hour on the day the President addresses MPs from both Houses in the Central Hall.
2. Question Hour is not scheduled on the day the Finance Minister presents the Budget.

**Key facts:**
The presiding officers of the both Houses (Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha) are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is question hour?
2. What is zero hour?
3. What are starred questions?
4. What are unstarred questions?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of Zero hour in parliament.

**Topics:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

### 1. Rajasthan becomes the 5th State to complete Urban Local Bodies (ULB) reforms:

**Context:**
Rajasthan has become the 5th State in the country to successfully undertake Urban Local Bodies (ULB) reforms. Rajasthan has joined four other States namely, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur and Telangana, who have completed ULB reforms.
- These reforms have been stipulated by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.

**Implications:**
- Rajasthan has thus become eligible for additional reform linked borrowing.
- Accordingly, the State has been granted permission by the Department of Expenditure to mobilise additional financial resources of Rs. 2,731 crore through Open Market Borrowings.

The set of reforms stipulated by the Department of Expenditure are:

1. **The State will notify:**
   - Floor rates of property tax in ULBs which are in consonance with the prevailing circle rates (i.e. guideline rates for property transactions) and;
   - Floor rates of user charges in respect of the provision of water-supply, drainage and sewerage which reflect current costs/past inflation.
2. The State will put in place a system of periodic increase in floor rates of property tax/ user charges in line with price increases.

Besides, the centre had identified four citizen centric areas for reforms. They are:

1. Implementation of One Nation One Ration Card System
2. Ease of doing business reform
3. Urban Local body/ utility reforms
4. Power Sector reforms.

**Topics:** Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

### 1. Judicial review:

**Context:**
The Supreme Court has refused to treat the Central Vista project as a unique one requiring greater or “heightened” judicial review.
What has the Court said?

1. A majority view of the Supreme Court said the government was “entitled to commit errors or achieve successes” in policy matters without the court’s interference as long as it follows constitutional principles.
2. It is not the court’s concern to enquire into the priorities of an elected government. Judicial review is never meant to venture into the mind of the government and thereby examine validity of a decision.

What is Judicial Review?
Judicial review is the power of Judiciary to review any act or order of Legislative and Executive wings and to pronounce upon the constitutional validity when challenged by the affected person.

Judicial review present in India:
1. The power of Judicial Review comes from the Constitution of India itself (Articles 13, 32, 136, 142 and 147 of the Constitution).
2. The power of judicial review is evoked to protect and enforce the fundamental rights guaranteed in Part III of the Constitution.
3. Article 13 of the Constitution prohibits the Parliament and the state legislatures from making laws that “may take away or abridge the fundamental rights” guaranteed to the citizens of the country.
4. The provisions of Article 13 ensure the protection of the fundamental rights and consider any law “inconsistent with or in derogation of the fundamental rights” as void.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is JR?
2. Evolution.
3. Articles 13, 21 and 32.

Mains Link:
What is Judicial Review in the Indian Context? Discuss.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G3A852U83.1&imageview=0.

2. Why Supreme Court’s ruling on farm laws sets a terrible constitutional precedent?

Context:
The apex court has suspended the implementation of the farm laws, and created a committee to ascertain the various grievances.

What’s the issue now?
The judges’ intervention on the laws has been questioned by the Attorney General on three grounds. He also said that a law can be stayed or struck down only on one of these three grounds. These include:
1. One is that it has been passed without legislative competence.
2. Two that it is violative of fundamental rights.
3. Third that it is violative of other provisions of the Constitution.

So, instead of doing a hearing on the substance: the possible federalism challenge, it has simply decided to create a committee to hear farmers’ grievances and wade into political territory.

Why this might be a dangerous precedent?
1. It has set a new precedent for putting on hold laws passed by Parliament without substantive hearings on the content of the laws.

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2. It has muddied all the possible lines of judicial procedure, where it is not clear what the locus standi of different counsel are, what are the specific prayers that need to be addressed and how the court’s remedies address them.
3. It has not really heard the farmers, whose counsel were not fully heard before the passing of orders.
4. This is a monumental irony since a court whose own procedures seem to be opaque sets itself up as the arbiter of responsive government.

Conclusion:
The court is, perhaps unintentionally but damagingly, seeking to break the momentum of a social movement.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Examples of invocation of Article 142 by the Supreme Court.
2. Similar powers to High Courts.
3. Original vs Appellate jurisdictions.
4. Judicial review of Speaker’s decisions.
5. What is Judicial activism?
6. What is Judicial overreach?

Topics: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

1. Budget session:
Context:
The budget session of Parliament is expected to be held under similar COVID-19 safety measures and restrictions, including strict physical distancing norms, that were in place for the monsoon session.
- So far, there is no clarity on whether the Question Hour which was suspended during the monsoon session as part of the COVID-19 restrictions will resume in the budget session.

Constitutional Provisions:
- Article 85 requires that there should not be a gap of more than six months between two sessions of Parliament.
- The Constitution does not specify when or for how many days Parliament should meet.

Why is a Parliamentary Session important?
1. Law-making is dependent on when Parliament meets.
2. Also, a thorough scrutiny of the government’s functioning and deliberation on national issues can only take place when the two Houses are in session.
3. Predictability in the functioning of Parliament is key to a well-functioning democracy.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Who summons the Houses of Parliament?
2. Powers of President vs Powers of Chairperson.
3. What is adjournment sine die?
4. What is dissolution of the house?
5. Why Rajya Sabha cannot be dissolved?

Mains Link:
What needs to be done to increase the productivity of both the houses of Parliament? Discuss.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GQH84V3PG.1&imageview=0.

2. President’s address:
Context:
As many as 18 Opposition parties have announced their decision to boycott President Ram Nath Kovind’s address to the joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget session, in solidarity with the farmers protesting against the three farm laws.

President’s Address to the Parliament- Constitutional Provisions:
**Article 87(1)** says: “At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons.”

**First Constitutional Amendment:** Originally, the Constitution required the President to address both Houses of Parliament at the commencement of “every session”. This requirement was changed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

**What is in President’s address?**
The President’s speech essentially highlights the government’s policy priorities and plans for the upcoming year. It is drafted by the Cabinet, and provides a broad framework of the government’s agenda and direction.

**Motion of thanks:**
The address is followed by a motion of thanks moved in each House by ruling party MPs. During the session, political parties discuss the motion of thanks also suggesting amendments.

**What procedures follow the address?**
After the President or Governor delivers the address, a debate takes place not only on the contents of the address but also the broad issues of governance in the country. This then paves the way for discussion on the Budget.

**If the President disagrees with the text of the speech, are they still bound to read it?**
- The President or a Governor cannot refuse to perform the constitutional duty of delivering an address to the legislature. But there can be situations when they deviate from the text of the speech prepared by the government.
- So far, there have been no instances of President doing so. But there has been an occasion when a Governor skipped a portion of the address to the Assembly.
- In 1969, the Governor of West Bengal, Dharma Vira, skipped two paragraphs of the address prepared by the United Front government. The skipped portion described as unconstitutional the dismissal of the first United Front government by the Congress-ruled central government.

**Are there parallels in other countries?**
Similar provisions exist in other democracies.
1. **In the United States,** it is referred to as the “State of the Union”. The phrase comes from an article in the US Constitution which specifies that the President, “from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”
2. In the United Kingdom, it is referred to as the **Queen’s Speech** and is part of the ceremony to mark the formal start of the parliamentary year.

**InstaLinks:**

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<td>2. Constitutional provisions.</td>
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<td>3. First Constitutional Amendment.</td>
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<td>4. What procedures follow the address?</td>
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<td>5. If the President disagrees with the text of the speech, are they still bound to read it?</td>
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<td>Discuss the significance of President’s address to the parliament.</td>
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**Topics:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. **Mercy plea of Rajiv case convict:**

**Context:**
Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit has told the Supreme Court that a decision on the mercy petition of AG Perarivalan - a convict serving a life sentence for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, will be taken within four weeks.

What’s the issue?
The petition has been pending with the Governor since December 30, 2015.
- Citing inaction on part of the Governor in deciding on his clemency plea moved under Article 161 of the Constitution, Perarivalan has come to Supreme Court for passing necessary directions.

What is Article 161?
Article 161 gives the Governor the “power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extends”.

Article 72 vs Article 161:
The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161.
The power differs in the following two ways:
1. The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
2. The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is sentence of death but pardoning power of Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

Significance of pardoning powers:
- The pardoning power of Executive is very significant as it corrects the errors of judiciary. It eliminates the effect of conviction without addressing the defendant’s guilt or innocence.
- Pardon may substantially help in saving an innocent person from being punished due to miscarriage of justice or in cases of doubtful conviction.
- The object of pardoning power is to correct possible judicial errors, for no human system of judicial administration can be free from imperfections.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About Article 161.
2. Article 72.
3. Pardoning powers of President vs Governors.
4. Advice of Cabinet to Governor on such matters.

Mains Link:
5. Interference by Courts- Judicial Review.

2. Kerala Assembly rejects motion to remove Speaker:
Context:
Kerala Assembly recently rejected a motion moved by the Opposition seeking the removal of Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan alleging his role in the diplomatic channel gold smuggling case and reckless expenditure in the various activities by the Legislature Secretariat.

Removal of Speaker:
Article 179(c) of constitution provides that a member holding office as a Speaker or Deputy Speaker of an Assembly may be removed from his office by a resolution of the Assembly passed by a majority of all the then Members of the Assembly.

- Provided that no resolution for the purpose shall be moved unless at least fourteen days’ notice has been given of the intention to move the resolution.

Subject to the provisions of Article 181 of Constitution, the Speaker, or the Deputy Speaker or such other person as is referred to in clause (2) of Article 180, presides when a resolution for the removal of the Speaker or Deputy Speaker is taken for consideration.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Election of Speaker.
2. Functions.
4. Removal.
5. Grounds for removal.
6. Committees he is associated with.

Mains Link:
Discuss the roles and functions of the Speaker.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GK186NV7J.1&imageview=0

3. SEC censures two IAS officers, A.P. govt. objects:

Context:
The Andhra Pradesh government has “objected” to the censure notices issued by State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar to two senior IAS officials over preparations for the local body elections.

What’s the issue?
- The State Election Commissioner had censured Panchayat Raj Principal Secretary Gopal Krishna Dwivedi and PR Commissioner M Girija Shankar for their 'failure' to publish 2021 electoral rolls.
- In the censure proceedings, Ramesh Kumar recommended compulsory retirement of the two IAS officers.

What has the state government said?
The State government has argued that this power is not in the domain of state election commissioner.

As per the guidelines, Election Commission is empowered to suspend:
- Any officer or police personnel working under the Central government or public sector undertaking or an autonomous body fully or partially funded by the government for insubordination or dereliction of duty, besides making recommendations to the competent authority for taking disciplinary action, while engaged in preparation of electoral rolls or election duty.

However, censure is a penalty classified under minor penalties and the State government is the competent authority to impose the said penalty on a member of service serving with the affairs of the State and it has to be imposed by following the procedure laid down under Rule 10 of the AIS (D&A) Rules, 1969.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Article 243 vs 324, similarities and differences in powers of state election commissions vs Election Commission of India.
2. Appeals against decisions of Election Commissions.
3. Elections to Parliament and state legislatures vs Local Bodies.
4. Powers of State Election Commissioner.

Mains Link:
Are the State Election Commissions in India as independent as the Election Commission of India? Discuss.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GPT87CCM4.1&imageview=0
Topics: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

1. SC asks government to repeal the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017:

Why the Supreme Court ordered so?
- The law allowed seizure and subsequent confiscation in ‘gaushalas’ of livestock from people, who depended on these animals for a livelihood, even before they were found guilty of cruelty towards them.
- It allowed authorities to seize cattle on a mere suspicion that they suffered cruel treatment at the hands of their owners or were being primed for slaughter.
- Because of this, a farmer, a livestock owner or a cattle trader loses his animals before being found guilty of the charge of cruelty.

About the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017:
- The rules were framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- The 2017 Rules allow a Magistrate to forfeit the cattle of an owner facing trial under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
- The animals are then sent to infirmaries, ‘gaushalas’, ‘pinjarapole’, etc. These authorities can further give such animals for “adoption”.


2. 3 states, 3 anti-conversion laws: what’s similar, what’s different?

Context:
The MP Cabinet has approved the Freedom to Religion Bill, 2020 as an Ordinance.
- Previously, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh have passed similar laws.

What's similar?
A common feature of all three laws is the declaration of such marriages as “null and void” and the penalising of conversions done without the prior approval of the state.

Differences:
They differ in the quantum of punishment prescribed, and in attributing the burden of proof that a conversion is lawful.

Prior notice:
The MP Law requires a 60-day prior “declaration of the intention to convert” to the District Magistrate for conversion to be valid, following which a couple from different religions can be legally married.
The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religious Ordinance, 2020 too requires a 60-day notice but also requires the Magistrate to conduct a police inquiry to ascertain the real intention behind the conversion.
The Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2019 that came into effect last week, requires a 30-day prior “declaration of intention to convert”.

Who can investigate?
The MP Law: Section 4 of the MP Law states that there cannot be an investigation by a police officer except on the written complaint of the person converted or the person's parents/siblings. No police officer below the rank of a sub-inspector can investigate an offence under the law.
The Himachal law says that prosecution cannot be initiated without the prior sanction of an officer not below the rank of a sub-divisional magistrate.
The UP law allows the same people as allowed by the MP Law to file a complaint.
Burden of proof:
The MP Law places on the person converted the burden of proving that the conversion was done without any coercion or illegality.
The Himachal law has a similar provision.
The UP law goes further, placing this burden of proof on people who “caused” or “facilitated” the conversion and not on the individual.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
2. Article 25.
3. What has the Allahabad High Court said in Salamat Ansari-Priyanka Kharwar case.

Mains Link:
4. Similarities and differences between these three laws.

3. How horizontal, vertical quotas work; what Supreme Court said?
Context:
The Supreme Court in Saurav Yadav versus State of Uttar Pradesh case has clarified the position of law on the interplay of vertical and horizontal reservations.
- The case was on issues arising from the way different classes of reservation were to be applied in the selection process to fill posts of constables in the state.

What are vertical and horizontal reservations?
Vertical reservation: Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes is referred to as vertical reservation. It applies separately for each of the groups specified under the law.
Horizontal reservation refers to the equal opportunity provided to other categories of beneficiaries such as women, veterans, the transgender community, and individuals with disabilities, cutting through the vertical categories.

How are the two categories of quotas applied together?
The horizontal quota is applied separately to each vertical category, and not across the board.
- For example, if women have 50% horizontal quota, then half of the selected candidates will have to necessarily be women in each vertical quota category i.e., half of all selected SC candidates will have to be women, half of the unreserved or general category will have to be women, and so on.

Overview of the case:
- Sonam Tomar and Rita Rani had secured 276.5949 and 233.1908 marks respectively. They had applied under the categories of OBC-Female and SC-Female respectively. OBC and SC are vertical reservation categories, while Female is a horizontal reservation category.
- The two candidates did not qualify in their categories. However, in the General-Female (unreserved-female) category, the last qualifying candidate had secured 274.8298 marks, a score that was lower than Tomar’s.

What did the court decide in this case?
The court ruled against the Uttar Pradesh government, holding that if a person belonging to an intersection of vertical-horizontal reserved category had secured scores high enough to qualify without the vertical reservation, the person would be counted as qualifying without the vertical reservation, and cannot be excluded from the horizontal quota in the general category.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Constitutional provisions wrt to Reservations.
2. Overview of articles 32, 226, 14, 15 and 16.

Mains Link:
3. What are writs?
4. Difference in powers of SC and HC wrt writ jurisdictions.
5. Indra Sawhney case verdict.
6. When can Article 32 be suspended?
7. Who can empower any other court to issue writs?

Mains Link:
Reservation is not a fundamental right. Discuss in the light of recent verdict of the Supreme Court.

4. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:

Context:
The Centre has informed the Supreme Court about the 2017 rules under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, and said that there was a difference between seizure and confiscation of animals, while responding to a petition.

- The Centre’s response came after last week the court had asked it to amend a rule in the Act pertaining to confiscation of animals before an accused is convicted under the legislation.

What’s the issue?
A plea was filed by Buffalo Traders Welfare Association, challenging the validity of the rules that allow authorities to seize vehicles used in cattle transportation and send the animals to shelters. The petition pointed out that the transporters, farmers and cattle traders were being threatened since the rules were notified.

What has the Centre said?
While seizure is temporary in nature and merely takes possession of property, confiscation amounts to transfer of ownership in the property and is supposed to be carried out only after final adjudication of the rights of the parties in a given case.

Background:
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017:

- The Rules allow a Magistrate to forfeit the cattle of an owner facing trial under the Act.
- The animals are then sent to infirmaries, animal shelters, etc.
- The authorities can further give such animals for “adoption”.

Concerns expressed by traders:
- The traders have claimed that they were being forcibly deprived of their cattle which is sent to Gaushalas.
- These frequent lootings are also threatening the rule of law and generally emboldening groups of persons to take the law into their own hands.
- Moreover, these incidents are acting as triggers for communal polarisation of society.

Way ahead:
If not halted effectively and immediately, will have disastrous consequences on the social fabric of the country.

About the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960:

- Seeks to “prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals”.
- The Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) was established in 1962 under Section 4 of the Act.
- This Act provides for punishment for causing unnecessary cruelty and suffering to animals. The Act defines animals and different forms of animals.
- It provides the guidelines relating to experimentation on animals for scientific purposes.

5. Keep adultery a crime in the armed forces’: SC agrees to examine Centre’s plea:

Context:
The Supreme Court has agreed to examine the Central government’s request to keep adultery a crime in the armed forces.

- The matter has been referred to Chief Justice S A Bobde for setting up of a five-judge Constitution Bench which can clarify the position.

**What’s the issue?**
The Centre, in its plea, said the 2018 verdict should not apply to armed forces where personnel can be cashiered from service on the grounds of unbecoming conduct for committing adultery with a colleague’s wife.

**Need for:**
Personnel of the Army, Navy and the Air Force were a “distinct class”. They were governed by special legislation, the Army Act, the Navy Act and the Air Force Act.

**September 2018 Supreme Court verdict:**
In September 2018, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code that makes adultery a punishable offence for men.

The five-judge bench of the Supreme Court said:
1. The 158-year-old law was unconstitutional and fell foul of Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty) and Article 14 (Right to equality).
2. Section 198(1) and 198(2) of the CrPC, which allows a husband to bring charges against the man with whom his wife committed adultery, are unconstitutional.
3. While adultery could be a ground for civil issues, including dissolution of marriage, it could not be a criminal offence.

**InstaLinks:**
- Review vs Curative petition.
- Procedure to be followed.
- Who can file?
- Time-period within which a review petition should be filed?

**Prelims Link:**
1. What is Section 497 of IPC?
2. What is Article 137?

**Mains Link:**
What is a review petition? What is the procedure to be followed? Discuss.

6. **Supreme Court dismisses Aadhaar review petitions:**

**Context:**
The Supreme Court, in a majority view, has dismissed a series of petitions seeking a review of its 2018 judgment upholding the Lok Sabha Speaker’s certification of Aadhaar law as a Money Bill and its subsequent passage in Parliament.

**Background:**
The Aadhaar Bill had been certified by the government as a money Bill, enabling it to get it cleared without getting the assent of a majority in the Rajya Sabha. A five-judge Bench headed by then Chief Justice Dipak Misra had upheld the Aadhaar Act in a 4:1 ruling on September 26, 2018.

**Aadhar Bill as Money Bill:**
Section 7 of Aadhaar Act provided that the expenditure for subsidy, services or benefits under welfare schemes would be met from the Consolidated Fund of India. Because of this, the bill was qualified to be categorised as a money bill.

**What’s the issue?**
Following the Supreme Court judgement, petitions were filed on two issues. These include:
1. Whether the Speaker’s decision to declare a proposed law as Money Bill was “final” and cannot be challenged in court.
2. Whether the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 was correctly certified as a ‘Money Bill’ under Article 110 (1) of the Constitution.
What has the Court said?
1. Speaker’s decision could be challenged in court only under “certain circumstances”.
2. The Aadhaar Act was rightly called a Money Bill.

What is a Money Bill?
- A Money Bill is one that contains provisions for taxes, appropriation of funds etc.
- Money Bills can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha cannot make amendments to such bills passed by the Lok Sabha.
- The Rajya Sabha can suggest amendments, but it is the Lok Sabha’s choice to accept or reject them.
- Under Article 110(1), a Bill is deemed to be a money Bill if it deals only with matters specified in Article 110 (1) (a) to (g) — taxation, borrowing by the government and appropriation of money from the Consolidated Fund of India among others.
- According to Article 110 (3) of the Constitution, “if any question arises whether a Bill is a Money Bill or not, the decision of the Speaker of the House of the People thereon shall be final.”

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a money bill?
2. What is a finance bill?
3. Power of Speaker in this regard.
4. Article 110 (1) (a) to (g).

Mains Link:
The Supreme Court finds a pragmatic middle path between the Aadhaar scheme excesses and its benefits to the marginalised. Analyze.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G8U86JSQF.1&imageview=0.

7. Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Ordinance, 2020:

Context:
Karnataka government has given an undertaking to the High Court that no coercive action will be initiated for transporting cattle in breach of the Cattle Ordinance, 2020 till the relevant rules are brought into force based on the draft rules notified recently.

What’s the issue?
The court is hearing PIL petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Ordinance promulgated recently.
- The government is yet to frame rules prescribing manner of cattle transportation.
- There have been apprehensions about likely prosecution of farmers for transporting cattle within the State even for the exemption granted for bonafide agriculture and animal husbandry.

Controversial Provisions:
Who has the power to conduct searches?
- Police officers ranked sub-inspector and above or a competent authority will have the power to search premises and seize cattle and materials used or intended to use to commit the offence.
- Such seizures, if any, will then be reported before the Sub Divisional Magistrate without unreasonable delay.

What are the penalties?
- It is a cognizable offence, violators can attract three to seven years of imprisonment.
- While a penalty between Rs 50,000 and Rs 5 lakh can be levied for the first offence, second and subsequent offences can attract penalties ranging between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 10 lakh.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Key features of the Bill.
2. Similar laws by other states.
3. India’s milk production and consumption.
4. White revolution- features and impacts.

Mains Link: Discuss the rationale behind and implications of such laws.

8. PLI Scheme:
Context:
Approval accorded under PLI Scheme for Promotion of Domestic Manufacturing of critical Key Starting Materials (KSMs)/ Drug Intermediates and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).

Indian pharmaceutical industry:
It is the 3rd largest in the world by volume. It has high market presence in several advanced economies such as the US and EU. The industry is well known for its production of affordable medicines, particularly in the generics space.

- However the country is significantly dependent on the import of basic raw materials, viz., Bulk Drugs that are used to produce medicines.

About the PLI scheme:
To make India a manufacturing hub, the government had initially announced the PLI scheme for mobile phones, pharma products, and medical equipment sectors.

- Notified on April 1, 2020 as a part of the National Policy on Electronics.
- It proposes a financial incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in the electronics value chain.

In November 2020, the Union Cabinet gave its approval to introduce the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme in 10 more sectors for enhancing India’s manufacturing capabilities and exports (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Key proposals under the National Policy on Electronics.
2. Production linked incentive scheme- when was it announced?
3. Incentives under the scheme is available to?
4. What kind of investments will be considered?
5. Duration of the scheme.
6. Who will implement it?

Mains Link:
What is the production linked incentive scheme for electronics manufacturers? Discuss.

9. DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019:
Context:
Leaders of All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) and CPI have filed dissent notes to the parliamentary standing committee’s report on the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019 on the following grounds:

1. The bill does not take into account their concerns over privacy violations.
2. If enacted, the Bill will target Dalits, Muslims and Adivasis by way of DNA sample collection and indefinite storage.

What are the main concerns and issues wrt to the bill?
The Bill proposes DNA sampling and profiling of citizens accused of crime or reported missing, and storing their unique genetic information for administrative purposes.
The fear is that:
1. The law could be used for caste or community-based profiling.
2. The Bill runs afoul with the standards set in the Puttaswamy and Subramanian Swamy judgments of the Supreme Court.
3. In the absence of a statutory framework protecting the right to privacy, this Bill will cause irreversible damage to individuals’ right to privacy as well as the criminal justice system.
4. Without adequate statutory safeguard to protect against the opacity of the law on the sort of information being collected and its unrestricted usage for a variety of purposes this law is susceptible to future misuse and abuse.

Highlights of the Bill:
1. As per the Bill, national and regional DNA data banks will be set up for maintaining a national database for identification of victims, suspects in cases, undertrials, missing persons and unidentified human remains.
2. Punishment: Those leaking the DNA profile information to people or entities who are not entitled to have it, will be punished with a jail term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs. 1 lakh.
3. Usage: As per the bill, all DNA data, including DNA profiles, DNA samples and records, will only be used for identification of the person and not for “any other purpose”.

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4. The bill’s provisions will enable the cross-matching between persons who have been reported missing on the one hand and unidentified dead bodies found in various parts of the country on the other, and also for establishing the identity of victims in mass disasters.

5. The Bill establishes a DNA Regulatory Board to accredit the DNA laboratories that analyse DNA samples to establish the identity of an individual.

**InstaLinks:**
- Prelims Link:
  1. What is DNA?
  2. Differences between DNA and RNA.
  3. What is a gene?
  4. Highlights of DNA Bill.

**Mains Link:**
- The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill is right in intent but bereft of safeguards, can be misutilized. Discuss.

**Topics: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.**

### 1. What is anaemia?

**Context:**
Indian women and children are overwhelmingly anaemic, according to the National Family Health Survey 2019-20.

**What is anaemia?**
- The condition of having lower than normal number of red blood cells or quantity of haemoglobin.
- It can make one feel tired, cold, dizzy, and irritable and short of breath, among other symptoms.
- A diet which does not contain enough iron, folic acid or vitamin B12 is a common cause of anaemia.

**Why is anaemia so high in the country?**
- Iron-deficiency and vitamin B12-deficiency anaemia are the two common types of anaemia in India.
- Among women, iron deficiency prevalence is higher than men due to menstrual iron losses and the high iron demands of a growing foetus during pregnancies.
- Lack of millets in the diet due to overdependence on rice and wheat, insufficient consumption of green and leafy vegetables, and dominance of packaged and processed foods which are low in nutrition could be the reasons behind the high prevalence of anaemia in India.

### 2. FSSAI slashes limit for transfat levels in foods:

**Context:**
The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.

**Background:**
The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.

**Need for:**
Transfats are associated with an increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease.
- According to the World Health Organization, approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of the intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids.
- The WHO has also called for the global elimination of transfats by 2023.

[Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GPT87CB5T.1&imageview=0]
What are Trans fats?
- Trans fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats which can have much more adverse effects on our body than any other dietary constituent.
- These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/or Natural TFAs.
- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.
- In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What are trans fats?
2. Why they are harmful?
3. How and where they are produced?
4. What is the permissible limit set by WHO and FSSAI?

Mains Link:
5. Replace Campaign is related to?
6. About FSSAI.

3. Panel to study NFHS-5 findings

Context:
The Health and Family Welfare Ministry has set up a technical expert group to examine the adverse findings from the National Family Health Survey-5.

About the committee:
The committee is chaired by Joint Secretary Preeti Pant and includes experts from medicine and nutrition.

Mandate:
To recommend programmatic and policy interventions to improve” indicators pertaining to malnutrition, stunting, anaemia, and C-section.

Findings of NFHS 5
The survey provides data of States and UTs on over 130 parameters. On various parameters, major number of states have worsened over the last round of survey (NFHS 4 - 2015-16).
- The children born between 2014 and 2019 are more malnourished than the previous generation.
- Infant and child mortality declined in most of the Indian states.
- Sikkim, Assam, Goa and Jammu & Kashmir witnessed a steep decline in Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Under-Five Mortality Rate (USMR).
- Meghalaya, Manipur and Andaman & Nicobar Island reported increase in all the three categories of child mortality - NMR, IMR and USMR.
- Among all the surveyed states and UTs, Bihar displayed the highest prevalence in Infant and child mortality in all three categories, while the lowest death rate was reported in Kerala.
Significance of NFHS 5 Results
Massive increase in child malnutrition and rising levels of anaemia in women and pregnant ladies clearly imply that the children born during 2015-2019 might be suffering from deficiencies.
Though India displayed improvement in child malnutrition between NFHS 3 (2005-06) and NFHS 4 (2015-16), the nation has now taken U-turn for the worse in terms of malnutrition among children, as per the NFHS 5 results.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Key findings of NFHS-5.
2. Panel to study NFHS-5 findings.
3. What is NFHS?
4. Who conducts the NFHS?

Mains Link: Though India displayed improvement in child malnutrition in earlier surveys the nation has now taken U-turn for the worse in terms of malnutrition among children. Discuss.

Links: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/panel-to-study-nfhs-5-findings/article33523146.ece

4. The return of bird flu

Context:
New Bird flu (avian influenza) cases have been confirmed in Gujarat recently, in addition to Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana where the disease has already been confirmed.
Several states, which have been reporting deaths of birds, including crows and migratory species, are scrambling to have samples tested for the virus.

The infection:
Bird flu or avian influenza is the name used to describe a viral infection that is reported mostly in birds, but has the potential to affect humans and other animals.
- More than a dozen types of bird flu have been identified, including the two strains that have most recently infected humans — H5N1 and H7N9. When bird flu does strike humans, it can be deadly.
- Outbreaks of bird flu have occurred in Asia, Africa, North America and parts of Europe.
- The virus was first reported in geese in China in 1996.
- In India, Samples from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Kerala have tested positive for the A (H5N8) strain of the virus, while samples from Himachal Pradesh have shown the presence of A (H5N1).

Causes of Bird flu
Bird flu occurs naturally in wild waterfowl and can spread into domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese.
- The disease is transmitted via contact with an infected bird's feces, or secretions from its nose, mouth or eyes.
- Undercooked poultry meat or eggs from infected birds can transmit bird flu.

Human transmission
The H5N1 virus can jump species and infect humans from the infected bird.
- The first case of H5N1 infection in humans was reported in Hong Kong in 1997, when a poultry farm worker caught the infection from infected birds.
- In its present form, human-to-human infection is not known — human infections have been reported only among people who have handled infected birds or carcasses.

Bird flu and consumption of Poultry meat, eggs
The chances of the H5N1 virus infecting humans is comparatively low in India as compared to South East Asian countries, mainly because of the difference in culinary habits.
- The virus dies immediately if exposed to temperatures over 70 degrees Celsius.
- Unlike in South East Asian countries, both meat and eggs in India are eaten well cooked, which sees them being exposed to over 100 degrees Celsius.
- Thus the chances of humans contracting the virus from eating chicken and eggs is extremely rare.
5. Institutions of Eminence (IoEs) to set up campuses abroad

**Context**
The University Grants Commission (UGC) has amended its regulations, allowing Institutions of Eminence (IoEs) to set up campuses abroad after receiving no objection certificates from the Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs.

- The amendments also permit the IOEs to start new off campus centres, with a maximum of three in five years and not more than one in an academic year.

**What are Institutions of Eminence (IoEs)?**
Institutions of Eminence scheme has been launched in order to implement the commitment of the Government to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world class teaching and research institutions.

- The scheme was announced by the Finance Minister in his budget speech of 2016.
- This will enhance affordable access to high quality education for ordinary Indians.

**About the IoEs scheme:**
Launched in order to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world-class teaching and research institutions.

**Objectives:**
**Excellence and Innovation:** To provide for higher education leading to excellence and innovations in such branches of knowledge as may be deemed fit at post-graduate, graduate and research degree levels.

**Specialization:** To engage in areas of specialization to make distinctive contributions to the objectives of the university education system.

**Global Rating:** To aim to be rated internationally for its teaching and research as a top hundred Institution in the world over time.

**Quality teaching and Research:** To provide for high quality teaching and research and for the advancement of knowledge and its dissemination.

**Incentives of the scheme:**
- Institutes with IOE tag will be given greater autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and governance structures.
- The public institutions under IOE tag will receive a government grant of ₹1,000 crore, while the private institutions will not get any funding under the scheme.

**Why is it important?**
Academic institutions that can impart highest quality education, generate cutting edge research, and attract the best and the brightest from across the globe can have multiplier beneficial effects for the country. So the idea of elevating the best in a sector to an eminent status by granting autonomy is a good one.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Key features of the IoEs Scheme
2. UGC guidelines for IoEs

**Mains Link:**
What are Institutions of Eminence? Discuss the benefits of Institutions of Eminence to India.

Link: [https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ugc-paves-way-for-ioes-to-set-up-campuses-abroad-7139085/](https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ugc-paves-way-for-ioes-to-set-up-campuses-abroad-7139085/)
6. PMKVY 3.0

Context:
Third phase of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 3.0) will be launched soon. It will be launched in 600 districts across all states of India.

- Spearheaded by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), this phase will focus on new-age and COVID-related skills.

About PMKVY 3.0:
Skill India Mission PMKVY 3.0 envisages training of eight lakh candidates over a scheme period of 2020-2021.

- The 729 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs), empaneled non-PMKK training centres and more than 200 ITIs under Skill India will be rolling out PMKVY 3.0 training to build a robust pool of skilled professionals.
- On the basis of the learning gained from PMKVY 1.0 and PMKVY 2.0, the Ministry has improved the newer version of the scheme to match the current policy doctrine and energize the skilling ecosystem affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

About PMKVY:
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), launched in 2015, is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented by National Skill Development Corporation.

- The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme: is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood.
- Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 2.0 (PMKVY 2.0) 2016-20
After the successful implementation of pilot PMKVY (2015-16), PMKVY 2016-20 was launched by scaling up both in terms of Sector and Geography and by greater alignment with other missions of Government of India like Make in India, Digital India, Swachh Bharat, etc.

Objectives of PMKVY 2016-20
Enable and mobilize a large number of youths to take up industry designed quality skill training, become employable and earn their livelihood.

- Encourage standardisation of the Certification process and put in place the foundation for creating a registry of skills.
- Benefit 10 million youth over the period of four years (2016-2020).

Skill India Mission
“Skill India Mission” has gained tremendous momentum through launch of its flagship scheme PMKVY to unlock the vision of making India the ‘Skill Capital’ of the world.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is the Skill India Mission?
2. PMKVY 1.0 vs PMKVY 2.0 vs PMKVY 3.0
3. The participants in PMKVY
4. Implementing agencies.

Mains Link:
5. Key features of the scheme
Mains Link:
Write a note on need and significance of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana in the backdrop of CORONA Pandemic.

7. SC directive on quota in promotions:

Context:
The Supreme Court has asked Attorney General K.K. Venugopal to compile the various issues being raised by States with regard to the application of a Constitution Bench judgment of 2006 in M. Nagaraj case.

- The court in M. Nagaraj case had upheld the application of creamy layer principle to members of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities in promotions.

M. Nagaraj Case:
www.insightsonindia.com
On June 17, 1995, Parliament, acting in its constituent capacity, adopted the seventy-seventh amendment by which clause (4A) was inserted into Article 16 to enable reservation to be made in promotion for SCs and STs.

- The validity of the seventy-seventh and eighty-fifth amendments to the Constitution and of the legislation enacted in pursuance of those amendments was challenged before the Supreme Court in the Nagaraj case.
- Upholding the validity of Article 16 (4A), the court then said that it is an enabling provision. “The State is not bound to make reservation for the SCs and STs in promotions. But, if it seeks to do so, it must collect quantifiable data on three facets — the backwardness of the class; the inadequacy of the representation of that class in public employment; and the general efficiency of service as mandated by Article 335 would not be affected”.
- The court ruled that the constitutional amendments do not abrogate the fundamentals of equality.

Constitutional basis - Article 335:

Article 335 recognises that special measures need to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs in order to bring them to a level-playing field.

Need:

- Centuries of discrimination and prejudice suffered by the SCs and STs in a feudal, caste-oriented societal structure poses real barriers of access to opportunity.
- The proviso contains a realistic recognition that unless special measures are adopted for the SCs and STs, the mandate of the Constitution for the consideration of their claim to appointment will remain illusory.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Article 335.
2. Article 16(4).
3. Right to equality.

Mains Link:
Discuss the need for reservation in promotions.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GIQ86CKUK.1&imageview=0.

8. Why bird flu virus has so many strains and what it means for humans?

Context:

Two different subtypes of the bird flu virus or avian influenza have been detected in Himachal Pradesh.

How many different subtypes or strains of the flu A virus are out there?

At least 131 different subtypes of influenza A virus have been detected in nature.

- The influenza A virus has two proteins on its surface hemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N) both of which have 18 and 11 different subtypes respectively, leading to different combinations such as H3N2 and H7N9.
- There are some strains which only infect birds, while others can infect birds.
as well as mammals such as pigs, dogs, horses and also humans.

How many of these strains can infect humans?
Mostly, humans have only experienced infections by three different H types (H1, H2 and H3), and two different N types (N1 and N2).

- Presently, two subtypes, H1N1 and H3N2, circulate among human beings, causing the seasonal flu epidemics. Since these strains are well adapted to humans, they are referred to as human flu rather than bird flu.
- Whenever a new flu A virus establishes itself in humans, it can cause a pandemic, and four such pandemics have occurred since 1918, including the Spanish flu (H1N1), the 1957-58 Asian flu (H2N2), the 1968 Hong Kong flu (H3N2) and the 2009 swine flu (caused by a newer version of the H1N1).

Why does the flu A virus have so many strains?
Influenza A virus mutates constantly and this is because:
1. Firstly, it is an RNA virus with a segmented genome, i.e. it has eight separate strands, which makes its copying prone to errors or mutations. This ‘antigenic drift’ results in slight but continuous mutations in the surface proteins, which is the reason why flu vaccines have to be updated regularly.
2. Secondly, when a cell happens to be infected with two different flu A viruses, their genes can easily get mixed up. This mixing, known as reassortment, is a viral version of sex.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:  
1. When a country is declared free from Avian Influenza, who declares it?
2. H5N1 vs H5N6 vs H9N2 vs H5N8.

Mains Link:  
Write a note on Bird Flu. Discuss how it can be prevented.

9. Ayushman Bharat health scheme for Central Armed Police Forces:

Context:
‘Ayushman CAPF’ scheme was launched recently, extending the benefit of the central health insurance programme to the personnel of all armed police forces in the country.

Key features of the scheme:
Under this scheme, around 28 lakh personnel of CAPF, Assam Rifles and National Security Guard (NSG) and their families will be covered by ‘Ayushman Bharat: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana’ (AB PM-JAY)

Key Features of PM-JAY:
1. The world’s largest health insurance/assurance scheme fully financed by the government.
2. It provides cover of 5 lakhs per family per year, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across public and private empaneled hospitals in India.
3. Coverage: Over 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable entitled families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) are eligible for these benefits.
4. Provides cashless access to health care services for the beneficiary at the point of service.

Eligibility:
- No restrictions on family size, age or gender.
- All pre-existing conditions are covered from day one.
- Covers up to 3 days of pre-hospitalization and 15 days post-hospitalization expenses such as diagnostics and medicines.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country.
- Services include approximately 1,393 procedures covering all the costs related to treatment, including but not limited to drugs, supplies, diagnostic services, physician’s fees, room charges, surgeon charges, OT and ICU charges etc.
- Public hospitals are reimbursed for the healthcare services at par with the private hospitals.
InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Components of Ayushman Bharat.
2. PMJAY- Key features.
3. Eligibility.

Mains Link:
4. About the National Health Agency.

Discuss the significance and potential of PMJAY.

10. COVID-19 performance ranking:

Context:
The COVID-19 “performance index” has been put together by the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank.

About the Index:
- The index seeks “to gauge the relative performance of countries”.
- The index is based on six different indicators, including confirmed cases and deaths per million people and the scale of testing.
- Publicly available and comparable data on Covid-19 response was used for this index.

How were the countries ranked?
- Countries were sorted into broad categories on the basis of regions, political systems, population size, and economic development.
- This was done to determine the variations that may have existed in the way different nations handled the pandemic.
- China was excluded from the list due to lack of publicly available data.

Performance of various countries:
1. New Zealand, Vietnam and Taiwan have been ranked the top three spots, respectively.
2. India has ranked 86th.
3. Sri Lanka was the best faring nation in South Asia, ranking 10.
4. Maldives was at 25, Pakistan at 69, Nepal at 70, and Bangladesh at 84.
5. The lowest score was given to Brazil.
6. Mexico, Colombia, Iran and the United States too featured among the bottom five countries in terms of performance.

General Observations:
1. While some countries managed the coronavirus crisis better than others, the index noted that most countries “outcompeted each other only by degrees of underperformance”.
2. Levels of economic development and differences in political systems didn’t have as much of an impact on coronavirus response as expected.
3. On an average, countries with authoritarian establishments had no “prolonged advantage” in containing the virus.
4. It was found that democracies had “marginally” more success than other governments in their handling of the pandemic.
5. There was little “discernible difference” in a country’s performance by population size.
6. Smaller countries with populations of fewer than 10 million people consistently outperformed their larger counterparts throughout 2020, although this lead narrowed slightly towards the end of the examined period.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G4N87FS88.1&imageview=0

11. Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs):

Context:
India has joined the world to Light Up Qutub Minar as a sign of unity to combat the Neglected Tropical Diseases.
- The second annual World NTD Day will be marked on 30th January.
Why are some tropical diseases called “neglected”?
The people who are most affected by these diseases are often the poorest populations, living in remote, rural areas, urban slums or conflict zones. Neglected tropical diseases persist under conditions of poverty and are concentrated almost exclusively in impoverished populations in the developing world.

Challenges and concerns:
1. Lacking a strong political voice, people affected by these tropical diseases have a low profile and status in public health priorities.
2. Lack of reliable statistics and unpronounceable names of diseases have all hampered efforts to bring them out of the shadows.
3. Neglected tropical diseases affect more than 1 billion people, primarily poor populations living in tropical and subtropical climates.
4. They are frequently clustered together geographically and individuals are often afflicted with more than one parasite or infection.
5. More than 70% of countries and territories that report the presence of neglected tropical diseases are low-income or lower middle-income economies.

Spread:
Infections are caused by unsafe water, poor housing conditions and poor sanitation. Children are the most vulnerable to these diseases, which kill, impair or permanently disable millions of people every year, often resulting in life-long physical pain and social stigmatization.

Policies on neglected diseases research in India:
- The National Health Policy (2017) sets an ambition to stimulate innovation to meet health needs and ensure that new drugs are affordable for those who need them most, but it does not specifically tackle neglected diseases.
- The National Policy on Treatment of Rare Diseases (2018) includes infectious tropical diseases and identifies a need to support research on treatments for rare diseases. It has not yet prioritised diseases and areas for research funding or how innovation would be supported.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What are neglected tropical diseases?
2. Difference between Protozoa, bacteria and viruses?
3. Why this disease is called the “silent and silenced disease”?
4. What is World Health Assembly?

Mains Link:
Write a note on Neglected Tropical Diseases.

12. PM-JAY:
Context:
As per the latest economic survey:
- The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) contributed to improvement in many health outcomes in States that implemented the programme.
- States that joined the PM-JAY, compared to those that did not, experienced greater penetration of health insurance, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, realised improved access and utilisation of family planning services and greater awareness of HIV/AIDS.
- Across all the States, the proportion of households with health insurance increased by 54% for States that implemented PM-JAY while falling by 10% in States that did not.

Key Features of PM-JAY:
1. The world’s largest health insurance/ assurance scheme fully financed by the government.
2. It provides cover of 5 lakhs per family per year, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across public and private empaneled hospitals in India.
3. Coverage: Over 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable entitled families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) are eligible for these benefits.
4. Provides cashless access to health care services for the beneficiary at the point of service.

Eligibility:
- No restrictions on family size, age or gender.
- All pre-existing conditions are covered from day one.
- Covers up to 3 days of pre-hospitalization and 15 days post-hospitalization expenses such as diagnostics and medicines.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country.
- Services include approximately 1,393 procedures covering all the costs related to treatment, including but not limited to drugs, supplies, diagnostic services, physician’s fees, room charges, surgeon charges, OT and ICU charges etc.
- Public hospitals are reimbursed for the healthcare services at par with the private hospitals.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Components of Ayushman Bharat.
2. PMJAY- Key features.
3. Eligibility.
4. About the National Health Agency.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance and potential of PMJAY.

Topics: Role of civil services in a democracy.

1. What are the new Jharkhand Combined Civil Services Examination Rules, 2021?

Context:
Jharkhand has for the first time framed rules pertaining to Jharkhand Civil Services.
- This will supersede the Bihar Civil Services (Executive Branch) and the Bihar Junior Civil Services Recruitment Rules of 1951.

Why was the Jharkhand Combined Civil Services Examination Rules, 2021 needed?
At least 204 petitions related to confusion, corruption in the selection process and irregularities among others were filed in the High Court against the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) with more than 30 per cent cases pending in the courts.
- In the last examination, the result of the Prelims examinations was declared thrice due to various reasons.

What do the new rules state?
1. The cadre-controlling department shall calculate the number of vacancies each year on January 1 with respect to the service to be filled in that particular year by direct recruitment and shall provide requisition for appointment to the Commission after roster clearance through the Department of Personnel, Administrative Reforms and Rajbhasha.
2. Marks obtained in Main (Written Test) Language Paper which is only qualifying in nature will not be added to the aggregate marks for calculation of percentage of marks, or for preparation of merit list for Main (Interview Test), or for preparation of final merit list.

Rules that experts say may create controversy:
1. Technically there is no reservation in Prelims.
2. There is no provision in the news rules for the graduation final year/appearing applicants. The UPSC, however, has a provision.
3. The request for withdrawal of candidature received from a candidate after he has submitted his application will be not entertained by the Commission.
4. The number of attempts of candidates may also get affected.
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Power to create a new all India service.
2. Powers and functions of State Public Service Commissions.
3. Who can frame rules for All India Services.
4. What is a Joint Public Service Commission?

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. China amends defence law to boost war preparedness:
Context:
China’s National Defence Law has been amended.

Key changes:
- Gives the Central Military Commission (CMC) greater power in mobilising resources to protect a new and broader definition of what constitutes the national interest.
- Experts say the phrase “development interests” included the protection of China’s economic activities and assets overseas, such as those under the Belt and Road Initiative, as a reason for defence mobilisation.
- The amendment broadened the scope of key security fields beyond land borders, maritime and air defence, to include outer space and electromagnetic networks.
- The amendment also said China “will participate in global security governance, join multilateral security talks and push for and set up a set of international rules that is widely accepted, fair and reasonable”.

Implications:
The change comes amid a push for closer civil-military fusion, with a target to make the PLA a “world class” military, or on par with the United States military, by 2049, when the People’s Republic of China turns 100.

2. China- Taiwan relations:
Context:
U.S. removes restrictions on diplomatic contact with Taiwan.
- The move is expected to upset China.

Recent developments:
The Trump administration has sought to strengthen bilateral relations with Taiwan.
- It announced UN Ambassador Kelly Craft would go to Taiwan, a move that sparked sharp criticism from Beijing and a warning that the U.S. would pay a heavy price.
- In August, Health and Human Services Secretary became the first Cabinet member to visit Taiwan since 2014.

China and Taiwan:
The Chinese government maintains that mainland China and Taiwan are parts of “one China.”
- China has been stepping up its threats to bring the self-governing island under its control by military force with frequent war games and aerial patrols.
- It has been using its diplomatic clout to stop Taiwan from joining any organisations that require statehood for membership.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Location of Taiwan and its historical background.
2. Regions being administered by China under One China policy.
3. Is Taiwan represented at WHO and the United Nations?
4. Countries in South China Sea.
5. Qing dynasty.
3. China draws back troops from LAC:

**Context:**
China has withdrawn around 10,000 troops from the depth areas along the disputed boundary in eastern Ladakh while frontline troops continue to remain in position.

**Why there is a dispute here?**
The Line of Actual Control (LAC) – the line that separates Indian and Chinese troops since 1962 – generally runs along the land except for the width of Pangong Tso. Here, it runs through water.
- Both sides have marked their areas announcing which side belongs to which country.
- India controls about 45 km stretch of the Pangong Tso and China the rest.

The lake is divided into sections called fingers:
There are eight of them in contention here. India and China have different understanding of where the LAC passes through.
- India has maintained that the LAC passes through Finger 8, which has been the site of the final military post of China.
- India has been patrolling the area – mostly on foot because of the nature of the terrain – up to Finger 8. But Indian forces have not had active control beyond Finger 4.
- China, on the other hand, says the LAC passes through Finger 2. It has been patrolling up to Finger 4- mostly in light vehicles, and at times up to Finger 2.

**Why China wants to encroach areas alongside Pangong Tso?**
- Pangong Tso is strategically crucial as it is very close to Chusul Valley, which was one of the battlefronts between India and China during the 1962 war.
- China also does not want India to boost its infrastructure anywhere near the LAC. China fears it threatens its occupation of Aksai Chin and Lhasa-Kashgar highway.
- Any threat to this highway also puts Chinese rather imperialist plans in Pakistan-occupied territories in Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, and beyond in Pakistan.

About Pangong Tso:
- Pangong Tso literally translates into a “conclave lake”.
- Situated at over 14,000 feet, the Lake is about 135 km long.
- It is formed from Tethys geosyncline.
- The Karakoram Mountain range ends at the north bank of Pangong Tso. Its southern bank too has high broken mountains sloping towards Spangur Lake in the south.

**InstaLinks:**
1. What is LoC and how is it established, geographical extent and significance?
2. What is LAC?
3. Where is Nathu la?
4. Where is Pangong Tso?
5. Who administers Akashi Chin?
6. Where is Naku La?
7. Who controls what in Pangong Tso lake region?

4. Jaishankar suggests way forward for China ties

**Context:**
Calling 2020 as a year of “exceptional stress” in a relationship “profoundly disturbed” by the border crisis, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has said a recognition of “mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests” was key to repairing India-China relations.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GUU85NF51.1&imageview=0
Background:
Twenty Indian soldiers, and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers, lost their lives in a clash on June 15 last year in the Galwan Valley, following tensions that erupted in early May triggered by transgressions by China across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), massing of troops, and what India has described as a unilateral attempt to redraw the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in several areas in eastern Ladakh.

Actions by China which went against India’s interests:
1. Issuing of staple visas to Indian citizens from Jammu and Kashmir in 2010.
2. A reluctance from China to deal with some of India’s military commands (Beijing had that same year refused to host the Northern Army Commander).
3. China’s opposition to India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the UN Security Council as a permanent member.
4. Blocking of UN listings of Pakistani terrorists.
5. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project under China’s Belt and Road Initiative, violating India’s sovereignty in J&K.

To solve the crisis, the External Affairs Minister suggested “three mutuals” and “eight broad propositions” as a way forward for the relationship. They are:
1. Agreements already reached must be adhered to in their entirety, both in letter and spirit.
2. Both sides also needed to strictly observe and respect the LAC, and any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo was completely unacceptable.
3. Peace and tranquillity in border areas was the basis for the development of the relationship in other domains. If that was disturbed, the rest of the relationship would be too.
4. While both remain committed to a multipolar world, they should recognise that a multipolar Asia was one of its essential constituents.

Conclusion:
While each state had its interests, concerns and priorities, sensitivities to them could not be be one-sided and relations were reciprocal in nature. As rising powers, neither should ignore the other’s set of aspirations.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is LoC and how is it established, geographical extent and significance?
2. What is LAC?
3. Where is Nathu la?
4. Where is Pangong Tso?
5. Who administers Akashi Chin?
6. Where is Naku La?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of Pangong Tso for India and China.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G4N87G69I.1&imageview=0.

Topics: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

1. NCAVES India Forum 2021

Context:
Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) India Forum-2021 is being organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
India is one of the five countries taking part in this project - the other countries being Brazil, China, South Africa and Mexico.

The NCAVES Project
The Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) project seeks to advance the theory and practice of environmental and ecosystem accounting in Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

The project has been jointly implemented by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).

- It aims to assist the five participating partner countries, to advance the knowledge agenda on environmental-economic accounting, in particular ecosystem accounting.
- The project will have a duration until the end of 2021.

Funding: The project is funded by the European Union through its Partnership Instrument (PI).

Objectives:
The objectives of the National Forum would be:

- To present India’s achievements in the domain of Natural Capital Accounting (NCA);
- To prioritize the emerging opportunities for NCA in India;
- To familiarize stakeholders with the work undertaken by the different international agencies in the area of NCA; and
- To provide a platform to selected Research Institutions to present their research conducted in the valuation of ecosystem services.

About NCAVES India Forum 2021
In India, the NCAVES project is being implemented by the MoSPI with collaboration of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).

NCAVES India Forum 2021 is being organised in a virtual format.

Key Focus area:
The Forum aims to build a stronger awareness about the different perspective to Environment and to show a way forward towards realizing the contribution of the natural capital to achieve a “better environment, better tomorrow”.

Significance:
The participation in the project has helped MOSPI commence the compilation of the Environment Accounts as per the UN-SEEA System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) framework.

- The MOSPI has also released environmental accounts in its publication “EnviStats India” on an annual basis since 2018.
- Several of these accounts are closely related to the social and economic attributes, making them a useful tool for the Policy.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
6. About NCAVES Project?
7. Member countries.
8. Implementing agencies in India
9. Funding
10. Significance for India

Mains Link:
Participation in the NCAVES project will help India to advance the theory and practice of environmental and ecosystem accounting. Discuss.


2. China holds third South Asia multilateral meet
Context:
China has held its third multilateral dialogue with countries from South Asia to take forward closer cooperation on fighting COVID-19.

www.insightsonindia.com
• It also strive to coordinate their economic agendas, reflecting a new approach in Beijing’s outreach to the region.

Key points:
• The third dialogue, held virtually on January 6, brought together every country in the region barring India, Bhutan and the Maldives.
• It was aimed at “anti-epidemic cooperation and poverty reduction cooperation”.

South Asia multilateral meet
All three dialogues have been attended by Pakistan and Nepal, which are emerging as two lynchpins in China’s regional strategy.
• The first such meeting was convened by China in July, and was attended by Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan.
• The second meet was held in November by a five-member grouping attended by China, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
• The third and recent January 6 meeting was attended by all five countries that have taken part in these dialogues — Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

CPEC extension
At the July quadrilateral dialogue with Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, China’s Foreign Minister proposed extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.
• China discussed about taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, called the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network.
• The four countries were “connected by mountains and rivers”, and china also offered to share China’s expertise and capacities on COVID-19 vaccines.

Significance and implications of the meet:
• The virtual meet seen as a bid to strengthen cooperation among the four nations in pandemic response and economic recovery.
• The two virtual meets appear part of China’s growing engagement in the region, in the wake of the global pandemic.


3. Who are the ‘difficult four’ countries, and why is India one of them?

Who are the difficult four?
Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and India.
• These are the Countries where citizens do not have the capacity to fight for their rights.
• The classification has been made by Chatham House, the century-old UK-based policy institute also known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Context:
Chatham House has published a report proposing a blueprint for Britain’s future foreign policy after Brexit. Titled “Global Britain, Global Broker”, the report sketches a bold path ahead for the UK.

Why the report chose to characterise India as such?
Because of a critique of India’s domestic political developments.
• The report notes how “the overt Hindu nationalism of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is weakening the rights of Muslims and other minority religious groups, leading to a chorus of concern that intolerant majoritarianism is replacing the vision of a secular, democratic India bequeathed by Nehru”.

India is a reluctant supporter of liberal democracy.
• It is “ambivalent” about human rights abuses within other states, and possesses “a long and consistent record of resisting being corralled into a ‘Western camp’”.

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InsightsIAS
4. What Russia’s exit means for the Open Skies Treaty?

Context:
Russia has announced that it is leaving the Open Skies Treaty (OST).

What is the Open Skies Treaty?
It is an accord between over 30 countries that allows participants to fly unarmed reconnaissance flights over any part of their fellow member states.

- First proposed in 1955 by former US President Dwight Eisenhower as a means to deescalate tensions during the Cold War, the landmark treaty was eventually signed in 1992 between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries following the demise of the Soviet Union.
- It went into effect in 2002 and had signatories, including key players US and Russia, along with one non-ratifying member (Kyrgyzstan).

Aims of the OST:
Build confidence among members through mutual openness, thus reducing the chances of accidental war.

Features of the treaty:
1. Under the treaty, a member state can “spy” on any part of the host nation, with the latter’s consent.
2. A country can undertake aerial imaging over the host state after giving notice 72 hours before, and sharing its exact flight path 24 hours before.
3. The information gathered, such as on troop movements, military exercises and missile deployments, has to be shared with all member states.
4. Only approved imaging equipment is permitted on the surveillance flights, and officials from the host state can also stay on board throughout the planned journey.

Why did Russia leave after the US?
In May 2020, the Trump administration announced its intention of withdrawing from the OST, accusing Russia of “flagrantly and continuously violating the Treaty in various ways for years”.

- Now, Russia has attributed this move to “the lack of progress in removing obstacles for the continued functioning of the agreement.”
- Moscow is worried that the U.S.’s withdrawal restricts its access to American territory, while Washington’s allies in Europe can continue flyovers over Russian territory to collect intelligence that could be handed to the U.S.

Implications:
Experts now worry about the fate of the much larger US-Russia ‘New START’ nuclear arms control agreement, which is slated to expire on February 5, 2021 while US President-elect Joe Biden has spoken in favour of preserving the treaty.
5. Military specialists to get S-400 training in Moscow:

Context:
The US has yet again warned India that it could face sanctions over it acquiring five Russian Almaz-Antei S-400 Triumph self-propelled surface-to-air (SAM) systems for $5.5 billion.

- India is unlikely to get a waiver over Washington invoking its Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) on the Indian Air Force (IAF) for its S-400 buy.

What is CAATSA, and how did the S-400 deal fall foul of this Act?
- Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)’s core objective is to counter Iran, Russia and North Korea through punitive measures.
- The Act primarily deals with sanctions on Russian interests such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US Presidential elections.

But why does the US have a law like CAATSA to begin with?
- Following the US elections and allegations of Russian meddling some call it collusion in the US elections, the strain between Washington and Moscow has reached a new level.
- Angry with Moscow’s actions around the world, US lawmakers are hoping to hit Russia where it hurts most, its defense and energy business, through CAATSA.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. CAATSA is associated with?
2. Powers of US president under CAATSA.
3. Types of sanctions that can be imposed.

Mains Link:
1. Overview of Iran Nuclear deal.
2. Discuss the features and significance of CAATSA.

6. NCAVES India Forum 2021:

Context:
Organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

What is it?
Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of the Ecosystem Services (NCAVES) India Forum-2021 is a part of NCAVES project of United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).
- It aims to help five countries for addressing the concerns of sustainability and conserving the environment for future use while charting the course for economic development.
- India is one of the five countries taking part in this project - the other countries being Brazil, China, South Africa and Mexico.

NCAVES project:
- The project seeks to advance the theory and practice of environmental and ecosystem accounting in Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.
- The project has been jointly implemented by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).
- It aims to assist the five participating partner countries, to advance the knowledge agenda on environmental-economic accounting, in particular ecosystem accounting.
- The project will have a duration until the end of 2021.

Significance:
- The participation in the project has helped MOSPI commence the compilation of the Environment Accounts as per the UN-SEEA framework.
- The MOSPI has also released environmental accounts in its publication “EnviStats India” on an annual basis since 2018.
- Several of these accounts are closely related to the social and economic attributes, making them a useful tool for the Policy.

InstaLinks:
- 1. About NCAVES project.
- 2. Participants.
- 3. Objectives.
- 4. What is EnviStats India?
- 5. About UNEP.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of NCAVES project.

Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Scottish independence referendum:

Context:
Boris Johnson has suggested Scotland should not hold another independence referendum until at least the 2050s, shrugging off claims that Brexit has strengthened the case for a new vote.

When was the last referendum held?
Referendum for Scottish independence was held in 2014. Scotland had voted to remain in the UK.

When did Scotland and England unite?
The Act of Union between Scotland and England was signed on Jan. 16, 1707. It came into effect on May 1 of that year, creating the United Kingdom of Britain. The Scottish Parliament was dissolved, and a single Parliament was created at Westminster in London.

Why did Scotland and England join in the first place?
Scotland and England have a complicated history, but the short answer is that Scotland needed an economic boost. The country’s finances were a mess after a failed attempt to establish a trading colony in Panama. This unsuccessful scheme was conclusive evidence that Scotland’s future prosperity was best served by union.

What is the main case for independence?
- Those who support independence believe Scotland "would be richer" if it breaks from England.
● Proponents of independence want Scotland to make its own decisions about how resources are controlled and money is invested.
● Rather than investing billions of pounds in nuclear weapons, for example, they would focus on things like childcare or programs to retain talent and encourage young Scots to stay.

2. Iran begins enriching uranium in new breach of nuclear deal:
Context:
Iran has resumed 20 percent uranium enrichment at its sensitive Fordow nuclear facility—a major step away from a 2015 nuclear deal struck with world powers.

Implications:
● Enriched uranium can be used to make reactor fuel but also nuclear bombs. Weapons-grade uranium is 90% purity.
● The move could complicate the incoming Biden administration's plans to restart nuclear talks with Tehran.

Iran's changing attitude:
● Iran, which insists that its nuclear programme is peaceful, has rolled back a number of commitments under the deal.
● It has said it is retaliating for the US economic sanctions that were reinstated in 2018 by President Donald Trump when he abandoned the accord, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

What is enriched uranium?
● Enriched uranium is produced by feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into centrifuges to separate out the most suitable isotope for nuclear fission, called U-235.
● Low-enriched uranium, which typically has a 3-5% purity of U-235, can be used to produce fuel for commercial nuclear power plants.
● Highly enriched uranium has a concentration of 20% or more and is used in research reactors.

Why is 20% purity significant?
● Experts at the Arms Control Association said that 120kg of uranium enriched to 20% was about half the amount of uranium that, when enriched to weapons-grade (90% or more), was necessary for one bomb.
● They also warned that the production of highly enriched uranium would pose a more serious near-term proliferation risk.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is JCPOA? Signatories.
2. Iran and its neighbours.
3. What is IAEA? Relation with the UN.
4. Members of IAEA.
5. Programs of IAEA.

7. What is Uranium Enrichment?

Mains Link:
Write a note on JCPOA.

3. Gulf leaders sign deal to end years-long dispute:
Context:
Gulf leaders have signed a “solidarity and stability” deal after leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar publicly embraced, bringing Doha back into the regional fold after a three-year-long rift.
What was the dispute?
Saudi Arabia had led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond to cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017, charging that it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups allegations that Doha denied.

Why peace in the region is important?
1. Any kind of instability in the Middle East tends to send up oil prices, and the longer prices stay high, the more likely it is that it will cost more to fill up your tank.
2. Qatar is the world’s biggest supplier of LNG and Egypt and UAE are key recipients.
3. India depends on Qatar for 90% of its natural gas requirements.
4. Qatar’s Sovereign Wealth Fund and other state-owned entities, as well as Qatari private investors, are looking at investment options in infrastructure in India.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Location of Qatar.
2. World’s top oil exporters and importers.
3. India’s oil imports.
4. What is LNG?

Mains Link:
Discuss why peace in middle East is important for India.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G3A852PLN.1&imageview=0.

4. 25th Amendment of the US Constitution

Context:
In the aftermath of Donald Trump supporters storming the US Capitol, many have urged Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment.

What is the 25th Amendment of the US Constitution?
The Twenty-fifth Amendment is known as amendment (1967) to the Constitution of the United States.

• It set forth succession rules relating to vacancies and disabilities of the office of the president and of the vice president.
• It was proposed by the U.S. Congress on July 6, 1965, and it was ratified on Feb. 10, 1967.

The amendment has four sections:
1. The first section codified the traditionally observed process of succession in the event of the death of the president—that the vice president would succeed to the office—it also introduced a change regarding the ascent of the vice president to president should the latter resign from office.
2. The second section of the amendment addresses vacancies in the office of the vice president.
3. The third section of the amendment set forth the formal process for determining the capacity of the president to discharge the powers and duties of office. If the president is able to declare his/her inability, then the vice president takes over as the acting president.
4. The fourth section of the amendment requires the vice president and the cabinet to jointly ascertain if the president is unable to declare his/her incompetence. In this case the vice president immediately assumes the position of acting president.

It is this fourth section of the 25th Amendment that many are asking Vice President Pence to invoke against President Trump.

When was it introduced and has it been used in the past?
• In the aftermath of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the 25th Amendment was proposed by Congress on July 6, 1965, and ratified by the states on February 10, 1967.
• However, the fourth section of the 25th Amendment has never been invoked.
• Trump has repeatedly asserted, although without any valid evidence, that the presidential election in November, was rigged.
• He has been urging his supporters to make their voices heard as members of the US Congress came together to confirm the counting of Electoral College votes and formally pave the way for Joe Biden to take over on January 20th.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the 25th Amendment?  
https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-is-the-25th-amendment-of-the-us-constitution-7136263/  
2. Sections of the amendment.  
3. Previous instance of its implementation.  
4. Capitol hill controversy

5. What are H-1B visas and new wage-based rules?

Context:
The US administration has once again amended the H-1B visa norms.

Changes:
• Rules to give priority to higher wages and skills for selection of deserving candidates.
• The old lottery system of work visa selection will not be followed now.

What are H-1B work visas?
In 1952, after the US started expanding its presence in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines, it felt the need to hire quality workers who could help the country achieve innovation in these areas at reasonable costs. The need to hire workers paved way for the introduction of the H-1 work visa system in US.
• This work visa system was further subdivided into H-1B, H-2B, L1, O1, and E1 visas, depending on the qualification required and the area for which workers were sought.
• Of these, the H-1B visa remains the most popular due to the relatively better wage chance it offers.

What is the new wage-based H-1B work visa regime?
• Priority in selection of visas to applications of those employers where the “proffered wage equals or exceeds” the prevailing level in that area of employment (The proffered wage is the wage that the employer intends to pay the beneficiary).
• This regime will also take into account the skill set that the respective worker brings to the country and cross check it whether such skill set is available at the same cost among the US workers.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Differences between H1B, F1 and M1 Visas.  
2. Difference between an NRI and an OCI cardholder.
3. When OCI and PIO were merged?
4. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 grants citizenship to?
5. Constitutional provisions related to citizenship in India.

Mains Link:
Discuss the impact of recent changes in US visa rules on Indian students in the US.

6. A strong India would act as ‘counterbalance’ to China: U.S:

Context:
The Trump administration has declassified a sensitive document on the U.S. strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific from 2018.
• The document outlines objectives and strategies with regard to China, North Korea, India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
Declassified document outlines objectives on China:
As per the document, The U.S.’s first national security challenge are:
1. Maintaining “U.S. strategic primacy” in the region and promoting a “liberal economic order”.
2. Stopping China from establishing “illiberal spheres of influence”.
3. Ensuring that North Korea does not threaten the U.S. and
4. Advancing U.S. economic leadership globally.

Objectives towards India:
● The U.S. aims to help India become a net security provider in the region and solidify a lasting strategic partnership with India.
● It plans to achieve via enhanced defence cooperation and interoperability;
● Working with India “toward domestic economic reform”, and
● Greater leadership roles for India in the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus.

Act-East policy in the document:
The U.S. aims to support India’s “Act East” policy and “its aspiration to be a leading global power, highlighting its compatibility with the U.S., Japanese and Australian vision” of the Indo-Pacific.
● A strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China, is one of the underlying assumptions of the strategy.
● China aims to dissolve U.S. alliances and partnerships across the region. China will exploit vacuums and opportunities created by these diminished bonds.
● On Russia, it says the country will “remain a marginal player” in the region relative to the U.S., China and India.
● On North Korea, a stated U.S. objective is to, “Convince the Kim regime that the only path to its survival is to relinquish its nuclear weapons.”

The reason for the early declassification of the document:
● To communicate to the American people and to our allies and partners, the enduring commitment of the U.S. to keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open long into the future.

Significance of declassification:
● It is an attempt by some in the outgoing administration to make their mark on policy clear and public, but it’s not a document that speaks to tremendous strategic foresight.
● There’s a considerable bit of dissonance across this document, however, in its professed goal of spreading American and liberal values and the complete lack of any language on human rights.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Indo- Pacific vs Asia- Pacific.
2. BRICS.
3. SAARC.

Mains Link:
4. South China sea.
5. UN rights inspectors

7. U.K. urges China to grant UN access to Xinjiang:
Context:
Britain’s government has pressed China to allow UN rights inspectors to visit Xinjiang after raising new allegations of “appalling” human rights abuses against the Uighur minority people.

Latest developments:
UK recently introduced import controls on firms that may have sourced goods from the region in northwest China using forced labour from the mainly Muslim Uighur community.
There have been reports of “slave labour, forced sterilisation, appalling human rights abuses in the region”.

Who are Uighurs?
A Muslim minority community concentrated in China’s northwestern Xinjiang province.

They claim closer ethnic ties to Turkey and other central Asian countries than to China.

Why is China targeting the Uighurs?

Xinjiang is technically an autonomous region within China — its largest region, rich in minerals, and sharing borders with eight countries, including India, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan.

- Over the past few decades, as economic prosperity has come to Xinjiang, it has brought with it in large numbers the majority Han Chinese, who have cornered the better jobs, and left the Uighurs feeling their livelihoods and identity were under threat.
- This led to sporadic violence, in 2009 culminating in a riot that killed 200 people, mostly Han Chinese, in the region’s capital Urumqi. And many other violent incidents have taken place since then.
- Beijing also says Uighur groups want to establish an independent state and, because of the Uighurs’ cultural ties to their neighbours, leaders fear that elements in places like Pakistan may back a separatist movement in Xinjiang.

Therefore, the Chinese policy seems to have been one of treating the entire community as suspect, and launching a systematic project to chip away at every marker of a distinct Uighur identity.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who are Uighurs?
2. Where is Xinjiang?
3. Who are Han Chinese?
4. Indian states bordering Xinjiang province.

Mains Link:
Who are Uighurs? Why are they in news? Discuss.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GIF869070.1&imageview=0.

8. West Bank and issues associated:

Context:
Israel approves West Bank settlement homes ahead of Trump exit.

- The approvals are widely seen as taking advantage of the last few days of US President Donald Trump’s administration.

Where is West Bank?
It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western Dead Sea shore.

What is the dispute settlements here? Who lives there?
1. The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
2. Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since. During this war, the country defeated the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.
3. It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
4. Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.
5. The territory is still a point of contention due to a large number of Palestinians who live there and hope to see the land become a part of their future state.
6. When Israel took control of the land in 1967 it allowed Jewish people to move in, but Palestinians consider the West Bank illegally occupied Palestinian land.

Are these settlements illegal?
1. The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
2. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.

3. Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Six-day war - countries involved, reasons and the outcome.
2. Where is Gaza Strip?
3. What’s there in the Middle East peace plan?
4. Where is Jerusalem?

Mains Link:

1. Six-day war - countries involved, reasons and the outcome.
2. Where is Gaza Strip?
3. What’s there in the Middle East peace plan?
4. Where is Jerusalem?

5. Who are Palestinians and what are their demands?
6. Countries surrounding Israel.

9. U.S. resumes WHO support:

Context:
The U.S. has resumed its funding for WHO as President Joe Biden shifts towards greater international cooperation in the fight against COVID-19.

Background:
Last year, US President Donald Trump had put a hold on America’s funding to the World Health Organization, accusing it of becoming China-centric during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.
- The US is the largest contributor to the WHO.

How is the WHO funded?
There are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the WHO. These are:

1. **Assessed contributions** are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the Organization. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country’s wealth and population.

2. **Voluntary contributions** come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.

3. **Core voluntary contributions** allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.

4. **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP)** Contributions were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

**WHO’s current funding pattern:**
As of fourth quarter of 2019, total contributions were around $5.62 billion, with assessed contributions accounting for $956 million, specified voluntary contributions $4.38 billion, core voluntary contributions $160 million, and PIP contributions $178 million.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. WHO governance.
2. Types of contributions in WHO.

Mains Link:

1. WHO governance.
2. Types of contributions in WHO.
Discuss the role of WHO in promoting public health and environmental health across the globe.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GS386NPA0.1&imageview=0

10. Taiwan invited to inauguration in a rare shift:

Context:
Taiwan’s de facto Ambassador to the U.S. was formally invited to President Joe Biden’s inauguration.
- Taipei’s Foreign Ministry said it was the first time in decades that a Taiwanese envoy had been “invited” by the inauguration committee.

China-Taiwan relations-Background:
China has claimed Taiwan through its “one China” policy since the Chinese civil war forced the defeated Kuomintang, or Nationalist, to flee to the island in 1949 and has vowed to bring it under Beijing’s rule, by force if necessary.
- China is Taiwan’s top trading partner, with trade totalling $226 billion in 2018. Taiwan runs a large trade surplus with China.
- While Taiwan is self-governed and de facto independent, it has never formally declared independence from the mainland.
- Under the “one country, two systems” formula, Taiwan would have the right to run its own affairs; a similar arrangement is used in Hong Kong.
- Taiwan is a member of the World Trade Organization, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Asian Development Bank under various names.

Indo-Taiwan relations:
- Although they do not have formal diplomatic ties, Taiwan and India have been cooperating in various fields.
- India has refused to endorse the “one-China” policy since 2010.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Location of Taiwan and its historical background.
2. Regions being administered by China under One China policy.
3. Is Taiwan represented at WHO and the United Nations?

Mains Link:
Write a note on India-Taiwan bilateral relations.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GS386NPAE.1&imageview=0

11. Scottish leader seeks ‘legal referendum’:

Context:
Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon recently said she planned to hold a legal referendum on independence from Britain despite Westminster’s opposition, as an opinion poll showed a majority would vote yes.

When was the last referendum held?
Referendum for Scottish independence was held in 2014. Scotland had voted to remain in the UK.

When did Scotland and England unite?
- The Act of Union between Scotland and England was signed on Jan. 16, 1707.
- It came into effect on May 1 of that year, creating the United Kingdom of Britain.
- The Scottish Parliament was dissolved, and a single Parliament was created at Westminster in London.

Why did Scotland and England join in the first place?
Scotland and England have a complicated history, but the short answer is that Scotland needed an economic boost. The country's finances were a mess after a failed attempt to establish a trading colony in Panama. This unsuccessful scheme was conclusive evidence that Scotland's future prosperity was best served by union.

**What is the main case for independence?**

- Those who support independence believe Scotland "would be richer" if it breaks from England.
- Proponents of independence want Scotland to make its own decisions about how resources are controlled and money is invested.
- Rather than investing billions of pounds in nuclear weapons, for example, they would focus on things like childcare or programs to retain talent and encourage young Scots to stay.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Scotland- location.
2. Demand for independence.
3. When and why it was united with Britain?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of Referendum.

**Link:** [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH87299N.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH87299N.1&imageview=0)

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12. **U.S. announces restoration of relations with Palestinians:**

**Context:**
U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration has announced that it is restoring relations with the Palestinians and renewing aid to Palestinian refugees.

- This is a reversal of the Donald Trump administration’s cutoff and a key element of its new support for a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict agreed to by Israelis and Palestinians.

**Israel-Palestine Conflict:**
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, primarily as a conflict over territory.

- After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Holy Land was divided into three parts: The State of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River), and the Gaza Strip.
- The 1993 Oslo Accords mediated the conflict, to set up a framework for two state solution. It recognized the Palestinian Authority tasked with limited self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

**West Asia peace plan:**

- Unveiled by former U.S. President Trump.
- It plans to revive the stalled two-state talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
- It seeks to give the Israelis an expansive state with Jerusalem as its “undivided capital” and tight security control over a future Palestinian state.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Overview of the proposed West Asia Peace plan?
2. What is Six Day war?

**3. About the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.**
4. Middle East quartet.

**Locate the following on map:**
- Golan Heights.
13. **U.S.- Taliban peace deal:**

**Context:**
The Biden administration has said that it will review the US-Taliban deal to see if the Taliban are able to keep their end of the bargain.

**U.S.- Taliban peace deal:**
- A peace deal between the U.S. Government and the Taliban was signed on 29 February, 2020.
- The deal calls for U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops to leave Afghanistan.

**Significance of Peace in Afghanistan for India:**
India has called for renewed efforts for establishing enduring peace and stability, and putting an end to externally-sponsored terrorism and violence in Afghanistan.
- Economically, it is a gateway to the oil and mineral-rich Central Asian republics.
- Afghanistan has also become the second-largest recipient of Indian foreign aid over the last five years.

**Some of the important elements of the deal include:**
- The withdrawal of US troops along with bringing down NATO or coalition troop numbers within 14 months from when the deal was signed.

**The main counter-terrorism commitment by the Taliban is that:**
- Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. About the deal.
2. What is NATO.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of the deal.

14. **Russia gives nod to extend START treaty:**

**Context:**
US, Russia agree to extend 'New START' nuclear arms treaty.
- The extension of the landmark arms control treaty will continue to limit the number of nuclear missiles and warheads each country can deploy.

**Background:**
Negotiations to extend the treaty were stalled by the administration of former US President Donald Trump, which insisted on tougher inspections for Russia and for China to be included, which Beijing refused.

**About the New START treaty:**
1. The New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), was signed in 2010 by former US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart at the time, Dmitry Medvedev.
2. The treaty limits each party to 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic
missiles (ICBMs) or deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, and 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers.

3. It also envisions a rigorous inspection regime to verify compliance.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About START and New START treaties.
2. Timelines under New START.
3. Signatories.
4. Terms of the treaty.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of the New START treaty.

**15. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the “Iran deal”:**

**Context:**
U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently confirmed that if Iran were to become compliant with the terms of the now defunct Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or the “Iran deal”), the U.S. would re-enter it too.
- The Trump administration had pulled out of the deal in 2018.

**About the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA:**
Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
The 2015 nuclear deal gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme.

Under the deal:
1. Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
2. Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
3. The Joint Commission was established, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. What is JCPOA? Signatories.
2. Iran and its neighbours.
3. What is IAEA? Relation with the UN.
4. What is Uranium Enrichment?

**Mains Link:**
Write a note on JCPOA.

**Topics: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.**

**1. International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO):**

**Context:**
The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has become an Associate Member of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO).

**IFSC in India:**
- The first International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in the country has been set up at the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) in Gandhinagar.
- To regulate such institutions, the government established IFSCA on April 27 last year with its head office in Gandhinagar.
- In December 2019, Parliament passed a bill to set up a unified authority for regulating all financial activities at IFSCs in the country.

**About IOSCO:**

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It is the international body that **brings together the world's securities regulators** and is recognized as the global standard setter for the securities sector.

- IOSCO develops, implements and promotes adherence to internationally recognized standards for securities regulation.
- It works intensively with the **G20 and the Financial Stability Board (FSB)** on the global regulatory reform agenda.

**Members:**
IOSCO was established in 1983. Its membership regulates more than 95% of the world's securities markets in more than 115 jurisdictions; securities regulators in emerging markets account for 75% of its ordinary membership.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What are IFSCs?
2. Can they be set up in SEZs?
3. India’s first IFSC.
4. Services they provide?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of international financial services centres.

### 2. India at UN high table:

**Context:**
India has entered the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a **non-permanent member** and it will stay on the council for two years.

**India at UNSC:**
- India has served in the UN Security Council seven times previously.
- In 1950-51, India presided over the adoption of resolutions calling for cessation of hostilities during the Korean War and for assistance to Republic of Korea.
- In 1972-73, India pushed strongly for admission of Bangladesh into UN. The resolution was not adopted because of a veto by a permanent member.
- In 1977-78, India was a strong voice for Africa in the UNSC and spoke against apartheid. Then External Affairs Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke in UNSC for Namibia’s independence in 1978.
- In 1984-85, India was a leading voice in UNSC for resolution of conflicts in the Middle East, especially Palestine and Lebanon.
- In 2011-2012, India was a strong vice for developing world, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and Africa.
- India chaired the UNSC 1373 Committee concerning Counter-Terrorism, the 1566 Working Group concerning threat to international peace and security by terrorist acts, and Security Council 751/1907 Committee concerning Somalia and Eritrea.

**UN REFORMS:**
New Delhi has said it is essential that the Security Council is expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories.
- It says India is eminently suited for permanent UNSC membership by any objective criteria, such as population, territorial size, GDP, economic potential, civilizational legacy, cultural diversity, political system and past and ongoing contributions to UN activities especially to UN peacekeeping operations.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Name the permanent members of UNSC?
2. How are non permanent members elected?
3. Voting powers at UNSC.
4. How are non permanent seats distributed?

5. **UNGA vs UNSC.**

**Mains Link:**
Discuss why India should be given a permanent seat at the UNSC.
3. G7 summit:

Context:
The United Kingdom has invited India, Australia and South Korea to attend the G7 summit that is scheduled to be held in June as “guest countries”.

What is G7?
The G7, originally G8, was set up in 1975 as an informal forum bringing together the leaders of the world’s leading industrial nations.
The summit gathers leaders from the European Union (EU) and the following countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The major purpose of the G-7 is to discuss and deliberate on international economic issues. It sometimes acts in concert to help resolve other global problems, with a special focus on economic issues.

How did G7 become G8?
- Russia was formally inducted as a member in the group in 1998, which led G7 to become G8.
- However, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s condemnable act of moving Russian troops into eastern Ukraine and conquering Crimea in 2014 drew heavy criticism from the other G8 nations.
- The other nations of the group decided to suspend Russia from the G8 as a consequence of its actions and the group became G7 again in 2014.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Groups: G7, G8, G10, G15, G20, G24 countries.
2. Geographical location of member countries.

Mains Link:
Discuss the relevance of G7 countries today. What are the reforms necessary to make the grouping more effective?


Context:
India signs Strategic Partnership Agreement with International Energy Agency (IEA).
- The agreement seeks to strengthen mutual trust and cooperation & enhance global energy security, stability and sustainability.

About IEA:
- Established in 1974 as per framework of the OECD, IEA is an autonomous intergovernmental organisation.
- Its mission is guided by four main areas of focus: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide.
- Headquarters (Secretariat): Paris, France.

Roles and functions:
- Established in the wake of the 1973-1974 oil crisis, to help its members respond to major oil supply disruptions, a role it continues to fulfil today.
- IEA’s mandate has expanded over time to include tracking and analyzing global key energy trends, promoting sound energy policy, and fostering multinational energy technology cooperation.
Composition and eligibility:
It has 30 members at present. IEA family also includes eight association countries. A candidate country must be a member country of the OECD. But all OECD members are not IEA members.
To become member a candidate country must demonstrate that it has:
1. Crude oil and/or product reserves equivalent to 90 days of the previous year’s net imports, to which the government has immediate access (even if it does not own them directly) and could be used to address disruptions to global oil supply.
2. A demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%.
3. Legislation and organisation to operate the Co-ordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM) on a national basis.
4. Legislation and measures to ensure that all oil companies under its jurisdiction report information upon request.
5. Measures in place to ensure the capability of contributing its share of an IEA collective action.

Reports:
2. World Energy Outlook.
5. Energy Technology Perspectives.

InstaLinks:
1. Various reports released by IEA.
2. Composition of OECD and OPEC? Who can become members?
3. Top crude oil producers and importers globally?
4. Who are associate members of IEA?
5. What kind of IEA member is India?

Mains Link:
Write a note on objectives and functions of the International Energy Agency.

5. World Gold Council:
Context:
As per WGC, Gold demand in India hit a 25-year low at 446.4 tonnes in 2020, compared with 690.4 tonnes in 2019 due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown and on account of record high prices.

Gold & Economy:
As Currency: Gold was used as the world reserve currency up through most of the 20th century. The United States used the gold standard until 1971.
As a hedge against inflation: The demand for gold increases during inflationary times due to its inherent value and limited supply. As it cannot be diluted, gold is able to retain value much better than other forms of currency.
Strength of Currency: When a country imports more than it exports, the value of its currency will decline. On the other hand, the value of its currency will increase when a country is a net exporter. Thus, a country that exports gold or has access to gold reserves will see an increase in the strength of its currency when gold prices increase, since this increases the value of the country’s total exports.
Factors affecting Indian gold demand

**Long-term factors**

1.5 billion

Forecast for Indian population by 2030

The Indian middle class is expected to rise to 547 million by 2025

The rise of the young, Indian, middle-class worker is expected to lead to increased gold demand

- Indian culture supports gold demand across religions
- As the population becomes more urbanised, earning power increases
- Higher household incomes boost gold demand

**Short-term factors**

**Inflation**

For a 1% increase in inflation, demand increases by 2.6%

**Gold price changes**

For a 1% increase in the gold price, demand will decrease by 0.9%

**Excess rainfall**

1% increase in monsoon rainfall above the long-run average, boosts gold demand by 0.5%

About World Gold Council:

- It is the market development organisation for the gold industry.
- It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.
- It is an association whose members comprise the world’s leading gold mining companies.
- It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Gold imports and exports.
2. About WGC.
3. India’s gold consumption.
4. Major gold producing sites in India.

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6. A global challenge to deliver vaccine, says WHO executive board:

Context:
If 2020 was the year of discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, 2021 will be the year India faces the challenge of getting them to people across the world who most need it, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, who is the Chairman of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization, has said.

What is the WHO Executive Board?
It is one of the WHO’s two decision making bodies. The other one is the World Health Assembly. The agency’s headquarters are located at Geneva in Switzerland.

Composition:
- The executive Board is composed of 34 members technically qualified in the field of health.
- The Board chairman’s post is held by rotation for one year by each of the WHO’s six regional groups: African Region, Region of the Americas, South-East Asia Region, European Region, Eastern Mediterranean Region, and Western Pacific Region.

Term:
Members are elected for three-year terms.

Functions:
1. Sets out agenda for the Health Assembly and resolutions for forwarding to the Assembly are adopted.
2. Gives effect to the decisions and policies of the Health Assembly.
3. Advises it and facilitates its work.
4. The Board and the Assembly create a forum for debate on health issues and for addressing concerns raised by Member States.
5. Both the Board and the Assembly produce three kinds of documents — Resolutions and Decisions passed by the two bodies, Official Records as published in WHO Official publications, and Documents that are presented “in session” of the two bodies.

Key facts:
1. India became a party to the WHO Constitution on 12 January 1948.
2. The first Regional Director for South East Asia was an Indian, Dr Chandra Mani, who served between 1948-1968.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. World Health Assembly- composition and functions.
2. Regional bodies of WHO.
3. Documents released by WHA and executive board.
4. Chairmanship of EB.

Mains Link:
Discuss the composition and objectives of WHO executive board.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GPT87CB6J.1&imageview=0.
GENERAL STUDIES – 3

Topics: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. Faceless tax scheme:
Context:
The government’s faceless tax assessment scheme has managed to deliver about 24,000 final orders since its introduction in August 2020.

About Faceless tax scheme:
In the Union Budget 2019, the Finance Minister proposed the introduction of a scheme of faceless e-assessment.
- It is an attempt to remove individual tax officials’ discretion and potential harassment for income tax payers.
- The scheme allows for appropriate cases where a certain hearing is necessary, so then after following protocols, a hearing is given.
- The main objective is to remove physical interaction as much as possible.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GQH84US76.1&imageview=0

2. What is a K-shaped economic recovery and what are its implications?
Context:
The prospects of a K-shaped recovery from COVID are increasing both in India and across the world.

What is a K-shaped recovery?
A K-shaped recovery happens when different sections of an economy recover at starkly different rates.
1. Households at the top of the pyramid are likely to have seen their incomes largely protected, and savings rates forced up during the lockdown, increasing ‘fuel in the tank’ to drive future consumption.
2. Meanwhile, households at the bottom are likely to have witnessed permanent hits to jobs and incomes.

What are the macro implications of a K-shaped recovery?
1. Upper-income households have benefitted from higher savings for two quarters.
2. Households at the bottom have experienced a permanent loss of income in the forms of jobs and wage cuts; this will be a recurring drag on demand, if the labour market does not heal faster.
3. To the extent that COVID has triggered an effective income transfer from the poor to the rich, this will be demand-impeding because the poor have a higher marginal propensity to consume (i.e. they tend to spend (instead of saving) a much higher proportion of their income.
4. If COVID-19 reduces competition or increases the inequality of incomes and opportunities, it could impinge on trend growth in developing economies by hurting productivity and tightening political economy constraints.

Way ahead:
Policy will, therefore, need to look beyond the next few quarters and anticipate the state of the macro economy post the sugar rush.
3. Balance sheet of a bad bank:

**Context:**
The idea of setting up a bad bank to resolve the growing problem of non-performing assets (NPAs), or loans on which borrowers have defaulted, is back on the table.

**Concept of Bad Bank:**
- A bad bank is a bank set up to buy the bad loans and other illiquid holdings of another financial institution.
- The entity holding significant nonperforming assets will sell these holdings to the bad bank at market price.
- By transferring such assets to the bad bank, the original institution may clear its balance sheet—although it will still be forced to take write-downs.

**Why be concerned about bad loans?**
1. Indian banks’ pile of bad loans is a huge drag on the economy.
2. It’s a drain on banks’ profits. Because profits are eroded, public sector banks (PSBs), where the bulk of the bad loans reside, cannot raise enough capital to fund credit growth.
3. Lack of credit growth, in turn, comes in the way of the economy’s return to an 8% growth trajectory. Therefore, the bad loan problem requires effective resolution.

Benefits:
1. This helps banks or FIs clear-off their balance sheets by transferring the bad loans and focus on its core business lending activities.
2. Large debtors have many creditors. Hence bad bank could solve the coordination problem, since debts would be centralised in one agency.
3. It can effect speedier settlements with borrowers by cutting out individual banks.
4. It can drive a better bargain with borrowers and take more stringent enforcement action against them.
5. It can raise money from institutional investors rather than looking only to the Government.

What are the Concerns or demerits of such banks?
Suppose, say for example, a bank sells bad loans. Then, it has to take a haircut because when Rs 100 goes bad, the actual amount that can be expected is lower than Rs 100 and that leads to haircut. When it takes haircut that will impact the P&L (Profit & Loss).
So, till that particular aspect is not addressed, creating a new structure may not be as potent in addressing the problem.

Way forward:
The K V Kamath Committee, has said companies in sectors such as retail trade, wholesale trade, roads and textiles are facing stress.
- Sectors that have been under stress pre-Covid include NBFCs, power, steel, real estate and construction.
- Setting up a bad bank is seen as crucial against this backdrop.

InstaLinks:
5. What are non performing assets?

Prelims Link:
1. What is an Asset Reconstruction Company?
2. What is a bad bank?
3. Who can set up a bad bank in India?
4. What are stressed assets?

Mains Link:
Discuss the merits and demerits of setting up of bad banks.

4. Limited Liability Partnership (LLP):

Context:
Govt. to amend LLP Act to spur ease of business.
- Decriminalising various offences and permitting LLPs to issue non-convertible debentures are among the changes being proposed under the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act.

What is a LLP?
A Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) is a partnership in which some or all partners have limited liability. It therefore exhibits elements of partnerships and corporations.
- In an LLP, one partner is not responsible or liable for another partner’s misconduct or negligence.

Salient features of an LLP:
- An LLP is a body corporate and legal entity separate from its partners. It has perpetual succession.
- Being the separate legislation (i.e. LLP Act, 2008), the provisions of Indian Partnership Act, 1932 are not applicable to an LLP and it is regulated by the contractual agreement between the partners.
- Every Limited Liability Partnership shall use the words “Limited Liability Partnership” or its acronym “LLP” as the last words of its name.

Composition:
Every LLP shall have at least two designated partners being individuals, at least one of them being resident in India and all the partners shall be the agent of the Limited Liability Partnership but not of other partners.
Need for and significance LLP:
- LLP format is an alternative corporate business vehicle that provides the benefits of limited liability of a company but allows its members the flexibility of organizing their internal management on the basis of a mutually arrived agreement, as is the case in a partnership firm.
- This format would be quite useful for small and medium enterprises in general and for the enterprises in services sector in particular.
- Internationally, LLPs are the preferred vehicle of business particularly for service industry or for activities involving professionals.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Difference between LLP and companies.
2. Difference between LP and LLP.
3. What is a body corporate?

Mains Link:
4. Roles and functions of LLP partners.

5. RBI sees V-shaped recovery, likely room for policy easing:

Context:
Forecasting a V-shaped recovery, Reserve Bank of India has said that if growth momentum continues and inflation stays benign there would be room for policy action to support growth.
- This comes at a time when the central bank has started ‘normalising’ the liquidity in the money markets by draining out the surplus it had pumped in to stave off an economic crisis in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are the various Shapes of economic recovery?
1. The Z-shaped recovery is the most-optimistic scenario in which the economy quickly rises like a phoenix after a crash. It more than makes up for lost ground (think revenge-buying after the lockdowns are lifted) before settling back to the normal trend-line, thus forming a Z-shaped chart.

2. In V-shaped recovery the economy quickly recoups lost ground and gets back to the normal growth trend-line.

3. A U-shaped recovery is a scenario in which the economy, after falling, struggles and muddles around a low growth rate for some time, before rising gradually to usual levels.

4. A W-shaped recovery is a dangerous creature — growth falls and rises, but falls again before recovering yet again, thus forming a W-like chart.
5. The L-shaped recovery is the worst-case scenario, in which growth after falling, stagnates at low levels and does not recover for a long, long time.

6. The J-shaped recovery is a somewhat unrealistic scenario, in which growth rises sharply from the lows much higher than the trend-line and stays there.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link and Mains Link:
1. Have a brief overview of various curves mentioned above.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GS386NK77.1&imageview=0.

Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

1. New Industrial Development Scheme for Jammu & Kashmir (J&K IDS, 2021)

Context

About the scheme:
J&K IDS, 2021 is a Central Sector Scheme. The scheme aims to take industrial development to the block level in UT of J&K, which is first time in any Industrial Incentive Scheme of the Government of India.
- The financial outlay of the proposed scheme is Rs.28400 crore for the scheme period 2020-21 to 2036-37.
- Scheme while encouraging new investment, also nurtures the existing industries in J&K by providing them working capital support at the rate of 5% for 5 years.

Objective:
Main purpose of the scheme is to generate employment which directly leads to the socio-economic development of the region.
- It aims at development of Manufacturing as well as Service Sector Units in J&K.

Key Features of the Scheme:
- Scheme is made attractive for both smaller and larger units.
- It attempts for a more sustained and balanced industrial growth in the entire UT.
- Scheme has been simplified on the lines of ease of doing business by bringing one major incentive-GST Linked Incentive- that will ensure less compliance burden without compromising on transparency.
- It is not a reimbursement or refund of GST but gross GST is used to measure eligibility for industrial incentive to offset the disadvantages that the UT of J&K face.

Major Impact and potential:
Scheme is to bring about radical transformation in the existing industrial ecosystem of J&K with emphasis on job creation, skill development and sustainable development.
It will attract new investment and nurturing the existing ones, thereby enabling J&K to compete nationally with other leading industrially developed States/UTs of the country.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is J&K IDS?
2. Duration of the scheme.

3. Purpose?
4. Incentives given under the scheme.
5. Central Sector Scheme VS Centrally Sponsored Scheme
Mains Link:
New Industrial Development Scheme for Jammu & Kashmir scheme attempts for a more sustained and balanced industrial growth in the entire UT. Discuss.

Topics: Government Budgeting.

1. HC upholds arrest provision in CGST Act for tax evasion:

Context:
Section 69 in the Central Goods and Service Tax (CGST) Act gives power to authorities to arrest any person if there is “reason to believe” that he has committed tax evasion.
- This provision was upheld by Delhi HC recently.

What’s the issue?
A petition filed in the court claimed that:
Section 69 being of criminal nature, it could not have been enacted under Article 246A of the Constitution.
- A person under the CGST Act can only be arrested, if the amount of tax evasion is more than ₹2 crore.
- All offences in which tax evasion is less than ₹5 crore are bailable and only grave offences involving tax evasion of ₹5 crore and above are non-bailable and cognisable.

What has the Court said?
- The pith and substance of the CGST Act is on a topic, upon which Parliament has power to legislate as the power to arrest and prosecute are ancillary and/or incidental to the power to levy and collect Goods and Services Tax.
- Both Sections 69 and 132 of the CGST Act are “constitutional and fall within the legislative competence of Parliament”.
- The court remarked that the scope of Article 246A is “significantly wide” as it not only empowers both Parliament and State Legislatures to levy or enact GST Act, but also grants the power to make all laws ‘with respect to’ GST.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GDV85JRD2.1&imageview=0

2. Green tax:

Context:
The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has approved the following proposals:
1. To levy a “Green Tax” on old vehicles which are polluting the environment.
2. The policy of deregistration and scrapping of vehicles owned by Government department and PSU, which are above 15 years in age.
3. Revenue collected from the Green Tax to be kept in a separate account and used for tackling pollution, and for States to set up state of-art facilities for emission monitoring.

Applicability of green tax:
1. Transport vehicles older than 8 years could be charged Green Tax at the time of renewal of fitness certificate, at the rate of 10 to 25 % of road tax;
2. Personal vehicles to be charged Green Tax at the time of renewal of Registration Certification after 15 years.
3. Public transport vehicles, such as city buses, to be charged lower Green tax.
4. Higher Green tax (50% of Road Tax) for vehicles being registered in highly polluted cities.
5. Differential tax, depending on fuel (petrol/diesel) and type of vehicle.

Exemptions:
- Vehicles like strong hybrids, electric vehicles and alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol, LPG etc.
- Vehicles used in farming, such as tractor, harvester, tiller etc.

The benefits of the “Green Tax” could be:
- To dissuade people from using vehicles which damage the environment.

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● To motivate people to switch to newer, less polluting vehicles.
● Reduce the pollution level, and make the polluter pay for pollution.

Need for:
● It is estimated that commercial vehicles, which constitute about 5% of the total vehicle fleet, contribute about 65-70% of total vehicular pollution.
● The older fleet, typically manufactured before the year 2000 constitute less that 1% of the total fleet but contributes around 15% of total vehicular pollution. These older vehicles pollute 10-25 times more than modern vehicles.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the recently approved green tax.
2. Applicability.
3. Exemptions.

Mains Link:
4. How the revenue collected from green tax will be utilised?

3. ‘Off-budget borrowing’:

Context:
One of the most sought after details in any Union Budget is the level of fiscal deficit. As such, it is keenly watched by rating agencies — both inside and outside the country. That is why most governments want to restrict their fiscal deficit to a respectable number.
One of the ways to do this is by resorting to “off-budget borrowings”.
● Such borrowings are a way for the Centre to finance its expenditures while keeping the debt off the books — so that it is not counted in the calculation of fiscal deficit.

What is the fiscal deficit?
It is essentially the gap between what the central government spends and what it earns. In other words, it is the level of borrowings by the Union government. This fiscal deficit is the most important metric to understand the financial health of any government’s finances.

What are off-budget borrowings?
Off-budget borrowings are loans that are taken not by the Centre directly, but by another public institution which borrows on the directions of the central government.
● Such borrowings are used to fulfil the government’s expenditure needs.
● But since the liability of the loan is not formally on the Centre, the loan is not included in the national fiscal deficit.
This helps keep the country’s fiscal deficit within acceptable limits.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is fiscal deficit?
2. What is revenue deficit?

3. What is effective revenue deficit?
4. What is off budget borrowing?
5. Sources of revenue for the government.

Topics: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

1. What kind of an agri-food policy does India need?
According to Ashok Galati, the Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER:

1. It should be able to produce enough food, feed and fibre for its large population.
● In this regard, the best step is to invest in R&D for agriculture, and its extension from laboratories to farms and irrigation facilities.
● It is believed that developing countries should invest at least one per cent of their agri-GDP in agri-R&D and extension. India invests about half.

2. **It should do so in a manner that not only protects the environment, soil, water, air, and biodiversity but achieves higher production with global competitiveness.**
   ● This can be done by switching from the highly subsidised input price policy (power, water, fertilisers) and MSP/FRP policy for paddy, wheat and sugarcane, to more income support policies linked to saving water, soil and air quality.

3. It should enable **seamless movement** of food from farm to fork, keeping marketing costs low, save on food losses in supply chains and provide safe and fresh food to consumers.

4. **Consumers should get safe and nutritious food at affordable prices.**
   ● The public distribution of food, through PDS, that relies on rice and wheat, and that too at more than 90 per cent subsidy over costs of procurement, stocking and distribution, is not helping much.

**Topics:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

1. **Bird Flu:**
   **Context:**
   Kerala on alert after bird flu in two districts.
   ● **H5N8 subtype of Influenza A** virus reported in ducks.

**About Avian influenza (bird flu):**
- It is a viral infection that can infect not only birds, but also humans and other animals. Most forms of the virus are restricted to birds.
- It is a highly contagious viral disease affecting several species of food-producing birds (chickens, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, etc.), as well as pet birds and wild birds.
- Occasionally mammals, including humans, may contract avian influenza.
- Influenza A viruses are classified into subtypes based on two surface proteins, Hemagglutinin (HA) and Neuraminidase (NA).

**Influenza A(H5N8) virus:**
According to Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health, H5N8 avian influenza is a disease of birds, caused by Type “A” influenza viruses, which can affect several species of domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, ducks, as well as pet birds, wild migratory birds and water fowl.

**Can the virus transfer to humans?**
There are no known cases of H5N8 in human beings. Risk to general public is very low. There is also no evidence that consumption of poultry meat or eggs could transmit the virus to humans. But necessary precautions are required while handling sick/dead birds and contaminated material during control and containment operations. It is considered safe to eat properly cooked poultry products.

**Control measures:**
Culling is usually undertaken to control the infection when it is detected in animals. Besides culling, safe disposal of all such culled animals and animal products is also important. The authorities also need to strictly enforce decontamination of infected premises and undertake quarantine of contaminated vehicles and personnel.
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:  
1. When a country is declared free from Avian Influenza, who declares it?  
2. H5N1 vs H5N6 vs H9N2 vs H5N8.

Mains Link:
Write a note on Bird Flu. Discuss how it can be prevented.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GVN84V4U1&imageview=0.

2. PM KISAN:

Context:
₹1,364 crore given to wrong beneficiaries of PM-Kisan.

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

- It is implemented as a central sector scheme by the Government of India.
- This scheme was introduced to augment the source of income of many small and marginal farmers.
- Under the Scheme an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiaries rests with the State / UT Governments.

Ambit:
The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers’ families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded w.e.f. 01.06.2019 to cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.

Exceptions:
Affluent farmers have been excluded from the scheme such as Income Tax payers in last assessment year, professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants etc and pensioners pensioners drawing at least Rs.10,000/- per month (excluding MTS/Class IV/Group D employees).

Similar programmes by states:
1. Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana- MP.
2. The Rythu Bandhu scheme- Telangana.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:  
1. PM KISAN- eligibility.

3. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:

Context:
The scheme completes five years.

About PMFBY:

- Merged schemes include National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).
- It aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim for the full insured sum.

Coverage:
The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

PMFBY to PMFBY 2.0:
www.insightsonindia.com
**Completely Voluntary:** It has been decided to make enrolment 100% voluntary for all farmers from 2020 Kharif.

**Limit to Central Subsidy:** The Cabinet has decided to cap the Centre’s premium subsidy under these schemes for premium rates up to 30% for unirrigated areas/crops and 25% for irrigated areas/crops.

**More Flexibility to States:** The government has given the flexibility to states/UTs to implement PMFBY and given them the option to select any number of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses.

**Penalising the Pendency:** In the revamped PMFBY, a provision has been incorporated wherein if states don’t release their share before March 31 for the Kharif season and September 30 for rabi, they would not be allowed to participate in the scheme in subsequent seasons.

**Investing in ICE Activities:** Insurance companies have to now spend 0.5% of the total premium collected on information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

**Topics:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

### 1. Global Housing Technology Challenge:

**Context:**
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of Light House Projects (LHPs) under Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India) at six sites across six states.

**What are Light house projects?**
The LHPs are being constructed at Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Rajkot (Gujarat), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Agartala (Tripura) and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh).
- They comprise about 1000 houses at each location along with allied infrastructure facilities.
- These projects will demonstrate and deliver ready to live houses at an expedited pace within twelve months, as compared to conventional brick and mortar construction, and will be more economical, sustainable, of high quality and durability.
- These LHPs demonstrate a variety of technologies, including Prefabricated Sandwich Panel System in LHP at Indore, Monolithic Concrete Construction using Tunnel Formwork etc.

**Key features of the Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC) are:**
Launched in 2019, the challenge is undertaken under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U).
- GHTC aims to fast-track the construction of affordable housing and meet the target of constructing 1.2 crore houses by 2022.
- GHTC focuses on identifying and mainstreaming proven demonstrable technologies for lighthouse projects and spotting potential future technologies for incubation and acceleration support through ASHA (Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators) — India.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. What is GHTC?
2. What is ASHA - India?
3. About PMAY- Urban.

**Mains Link:**
In your opinion, what needs to be done in order to make the ‘Housing for All by 2022’ programme successful? Discuss.

### 2. Industrial Corridor nodes at Krishnapatnam and Tumakuru:

**Context:**
Cabinet approves Industrial Corridor nodes at Krishnapatnam and Tumakuru.
What is an industrial corridor?
An industrial corridor is basically a corridor comprising of multi-modal transport services that would pass through the states as main artery.
- Industrial corridors offer effective integration between industry and infrastructure, leading to overall economic and social development.

Industrial corridors constitute world-class infrastructure, such as:
2. Ports with state-of-the-art cargo handling equipment.
3. Modern airports.
4. Special economic regions/industrial areas.
5. Logistic parks/transhipment hubs.
6. Knowledge parks focused on catering to industrial needs.
7. Complementary infrastructure such as townships/real estate.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Greenfield vs Brownfield projects.

3. Kochi-Mangaluru LNG pipeline:
Context:
Inaugurated recently by PM.
- It is 450 km long.
- It provides another 21 lakh PNG connections.

What next?
1. As part of efforts to make India a natural gas-based economy, 10,000 more CNG (compressed natural gas) stations would be opened and several lakh PNG (piped natural gas) household connections given in the coming days.
2. The government has a concrete plan to move towards a gas-based economy that would be cheaper, convenient and environment-friendly.
3. The government would make substantial investments in coal and gas sectors. The plan was to increase the share of natural gas in the energy sector from the present 6% to 15% by 2030.

"One nation, one gas grid" concept:
It will be high-voltage electric power transmission network in mainland India, connecting power stations and major substations and ensuring that electricity generated anywhere in mainland India can be used to satisfy demand elsewhere.

Evolution of National Grid:
1. Grid management on regional basis started in sixties.
2. Initially, State grids were inter-connected to form regional grid and India was demarcated into 5 regions namely Northern, Eastern, Western, North Eastern and Southern region.
3. In August 2006 North and East grids were interconnected thereby four regional grids—Northern, Eastern, Western, and North Eastern grids are synchronously connected forming central grid operating at one frequency.

4. On 31st December 2013, Southern Region was connected to Central Grid in Synchronous mode with the commissioning of 765kV Raichur-Solapur Transmission line thereby achieving ‘ONE NATION’-‘ONE GRID’-‘ONE FREQUENCY’.

Benefits of a National Grid:
1. Better availability resulting in lesser power cuts.
2. More stability in power.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About One Nation One Grid.
2. What is National Grid.
3. About UDAY Scheme.
4. What is Natural Gas?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of National Grid.

4. National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP):

Context:
FM reviews NIP as part of infra spending push.
- The NIP has been expanded from 6,385 projects at the time of its introduction a year ago, to more than 7,300 projects, and is making progress despite the pandemic.

About NIP:
- In the budget speech of 2019-2020, Finance Minister announced an outlay of Rs 100 lakh Crore for infrastructure projects over the next 5 years.
- NIP is a first-of-its-kind initiative to provide world-class infrastructure across the country and improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- It will improve project preparation, attract investments (both domestic & foreign) into infrastructure, and will be crucial for attaining the target of becoming a $5 trillion economy by FY 2025.
- Covers both economic and social infrastructure projects.

Important recommendations and observations made by Atanu Chakraborty taskforce:
1. Investment needed: ₹111 lakh crore over the next five years (2020-2025) to build infrastructure projects and drive economic growth.
2. Energy, roads, railways and urban projects are estimated to account for the bulk of projects (around 70%).
3. The centre (39 percent) and state (40 percent) are expected to have an almost equal share in implementing the projects, while the private sector has 21 percent share.
4. Aggressive push towards asset sales.
5. Monetisation of infrastructure assets.
6. Setting up of development finance institutions.
7. Strengthening the municipal bond market.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is NIP? When was it launched?
2. Projects covered under NIP.
3. Key recommendations made by task force headed by Atanu Chakraborty on NIP.

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance and features of NIP.
5. What are the spectrum auctions?

**Context:**
The Department of Telecommunications (DoT), recently said that auctions for 4G spectrum will begin from March 1.

**The main objectives of the sale were:**
- To obtain a market-determined price for the spectrum on offer,
- Ensure efficient use of spectrum and avoid hoarding,
- Stimulate competition in the sector and maximise revenue proceeds.

**What are spectrum auctions?**
A spectrum auction is a process whereby a government uses an auction system to sell the rights to transmit signals over specific bands of the electromagnetic spectrum and to assign scarce spectrum resources.

**Spectrum auctions in India**
Devices such as cellphones and wireline telephones require signals to connect from one end to another. These signals are carried on airwaves, which must be sent at designated frequencies to avoid any kind of interference.
- The Union government owns all the publicly available assets within the geographical boundaries of the country, which also include airwaves.
- With the expansion in the number of cellphone, wireline telephone and internet users, the need to provide more space for the signals arises from time to time.
- To sell these assets to companies willing to set up the required infrastructure to transport these waves from one end to another, the central government through the DoT auctions these airwaves from time to time.
- These airwaves are called spectrum, which is subdivided into bands which have varying frequencies.
- All these airwaves are sold for a certain period of time, after which their validity lapses, which is generally set at 20 years.

**The likely bidder for the spectrum**
All three private telecom players, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Bharti Airtel, and Vi are eligible contenders to buy additional spectrum to support the number of users on their network.
- Apart from these three, new companies, including foreign companies, are also eligible to bid for the airwaves.
- Foreign companies, however, will have to either set up a branch in India and register as an Indian company, or tie up with an Indian company to be able to retain the airwaves after winning them.

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6. Why Jharkhand has exited an agreement with Centre, RBI on power dues?

**Context:**

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Jharkhand exited from a Tripartite Agreement (TPA) between the state, Government of India (GOI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

What is the Tripartite Agreement?
An agreement was signed between GOI, Jharkhand state and RBI in 2017 stating that the state government shall ensure that the state power utilities make the supply payment due to the Central Public Sector Units in this case, Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) within the period specified in the supply agreement.

1. In the event of State Power Utilities committing a breach in the terms, the state government shall independently and as a principal debtor become liable for the payment.
2. As per the TPA, it authorises the GOI to instruct RBI to act promptly on its instructions i.e. to debit the amount.
3. As per the tripartite agreement, the Centre has the power to auto-debit the dues of a state to central power discoms from the state’s RBI account.

What is Jharkhand’s say?
● The cabinet decided to pull out of the agreement as it is not in the best interest of the state.
● It says, the Centre’s decisions like these affect the federal structure of the country.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/jharkhand-tpa-agreement-rbi-7138548/.

7. SC upholds IBC’s Section 32A: Why is it important, what are the implications?

Context:
SC has upheld section 32A of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

What did the Supreme Court say in its judgment?
In its judgment, the apex court, while upholding the validity of Section 32 A of IBC, said
1. It was important for the IBC to attract bidders who would offer reasonable and fair value for the corporate debtor to ensure the timely completion of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP).
2. Such bidders, however, must also be granted protection from any misdeeds of the past since they had nothing to do with it.
3. Such protection, the court said, must also extend to the assets of a corporate debtor, which form a crucial attraction for potential bidders and helps them in assessing and placing a fair bid for the company, which, in turn, will help banks clean up their books of bad loans.

What is Section 32A?
● Section 32A provides that Corporate Debtor shall not be prosecuted for an offence committed prior to commencement of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) once Resolution Plan has been approved by Adjudicating Authority (AA).
● The section further provides that no action shall be taken against property of Corporate Debtor covered under such a Resolution Plan.

What’s the issue then?
32A continues to hold liable every person who was a ‘designated partner’ or an 'officer who is in default' or was in any manner in-charge of, or responsible to Corporate Debtor for conduct of its business or associated in any manner and who was directly or indirectly involved in commission of such offence.

Why is the SC upholding Section 32A important?
● With the Supreme Court upholding the validity of Section 32 A, the cases such as that of Bhushan Power are expected to be completed soon.
● Experts also said that this will give confidence to other bidders to proceed with confidence while bidding on such disputed companies and their assets.
8. India Innovation Index by NITI Aayog:

Context:
Second edition of the NITI Aayog’s India Innovation Index has been released.

Performance of various states:
1. Karnataka is the most innovative state for the second year in a row.
2. Maharashtra pipped Tamil Nadu to the second spot.
3. Bihar was featured at the bottom of the list.

About the index:
The index attempts to create an extensive framework for the continual evaluation of the innovation environment of states and union territories in India and intends to perform the following three functions:
- Ranking of states and UTs based on their index scores.
- Recognizing opportunities and challenges.
- Assisting in tailoring governmental policies to foster innovation.

The Index is calculated as the average of the scores of its two dimensions — Enablers and Performance.
1. The Enablers are the factors that underpin innovative capacities, grouped in five pillars: (1) Human Capital, (2) Investment, (3) Knowledge Workers, (4) Business Environment, and (5) Safety and Legal Environment.
2. The Performance dimension captures benefits that a nation derives from the inputs, divided in two pillars: (6) Knowledge Output and (7) Knowledge Diffusion.

Significance of the index:
India has a unique opportunity among its myriad challenges to become the innovation leader in the world. Cluster-based innovation should be leveraged upon as the focal point of competitiveness.
- The index is a great beginning to improve the environment of innovation in the country as it focuses on both the input and output components of the idea.
- The index is a good effort to benchmark the performance of the state with each other and promote competitive federalism.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the Global Innovation Index.
2. About NITI Aayog Innovation Index.
3. Performance of various states.

Mains Link:
4. Parameters for ranking.

Topics: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. Serum Institute`s Covishield vs Bharat Biotech`s Covaxin:

Context:
In a significant development, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has formally approved Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech vaccines for restricted emergency use against COVID-19 in India.

Background:
Neither Covishield nor Covaxin has completed the crucial Phase-3 trial, under which a vaccine candidate is administered to volunteers at multiple locations across the country.
- The approval was based on a recommendation by a Subject Expert Committee which deliberated for two days on granting approvals to the vaccines.

About Covishield:
www.insightsonindia.com
Covishield has been developed by Oxford University in collaboration with Astrazeneca.

Pune-based Serum Institute of India is their manufacturing and trial partner.

It uses a replication-deficient chimpanzee viral vector based on a weakened version of a common cold virus.

This virus causes infections in chimpanzees and contains the genetic material of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spike protein.

About Covaxin:

Covaxin is developed by Bharat Biotech and it is India’s first indigenous vaccine against Covid-19.

Bharat Biotech has developed this vaccine in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and National Institute of Virology.

It is an inactivated vaccine which is developed by inactivating (killing) the live microorganisms that cause the disease.

This destroys the ability of the pathogen to replicate, but keeps it intact so that the immune system can still recognise it and produce an immune response.

Is it safe?

WHO has welcomed the authorisation but there are many who fear the vaccine and the safety of it all. Surveys have found that many Indians are in no rush to get vaccinated. Experts also believe that more information about the vaccine trials should be published.

What is the process of getting an emergency use authorisation in India?

Experts and activists say India’s drug regulations do not have provisions for a EUA, and the process for receiving one is not clearly defined or consistent.

Despite this, CDSCO has been granting emergency or restricted emergency approvals to Covid-19 drugs during this pandemic for remdesivir and favipiravir.

Is there a risk in using a product that has only been granted an emergency use authorisation?

According to the US FDA, the public has to be informed that a product has only been granted an EUA and not full approval.

In the case of a Covid-19 vaccine, for example, people have to be informed about the known and potential benefits and risks, and the “extent to which such benefits or risks are unknown”, and that they have a right to refuse the vaccine.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Antigens vs Antibodies.
2. How a vaccine works?
3. Types of vaccines.
4. About DGCI.
5. Procedure to be followed for vaccine approval in India.

2. National Innovation Foundation (NIF) - India

Context

Science & Technology minister dedicates an Innovation Portal developed by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India to the nation.

Highlights:

Innovation Portal is developed by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India, an autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

www.insightsonindia.com 82 InsightsIAS
• The National Innovation Portal (NIP) is currently home to about 1.15 lakh innovations scouted from common people of the country, covering Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary and Human Health.
• In terms of domain areas, presently the innovations cover Energy, mechanical, automobile, electrical, electronics, household, nutraceuticals etc.

About National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India:
It is an autonomous body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India.
• Set up in February 2000 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat to provide institutional support for scouting, spawning, sustaining and scaling up the grassroots innovations across the country.
• It is India’s national initiative to strengthen the grassroots technological innovations and outstanding traditional knowledge.
• Its mission is to help India become a creative and knowledge-based society by expanding policy and institutional space for grassroots technological innovators.

3. India proposes to expand research, tourism in the Arctic:
Context:
India has unveiled a new draft ‘Arctic’ policy.

India’s Arctic Policy Roadmap For Sustainable Engagement draft rides on five pillars:
1. Science and research activities.
2. Economic and human development cooperation.
3. Transportation and connectivity.
4. Governance and international cooperation.
5. National capacity building.

Highlights of the Policy:
1. The policy commits to expanding scientific research, “sustainable tourism” and mineral oil and gas exploration in the Arctic region.
2. The draft spells out goals in India’s Arctic Mission such as to better understand the scientific and climate-related linkages between the Arctic and the Indian monsoons.
3. It also seeks to harmonise polar research with the third pole (the Himalayas) and to advance the study and understanding of the Arctic within India.
4. The policy calls for exploration opportunities for responsible exploration of natural resources and minerals from the Arctic and identifying opportunities for investment in Arctic infrastructure in areas such as “offshore exploration/mining, ports, railways and airports.

Arctic region:
• The Arctic region comprises the Arctic Ocean and parts of countries such as Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia, USA (Alaska), Finland, Sweden and Iceland.
• These countries together form the core of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum. The region is home to almost four million inhabitants, of which, about one-tenth are indigenous people.

India’s engagement in the Arctic:
• India already has a research station in the Arctic, Himadri, for the research work.
• India received the ‘Observer’ country status in the Arctic Council in 2013 and is one among the 13 countries across the world, including China, to have that position. The status was renewed in 2018.

Significance of arctic study for India:
• Though none of India’s territory directly falls in the Arctic region, it is a crucial area as the Arctic influences atmospheric, oceanographic and biogeochemical cycles of the earth’s ecosystem.
• Due to climate change, the region faces the loss of sea ice, ice caps, and warming of the ocean which in turn impacts the global climate.
• The frigid Arctic, which keeps losing ice due to global warming, is one of the batteries feeding the variations in Indian monsoons.
4. Manufactured sand:

Context:
The Rajasthan government has brought a policy on manufactured sand (M-sand), giving industry status to the units producing it for construction work and reducing the dependence on bajri (riverbed sand).

Highlights of the new Policy:
- The policy will enable the investors to set up M-sand units by utilising the incentives offered by the State government.
- It will also help in environmental protection and generate faith among the public in the efficacy of M-sand for construction works.
- The policy would help create employment opportunities through new units and resolve the issue of huge quantities of waste generated in the mining areas.

Background:
The Supreme Court had banned illegal mining on riverbeds in 2017.

What is M-Sand?
- M-sand is a substitute of river sand for concrete construction.
- Manufactured sand is produced from hard granite stone by crushing.
- The crushed sand is of cubical shape with grounded edges, washed and graded to as a construction material.
- The size of manufactured sand (M-Sand) is less than 4.75mm.

Its significance:
- It can be dust free, the sizes of m-sand can be controlled easily so that it meets the required grading for the given construction.
- It is well graded in the required proportion.
- It does not contain organic and soluble compounds that affect the setting time and properties of cement, thus the required strength of concrete can be maintained.
- It does not have the presence of impurities such as clay, dust and silt coatings.

5. BBV154, Bharat Biotech’s single-dose intranasal vaccine for Covid-19:

Context:
Bharat Biotech’s BBV154 is the first publicised attempt at getting an intranasal Covid-19 vaccine.

What is an intranasal vaccine?
- Vaccines are most commonly administered as injectable shots into the muscles (intramuscular) or the tissue just between the skin and the muscles (subcutaneous).
• However, with intranasal vaccines, the solution is squirted or sprayed into the nostrils and inhaled instead of injecting it.

What are the benefits to an intranasal vaccine during a pandemic?
• Such vaccines not only aim to overcome barriers to delivery and administration that come with producing and distributing injectable vaccines, they also may be able to tap an additional set of immune cells found in the tissues lining the nose, mouth and lungs.
• Intranasal vaccines cut down on the need for syringes, needles and other components like alcohol swabs, as they are not injected.
• Eliminates needle-associated injuries and infections and is easy to administer, as it also does not require trained healthcare workers.
• It is also a single-dose, making it easier for those receiving the vaccine as well—they would not have to schedule revisits for booster shots the way they would have to with existing, injectable Covid-19 vaccines.

What are the potential setbacks?
• Past attempts to develop intranasal vaccines, including for measles flu, have not been very successful.
• These vaccines have mostly been made using live, weakened viruses, but have never cleared clinical trials.
• Only a live attenuated influenza flu vaccine has been licenced through this route of delivery.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. Two flight surgeons for Gaganyaan to train in Russia:

Context:
Russia will train two flight surgeons from India in space medicine for the Gaganyaan mission.

Flight surgeons are:
• Doctors from the Indian Air Force who have specialised in aerospace medicine.
• Responsible for astronauts’ health before, during and after a flight.

Indian Human Space Flight Programme:
ISRO aims to launch its maiden Human Space Mission, Gaganyaan before the 75th anniversary of India’s independence in 2022.

Objectives of the Mission:
1. Enhancement of science and technology levels in the country
2. A national project involving several institutes, academia and industry
3. Improvement of industrial growth
4. Inspiring youth
5. Development of technology for social benefits
6. Improving international collaboration

Relevance of a Manned Space Mission for India:
Boost to industries: The Indian industry will find large opportunities through participation in the highly demanding Space missions. Gaganyaan Mission is expected will source nearly 60% of its equipment from the Indian private sector.
Employment: According to the ISRO chief, the Gaganyaan mission would create 15,000 new employment opportunities, 13,000 of them in private industry and the space organisation would need an additional manpower of 900.
Technological development: Human Space flights are frontier field in the science and technology. The challenges the Human Space Flights provide to India, and the benefits accruing from taking up those missions will be very high and will lead to further thrust for technological developments in India.
Spurs research and development: It will boost good research and technology development. With a large number of researchers with proper equipment involved, HSF will thrust significant research in areas such as
materials processing, astro-biology, resources mining, planetary chemistry, planetary orbital calculus and many other areas.

**Motivation:** Human space flight will provide that inspiration to the youth and also the national public mainstream. It would inspire young generation into notable achievements and enable them to play their legitimate role in challenging future activities.

**Prestige:** India will be the fourth country to launch human space mission. The Gaganyaan will not only bring about prestige to the nation but also establish India’s role as a key player in the space industry.


### 2. AstroSat:

**Context:**
AstroSat’s Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope spots rare ultraviolet-bright stars in a massive intriguing cosmic dinosaur in the Milky Way.

**Significance of the discovery:**
Such UV-bright stars are speculated to be the reason for the ultraviolet radiation coming from old stellar systems such as elliptical galaxies which are devoid of young blue stars. Hence, it is all the more important to observe more such stars to understand their properties.

**About AstroSat:**
- AstroSat is **India’s first multi-wavelength space telescope**, which has five telescopes seeing through different wavelengths simultaneously — visible, near UV, far UV, soft X-ray and hard X-ray.
- Onboard the AstroSat is a 38-cm wide **UltraViolet Imaging Telescope (UVIT)**, which is capable of imaging in far and near-ultraviolet bands over a wide field of view.
- AstroSat was launched on 28 September 2015 by ISRO into a near-Earth equatorial orbit.
- It is a **multi-institute collaborative project**, involving IUCAA, ISRO, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (Mumbai), Indian Institute of Astrophysics (Bengaluru), and Physical Research Laboratory (Ahmedabad), among others.

**Topics:** Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

### 1. Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy:

**Context:**
The draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy released on Jan 1.
- It could be game-changers for not just the scientific research community, but also for the way ordinary Indians interact with Science.

**What is the overall philosophy behind the policy?**
- Unlike previous STI policies which were largely top-driven in formulation, the 5th national STI policy (STIP) follows core principles of being **decentralised, evidence-informed, bottom-up, experts-driven, and inclusive.**

**Overall objectives:**
1. To position India among the top three scientific superpowers in the decade to come.
2. To attract, nurture, strengthen, and retain critical human capital through a people-centric STI ecosystem.
3. To double the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) researchers, gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) and private-sector contribution to GERD every five years.
4. To build individual and institutional excellence in STI with the aim of reaching the highest levels of global recognition and awards in the coming decade.
Key components:
1. It proposes an Open Science Framework, with free access for all to findings from publicly funded research.
2. One Nation, One Subscription: The idea is to democratise science by providing access to scholarly knowledge to not just researchers but to every individual in the country.
3. It suggests modification or waiver of General Financial Rules (GFR), for large-scale mission mode programmes and projects of national importance.

It has made recommendations such as:
1. Mandatory positions for excluded groups in academics; 30% representation of women in selection/evaluation committees and decision-making groups.
2. Addressing issues related to career breaks for women by considering academic age rather than biological/physical age.
3. A dual recruitment policy for couples; and institutionalisation of equity and inclusion by establishing an Office of Equity and Inclusion, etc.

What are the learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic for India’s science and technology sector? How does the draft policy address those learnings?
In India, the pandemic presented an opportunity for R&D institutions, academia, and industry to work with a shared purpose, synergy, collaboration and cooperation, which helped the country develop the capability to produce these kits in record time.
- The STIP draft focuses on the need to adopt such learnings for greater efficiency and synergy in future.


2. What is 5G and how prepared is India to adapt to this tech?
Context:
The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has sought inputs from Telcos and other industry experts on the sale and use of radio frequency spectrum over the next 10 years, including the 5G bands.

What is 5G?
- 5G is the next generation of mobile broadband that will eventually replace, or at least augment 4G LTE connection.
- 5G offers exponentially faster download and upload speeds.
- 5G will deliver multi-Gbps peak rates, ultra-low latency, massive capacity, and a more uniform user experience.

Where does India stand in the 5G technology race?
All the three private telecom players, Reliance Jio Infocomm, Bharti Airtel and Vi have been urging the DoT to lay out a clear road map of spectrum allocation and 5G frequency bands, so that they would be able to plan the roll out of their services accordingly.
- One big hurdle, however, is the lack of flow of cash and adequate capital with at least two of the three players, namely Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea.
- On the other hand, Reliance Jio plans to launch an indigenously built 5G network for the country as early as the second half of this year.
What is the global progress on 5G?
More than governments, global telecom companies have started building 5G networks and rolling it out to their customers on a trial basis. In countries like the US, companies such as AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon have taken the lead when it comes to rolling out commercial 5G for their users.

Conclusion:
India’s National Digital Communications Policy 2018 highlights the importance of 5G when it states that the convergence of a cluster of revolutionary technologies including 5G, the cloud, Internet of Things (IoT) and data analytics, along with a growing start-up community, promise to accelerate and deepen its digital engagement, opening up a new horizon of opportunities.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is 5G?
2. Differences between 3G, 4G and 5G.
3. Applications.

Mains Link:
4. What is a spectrum?

3. GI tag sought for India’s costliest mushroom:
Context:
A geographical indication (GI) tag has been sought for one of the costliest mushrooms in the world that grows in Jammu and Kashmir’s Doda district.

Key Points:
- Locally called Gucchi, or Morel, the mushroom, priced at over ₹20,000 a kg, is a forest produce collected by local farmers and tribals.
- It is said to have medicinal and anti-inflammatory properties.
- It is found in the temperate forests.

About GI tag:
A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.
- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Security:
Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

Who is a registered proprietor of a geographical indication?
- Any association of persons, producers, organisation or authority established by or under the law can be a registered proprietor.
- Their name should be entered in the Register of Geographical Indication as registered proprietor for the Geographical Indication applied for.

How long the registration of Geographical Indication is valid?
- The registration of a geographical indication is valid for a period of 10 years.
- It can be renewed from time to time for further period of 10 years each.

In India, Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 which came into force with effect from September 2003. The first product in India to be accorded with GI tag was Darjeeling tea in the year 2004-05.
1. What is GI tag?
2. Who grants?
3. GI products in India and their geographical locations.
4. Other IPRs.

Mains Link:
What is a Geographical Indication (GI) tag? Discuss its significance.

4. Parker Solar Probe:

Context:
Parker Solar Probe Marks Seventh Successful Swing around the Sun.

- None are closer than Parker Solar Probe, which passed just 8.4 million miles (13.5 million kilometers) from the Sun’s surface while flying at 289,932 miles per hour on Jan 17.
- Now just over two years into its seven-year mission, the Parker Solar Probe spacecraft will eventually travel within 4 million miles of the Sun’s surface.

About the mission:
- NASA’s historic Parker Solar Probe mission will revolutionize our understanding of the sun, where changing conditions can propagate out into the solar system, affecting Earth and other worlds.
- Parker Solar Probe will travel through the sun’s atmosphere, closer to the surface than any spacecraft before it, facing brutal heat and radiation conditions — and ultimately providing humanity with the closest-ever observations of a star.

Journey:
- In order to unlock the mysteries of the sun’s atmosphere, Parker Solar Probe will use Venus’ gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the sun.
- The spacecraft will fly through the sun’s atmosphere as close as 3.9 million miles to our star’s surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and more than seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before.

Goals:
The primary science goals for the mission are to trace how energy and heat move through the solar corona and to explore what accelerates the solar wind as well as solar energetic particles.

Parker Solar Probe has three detailed science objectives:
1. Trace the flow of energy that heats and accelerates the solar corona and solar wind.
2. Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields at the sources of the solar wind.
3. Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.

Why study corona?
The corona is hotter than the surface of the sun. The corona gives rise to the solar wind, a continuous flow of charged particles that permeates the solar system. Unpredictable solar winds cause disturbances in our planet’s magnetic field and can play havoc with communications technology on Earth. Nasa hopes the findings will enable scientists to forecast changes in Earth’s space environment.

InstaLinks:
2. What are Solar Flares.

Mains Link:

5. Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021:

Context:
The Budget session of Parliament is likely to consider this bill, which prohibits all private cryptocurrencies and provides for an official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India.

The purpose of the law has been described as:
1. to create a facilitative framework for an official digital currency issued by the RBI.
2. to “prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India”.

The Bill also seeks to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India, however, it allows for certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses.

Background:
The Supreme Court, last year, set aside an April 6, 2018, circular of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that prohibited banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies (VCs).

What did the Court say?
1. RBI has not come out with a stand that any of the entities regulated by it namely, nationalised banks/scheduled commercial banks/cooperative banks/NBFCs, have suffered any loss or adverse effect directly or indirectly, on account of virtual currencies (VCs).
2. Hence, the RBI circular is “disproportionate” with an otherwise consistent stand taken by the central bank that VCs were not prohibited in the country.
3. Besides, the court found that the RBI did not consider the availability of alternatives before issuing the circular.
4. Besides, the court referred to the Centre’s failure to introduce an official digital rupee despite two draft Bills and several committees.

What are Cryptocurrencies?
Cryptocurrencies are digital currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank.
Examples: Bitcoin, Ethereum etc.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Various cryptocurrencies.
2. Cryptocurrencies launched by various countries.
3. What is Blockchain technology?
Mains Link: What are Cryptocurrencies? Why there is a need for regulation? Discuss.

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. “Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)” scheme:

Context:
The scheme was recently reviewed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

ACROSS Scheme:
● ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
● It addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc.
● Each of these aspects is incorporated as nine sub-schemes under the umbrella scheme “ACROSS” and is implemented in an integrated.

Benefits of the Scheme:
● The scheme will provide improved weather, climate and ocean forecast and services, thereby ensuring transfer of commensurate benefits to the various services.
● It will also provide a sizable number of scientific and technical staff along with requisite administrative support, thereby generating employment.
● To ensure last-mile connectivity of the weather based services to the end-user, a large number of agencies like the Krishi Vigyan Kendras of ICAR, Universities and local municipalities are roped in thus generating employment opportunities to many people.

2. Flue Gas Desulphurization:

Context:
The Ministry of Power has proposed pushing back deadlines for adoption of new emission norms by coal fired power plants, saying “an unworkable time schedule” would burden utilities and lead to an increase in power tariffs.

Details:
● The Centre had initially set a 2017 deadline for thermal power plants to comply with emissions standards for installing Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) units that cut emissions of toxic sulphur dioxide.
● That was later changed to varying deadlines for different regions ending in 2022. Under the latest proposal, no new dates have been set.
● The target should be to maintain uniform ambient air quality across the country and not uniform emission norms for thermal power plants.

What is flue gas desulphurisation?
● Removal of Sulfur Dioxide is called as Flue-gas Desulphurization (FGD).
● It seeks to remove gaseous pollutants viz. SO2 from exhaust flue gases generated in furnaces, boilers, and other industrial processes due to thermal processing, treatment, and combustion.

Common methods used:
1. Wet scrubbing using a slurry of alkaline sorbent, usually limestone or lime, or seawater to scrub gases;
2. Spray-dry scrubbing using similar sorbent slurries;
3. Wet sulfuric acid process recovering sulfur in the form of commercial quality sulfuric acid;
4. SNOX Flue gas desulfurization removes sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulates from flue gases;
5. Dry sorbent injection systems that introduce powdered hydrated lime (or other sorbent material) into exhaust ducts to eliminate SO2 and SO3 from process emissions.

InstaLinks:

3. What is SO2? How is it produced?

Prelims Link:
1. What is flue gas desulphurisation?

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GQH84US74.1&imageview=0.

3. Asian Waterbird Census:

Context:
The two-day Asian Waterbird Census-2020 commenced in Andhra Pradesh.

About AWC:
- Asian Waterbird Census is an annual event in which thousands of volunteers across Asia and Australasia count waterbirds in the wetlands of their country.
- This event happens every January.
- This event is coordinated by wetlands International and forms part of global waterbird monitoring programme called the International Waterbird Census (IWC).
- It was started in the year 1987.
- Its main focus is to monitor the status of waterbirds and the wetlands.
- In India, the AWC is annually coordinated by the Bombay Natural history Society (BNHS) and Wetlands International.

What are waterbirds?
According to Wetlands International (WI), waterbirds are defined as species of birds that are ecologically dependent on wetlands. These birds are considered to be an important health indicator of wetlands of a region.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G3A85337T.1&imageview=0.

4. Why forest fires are common in Himachal Pradesh?

Context:
Himachal Pradesh frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions. Recently, a forest fire which started near Kullu raged for several days before being brought under control. Forest fires were also reported in Shimla and other parts of the state.

What is the forest cover of Himachal Pradesh?
Although two-thirds of the total geographical area of Himachal Pradesh is legally classified as forest area, much of this area is permanently under snow, glaciers, cold desert or alpine meadows and is above the tree line.
- As per the Forest Survey of India, the effective forest cover is around 28 percent of the total area which amounts to 15,434 square kilometres.
- Chir Pine, Deodar, Oak, Kail, Fir and Spruce are some of the common trees found here.

How fire prone are these forests?
Except for periods of precipitation in monsoon and winter, the forests remain vulnerable to wildfries.
- In the summer season, forest fires occur frequently in the low and middle hills of the state, where forests of Chir Pine are common.
- During the post-monsoon season and in winters, forest fires are also reported in higher areas, including parts of Shimla, Kullu, Chamba, Kangra and Mandi districts, where they usually occur in grasslands.

Causes of the fire
**Natural causes** such as lightning or rubbing of dry bamboos with each other can sometimes result in fires, but forest officials maintain that **almost all forest fires can be attributed to human factors.**

- Setting up of temporary hearth to cook food by the herdsman and minor forest produce gatherer may **leave behind a smouldering fire,** it can develop into a forest fire.
- Also, when people **burn their fields to clear them of stubble,** dry grass or undergrowth, the fire sometimes spreads to the adjoining forest.
- A spark can also be produced when dry pine needles or leaves fall on an **electric pole.**

**What is done to prevent and control forest fires?**
To prevent and control forest fires the following can be done:

1. Forecasting fire-prone days using meteorological data,
2. Clearing camping sites of dried biomass,
3. Early burning of dry litter on the forest floor,
4. Growing strips of fire-hardy plant species within the forest, and
5. Creating fire lines in the forests are some of the methods to prevent fires (fire lines are strips in the forest kept clear of vegetation to prevent the fire from spreading).

**Way forward:**
**In 1999, the state government notified forest fire rules** which restrict or regulate certain activities in and around forest areas such as lighting a fire, burning agricultural stubble or undergrowth (ghasnis) and stacking inflammable forest produce such as dried leaves and firewood.

For such activities, the state forest department has a fire protection and fire control unit.

**InstaLinks:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prelims Link</th>
<th>Mains Link</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Forest cover in Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>5. Tree species found in Himachal</td>
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<td>2. Causes of forest fire</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Measures to to prevent and control wildfire</td>
<td>Forest fires are a recurrent annual phenomenon in the state. Discuss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Damages done by forest fires</td>
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</tbody>
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5. **SC seeks status report on river water quality:**

**Context:**
The Supreme Court has sought a status report from the National Green Tribunal-appointed **River Yamuna Monitoring Committee** about its recommendations to improve the quality of water and the extent to which the States have implemented their suggestions.

- The Committee was led by former Delhi Chief Secretary **Shailaja Chandra.**

**Background:**
The Supreme Court had, on January 13, taken suo motu cognisance of the contamination of rivers by sewage effluents through lapses committed by municipalities, saying “open surface water resources including rivers are the lifeline of human civilisation”.

**Why is Yamuna so polluted?**

1. **The sewage treatment plants** of Delhi are major contributors of the Pollutants being discharged in the river.
2. **Pollutants discharge** from different types of industry is also a major issue.
3. **Agriculture activities** along the banks of the river in Delhi contributes to river pollution.
4. **Agricultural waste and pesticide discharge** from the Haryana field also contributes to the pollution.
5. **The low volume of water flow** in the river causes the pollutants to accumulate and raise the pollution level.

**About Yamuna River:**

- The river Yamuna is a major tributary of river Ganges.
- Originates from the Yamunotri glacier near Bandarpooch peaks in the Mussoorie range of the lower Himalayas in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
- It meets the Ganges at the Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh after flowing through Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi.
- Tributaries: Chambal, Sindh, Betwa and Ken.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. River Yamuna Flows through how many states and UTs?
2. Tributaries of Yamuna.
3. Acceptable maximum limit of ammonia in drinking water?
4. Permissible level of Sulfate.
5. Desirable limit of hardness of water.
6. The desirable level of faecal coliform.

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**6. SC seeks status report on river water quality:**

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**7. Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):**

**Context:**
The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in NCR and adjoining areas has begun the process of setting up a Decision Support System (DSS) having a web, GIS and multi-model based operational and planning decision support tool.

- This tool will help immensely in capturing the static and dynamic features of the emissions from various sources.

**About the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):**
The Commission for Air Quality Management was formed by an ordinance in October 2020, the “Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance 2020”.

**Composition:**
**Chairperson:** To be chaired by a government official of the rank of Secretary or Chief Secretary.

**It will be a permanent body and will have over 20 members.**
- The Commission will be a statutory authority.
- The Commission will supersede bodies such as the central and state pollution control boards of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan.
- It will have the powers to issue directions to these state governments on issues pertaining to air pollution.

**Jurisdiction:**
**Exclusive jurisdiction** over the NCR, including areas in Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, in matters of air pollution, and will be working along with CPCB and ISRO, apart from the respective state governments.

**Will this new body also have penal powers?**
Yes, the Commission will have some teeth. If its directions are contravened, through say, the setting up of an industrial unit in a restricted area, the Commission will have the power to impose a fine of up to Rs 1 crore and imprisonment of up to 5 years.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. About EPCA.
2. About NGT.
3. About CPCB.

**8. Birds of the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve- a publication by ZSI:**

**Context:**
The report was recently published by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI).
- The report not only documents the avifauna of the Sunderbans, but also serves as a comprehensive photographic field guide, with detailed distribution and locality data for all the species from the region.

**Key Findings:**
1. The Indian Sunderbans, which is part of the largest mangrove forest in the world, is home to 428 species of birds. This means that one in every three birds in the country is found in the unique ecosystem.
2. Some birds, like the masked finfoot and the Buffy fish owl, are recorded only from the Sunderbans.
3. The area is home to nine out of 12 species of kingfishers found in the country as well rare species such as the Goliath heron and the spoon-billed sandpiper.

**About Indian Sundarbans:**
- Covers 4,200 sq. km and includes the Sunderban Tiger Reserve of 2,585 sq. km — home to about 96 royal Bengal tigers (as per the last census in 2020).
- It is a world heritage site and a Ramsar site (a wetland site designated to be of international importance).

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It is also home to a large number of “rare and globally threatened species, such as the critically endangered northern river terrapin (Batagur baska), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin (Orcaella brevirostris), and the vulnerable fishing cat (Prionailurus viverrinus).”

Two of the world’s four horseshoe crab species, and eight of India’s 12 species of kingfisher are also found here. Recent studies claim that the Indian Sundarban is home to 2,626 faunal species and 90% of the country’s mangrove varieties.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Where is Sundarbans?
2. What are mangroves?
3. Flora and fauna in the regions.
4. Recent cyclones in BoB region.

Mains Link:
Discuss the impact of cyclone amphan on Mangroves in India.
Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH872DIS.1&imageview=0

9. Conservationist joins panel on elephant corridor case:

Context:
The Supreme Court has appointed conservationist Nandita Hazarika as Member of a Technical Committee constituted by it on October 14 last year to hear complaints by land owners against the action taken by the Nilgris Collector, which included sealing of their buildings and allegations about the “arbitrary variance in acreage of the elephant corridor.”

What’s the issue?
1. On October 14, the court upheld the Tamil Nadu government’s authority to notify an ‘elephant corridor’ and protect the migratory path of the animals through the Nilgiri biosphere reserve.
2. The court had said it was the State’s duty to protect a “keystone species” such as elephants, immensely important to the environment.

Location of the corridor:
1. The corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau, which connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats and sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity.
2. It has the Nilgiri Hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar River Valley on its north-eastern side. The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water.

What are Elephant Corridors?
Elephant corridors are narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats of elephants. Elephant corridors are crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons. So fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to preserve migratory corridors.

Why protect elephant corridors?
1. The movement of elephants is essential to ensure that their populations are genetically viable. It also helps to regenerate forests on which other species, including tigers, depend.
2. Nearly 40% of elephant reserves are vulnerable, as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries. Also, the migration corridors have no specific legal protection.
3. Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking animals’ paths. Animals are thus forced to seek alternative routes resulting in increased elephant-human conflict.
4. Weak regulation of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats. It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.

Efforts at all- India level:
- ‘Gaj Yatra’, a nationwide campaign to protect elephants, was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day in 2017.
- The campaign is planned to cover 12 elephant range states.
- The campaign aims to create awareness about elephant corridors to encourage free movement in their habitat.

Forest Ministry guide to managing human-elephant conflict (Best Practices):
1. Retaining elephants in their natural habitats by creating water sources and management of forest fires.
2. Elephant Proof trenches in Tamil Nadu.
3. Hanging fences and rubble walls in Karnataka.
4. Use of chilli smoke in north Bengal and playing the sound of bees or carnivores in Assam.
5. Use of technology: Individual identification, monitoring of elephants in south Bengal and sending SMS alerts to warn of elephant presence.

Efforts by Private Organizations in this regard:
- Asian Elephant Alliance, an umbrella initiative by five NGOs, had come together to secure 96 out of the 101 existing corridors used by elephants across 12 States in India.
- NGOs Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare, IUCN Netherlands and World Land Trust have teamed up with Wildlife Trust of India’s (WTI) in the alliance.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. IUCN conservation status of Asian Elephant.
2. Elephant corridors in India.
3. Calving period of elephants.
4. Heritage animal of India.
5. About Gaj Yatra.
6. Elephant herd is led by?

Mains Link:
Discuss the measures suggested by the Environment Ministry to manage man-elephant conflicts.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GPT87CCM0.1&imageview=0.

Topics: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

1. UAPA:
Context:
Peoples Democratic Party leader Waheed Para has been booked under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

About the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:
Passed in 1967, the law aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
The Act assigns **absolute power to the central government**, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.

- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.

**Key points:**
Under UAPA, **both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.**

- It will be **applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.**
- Under the UAPA, **the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.**

As per amendments of 2019:
- The Act empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.
- It also included the provision of **designating an individual as a terrorist.**

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Definition of unlawful activity.
2. Powers of Centre under the act.
3. Is judicial review applicable in such cases?
5. Can foreign nationals be charged under the act?

**Mains Link:**
Do you agree that the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act could prove catastrophic for fundamental rights? Is sacrificing liberty for national security justified? Discuss and provide for your opinion.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GUU85NF4L.1&imageview=0.

**Topics:** Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

1. **Economic Impact due to Internet shutdowns; over double of 20 others’:**

**Context:**
Findings of a report by the UK-based privacy and security research firm **Top10VPN** over on economic impact due to internet shutdowns.

**Key Findings:**
- India suffered the biggest economic impact in the world in 2020 due to Internet shutdowns.
- Up to 8,927 hours and $2.8 billion losses.

**Internet shutdown:**
Internet shutdown is an intentional disruption of Internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information.

**Areas that are affected:**
- As in previous years, India continued to restrict Internet access more than any other country over 75 times in 2020.
- The majority of these short blackouts were highly targeted, affecting groups of villages or individual city districts, and so were not included in this report, which focuses on larger region-wide shutdowns.

**Restrictions in J&K:**
1. The report made a separate mention of the extended curbs on Internet use in Kashmir, with suspension of services lasting from August 2019 when J&K’s special status was scrapped to March 2020 and still remaining severely throttled, with only 2G accesses available.

2. Calling it the longest Internet shutdown in a democracy the report says, “The restrictions have negatively impacted the distribution of medicine, businesses and schools.”

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Section 144 of the CrPC.
4. Anuradha Bhasin case (2020) is related to?

Mains Link:
Discuss about the various impacts of internet suspension in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

2. RBI forms working group on digital lending:
Context:
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a working group on digital lending — including online platforms and mobile apps — to study all aspects of digital lending activities in the regulated financial sector as well as by unregulated players.

- This is to ensure that an appropriate regulatory approach is put in place.

The working group will:
1. Evaluate digital lending activities and assess the penetration and standards of outsourced digital lending activities in RBI regulated entities.
2. Identify the risks posed by unregulated digital lending to financial stability, regulated entities and consumers.
3. Suggest regulatory changes to promote orderly growth of digital lending.
4. Recommend measures for expansion of specific regulatory or statutory perimeter and suggest the role of various regulatory and government agencies.
5. Recommend a robust fair practices code for digital lending players.

Benefits of digital lending:
- Digital lending has the potential to make access to financial products and services more fair, efficient and inclusive.
- From a peripheral supporting role a few years ago, FinTech-led innovation is now at the core of the design, pricing and delivery of financial products and services.

Need of the hour:
A balanced approach needs to be followed so that the regulatory framework supports innovation while ensuring data security, privacy, confidentiality and consumer protection.
What are the issues wrt digital lending apps?
1. They attract borrowers with promise of loans in a quick and hassle-free manner.
2. But, Excessive rates of interest and additional hidden charges are demanded from borrowers.
3. Such platforms adopt unacceptable and high-handed recovery methods.
4. They misuse agreements to access data on the mobile phones of the borrowers.

3. FB official says he has right to remain silent:

Context:
Facebook India Head Ajit Mohan recently told the Supreme Court that the summons issued to him by the Delhi Legislative Assembly's Peace and Harmony Committee, which is probing the Delhi riots of February 2020, was "politically motivated".

What's the issue?
- Invoking his right to silence, Ajit Mohan said he will not appear before the Committee which is examining the role of Facebook in failing to curb hate speech in connection with the riots.
- He claimed that the inquiry by the Committee will soon evolve into what is hate speech and what is permissible speech, which would be very polarising subjects.

What is Hate Speech?
Hate speech is an incitement to hatred against a particular group of persons marginalized by their religious belief, sexual orientation, gender, and so on.
- The Law Commission, in its 267th report on hate speech, said such utterances have the potential to provoke individuals and society to commit acts of terrorism, genocide, and ethnic cleansing.

Why Hate Speech must be curbed?
1. Internal Security: The Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 was triggered by a fake video that incited communal passions.
2. Igniting extremist sentiments.
3. Mob lynching.

Measures:
1. The world’s biggest social media companies, including Facebook, Google, Twitter and ByteDance, are exploring an industry-wide alliance to curb fake news on their platforms in India.
2. Election Commission of India must tie up with tech companies to identify the creator of such news.
3. Educating the end-users.
4. The government should bring out a policy framework on the possible harm due to the internet messaging platforms to engage at a deeper level.
5. Imposing hefty fines, like in Germany the Social media companies face fines of up to €50m if they persistently fail to remove illegal content from their sites.

Mains Link:
What is Hate speech? How it should be curbed? Discuss.
Link:https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GS386NTPL.1&imageview=0.

4. New Whatsapp Policy and related Privacy issues:

Context:
Recently, WhatsApp has updated its privacy policy.
- As per the new policy, whatsapp may now share information of any of its users with its family of companies including Facebook.
This new update has caused a lot of concern over the privacy of the people that use this application.

**Key Features of the Policy:**
1. **Information Sharing with Third Party Services:** When users rely on third-party services or other Facebook Company Products that are integrated with our Services, those third-party services may receive information about you or others share with them.
2. **Hardware Information:** WhatsApp collects information from devices such as battery level, signal strength, app version, browser information, mobile network, connection information (including phone number, mobile operator or ISP) among others.
3. **Deleting the Account:** If someone only deletes the WhatsApp app from their device without using the in-app delete my account feature, then that user’s information will remain stored with the platform.
4. **Data Storage:** WhatsApp mentions that it uses Facebook’s global infrastructure and data centers including those in the United States to store user data. It also states that the data in some cases will be transferred to the United States or other parts where Facebook’s affiliate companies are based.
5. **Location:** Even if a user does not use their location-relation features, WhatsApp collects IP addresses and other information like phone number area codes to estimate your general location (city, country).
6. **Payment Services:** WhatsApp says that if anyone uses their payments services they will process additional information about you, including payment account and transaction information.

**Issues and concerns:**
1. The new WhatsApp policy contradicts the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee report, which forms the basis of the Data Protection Bill 2019.
2. The principle of Data Localisation, which aims to put curbs on the transfer of personal data outside the country, may come in conflict with WhatsApp’s new privacy policy.
3. With the updated privacy policy, WhatsApp can now share one’s metadata, essentially everything beyond the conversation’s actual text.
4. If users disagree with the messaging platform’s updated privacy policy, they will have to quit WhatsApp when the new terms of service are set to come into effect.

**Conclusion:**
As the Supreme court in K. Puttaswamy’s judgment held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, the Whatsapp new policy is yet another reason why India needs data protection law.

Link: [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G5386NP1O.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=G5386NP1O.1&imageview=0)

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**5. Indian Telegraph Act, 1885:**

**Context:** Following violent protests, the Union Home Ministry has issued orders to suspend Internet in some areas in Delhi under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety Rules 2017) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885.

- The order under this act had been issued only twice before — in Delhi on December 19 and 20, 2019, at the height of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

**Implications:** The rules framed in 2017 empower the Union Home Secretary and a State’s Home Secretary to pass directions to suspend the telecom services, including the Internet, “due to public emergency or public safety.”

**About the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885**
- It governs the use of wired and wireless telegraphy, telephones, teletype, radio communications and digital data communications.
- It gives the Government of India exclusive jurisdiction and privileges for establishing, maintaining, operating, licensing and oversight of all forms of wired and wireless communications within Indian territory.

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It also authorizes government law enforcement agencies to monitor/intercept communications and tap phone lines under conditions defined within the Indian Constitution.

Section 5(2) of the act allows central and state governments to prevent the transmission of messaging during a “public emergency or in the interest of public safety”, or “in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state”.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the Indian Telegraphs Act.
2. Section 5(2).
3. Powers of centre and the states under the act.

Mains Link:
Discuss the issues associated with Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraphs Act of 1885.

6. Official Secrets Act:

Context:
Complaints have been filed with the Mumbai Commissioner of Police demanding action against Republic TV Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami under the Official Secrets Act.

Background:
Maharashtra Congress demanded for the arrest of Republic TV’s editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami by registering cases for sedition for leak of sensitive information related to national security through WhatsApp chat.

About the Official Secrets Act:
- Originally enacted during the time of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905.
- One of the main purposes of the Act was to muzzle the voice of nationalist publications.
- The Act replaced the earlier Act, and was extended to all matters of secrecy and confidentiality in governance in the country.

It broadly deals with two aspects:
1. Spying or espionage, covered under Section 3.
2. Disclosure of other secret information of the government, under Section 5.

Is “secret information” defined?
The Act does not say what a “secret” document is. It is the government’s discretion to decide what falls under the ambit of a “secret” document.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
2. Key provisions.

Mains Link:
4. Official Secrets Act vs RTI.

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) agreement:

Context:
Assam is celebrating the first anniversary of the historic Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) agreement.
- The BTAD district is currently spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri.

Overview of the agreement signed:
- As per the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos that were presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.
• The memorandum of settlement says that the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.
• The families of those killed during the Bodo movement would get Rs. 5 lakh each.
• A Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 Crore would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.
• A committee will decide the exclusion and inclusion of new areas in the BTAD. Subsequent to this alteration, the total number of Assembly seats will go up to 60, from the existing 40.

Significance:
The signing of the agreement ended the 50-year-old Bodo crisis.
• Around 1500 cadres of NDFB(P), NDFB(RD) and NDFB(S) will be rehabilitated by Centre and Assam Government. They will be assimilated in the mainstream now.
• After the agreement, the NDFB factions will leave the path of violence, surrender their weapons and disband their armed organisations within a month of signing the deal.

Who are Bodos?
• Bodos are the single largest tribal community in Assam, making up over 5-6 per cent of the state’s population. They have controlled large parts of Assam in the past.
• The four districts in Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), are home to several ethnic groups.

The Bodoland dispute:
• In 1966-67, the demand for a separate state called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit.
• In 1987, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) renewed the demand. “Divide Assam fifty-fifty”, was a call given by the ABSU’s then leader, Upendra Nath Brahma.
• The unrest was a fallout of the Assam Movement (1979-85), whose culmination — the Assam Accord — addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the “Assamese people”, leading the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.

InstaLinks:
3. Highlights of BTR agreement.

Prelims Link:
1. Who are bodos?
2. What is Bodoland?

Mains Link:
Discuss the significance of BTR Agreement.

Topics: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

1. Pakistan risks FATF blacklisting:
Context:
Pakistan might be pushed into the Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) 'black list' next month as it continues to finance and tolerate terrorist organisations.
• According to a report, terrorist organisations, such as Jamaar-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM), continue to operate with impunity in Pakistan.

What is FATF Blacklist?
It is a list of countries that the intra-governmental organisation considers non-cooperative in the global effort to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Background:
• In October, the FATF decided that Pakistan will continue to be on its greylist and asked it to continue to work on implementing an action plan to address its strategic deficiencies.
Pakistan is on the FATF's grey list since June 2018 and the government was given a final warning in February 2020 to complete the 27 action points by June in the same year.

The FATF extended the June deadline to September due to the spread of coronavirus that disrupted the FATF plenary meetings.

About FATF:
- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.
- It is a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.
- The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.

Roles and functions:
- Initially it was established to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- In April 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. G7 vs G8 vs G20.
2. Black vs Grey list.
3. Are FATF’s decisions binding on member countries?
4. Who heads the FATF?
5. Where is its secretariat?

Mains Link:
What is the mandate and objectives of the Financial Action Task Force? Discuss.
1. SOP for immunisation emergencies issued:

**Context:**
The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Immunisation Division) has issued a Standard Operating Procedure for the Ministry of Home Affairs in case of Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI).

**Background:**
Emergency Use Authorisation or Accelerated Approval has been granted by the National Regulator for two vaccines (Covishield and Covaxin) which have established safety & immunogenicity against covid-19.

**Standard Operating Procedure:**
The SOP is meant to help the investigator ensure appropriate handling of the vaccine, victim assistance as well as timely and effective law enforcement.

- In case of an AEFI, the officer must ensure proper handling of the vaccine and diluent as evidence, and make sure the samples are preserved maintaining proper cold chain.
- The police officer must also ensure that the AEFI victims, and any witnesses, are provided assistance and appropriate protection, care and attention.
- The SOP also provides for investigation/interrogation of the vaccinator, if needed.
- This will help in monitoring immunisation safety, correcting unsafe immunisation practices, reducing negative impact of the event on health and contributing to the quality of immunisation.
- Documentation and completed requisition form for transportation of AEFI samples to a laboratory must have same official stamp.
- The seal will ensure the samples and details sent to the lab are not tampered with during transportation.
- While probing serious AEFI, which has resulted in death, the police must “always keep the perspective that the event might be coincidental and/or reaction to the vaccine and it may not be criminal negligence of the vaccinator and/or other workers, for which causality assessment report by an expert is needed”.

Link: [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GN585JVMG.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GN585JVMG.1&imageview=0).

2. Odisha sisters work for MGNREGS to pay fees:

- Two of Ms. Behera’s sisters, who are B. Tech and Class XII students under 19 years of age, have also been working to earn ₹207 each a day in Odisha under MGNREGA.
- They belong to a Dalit family in Goradipidha village under Chainpur panchayat.
- They are desperate to arrange funds to help Ms. Behera, the eldest of five sisters, finish her higher studies.

Link: [https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH872DQR.1&imageview=0](https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GBH872DQR.1&imageview=0).
FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. SAHAYAK-NG:
- SAHAYAK-NG is India’s first indigenously designed and developed Air Droppable Container.
- It is a GPS aided air dropped container with the capacity to carry a payload of up to 50 kg and can be dropped from a heavy aircraft.
- The successful maiden test was conducted by the DRDO along with the Indian Navy.

2. Argentina’s legalisation of abortion:
Argentina’s has legalised abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy.
- Prior to this, women were forced to turn to illegal and unsafe procedures because abortion was against the law in Argentina.
- For women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the scope of access to safe medical procedures for abortion was even narrower.

3. Core Sector:
- The eight core sector industries include coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity
- The eight core industries comprise nearly 40% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- The eight Core Industries in decreasing order of their weightage: Refinery Products> Electricity >Steel > Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.

4. Mannathu Padmanabhan:
- He was an Indian social reformer and freedom fighter from Kerala.
- He lived from January 2, 1878 - February 25, 1970.
- He took part in anti-untouchability agitations and advocated opening temples for people of all castes.
- He also participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha.
- He is also known for his founding of the Nair Service Society (NSS).
Why in News?
Birth anniversary.

5. Pangolin:
Context:
The Odisha Forest department has stressed the need for stricter monitoring of social media platforms to check pangolin poaching and trading.

Key Facts:
Pangolin is the only scaly mammal on the planet.
According to CITES, it is also the most illegally traded vertebrate within its class (Mammalia).
Of the eight species of pangolin worldwide, two are found in India. They are Chinese pangolin, mostly found in northeast India and Indian pangolin.
- Chinese pangolin has been listed as “critically endangered”.
- Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata) has been listed as “endangered”.
It is also a Schedule I category protected animal, under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).
6. India's Arctic Expedition To Resume In June:
India embarked upon the Arctic research by launching first scientific expedition to Arctic in the first week of August, 2007, using the international research facility in the Spitsbergen Island of Norway.
- Subsequently, India has been sending scientific teams every summer and winter for carrying out studies in the Arctic, primarily in the fields of glaciology, hydrochemistry, microbiology, and atmospheric sciences.

Background:
India is also a signatory to the Antarctic Treaty and to the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection and has two research stations in Antarctica: Bharati (commissioned in 2012) and Maitri (since 1988). India has the Observer Status in the Arctic Council.

Released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- The weight of the school bags, as per the policy, should be 1.6 to 2.2 kg for students of Classes I and II, 1.7 to 2.5 kg for Classes III, IV and V, 2 to 3 kg for Classes VI and VII, 2.5 to 4 kg for Class VIII, 2.5 to 4.5 kg for Classes IX and X and 3.5 to 5 kg for Classes XI and XII.

8. Sagarmala Seaplane Services:
To be launched by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways.
- It will be launched under a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) framework through prospective airline operators.
- The project execution and implementation would be through the Sagarmala Development Company Ltd (SDCL), which is under the administrative control of the Ministry.

9. TRIFOOD Parks:
TRIFOOD Parks to be set up in Madhya Pradesh.
- It is a joint initiative of TRIFED (under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs) and the Ministry of Food Processing.
- TRIFOOD Parks are food processing centres aiming at promoting value addition to minor forest produce.
- It was launched under the Van Dhan Yojana in 2020.
- The parks procure raw materials from the Van Dhan Kendras and process them to be sold across the country through Tribes India outlets.
- The minimum support price for minor forest produce is fixed by the Tribal Affairs Ministry and it is revised every three years by a pricing cell constituted under the Ministry.

10. SEBI moots entry norms to set up stock exchanges:
The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has floated a discussion paper on review of ownership and governance norms to facilitate new entrants to set up stock exchanges and depositories, otherwise called as market infrastructure institutions (MIIs).
As per the key proposals:

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1. A resident promoter setting up an MII may hold up to 100% shareholding, which will be brought down to not more than (either 51% or 26%) in 10 years.
2. A foreign promoter from Financial Action Task Force FATF member jurisdictions setting up an MII may hold up to 49% shareholding, which shall be brought down to not more than (either 26% or 15%) in 10 years.
3. Foreign individuals or entities from other than FATF member jurisdictions may acquire or hold up to 10% in an MII.
4. Any person other than the promoter may acquire or hold less than 25% shareholding.

11. Magnetotelluric-MT survey:
The National Centre for Seismology (NCS) is conducting a unique geophysical (magnetotelluric-MT) survey in Delhi-NCR region to accurately assess potential seismic hazards.
- Its findings will help different user agencies for designing quake-resistant buildings, industrial units and structures such as hospitals and schools.

What is MT method?
Magnetotelluric (MT) is a geophysical method which uses natural time variation of the earth’s magnetic and electric fields to understand geological (underground) structure and processes. It’s quite a reliable technique.

12. Kamdhenu Gau-Vigyan Prachar-Prasar Exam:
- Announced by Rastriya Kamdhenu Aayog.
- The exam has been initiated for raising mass awareness about Indigenous cows among young students and all citizens.
- It will also help make study materials about cow science available.
- It will be conducted in four categories, primary, secondary, college and general public levels.
- The exam will be in Hindi, English and 12 regional languages.
- There will be no fee for taking the exam.

13. Toycathon-2021:
- This is a special kind of hackathon where students and teachers from schools and colleges, design experts, toy experts and start-ups will get together to crowd source ideas for developing toys and games that are based on Indian culture and ethos, local folklore and heroes, and Indian value systems.
- It is an inter-ministerial initiative. The participating agencies are the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Women & Child Development, the Ministry of Textiles, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, DPIIT, Ministry of MSME, Innovation Cell (Education Ministry) and the AICTE.

14. Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)
Bureau of Indian Standards celebrates its foundation day on 6th January 2021.
About BIS:
Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the National Standard Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- BIS was established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986 which came into effect on 23 December 1986.
- The Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016 made the BIS a National Standards Body. The BIS Act has been implemented since 12 October 2017.
- BIS is responsible for the harmonious development of the activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

15. Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO)
Recently, Raksha Mantri has launched the Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO). The NIIO is a three-tiered organisation.
- Naval Technology Acceleration Council (N-TAC) will bring together the twin aspects of innovation and indigenisation and provide apex level directives.
• A working group under the N-TAC will implement the projects.
• A Technology Development Acceleration Cell (TDAC) has also been created for induction of emerging disruptive technology in an accelerated time frame.
• The NIIO puts in place dedicated structures for the end users to interact with academia and industry towards fostering innovation and indigenisation for self-reliance in defence in keeping with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

16. Tripura govt's new scheme to offer jobs to next of kin of those lost in political violence:

• Under the New scheme, the state cabinet has decided to provide government jobs to the next of kin of those who lost their lives in political violence till March 2018.
• Under the scheme, government jobs will be provided to any one member of such families, provided they meet a set of requisite criteria.

17. National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI)

The National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) announced that it will offer a free IDN (Internationalized Domain Name) in any of their preferred 22 official Indian language.

• It will be available along with every IN domain booked by the registrant.
• This offer has been created to stimulate the adoption of भारत (IDN) domain name and proliferation of local language content.

About NIXI

National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) is a not for profit organization working since 2003 for spreading the internet technology to the citizens of India.

18. What is CoWIN?

CoWIN is essentially an extension of eVIN.

It is a cloud-based IT solution for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Covid-19 vaccination in India.

19. Vanadium:

Context:

Promising concentrations of vanadium found in the palaeo-proterozoic carbonaceous phyllite rocks in the Depo and Tamang areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh. This was the first report of a primary deposit of vanadium in India.

Key Points:

1. Vanadium is a high value metal used in strengthening steel and titanium.
2. India consumed 4% of about 84,000 tonnes of vanadium produced across the globe in 2017. China, which produces 57% of the world’s vanadium, consumed 44% of the metal.
3. The largest deposits are in China, followed by Russia and South Africa.

20. Dzukou Valley:

Why in News?

The wildfire at Dzukou Valley straddling the Manipur-Nagaland border has been doused after it raged for two weeks.

About Dzukou Valley:

• Located at the borders of the states of Nagaland and Manipur.
• Famous for the Dzüko Lily and it is found only in this valley.
• The Asian Highway 1 and also the NH-2 passes through its foothills.

21. Khadi Prakritik paint:

• It is India’s first cow dung paint - developed by Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
● It is an eco-friendly, non-toxic paint.
● It is a first-of-its-kind product, with anti-fungal, anti-bacterial properties.
● Based on cow dung as its main ingredient, the paint is cost-effective and odorless, and has been certified by Bureau of Indian Standards.
● The paint is free from heavy metals like lead, mercury, chromium, arsenic, cadmium and others.

22. Makaravilakku festival season:
Makaravilakku is an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, at the shrine of Sabarimala. The festival includes the Thiruvabharanam (sacred ornaments of Ayyappan) procession and a congregation at the hill shrine of Sabarimala.

23. Tejas:
● Tejas is a single-seat, single-jet engine, multirole light fighter.
● It is the smallest and lightest multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft in the Indian Air Force.
● It has been designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
● It is designed to carry a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided, and standoff weaponry.

24. Spintronics:
● Spintronic, also known as spin electronics, is the study of the intrinsic spin of the electron and its associated magnetic moment, in addition to its fundamental electronic charge, in solid-state devices.
● A phenomenon called the ‘Rashba effect’, which consists of splitting of spin-bands in an electronic system, might play a key role in spintronic devices.

The Rashba effect, or Rashba-Dresselhaus effect, is a momentum-dependent splitting of spin bands in two-dimensional condensed matter systems.

25. ‘Prarambh: Startup India International Summit’
The Summit is being organized by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
● The Summit marks the fifth anniversary of the Startup India initiative, launched on 16 January, 2016.
● The Summit will be the largest startup confluence organised by the Government of India since the launch of the Startup India initiative.

26. India’s first indigenously Developed 9mm Machine Pistol
India’s first indigenous 9mm Machine Pistol has been jointly developed by DRDO and Indian Army. The machine pistol fires the in-service 9mm ammunition and sports an upper receiver made from aircraft grade aluminium and lower receiver from carbon fibre.
● 3D Printing process has been used in designing and prototyping of various parts including trigger components made by metal 3D printing.
● The weapon is named “Asmi” meaning “Pride”, “Self-Respect” & “Hard Work”.
● The weapon has huge potential in Armed forces as personal weapon for heavy weapon detachments, commanders and counter terrorism operations etc.

27. Desert Knight-21:
● It is a bilateral Air exercise held between Indian Air Force and French Air and Space Force (Armée de l’Air et de l’Espace).
● The latest edition will be held at Air Force Station Jodhpur.

28. Rakshita:
● It is a bike-based casualty transport emergency vehicle.
Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Delhi based DRDO laboratory, handed over Rakshita to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

The bike ambulance will help in overcoming the problems faced by Indian security forces and emergency healthcare providers.

29. **Kevadia:**
Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently flagged off eight trains connecting Kevadia in Gujarat, where the Statue of Unity is located, to different regions of the country.

30. **Rakshita:**
- It is a bike-based casualty transport emergency vehicle.
- Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Delhi based DRDO laboratory, handed over Rakshita to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).
- The bike ambulance will help in overcoming the problems faced by Indian security forces and emergency healthcare providers.

31. **Tsari Chu river:**
- Satellite image shows China built new village in Arunachal.
- The settlements are situated on the banks of Tsari Chu river in Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal.
- The village lies south of the McMahon Line. The McMahon Line demarcates between Tibet and India’s Northeast, which is disputed by China.

32. **Indian star tortoise:**
- Found across the Indian sub-continent, more specifically, in the Central and Southern parts of India, in West Pakistan and in Sri Lanka.
- Protected under Schedule IV of Wild Life Protection Act 1972.
- Convention on International Trade in Species (CITES): Appendix I
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable.

33. **Semeru volcano:**
- Erupted recently.
- Located in Indonesia’s East Java province.
- It is the highest volcano in Java and one of the most active.
34. Kamalam:
   - The Gujarat government has decided to rename the dragon fruit as ‘kamalam’.
   - The word ‘kamalam’ is a Sanskrit word and the shape of the fruit does resemble the lotus flower.

35. Houthi:
U.S. to review Houthi terrorist label.
   - The Houthis were formed by Zaidite scholars, a Shia sect who have lived in Yemen for over a thousand years and also ruled the country for several centuries.
   - Their rebellion against the Saudi-backed government began about a decade ago.

36. What Is the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR)?
SBI does deals using SOFR as benchmark.
   - SOFR is a secured interbank overnight interest rate and reference rate.
   - It is based on the Treasury repurchase market (repo), Treasuries loaned or borrowed overnight.

37. Tripura CM promoting the Risa:
   - Risa is a customary hand woven cloth used by Tripura’s indigenous tribal communities.
   - It is one of the three parts of customary Tripura female attire, the other two being the Rignai and Rikutu.
   - The Risa is used as a head gear, stole and female upper cloth or presented to honour a distinguished recipient.

38. New US President:
   - Joe Biden recently took oath as 46th US President and Kamala Harris as 49th Vice President.
   - Biden will be the oldest president in American history.
   - Harris will be the first female, and first Indian American vice president of the United States.
   - A newly elected or re-elected president of the United States begins their four-year term of office at noon on the twentieth day of January following the election.
   - While the Constitution does not mandate that anyone in particular should administer the presidential oath of office, it has been administered by the Chief Justice.

39. Angiogenesis:
   - Angiogenesis is the physiological process through which new blood vessels form from pre-existing vessels, formed in the earlier stage of vasculogenesis.
   - It is a normal and vital process in growth and development, as well as in wound healing and in the formation of granulation tissue.
   - However, it is also a fundamental step in the transition of tumours from a benign state to a malignant one. Deregulation of angiogenesis is the main reason for tumour growth and progression.

40. Smart cameras to help women in distress:
The police in the Uttar Pradesh capital are set to install smart cameras in public places that will automatically click the pictures of women in distress situations by reading their facial expressions and alert the nearest police vehicle.

41. Exercise Kavach:
   - It is a Joint Military exercise involving assets of Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and Indian Coast Guard.
● It is being conducted in the coming week under the aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), the only Joint Forces Command of the country.
● The tri-services exercise aims to fine tune joint war-fighting capabilities and SOPs towards enhancing operational synergy.

42. Shramshakti Digital Data Solution:
● To be launched jointly by Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Goa Government.
● It is a national migration support portal aimed at the smooth functioning of national and state level programmes for migrant workers.

43. Smart Anti Airfield Weapon:
● DRDO has successfully conducted captive and release trial of indigenously developed Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) from Hawk-I of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) off the Odisha coast.
● Smart Anti Airfield Weapon is a 125 Kg class smart weapon, capable of engaging ground enemy airfield assets such as radars, bunkers, taxi tracks, and runways, etc. up to a range of 100 kms.

44. Spices Board:
● Spices Board is a body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
● It was constituted in 1987 under the Spices Board Act, 1986 by merging the Cardamom Board and the Spices Export Promotion Council.
● The Spices Board is one of the five commodity boards functioning under the Commerce Ministry.
● It is an autonomous body responsible for the promotion of the 52 scheduled spices and the development of small and large cardamom.

45. SpaceX launches 143 satellites, breaks world space record:
● SpaceX recently broke a world space record by launching 143 satellites in quick succession, beating India’s record of deploying 104 satellites in February 2017.
● The launch vehicle for the SpaceX record-breaking flight was the Falcon 9 and the mission was designated as Transporter-1.
● The launch marks the first dedicated mission for SpaceX’s SmallSat Rideshare Program, which enables small-satellite customers to book a ride to orbit with SpaceX directly.

46. Two new ant species discovered:
Two new species of a rare ant genus have been discovered in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. They differ from others of the same genus on the basis of the number of antennal segments.
The new species are:
1. Ooceraea Joshii:
   Found in the Periyar Tiger Reserve of Kerala.
   Named after Ooceraea Joshii in honour of professor Amitabh Joshi — a distinguished evolutionary biologist from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR).
2. Ooceraea decamera:
   Decamera refers to the ten-segmented antennal count. Discovered from Alagarkoil in Madurai.

47. National Voters’ Day (NVD):
● 11th National Voters’ Day (NVD) to be celebrated on 25th January 2021.
● Theme for this year’s NVD is ‘Making Our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed’.
● The National Voters’ Day has been celebrated on January 25 every year since 2011, all across the country to mark the foundation day of Election Commission of India, i.e. 25th January 1950.
48. Padma Awards:

Context:
7 personalities have been awarded the Padma Vibhushan, 10 named for the Padma Bhushan and 102 named for Padma Shri.

About Padma Awards:
- The Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian honours of India announced annually on the eve of Republic Day.
- The award seeks to recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved.
- The Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year.

The Awards are given in three categories:
1. Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service).
2. Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher order).
3. Padma Shri (distinguished service).

49. Akash-NG Missile:
- DRDO conducted the successful maiden launch of Akash-NG (New Generation) Missile from Integrated Test Range off the coast of Odisha.
- Akash-NG is a new generation Surface to Air Missile meant for use by Indian Air Force with an aim of intercepting high maneuvering low RCS aerial threats.

50. Bharat Parv 2021:
- It is a mega event organized every year to coincide with the Republic Day Celebrations.
- It was started in the year 2016.
- The event envisages generating patriotic fervor and showcases the rich and varied cultural diversity of the country.
- Bharat Parv 2021 will be organized by the Ministry of Tourism.

51. Bangladesh contingent participated in Republic Day parade:
For the first time, a 122-member strong contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces participated at the Republic Day celebrations.
- This is significant as New Delhi and Dhaka celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1971 Liberation War.

Important events during the 1971 war:
1. The Bangladesh Navy had successfully conducted “Operation Jackpot” during the war, destroying 26 enemy ships in sea ports and river ports.
2. The Bangladesh Air Force conducted 50 successful strikes on the enemy targets as part of “Kilo Flight” from the base in Dimapur, India.
52. **What is non-price competition?**

- Non-price competition refers to competition between companies that focuses on benefits, extra services, good workmanship, product quality – plus all other features and measures that do not involve altering prices.
- It contrasts with price competition, in which rivals try to gain market share by reducing their prices.
- Non-price competition is often adopted by the competing players in a sector in order to prevent a price war, which can lead to a damaging spiral of price cuts.

**Context:**
Data privacy can take the form of non-price competition and abuse of dominance can lower privacy protection, a study by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has said.

53. **Climate Adaptation Summit 2021:**

- The climate adaptation summit was **hosted by the Netherlands government** on January 25, 2021.
- The summit was held online and it is being called “CAS Online”.
- The summit was built on the advances of the UN Climate Action Summit.
- The summit also showcased the pioneering solutions of the climate emergency and sustaining momentum through UNFCCC’s COP26.
- CAS will help in delivering the action and inspire the change to help the societies build back better.
- The summit was organized with the aim of realizing the transitions which is required for a climate-resilient world.

54. **Minimum Support Price of Copra:**

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has given its approval for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of copra for 2021 season.
- The approval is based on recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- The increase in MSP for copra for 2021 season is in line with the principle of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times the all India weighted average cost of production which was announced by the Government in the Budget 2018-19.

55. **Kala Utsav:**

Kala Utsav is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (now called Ministry of Education) under **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan**, to promote arts in education by nurturing and showcasing the artistic talent of school students at the secondary stage in the country.

56. **National Marine Turtle Action Plan:**

**Context:**
The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has released ‘Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Guidelines’ and ‘National Marine Turtle Action Plan’.

- The documents contain ways and means to promote inter-sectoral action for conservation.

57. **The ‘Top 25’ drive initiated by Mumbai police:**

- The Mumbai police have started a drive titled ‘Top 25’ aimed at keeping under check history-sheeters and those they believe could foment trouble.
- All 95 police stations in the city will make a list of the “top 25” criminal elements in their jurisdictions, and ask them to sign a bond of good behaviour failing which they would have to pay a fine.