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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. **Eighth schedule to the Constitution:**

Context:
Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has said his government would revive its long-pending demand for inclusion of **Bhojpuri** in the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution**, so that it can be accorded the status of an official language.
- The state cabinet had sent a proposal to the Centre in this regard in 2017.

Eighth schedule to the Constitution:
Part XVII of the Indian constitution deals with the official languages in Articles 343 to 351.
The Constitutional provisions related to the Eighth Schedule are:

1. **Article 344:** Article 344(1) provides for the constitution of a Commission by the President on expiration of five years from the commencement of the Constitution.
2. **Article 351:** It provides for the spread of the Hindi language to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri are the 22 languages presently in the eighth schedule to the Constitution.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that Kasaragod district is called ‘**Sapta bhasha Samgama Bhumi (the confluence of seven languages)**’, and Tulu is among the seven? [Read more about the issue here](https://www.google.com/amp/s/indianexpress.com/article/cities/patna/bihar-govt-to-revive-demand-for-inclusion-of-bhojpuri-in-eighth-schedule-of-constitution-7784802/lite/).

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**

1. Which states in India have the provision of optional use of Hindi in Court proceedings?
2. What is the Eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution?
3. What is Article 348 related to?
4. Governors’ powers to authorise the use of Hindu in High Court proceedings.
5. Who can add or remove languages from the 8th schedule?

**Mains Link:** Discuss why the government should consider amending the Official Languages Act of 1963 to include more vernacular languages in governance, and not just confine it to Hindi and English.


2. **Char Dham:**

Context:
The Supreme Court has urged its former **Justice AK Sikri** to take over as the Chairman of the **high-powered committee constituted by it** to “consider the cumulative and independent impact of the Char Dham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojana (Char Dham Highway Development Project) on the entire Himalayan valley”.

What’s the issue?
In February 2022, Veteran environmentalist Ravi Chopra has resigned as **chairman of the Supreme Court’s High Powered Committee (HPC) on the Char Dham project**, saying that his “belief that the HPC could protect this fragile (Himalayan) ecology has been shattered”.

- In his resignation letter to the secretary general of the Supreme Court on January 27, Chopra referred to the apex court’s December 2021 order that accepted the wider road configuration to meet defence needs, instead of what the **HPC had recommended and the SC accepted in its earlier order in September 2020.**
What has the Court said so far in this matter?

- In 2018, the project was challenged by an NGO for its potential impact on the Himalayan ecology due to felling trees, cutting hills and dumping excavated material.
- In 2019, the SC formed the HPC Chopra to examine the issues, and in September 2020, accepted his recommendation on road width etc.
- In November 2020, the ministry of Defence sought wider roads to meet the requirement of the Army.
- In December 2021, the SC modified its September 2020 order on the ground that the court could not “interrogate the policy choice of the establishment which is entrusted by law with the defence of the nation”.

About Chardham project:

- The project involves developing and widening nearly 900-km of national highways connecting the holy Hindu pilgrimage sites of; Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri at an estimated cost of Rs.12,000 crores.
- The highway will be called Char Dham Mahamarg(Char Dham Highway) and the highway construction project will be called Char Dham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojana(Char Dham Highway Development Project).

What Are The Environmental Concerns That Were Flagged?

1. Large-scale construction works in hilly terrain is a recipe for disaster as it leads to a heightened risk of landslides given the felling of trees and loosening of rocks.
2. The project was being executed bypassing mandatory environment clearances and environment impact assessment (EIA) procedures.
3. Over 25,000 trees have reportedly been felled to make way for the project as a grave worry for the ecologically sensitive zone.
4. Since wider carriageways would require more excavation and blasting, the purpose of having an all-weather highway may be compromised since the topography would become that much more sensitive to slippage and landslides.

Developments so far wrt the Chardham Project:

1. The foundation stone for the Char Dham road project was laid by PM Narendra Modi in December 2016.
2. But the project was challenged on environmental grounds in courts with petitioners alleging irregularities vis-a-vis environmental clearances for the project and that it was being pursued in violation of existing norms.
3. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) cleared the project in September 2018, but its order was challenged for being passed by a bench different from the one that had heard the matter. Supreme Court stayed the NGT order in October 2018.
4. In September 2020, it passed an order on a writ petition stating that highways for the Char Dham project should not exceed 5.5m in width as prescribed in a 2018 circular of the Union Road Transport Ministry. But the Defence Ministry had in December that year sought a modification in the order to allow the width to be of 10m.
5. The top court then asked its high-powered committee (HPC) to look into the contentions raised by the Centre on the width of the highways.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Overview of the project.
2. Important National Parks and wildlife sanctuaries in the region.
3. Important rivers flowing through these places.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of Chardham Project.
3. Citizens look forward to a colourful Holi

Context
President of India extended his greeting to the citizens in India and abroad on the auspicious occasion of Holi which is being celebrated in India today.

About Holi
- It is also famously called ‘Festival of colours’
- Holi falls on the full moon day in the month of Phalgun
- The festival marks the end of winter and the beginning of the season of spring and also marks the harvesting of the crop in the country during this time.
- In various regions of the country, Holi is also called as Dhulendi, Lathmar Holi, Mohhalla Hola, Basant Utsav, Rangpanchami
- People during Holi play with bright organic colours as part of the festivities
- Some of the sweets associated with Holi are: Gujiyas, Malpuas and Bhang
- Holi is associated with myths relating to events from the lives of Prahlada and Lord Krishna
- Holika Dhan custom is an important part of the ritual which symbolizes the death of the demon Holika who planned to kill Prahlada (triumph of good over the evil)

Insta curious: Know more about the myths associated with Holi

Insta links
1. Prelims link
- Various months in a Hindu calendar
- Different names of Holi
- In which month is Holi celebrated?

2. Mains link: Explain by giving examples as to the various festivals associated with climate or the local environment of the place. (15M)

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

1. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar:

Context:
Veer Savarkar was born on May 28, 1883, at Bhagur village of Nashik district in Maharashtra and died on February 26, 1966, in Mumbai.

Things you should know about Veer Savarkar:
- 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.
- He also worked on abolishment of untouchability in Ratnagiri. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar also compared his work to Lord Buddha.

Organizations/institutions he was associated with:
- He 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.
Important works:
2. An armed revolt against the Morley-Minto reform.

Insta Curious: A quote attributed to Savarkar has been going around in academic circles which shows that Savarkar supported Jinnah’s two nation theory. Read this article to know if it's true.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
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.
6. Hindu Mahasabha- key achievements.

Mains Link: Discuss Veer Savarkar’s contributions to social reforms in the country.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-savarkar-fought-for-a-casteless-society-7794728/lite/.

2. Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule:

Context:
Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari has recently received flak for his remarks on the social reformist couple Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule.
   ● He said in a video, “Savitribai was married off at the age of 10 and her husband was 13 years old at that time. Now think about it, what must girls and boys be thinking after getting married”.

About Savitribhai Phule:
   ● Born in Naigaon in Maharashtra on January 3, 1831, Phule is widely regarded as one of India’s first generation modern feminists for her significant contributions in ensuring equal education opportunities under the British raj.
   ● She became the first female teacher in India in 1848 and opened a school for girls along with her husband, social reformer Jyotirao Phule.
   ● The two also worked against discrimination based on caste-based identity, something vehemently opposed by the orthodox sections of society in Pune.
   ● The couple set up ‘Balyata Pratibandak Gruha’, a childcare centre for the protection of pregnant widows and rape victims.
   ● Phule also played a pivotal role in directing the work of the Satyashodhak Samaj, formed by her husband with the objective to achieve equal rights for the marginalised lower castes.
   ● As an extension, they started, ‘Satya Shodhaka Marriage’ where the marrying couple has to take a pledge to promote education and equality.
   ● Savitribai opened a clinic in 1897 for victims of the bubonic plague that spread across Maharashtra just before the turn of the century.
   ● She also set up “Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha”.
   ● She organised a boycott by barbers against the tradition of head tonsuring of widows.
   ● In her honour, University of Pune was renamed Savitribai Phule University in 2015.

About Jyotirao Phule:
Born in 1827 in Satara district of Maharashtra.
Phule was given the title of Mahatma on May 11, 1888, by Vithalrao Krishnaji Vandekar, a Maharashtrian social activist.
His famous works:
Tritiya Ratna (1855), Gulamgiri (1873), Shetkarayacha Aasud, or Cultivator’s Whipcord (1881), Satyashodhak Samajokt Mangalashtakasah Sarva Puja-vidhi (1887).

Need of the hour:
Complete women’s empowerment is still a distant dream in India. While celebrating her legacy, we must also remember the contributions of her husband Jyotiba, who dreamt of equity for women and people of lower castes.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Important literary works of Mahatma Phule.
2. Who gave him the title Mahatma?
3. Objectives of Satyashodhak Samaj.
4. Which state has launched a scheme on Jyotirao Phule and what is it related to?
5. Notable contributions of Savitribai Phule.


3. Pal-Dadhvav massacre:
Context:
On Monday, March 7, the Gujarat government marked 100 years of the Pal-Dadhvav killings, calling it a massacre “bigger than the Jallianwala Bagh”.

What is Pal - Dadhvav massacre?
Took place on March 7, 1922, in the Pal-Chitariya and Dadhvaav villages of Sabarkantha district, then part of Idar state (present-day Gujarat).
Villagers from Pal, Dadhvav, and Chitariya had gathered on the banks of river Heir as part of the ‘Eki movement’, led by one Motilal Tejawat.
- The movement was to protest against the land revenue tax (lagaan) imposed on the peasants by the British and feudal lords.

British Paramilitary force was on hunt for Tehawat. It heard of this gathering and reached the spot.
- Nearly 200 bhils under the leadership of Tehawat lifted their bows and arrows. But, the Britishers opened fire on them. Nearly 1,000 tribals (Bhils) fell to bullets.
- Tejwat, however, escaped and later “returned to the spot to christen it ‘Veerbhumi’.”

Legacy:
A Gujarat government release on the centenary of the massacre described the incident as “more brutal than the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919”.

Insta Curious:
Gujarat has a near 14 per cent tribal population that resides along its northern-eastern stretch, called the ‘poorvi patti’, bordering the districts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.
- Bhils are the dominant tribe in this stretch, which covers the districts of Aravalli, Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Chhota Udepur, Mahisagar, Narmada, Dahod, Tapi, Navsari and Dang.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-was-the-pal-dadhvav-massacre-whose-centenary-the-gujarat-govt-is-observing-7807499/lite/.

4. Row over the Shivaji statue in Telangana’s Bodhan town:
Context:
Section 144 has been imposed in Bodhan town in Telangana after protests turned violent over the installation of a statue of Chhatrapati.
About Shivaji:
Born at Shivner in 1627.
Father: Shahji Bhonsle.
Mother: Jija Bai.
Inherited the jagir of Poona from his father in 1637.

Achievements of Chhatrapati Shivaji:
Initial phase:
- He first conquered Raigarh, Kondana and Torna from the ruler of Bijapur.
- After the death of his guardian, Dadaji Kondadev in 1647, Shivaji assumed full charge of his jagir.
- He captured Javli from a Maratha chief, Chanda Rao More. This made him the master of Mavala region.
- In 1657, he attacked the Bijapur kingdom and captured a number of hill forts in the Konkan region.
- The Sultan of Bijapur sent Afzal Khan against Shivaji. But Afzal Khan was murdered by Shivaji in 1659 in a daring manner.

Military Conquests of Shivaji:
- Shivaji’s military conquests made him a legendary figure in the Maratha region. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was anxiously watching the rise of Maratha power under Shivaji.
- Aurangzeb sent the Mughal governor of the Deccan, Shaista Khan, against Shivaji. Shivaji suffered a defeat at the hands of the Mughal forces and lost Poona.
- But Shivaji once again made a bold attack on Shaista Khan’s military camp at Poona in 1663, killed his son and wounded Khan.
- In 1664, Shivaji attacked Surat, the chief port of the Mughals and plundered it.
- A second attempt was made by Aurangzeb to defeat Shivaji by sending Raja Jai Singh of Amber. He succeeded in besieging the fort of Purander.

Treaty of Purander 1665:
- According to the treaty, Shivaji had to surrender 23 forts to the Mughals out of 35 forts held by him.
- The remaining 12 forts were to be left to Shivaji on condition of service and loyalty to Mughal empire.
- On the other hand, the Mughals recognized the right of Shivaji to hold certain parts of the Bijapur kingdom.

Renewed war against Mughals:
- Surat was plundered by him for the second time in 1670.
- He also captured all his lost territories by his conquests.
- In 1674 Shivaji crowned himself at Raigarh and assumed the title Chatrapathi.

Administrative Policies:
He laid the foundations of a sound system of administration. The king was the pivot of the government. He was assisted by a council of ministers called Ashtapradhan.
- Peshwa – Finance and general administration. Later he became the prime minister.
- Sar-i-Naubat or Senapati – Military commander, an honorary post.
- Amatya – Accountant General.
- Waqenavis – Intelligence, posts and household affairs.
- Sachiv – Correspondence.
- Sumanta – Master of ceremonies.
- Nyayadish – Justice.
- Panditarao – Charities and religious administration.

Revenue Policies:
- Lands were measured by using the measuring rod called kathi. Lands were also classified into three categories – paddy fields, garden lands and hilly tracks.
- Taxes: Chauth and sardeshmukhi were the taxes collected not in the Maratha kingdom but in the neighbouring territories of the Mughal empire or Deccan sultanates.
Chauth was one fourth of the land revenue paid to the Marathas in order to avoid the Maratha raids.

Sardeshmukhi was an additional levy of ten percent on those lands which the Marathas claimed hereditary rights.

Shivaji was a man of military genius and his army was well organized:
There were two divisions in the Maratha cavalry:

- **Bargirs**, equipped and paid by the state;
- **Silahdars**, maintained by the nobles.

In the infantry, the **Mavli foot soldiers** played an important role.

Insta Curious: Do you know about Taanaji Malusare and the Battle of Singhagad? Reference: read this.

Insta Links:

Prelims Link:
1. About Shivaji.
2. His policies.
3. His military conquests.
4. Battles and wars associated with him.

Mains Link: Discuss about Shivaji’s military policies and comment on their significance.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/controversy-over-shivaji-statue-telangana-bodhantown-7829183/lite/.

5. **Battle of Rezang La and the Ahir Regiment demand:**

Context:
Members of the **Ahir community** have been demanding an **Ahir Regiment in the Indian Army**.

Legacy:
- The **Ahirwal region** includes the southern Haryana districts of Rewari, Mahendragarh, and Gurgaon, and is associated with Rao Tula Ram, the Ahir hero of the revolt of 1857.
- The community was brought into national limelight after the story of the bravery of the Ahir troops of Haryana in the Battle of Rezang La in 1962 was widely known.
- The region has traditionally contributed soldiers to the Indian Army in large numbers.

What’s the demand?
Members of the community have long argued that the Ahirs deserve a full-fledged Infantry Regiment named after them, not just two battalions in the Kumaon Regiment and a fixed percentage in other regiments.

What has been the Army’s response to the demand?
The Army has rejected the demand for any new class or caste based regiment. It has said that while the older regiments based on castes and regions like the Dogra Regiment, Sikh Regiment, Rajput Regiment, and Punjab Regiment will continue, no new demands on the lines of an Ahir Regiment, Himachal Regiment, Kalinga Regiment, Gujarat Regiment or any tribal regiment would be entertained.

Background:
November 18 this year marked the 59th anniversary of the Battle of Rezang La. A memorial was inaugurated on the occasion.

Where is Rezang La?
Rezang La is a mountain pass on the **Line of Actual Control** in Ladakh. It is located between village of Chushul and the **Spanggur Lake** that stretches across both Indian and Chinese territories. It had also been the site of a heroic battle on 18 November 1962.
About the battle:
- Troops from the 13 Kumaon Regiment defeated several waves of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in 1962.
- Despite being heavily outnumbered, soldiers of the regiment fought to the last man standing, under freezing temperatures, and with limited ammunition.

Significance of the region:
Rezang La is vital for the defence of the crucially important Chushul. Any invader reaching there would have had a free run to Leh.

Insta Curious: All you need to know about the Indo-China border dispute: read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the Battle of Rezang La.
2. What is LoC and how is it established, geographical extent and significance?
3. What is LAC?

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of Rezang La for India.

6. Malabar rebellion of 1921:
Context:
The Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) has deferred its decision on a recommendation to remove the 1921 Malabar Rebellion martyrs, including Variamkunnaathu Kunhahamad Haji and Ali Musliyar, from the list of India’s freedom fighters.

What's the issue?
- The panel was of the view that the rebellion that took place at Malabar was a one-sided attack on Hindus. Just two Britishers were killed during the unrest and hence the rebellion could not be considered as part of the freedom struggle.
- The subcommittee had recommended the removal of the Malabar Rebellion leaders, mostly Muslims, from the list. This is viewed by some as an attempt to distort history.

What was the Mapilla rebellion?
The Mapilla rebellion or Moplah Rebellion (Moplah Riots) of 1921 was the culmination of a series of riots by Moplahs (Muslims of Malabar) in the 19th and early 20th centuries against the British and the Hindu landlords in Malabar (Northern Kerala).
- The year 2021 will mark the 100th year anniversary of the uprising.

Causes and outcomes of the revolt:
1. The resistance which started against the British colonial rule and the feudal system later ended in communal violence between Hindus and Muslims.
2. Gandhiji along with Shaukat Ali, the leader of the Khilafat movement in India, visited Calicut in August 1920 to spread the combined message of non-cooperation and Khilafat among the residents of Malabar.
3. In response to Gandhiji’s call, a Khilafat committee was formed in Malabar and the Mappilas, under their religious head Mahadum Tangal of Ponnani who pledged support to the non-cooperation movement.
4. Most of tenants’ grievances were related to the security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other unfair exactions of the landlords.
5. The British government responded with much aggression, bringing in Gurkha regiments to suppress it and imposing martial law.

**Wagon Tragedy:**
A noteworthy event of the British suppression was the wagon tragedy when approximately 60 Mappila prisoners on their way to prison, were suffocated to death in a closed railway goods wagon.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know who was Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji? How his rule came to an end?

**Reference:**

**InstaLinks:**

- **Prelims Link:**
  1. Who was Haji?
  2. What was the 1921 Malabar rebellion all about?
  3. Who led the revolt?
  4. How he established his own independent state and ruled it?
  5. What is Khilafat Movement?

- **Mains Link:** Who was Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji? How he stood up to the British in Malabar region in 1921? Discuss why this rebellion has been controversial?

**Topics: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.**

1. **Enacting of Dandi March on March 12:**

**Context:**
The Salt March, which took place from *March to April 1930*, was an *act of civil disobedience led by Mahatma Gandhi* to protest the British rule in the country.

**About Dandi March:**
Mahatma Gandhi and 78 others from his Sabarmati Ashram had embarked on the Dandi Yatra on March 12, 1930 to *break the law which had imposed tax on salt.*
- After walking for 21 days, they reached Dandi on April 5 and broke the law.
- After making salt at Dandi, Gandhi headed to Dharasana Salt Works, 40 km south, but was arrested on May 5.

**Facts related to Salt Satyagraha:**
- The Congress Party in the Lahore session of December 1929, passed the *Purna Swaraj resolution*. It was proclaimed on 26 January, 1930 and decided that *civil disobedience was the way to achieve it.*
- Mahatma Gandhi chose the path of *non-violence to break the salt tax* against the British government.

**Why salt?**
- Salt was a commodity used by all people of every community and the poor people were affected more by the salt tax.
- Until the passing of the 1882 Salt Act, Indians were making salt from seawater free of cost.
- But the Salt Act gave British monopoly over the production of salt and authority to impose a salt tax. Violation of the Salt Act was a criminal offence.
- With the Salt Satyagraha, Mahatma Gandhi tried to unite Hindu and Muslims because the cause was common.
Outcomes of Salt March or Salt Satyagraha:
- A lot of people came together including women, depressed class.
- The movement showed the power of non-violence in fighting against colonialism for the freedom struggle.
- In 1931, Mahatma Gandhi was released and met Lord Irwin who wanted to put an end to the civil disobedience movement.
- As a result, Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed, the civil disobedience movement ended and Indians were allowed to make salt for domestic use.

Insta Curious: On his return from South Africa, Gandhi's first Ashram in India was established in the Kochrab area of Ahmedabad on 25 May 1915. The Ashram was then shifted on 17 June 1917 to a piece of open land on the banks of the river Sabarmati.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About Salt March.
2. Causes, effects and outcomes.
3. About the Civil Disobedience Movement.
4. Key leaders.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance and outcomes of Dandi March.

2. Controversy over Bhagat Singh photograph at Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann’s office:

Context:
A photograph of Bhagat Singh in Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann’s office has run into a controversy.
- The new AAP Party CM has said that he dreams of creating an egalitarian Punjab that Bhagat Singh had dreamt of and sacrificed his life for.
- However, the basanti (yellow) turban Bhagat Singh is seen wearing in the photo is being objected to, primarily for the photo’s lack of authenticity.

What’s the issue now?
According to experts, there are only four original photographs of him. In one picture, he is sitting with open hair in jail, another shows him in a hat and two others show him in a white turban. All other pictures showing him in yellow or orange turbans or even with a weapon in his hand are products of imagination.

- Bhagat Singh was born in 1907 in Lyallpur district (now in Pakistan), and grew up in a Sikh family deeply involved in political activities.
- In 1923, Bhagat Singh joined the National College, Lahore which was founded and managed by Lala Lajpat Rai and Bhai Parmanand.
- In 1924 in Kanpur, he became a member of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), started by Sachindranath Sanyal a year earlier.
- In 1928, HRA was renamed from Hindustan Republican Association to Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).
- In 1925-26 Bhagat Singh and his colleagues started a militant youth organization called the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.
- In 1927, he was first arrested on charges of association with the Kakori Case accused for an article written under the pseudonym Vidrohi (Rebel).
- In 1928, Lala Lajpat Rai had led a procession to protest against the arrival of the Simon Commission. The police resorted to a brutal lathi charge, in which Lala Lajpat Rai was severely injured and later succumbed to his injuries.
- To take revenge for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh and his associates plotted the assassination of James A. Scott, the Superintendent of Police.
• However, the revolutionaries mistakenly killed J.P. Saunders. The incident is famously known as Lahore Conspiracy case (1929).
• Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a bomb on 8 April, 1929 in the Central Legislative Assembly, in protest against the passing of two repressive bills, the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Dispute Bill.
• The aim was not to kill but to make the deaf hear, and to remind the foreign government of its callous exploitation.

Trial:
Both Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt surrendered thereafter and faced trial so they could further promote their cause. They were awarded life imprisonment for this incident.
• However, Bhagat Singh was re-arrested for the murder of J.P. Saunders and bomb manufacturing in the Lahore Conspiracy case.
• He was found guilty in this case and was hanged on 23rd March, 1931 in Lahore along with Sukhdev and Rajguru.
• Every year, March 23 is observed as Martyrs’ Day as a tribute to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru.

Insta Curious:
Did you know that the basanti colour is often associated with protests and revolution in Punjab?

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: About:
1. HRA.
2. HSRA.
5. Lahore Conspiracy case.

Mains Link: A revolutionary and a socialist, the contribution of Bhagat Singh to the Independence Movement of India is immense. Discuss.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/controversy-bhagat-singh-photograph-punjab-cm-bhagwant-mann-office-782626/lite/

Topics: Women and women related issues.

1. Women's day 2022:
Context:
Women’s Day is celebrated every year around the world on March 8.

Theme:
Theme for International Women’s Day, 2022 (IWD 2022) is ‘Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow’.
• It attempts to recognise the “contribution of women and girls around the world, who are leading the charge on climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response, to build a more sustainable future for all”.
IWD 2022 campaign theme is ‘#BreakTheBias’.
• It intends to promote a “gender equal world”, which is “free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination”.
  “A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive”, and where “difference is valued and celebrated”.

History and significance:
IWD has been celebrated for over a century now, but many people think of it purely as a feminist cause. Its roots, however, are found in the labour movement, wherein it was first organised in 1911 by the early 20th century Marxist from Germany Clara Zetkin.

What colors symbolize International Women's Day?
Purple, green and white are the colors of International Women’s Day.
• Purple signifies justice and dignity.
• Green symbolizes hope.

www.insightsonindia.com
White represents purity, albeit a controversial concept. The colors originated from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the UK in 1908.

**Need for an International Women's Day:**
According to the World Economic Forum, sadly none of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children. Gender parity will not be attained for almost a century.

- Women, especially young women, are at the forefront of diverse and inclusive movements online and on the streets for social justice, climate change and equality in all parts of the world.
- Yet, women under 30 are less than 1 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide.
- This is why, this year’s International Women’s Day is a rallying cry for Generation Equality, to act for an equal future for all.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Brief overview of various days of international importance.
2. Key themes.
3. Special campaigns wrt women in India and around the World.
4. Schemes for women in India.

**Mains Link:** Write a note on International Women’s Day.


**2. 'Kanya Shiksha Pravesh Utsav' scheme:**

**Context:**
On the eve of International Women's Day, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched 'Kanya Shiksha Pravesh Utsav' scheme to bring back the out-of-school girls back to the education system.

**Key features of the scheme:**
- Launched by the Women and Child Development Ministry in partnership with the Education Ministry.
- This scheme will fulfill the target of Right To Education act that says to bring out-of-school girls back to the education system.

**Issues in women education:**

**Gap in upper primary and secondary schooling:** While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there is still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling.

**High drop-out rates:** Increased female enrolment is, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children.

**Inter-state variations:** There are also considerable inter-state variations in gender parity. While the greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh.

**Son preference:** Some studies suggest that girls are over-represented in the government schools, demonstrating continuing son preference where boys (highlighted in economic survey 2018) are educated in private and better schools which are of (perceived) better quality.

**Various government efforts towards women education in India:**

**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme:** It aims to generate awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services for the girl child. The initial aim of the campaign was to address the declining child sex ratio but it also include propagating education, survival and protection of the girl child.

**Digital Gender Atlas:** Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a digital gender atlas for advancing girls’ education in India.

**National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE):** The objective of the scheme is to establish an enabling environment to reduce the drop outs and to promote the enrolment of girl children in secondary schools.
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: In order to ensure greater participation of girls in elementary education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has targeted interventions for girls which include opening of schools, appointment of additional women teachers, separate toilets for girls, teachers’ sensitisation programmes etc. In addition, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas has been opened in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs).

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA): It envisages enhancing the quality of education by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, improving quality of education imparted at secondary level, removal of gender, socio-economic and disability barriers.

Udaan: CBSE has launched ‘Udaan’ to provide free online resources to girl students of Class XI and Class XII for preparation. The special focus of the scheme is to address the low enrolment ratio of girl students in prestigious institutions.

STEM education: To increase the participation of women in STEM education, supernumerary seats have been created in the IITs and NITs.

3. Prevention of sexual harassment or POSH Act:

Context:
Kerala High Court has asked organisations associated with the film industry to take steps to constitute a joint committee to deal with cases of sexual harassment of women, in line with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013.

Did you know about the Vishaka guidelines?
The Vishaka guidelines (legally binding) were laid down by the Supreme Court in a judgment in 1997. This was in a case filed by women’s rights groups, one of which was Vishaka.

- The guidelines defined sexual harassment and imposed three key obligations on institutions — prohibition, prevention, redress.
- The Supreme Court directed that they should establish a Complaints Committee, which would look into matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace.
- The 2013 Act broadened these guidelines.

About the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013:
The law against sexual harassment is commonly known as the prevention of sexual harassment or POSH Act, passed by Parliament in 2013.

Definition of sexual harassment:
Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act, 2013 defines sexual harassment:
It includes “any one or more” of the following “unwelcome acts or behaviour” committed directly or by implication: Physical contact and advances, Sexually coloured remarks, Showing pornography, A demand or request for sexual favours, Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Key provisions of the act:
1. This Act lays down the procedures for a complaint and inquiry and the action to be taken.
2. It mandates that every employer constitute an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at each office or branch with 10 or more employees.
3. It lays down the procedures and defines various aspects of sexual harassment.
4. A woman can be of any age, whether employed or not, who “alleges to have been subjected to any act of sexual harassment”, that means the rights of all the women working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity, are protected under the Act.

Need for stricter provisions:
- The 2013 Act has entrusted the powers of a civil court to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background. This was a major lacuna given that the ICC formed an important grievance redressal mechanism under the framework of the act.
- The 2013 act only imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on employers for non-compliance with respect to the constitution of the ICC. This proved to be insufficient in ensuring that the employers constituted the ICC in a time-bound manner.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
2. Vishaka guidelines.
3. Internal Complaints committee.
4. Laws for protection of women sexual harassment.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of 2013 law for the Protection of Women from sexual harassment.


Topics: Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

1. Swachh Bharat Mission:
Context:
According to the parliamentary standing committee report on water resources:
- Only 12% of the villages that were supposed to get infrastructure for liquid waste management this year have achieved their goal under the second phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The implementation of solid waste management infrastructure also lagged behind, with only 22% of target villages covered during 2021-22 until February 7.

Background:
In its first phase, the Swachh Bharat Mission aimed to provide a toilet in every rural household and claimed to have achieved its goal in 2019.

Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0 (SBM-U):
- To make all cities 100% ‘garbage free’ from current 70%.
- Ensure grey and black water management in all cities other than those covered under AMRUT.
- Make all urban local bodies as ODF+ and those with a population of less than 1 lakh as ODF++.
- Focus on source segregation of solid waste by utilizing the principles of 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).
- Scientific processing of all types of municipal solid waste and remediation of legacy dumpsites for effective solid waste management.
Insta Curious: Do you know how women contribute to the success of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan? Read Here.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What are the targets and timelines for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan 2.0 and Amrut 2.0?
2. Which ministries will be involved in its implementation?
3. What will be the contribution of the State government and their responsibilities?
4. What parameters will be used to monitor the scheme?

Mains Link: What are the major causes of Man – wildlife conflicts? What are the ways to prevent human-animal conflicts? Explain. (250 words)


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. Another bomb cyclone over the North Atlantic:

Context:
Another violent bomb cyclone is grazing north just west of Ireland and UK with violent, hurricane winds and major waves.
- Thanks to still a very powerful southern lobe of the Polar Vortex aloft, the North Atlantic is yet to produce more dangerous storms this week.

What is a Bomb Cyclone?
“Bombogenesis is the technical term. ‘Bomb cyclone’ is a shortened version of it.”
- It is a mid-latitude cyclone that intensifies rapidly.
- It has low pressure at its center, weather fronts and an array of associated weather, from blizzards to severe thunderstorms to heavy precipitation.

Generally, a bomb cyclone happens when atmospheric pressure in the middle of the storm drops at least 24 millibars over 24 hours, quickly increasing in intensity. The lower the pressure, the stronger the storm.

Why is it called a bomb?
Most cyclones don’t intensify rapidly in this way. Bomb cyclones put forecasters on high alert, because they can produce significant harmful impacts.

Things you should know about a bomb cyclone:
- Occurs over midlatitudes.
- Have cold air and fronts.
- Form during winter.

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, it forms a wall that protects the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air.
- When the vortex weakens, 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’.

Insta Curious: Did you know that all bomb cyclones are not hurricanes? Know the differences between these two here.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. What is a cyclone?
2. Differences between cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons.
3. What is a Bomb Cyclone?

Mains Link: What is a Bomb Cyclone? How is it formed?

2. What are Karewas?

Context:
In the name of development, Kashmir’s highly fertile alluvial soil deposits called ‘karewas’ are being destroyed.

- Despite its agricultural and archaeological importance, karewas are now being excavated to be used in construction.

What are Karewas?
In the Kashmiri dialect, the term Karewa means “elevated table land”.

- Firstly, this term was used by Godwin Austin in 1859 and later on by Lydekker in 1878 for unconsolidated to semi-consolidated sand clay conglomerate sequence.
- “Vudr” is the local name for Karewas in Kashmiri language.

Karewas are the thick deposits of glacial clay and other materials embedded with moraines. These are unconsolidated lacustrine deposits. Lacustrine means “associated with lakes”.

How were they formed in Kashmir valley?

- Kashmir valley resides between the Great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal ranges of the Kashmir Himalayas. In earlier times, when the upliftment of the Pir Panjal ranges happened, the flow of the river had stopped.
- As a result, the whole of Kashmir valley became a large lake. Slowly, the glacial deposits have accumulated here in this lake. Thus creating a large lacustrine plain.
- Later on, the water drained away and these unconsolidated deposits remained there. These unconsolidated gravel and mud deposits are known as Karewa formation.

Economic significance of Karewas:
Karewa deposits have different soil and sediments such as sand, clay, silt, shale, mud, lignite and losses. Hence, these are very useful for agricultural and horticulture activities.

Karewa formations are useful for the cultivation of Zafran. Zafran is a local variety of Saffron in Kashmir valley. These are also important for the cultivation of almond, walnut, apple, and orchards.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Karewas.
2. Formation.
3. Location.

**Mains Link:** Discuss why Karewa formations are significant?

### 3. What are heat waves?

**Context:**
The Konkan region, including Mumbai, has been experiencing sweltering heat in the recent days, with maximum temperatures touching the 40-degree mark.

**So, why is Konkan experiencing heatwave conditions?**
The ongoing heatwave in Konkan, including Mumbai, is because it is under the direct influence of the prevailing heatwave in the adjacent Saurashtra-Kutch regions of Gujarat.

- The hot and dry winds from northwest India are reaching parts of Konkan.
- In addition, the slow movement of sea breeze along the Maharashtra coast and the overall clear sky conditions have together resulted in such hot conditions.

**What is a heatwave?**
The IMD says heatwave is considered when the maximum temperature of a station touches at least 40 degrees Celsius or more for plains, 37 degrees Celsius or more for coastal regions and at least 30 degrees Celsius or more for hilly regions.

**What are the criteria?**
Heatwave is declared when the departure from normal temperature is by 4.5 to 6.4 degrees Celsius and a severe heatwave is when the departure from normal is more than 6.4 degrees Celsius.

- **For plains, based on actual maximum temperature,** IMD considers heatwaves when actual maximum temperature is more than 45 degrees Celsius and severe heat wave when it is more than 47 degrees Celsius.
- This apart, if the locality records over 45 degrees and 47 degrees on any given day, then the IMD declares heatwave and severe heatwave.

**Reasons why India is experiencing more heat waves are:**

1. Magnified effect of paved and concrete surfaces in urban areas and a lack of tree cover.
2. Urban heat island effects can make ambient temperatures feel 3 to 4 degrees more than what they are.
3. More heat waves were expected as globally temperatures had risen by an average 0.8 degrees in the past 100 years. Night-time temperatures are rising too.
4. Higher daily peak temperatures and longer, more intense heat waves are becoming
increasingly frequent globally due to climate change.
5. High intensity of UV rays in medium-high heat wave zones.
6. Combination of exceptional heat stress and a predominantly rural population makes India vulnerable to heat waves.

Way ahead for India- How should India deal with heat waves?
1. Identifying heat hot-spots through appropriate tracking of meteorological data and promoting timely development and implementation of local Heat Action Plans with strategic inter-agency coordination, and a response which targets the most vulnerable groups.
2. Review of existing occupational health standards, labour laws and sectoral regulations for worker safety in relation to climatic conditions.
3. Policy intervention and coordination across three sectors health, water and power is necessary.
4. Promotion of traditional adaptation practices, such as staying indoors and wearing comfortable clothes.
5. Popularisation of simple design features such as shaded windows, underground water storage tanks and insulating housing materials.
6. Advance implementation of local Heat Action Plans, plus effective inter-agency coordination is a vital response which the government can deploy in order to protect vulnerable groups.

Insta Curious: In India, heatwaves occur from March to June, occasionally in July. The peak heatwave events have been reported in the month of May.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. When is a heat wave declared?
2. Criteria?
3. Difference between heatwave and super heatwave?

Mains Link: Examine the adverse impacts caused by heat waves and how India should deal with it?

4. Interaction between La Niña and the warm Arctic:

Context:
The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) declared the season’s first heat wave and severe heat wave March 11 and the first depression March 3.
- Experts say this is early compared to previous years and may be because of an unexpected climatic anomaly which could, in turn, be linked to global warming.

According to experts:
The reason behind early heat waves, early depressions and the weird dust storms is the continued persistence of a north-south low pressure pattern that forms over India during winters when a La Niña phenomenon is occurring in the equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- The last time we had a La Niña persisting for three years was during 1998-2000 and 2000 also had a cyclone in March.

Impact of La Niña:
- The sea surface temperatures over the east and central Pacific Ocean become cooler-than-average during La Niña.
- This affects the trade winds flowing over the ocean surface through change in wind stress.
- The trade winds carry this weather disturbance elsewhere and affect large parts of the world.
- In India, the phenomenon is mostly associated with wet and cold winters.

Larger concern:
If the interaction between the La Nina and the warm Arctic is in fact happening then it is an impact of global warming induced by human greenhouse gas emissions.
What are the Niño and La Niña?
They are two natural climate phenomena occurring across the tropical Pacific Ocean and influence the weather conditions all over the world.
- While the El Niño period is characterised by warming or increased sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, a La Niña event causes the water in the eastern Pacific Ocean to be colder than usual.
- Together, they are called ENSO or El Niño-Southern Oscillation.

What causes El Nino?
1. El Nino sets in when there is an anomaly in the pattern.
2. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America.
3. The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition.

Weather changes because of La Nina:
1. The Horn of Africa and central Asia will see below average rainfall due to La Niña.
2. East Africa is forecast to see drier-than-usual conditions, which together with the existing impacts of the desert locust invasion, may add to regional food insecurity.
3. It could also lead to increased rainfall in southern Africa.
4. It could also affect the South West Indian Ocean Tropical Cyclone season, reducing the intensity.
5. Southeast Asia, some Pacific Islands and the northern region of South America are expected to receive above-average rainfall.
6. In India, La Niña means the country will receive more rainfall than normal, leading to floods.

Insta Curious: In March 2022, for the first time in 130 years two depressions were formed. Both depressions intensified into deep depressions and the second one threatened to even intensify into a rare March cyclone.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is El Nino?
2. What is La Nina?
3. What is ENSO?
4. When do these events occur?
5. Impact of ENSO on Asia, Africa and Australia.

Mains Link: Discuss the impact of La Nina weather phenomenon on India.
1. **Bombay High Court judgement related to Anti-defection law:**

**Context:**
The High Court of Bombay at Goa in its judgment, delivered on February 25, held that the former members of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) in the Goa assembly who had defected to the BJP are exempt from disqualification under paragraph 4(2) of the Constitution’s Tenth Schedule, referred to commonly as the anti-defection law.

**Why did the High Court rule so?**
The court said that under sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph (4), the merger of this group of Congress MLAs with the BJP is deemed to be a merger of the original political party (Indian National Congress) with the BJP. Therefore, these members are protected under paragraph (4).

**Provisions in this regard under the 10th schedule of the Indian Constitution:**
Paragraph (4) of the Tenth Schedule exempts defectors from disqualification if their original political party merges with another party and two-thirds of the members of that party in the legislature agree with the merger.
- Here, in the case of Goa, Ten of the 15 MLAs of the CLP in the Goa Assembly — two-thirds of the party’s strength in the House — had joined the BJP.

**But, this judgement has raised a concern. What is it?**
Paragraph (4) of the Anti-defection law contemplates the factual merger of the original political party.
- However, in the latest judgment, Bombay High Court has held that a factual merger of the original political party is not necessary to seek exemption. And the merger of the 10 MLAs of the CLP with the BJP should be regarded as the Congress itself merging with the BJP.
- The court has said, erroneously, that the two sub-paragraphs 1 and 2 of paragraph 4 should be seen as independent entities.
- But, this opinion goes against the letter and spirit of the Tenth Schedule, paragraph (4) in particular.

**How does this opinion go against the letter and spirit of the Tenth Schedule, paragraph (4) in particular?**
Under this provision, for a member to seek exemption from disqualification, the merger of the original political party has to take place first, followed by two-thirds of the MLAs agreeing to such merger.
- The words “such merger” make it clear beyond any shadow of doubt that the merger of the original political party has to take place before two-thirds of the members agree to such a merger.
- The HC seems to have missed the significance of the words “such merger”. In fact, the members of the legislature cannot agree among themselves to merge as the court has said, but they can agree to a merger after it takes place.

**Need of the hour:**
The anti-defection law was designed to eliminate political defection. However, the judgment of the Bombay HC seems to assume that paragraph (4) of the 10th schedule is meant to facilitate defection. This judgment is likely to open the flood gates to defection. The Supreme Court must intervene quickly.

Read more about Anti - defection law [here](#).

**InstaLinks:**
1. Names of various committees and commissions with regard to Anti Defection law.
2. Committees vs Commissions.
5. Is anti-defection law applicable to the presiding officer?

6. Relevant Supreme Court cases and verdicts.

Mains Link: Examine the provisions of Anti-defection law. Has this law largely failed to meet its objective? Discuss.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-judgement-that-could-open-floodgates-to-defection-goa-assembly-7795224/lite/.

2. Chandigarh's proposal to amend Article 80 of the Constitution:

Context:
The Chandigarh Municipal Corporation has approved a proposal to amend Article 80 of the Constitution.
- This amendment says, its councillors could send a representative to the Rajya Sabha.
- A Private Member’s Bill in this regard has also been introduced.

Basics you need to know:
- Article 80 of the Constitution of India deals with the composition of the council of states also called the Upper House and Rajya Sabha (Upper House).
- Chandigarh is a Union Territory without any legislative assembly. Chandigarh has a seat of Member of Parliament (MP) in the lower house (Lok Sabha) or House of the People.
- Chandigarh residents elect an MP every five years through direct voting.

What is the Demand of the Proposed Bill?
The bill (Private Member Bill) sought the adding of a provision “provided that the representative of the Union Territory of Chandigarh in the council of states shall be elected by an electoral college.

The electoral college should consist of elected members of the Municipal Corporation of Chandigarh constituted under the Punjab Municipal Corporation (Extension to Chandigarh) Act, 1994 in Article 80 of the Constitution.
An amendment has also been sought to the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution with ‘Entry 32, Chandigarh.

- The fourth Schedule contains provisions as to the allocation of seats in the Council of States.

What's the legal issue now? Why can't municipal councillors elect?
The elected Municipal Corporation Councillors do not form the electoral college for selecting a member for Upper house (Rajya Sabha) because it is beyond the powers of the Municipal Corporation (As defined by the Constitution).
- If the functions of the civic body are to be extended beyond the listed scope of functions it would not be feasible and would go against the constitutional mandate of any such Municipal Corporation.

How Rajya Sabha members are elected?
Rajya Sabha members are elected indirectly by the people, that is, by the MLAs.
- Members of a state's Legislative Assembly vote in the Rajya Sabha elections in proportional representation with the single transferable vote (STV) system. Each MLA’s vote is counted only once.
- To win a Rajya Sabha seat, a candidate should get a required number of votes. That number is found out using the below formula. Required vote = Total number of votes / (Number of Rajya Sabha seats + 1) + 1.

To know more about Rajya Sabha, its composition and functions, read this article.

Insta Curious:
Did you know that Delhi has a seat in Rajya Sabha?
- MPs for Rajya Sabha in Delhi are selected by the members of the Metropolitan Council of Delhi.
- There is a difference between the Metropolitan Council and Municipal Corporation.

InstaLinks:
www.insightsonindia.com
1. About Rajya Sabha.
2. UTs having representation in Rajya Sabha.
3. Composition of Rajya Sabha.

Mains Link: Chandigarh Municipal Corporation has approved a proposal to amend Article 80 of the Constitution. Discuss about the potential implications of this move.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-one-bill-can-alter-power-dynamics-in-ut-civic-body-7796739/lite/

3. ‘Voter islands’ after J&K delimitation exercise:

Context:
Political leaders participating in the delimitation process in J&K as well as independent observers have raised fears of “islands” being formed.

What’s the issue?
The Delimitation Act, 2002 says that apart from population, the constituencies have to be geographically compact areas and contiguous. Observers say this principle is not being followed in the ongoing Delimitation exercise.
- For example, a village in one tehsil would be completely surrounded by villages in another Tehsil. Geographical connectedness is not being considered here. This gives rise to the voter islands.
- It is being said that the Commission “has carved out geographical islands and joined with the other Assembly segments without any proximity or connectivity”.

Delimitation exercise in J&K- a timeline:
1. The first delimitation exercise, carving out 25 assembly constituencies in the then state, was carried out by a Delimitation Committee in 1951.
2. The first full-fledged Delimitation Commission was formed in 1981 and it submitted its recommendations in 1995 on the basis of 1981 Census. Since then, there has been no delimitation.
3. In 2020, the Delimitation Commission was constituted to carry out the exercise on the basis of 2011 Census, with a mandate to add seven more seats to the Union Territory’ and grant reservations to SC and ST communities.
4. Now, the total number of seats in Jammu and Kashmir will be raised to 90 from the previous 83. This is apart from 24 seats which have been reserved for areas of PoK and have to be kept vacant in the Assembly.

What is delimitation and why is it needed?
The Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir was constituted by the Centre on March 6 last year to redraw Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies of the union territory in accordance with the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 and Delimitation Act, 2002, passed by the Centre in August 2019 along with other J&K-specific Bills.

What is Delimitation?
Delimitation literally means the process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a state that has a legislative body.

Who carries out the exercise?
- Delimitation is undertaken by a highly powerful commission. They are formally known as Delimitation Commission or Boundary Commission.
- These bodies are so powerful that its orders have the force of law and they cannot be challenged before any court.
**Insta Curious:** Did you know that prior to August 5, 2019, carving out of J&K’s Assembly seats was carried out under the J&K Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957?

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Previous delimitation commissions- powers and functions.
2. Composition of the commission.
3. Who can set up?
4. Are changes allowed in final orders?
5. Which are the constitution provisions related?

**Mains Link:** How and why delimitation of constituencies is carried out? Discuss.


**4. Supplementary demand for grants:**

**Context:** The government has sought approval from Parliament to spend an extra ₹1.07 lakh crore in the current fiscal year.

- The additional spending of Rs1.58 trillion is required for expenditure commitments towards settling loans taken from National Small Savings Funds for PM Awas Yojana and higher fertiliser subsidy outgo.

**What are Supplementary Demands for Grants?**
The supplementary demand for grants is needed for government expenditure over and above the amount for which Parliamentary approval was already obtained during the Budget session.

**Constitutional provisions:**
Supplementary, additional or excess grants and Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants are mentioned in the Constitution of India 1949.

- **Article 115:** Supplementary, additional or excess grants.
- **Article 116:** Votes on account, votes of credit and exceptional grants.

**Procedure to be followed:**
1. When grants, authorised by the Parliament, fall short of the required expenditure, an estimate is presented before the Parliament for Supplementary or Additional grants.
2. These grants are presented and passed by the Parliament before the end of the financial year.
3. When actual expenditure incurred exceeds the approved grants of the Parliament, the Ministry of Finance presents a Demand for Excess Grant.
4. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India bring such excesses to the notice of the Parliament.
5. The Public Accounts Committee examines these excesses and gives recommendations to the Parliament.
6. The Demand for Excess Grants is made after the actual expenditure is incurred and is presented to the Parliament after the end of the financial year in which the expenses were made.

**Other grants:**
- **Additional Grant:** It is granted when a need has arisen during the current financial year for supplementary or additional expenditure upon some new service not contemplated in the Budget for that year.
- **Excess Grant:** It is granted when money has been spent on any service during a financial year in excess of the amount granted for that year. The demands for excess grants are made after the expenditure has actually been incurred and after the financial year to which it relates, has expired.
- **Exceptional Grants:** It is granted for an exceptional purpose which forms no part of the current service of any financial year.
Token Grant: It is granted when funds to meet proposed expenditure on a new service can be made available by re-appropriation, a demand for the grant of a token sum may be submitted to the vote of the House and, if the House assents to the demand, funds may be so made available.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

What are?
1. Additional grants.
2. Excess grants.
3. Exceptional Grants.
4. Token grant.
5. Procedure to be followed.
7. About CAG and PAC.

5. Wearing hijab is not essential religious practice, says Karnataka High Court:

Context:
The verdict has come on petitions filed by Muslims girls seeking the right to wear hijabs or head scarves along with uniforms inside classrooms.

What has the court ruled?
- **An essential religious practice**: Wearing of the hijab by Muslim women does not make up an essential religious practice in Islamic faith.
- **A reasonable restriction**: The prescription of a school uniform is a reasonable restriction constitutionally permissible which the students cannot object to.
- **The government has the power to restrict** the wearing of hijabs in colleges where uniforms are prescribed.

Therefore, the prescription of school uniform does not violate the petitioners fundamental rights guaranteed under article 19 1 a of the constitution that is freedom of expression and article 21 that is privacy.

What constitutes an essential religious practice? Who decides on it?
**Shirur Mutt case in 1954**: The doctrine of “essentiality” was invented by the Supreme Court. The court held that the term “religion” will cover all rituals and practices “integral” to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion.

What constitutes a reasonable restriction?
1. Sovereignty and integrity of India.
2. Security of the state.
3. Friendly relations with foreign states.
4. Public order.
5. Decency or morality.
6. Contempt of court.
7. Defamation.
8. Incitement to an offence.

What are Kerala High Court’s rulings on Hijab?
**In Amna Bint Basheer v Central Board of Secondary Education (2016)**, the Kerala High Court held that the practice of wearing a hijab constitutes an essential religious practice but did not quash the dress code prescribed by CBSE. It rather provided additional safeguards, such as examining students wearing full sleeves when needed.

**In Fathima Tasneem v State of Kerala (2018)**, Kerala HC held that collective rights of an institution would be given primacy over the individual rights of the petitioner. The case involved two girls who wanted to wear the headscarf. The school refused to allow the headscarf. However, the court dismissed the appeal as students were no longer in the rolls of the respondent-School.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:

1. Definition of state under article 12.
2. Article 13(3) is related to?
3. Writ jurisdiction of Supreme Court and High Courts.

www.insightsonindia.com
4. Overview of Articles 21 and 25. 
Mains Link: Discuss the significance of freedom of religion under the Indian Constitution. 


6. What is the Principle of ‘Reasonable Accommodation’?

Context:
In its recent verdict on Hijab case, the Karnataka High Court rejected an argument in support of permitting Muslim girls wearing head-scarves that was based on the principle of ‘reasonable accommodation’.

- This meant that the court did not favour making any change or adjustment to the rule that could have enabled the students to maintain their belief or practice even while adhering to the uniform rule.

What is the Principle of ‘Reasonable Accommodation’?

- It is a principle that promotes equality, enables the grant of positive rights and prevents discrimination based on disability, health condition or personal belief.
- It captures the positive obligation of the State and private parties to provide additional support to persons with disabilities to facilitate their full and effective participation in society.

How does the principle work?
The general principle is that reasonable accommodation should be provided, unless some undue hardship is caused by such accommodation.

In 2016, the ILO came out with a practical guide on promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments.

Four categories of workers were chosen for the guide:
1. Workers with disabilities.
2. Workers living with HIV and AIDS.
3. Pregnant workers and those with family responsibilities.
4. Workers who hold a particular religion or belief.

Accomodations:
- A modified working environment, shortened or staggered working hours, additional support from supervisory staff and reduced work commitments are ways in which accommodation can be made.
- Suitable changes in recruitment processes — allowing scribes during written tests or sign language interpreters during interviews — will also be a form of accommodation.

Significance:
The provision of reasonable accommodation plays a major role in addressing these barriers and thus contributes to greater workplace equality, diversity and inclusion.

What is the legal position on this in India?
In India, the Rights of People with Disabilities Act, 2016, defines ‘reasonable accommodation’ as “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, without imposing a disproportionate or undue burden in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise of rights equally with others”.

Insta Curious:
Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines reasonable accommodation as “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

Relevant Supreme Court judgements:
In Jeeja Ghosh and Another v. Union of India and Others (2016), the Supreme Court observed “Equality not only implies preventing discrimination but goes beyond in remedying discrimination against groups suffering
systematic discrimination in society. In concrete terms, it means embracing the notion of positive rights, affirmative action and reasonable accommodation.”

**Vikash Kumar v. UPSC (2021):** This was a case in which the court allowed the use of a scribe in the Union Public Service Commission examination for a candidate with dysgraphia, or writer’s cramp. The court ruled that benchmark disability, that is a specified disability to the extent of 40%, is related only to special reservation for the disabled in employment, but it need not be a restriction for other kinds of accommodation. It also said failure to provide reasonable accommodation amounts to discrimination.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. Articles 14, 15 and 19 of the Indian Constitution.
2. What is the Principle of ‘Reasonable Accommodation’?
3. Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
4. Relevant Supreme Court judgements.

**Mains Link:** What is the Principle of ‘Reasonable Accommodation’? Discuss.

**Link:**

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**7. Article 355:**

**Context:**
Congress party in West Bengal has demanded that the law and order situation in West Bengal is completely broken and **Article 355** should be invoked to ensure the State is governed as per the provisions of the Constitution.

**What’s the issue?**
On 21st March 2022, there was a violent fight between two groups of the ruling party in Bogtui village in Birbhum district.

- The Deputy Pradhan, Shri Bhadu Sheikh was killed and in retaliation houses in the area were attacked and set on fire resulting in 12 deaths including that of women and children. All the members belong to the minority community.

**What is Article 355?**
Article 355 refers to the provision in the Constitution that states that “It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution”.

There are several angles to the second part of this duty – to ensure that the Government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

1. **The law & order angle:**
The “public order” and “police” are state subjects and states have exclusive power to legislate on these matters.

2. **Alleged justification of emergency:**
Although this article has been seldom used; it is seen as an instrument to justify imposition of emergency under articles 352 and 356. While article 352 empowers the centre to impose emergency when an armed rebellion occurs, such proclamation cannot be for internal disturbance – thus said **SC in SR Bommai Case.**
- So, the Supreme Court interpretation was that article 355 itself does not give power to the centre to impose emergency because mere internal disturbance short of armed rebellion cannot justify a proclamation of emergency under Art. 352 nor can such disturbance justify issuance of proclamation under Art.
8. Article 371 of the Constitution:

Context:
Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu is planning to lead an all-party delegation to New Delhi soon to seek amendment of Article 371 (H) which has special provisions pertaining to the state in order to place it at par with special provisions meant for Nagaland enshrined in Article 371 (A) of the constitution.

Other demands:
The special provision with respect to the state should be further strengthened by amending Article 371(H) by inserting provisions for protection of religious or social practices of the tribes of the state, customary law and procedure of the state’s tribes, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to customary laws of the tribes and including provisions to protect local ownership and transfer of land and its resources.
This is necessary to protect tribal rights and customary laws.

What is Article 371 all about?
Article 371 of the Constitution includes “special provisions” for 11 states, including six states of the Northeast.
Articles 370 and 371 were part of the Constitution at the time of its commencement on January 26, 1950; Articles 371A through 371J were incorporated subsequently.

Overview:
1. Article 371, Maharashtra and Gujarat:
Governor has “special responsibility” to establish “separate development boards” for “Vidarbha, Marathwada, and the rest of Maharashtra”, and Saurashtra and Kutch in Gujarat; ensure “equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said areas”, and “equitable arrangement providing adequate facilities for technical education and vocational training, and adequate opportunities for employment” under the state government.

2. Article 371A (13th Amendment Act, 1962), Nagaland:
Inserted after a 16-point agreement between the Centre and the Naga People’s Convention in 1960, which led to the creation of Nagaland in 1963.
Parliament cannot legislate in matters of Naga religion or social practices, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, and ownership and transfer of land without concurrence of the state Assembly.

3. Article 371B (22nd Amendment Act, 1969), Assam:
The President may provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the Assembly consisting of members elected from the state’s tribal areas.

4. Article 371C (27th Amendment Act, 1971), Manipur:
The President may provide for the constitution of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas in the Assembly, and entrust “special responsibility” to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning.

5. Article 371D (32nd Amendment Act, 1973; substituted by The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana:
President must ensure “equitable opportunities and facilities” in “public employment and education to people from different parts of the state”. He may require the state government to organise “any class or classes of
posts in a civil service of, or any class or classes of civil posts under, the State into different local cadres for different parts of the State”. He has similar powers vis-à-vis admissions in educational institutions.

6. **Article 371E:**
   Allows for the establishment of a university in Andhra Pradesh by a law of Parliament. But this is not a “special provision” in the sense of the others in this part.

7. **Article 371F (36th Amendment Act, 1975), Sikkim:**
   The members of the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim shall elect the representative of Sikkim in the House of the People. To protect the rights and interests of various sections of the population of Sikkim, Parliament may provide for the number of seats in the Assembly, which may be filled only by candidates from those sections.

8. **Article 371G (53rd Amendment Act, 1986), Mizoram:**
   Parliament cannot make laws on “religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, ownership and transfer of land... unless the Assembly... so decides”.

9. **Article 371H (55th Amendment Act, 1986), Arunachal Pradesh:**
   The Governor has a special responsibility with regard to law and order, and “he shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgment as to the action to be taken”.

10. **Article 371J (98th Amendment Act, 2012), Karnataka:**
    There is a provision for a separate development board for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. There shall be “equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said region”, and “equitable opportunities and facilities” for people of this region in government jobs and education. A proportion of seats in educational institutions and state government jobs in Hyderabad-Karnataka can be reserved for individuals from that region.

11. **Article 371I deals with Goa**, but it does not include any provision that can be deemed ‘special’.

**Significance:**
All these provisions take into account the special circumstances of individual states, and lay down a wide range of specific safeguards that are deemed important for these states.
In these range of Articles from 371 to 371J, **Article 371I**, which deals with Goa, stands out in the sense that it does not include any provision that can be deemed “special”. **Article 371E**, which deals with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, too, is not that “special”.

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9. Hindus can get minority status in some states: Centre to Supreme Court:

Context:
A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking minority status for Hindus in Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Kashmir etc.

What the plea seeks?
1. **Minority status for Hindus:** Hindus were a minority in 10 states as per the 2011 Census. Therefore, they are not able to avail the benefits of schemes meant for minorities.
2. **Scrap the National Commission for Minority Education Institution Act, 2004:** Section 2(f) of NCMEI Act confers power to the Centre to identify and notify minority communities in India. Therefore, it gives unbridled power to the Centre and is "manifestly arbitrary, irrational, and offending".
3. **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** Denial of benefits to the "real" minorities and the "arbitrary and unreasonable" disbursements under schemes meant for them to the absolute majority infringe upon their fundamental rights (Articles 14 and 21).
4. **Citing Article 30 of the Constitution,** the plea said that minorities whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish-administer educational institutions of their choice.

What has the Centre said on these?
1. **States too have the power** to declare any religious or linguistic community, including Hindus, as ‘minority’.

2. **Matters concerning whether followers of Hinduism, Judaism, Bahaism can establish and administer educational institutions of their choice** in the said states and those related to their identification as minority within the state may be considered at the state level.

3. **Minority welfare schemes** are for underprivileged students and economically weaker sections of the minority community and are not for everyone belonging to the minority community. These schemes are only enabling provisions so as to achieve inclusiveness and therefore cannot be held to suffer from any infirmity.

Several state governments have given minority status to some communities. These include:
- **Maharashtra government** has notified ‘Jews’ as a minority community within the state.
- **The Karnataka government** has notified Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, Tulu, Lamani, Hindi, Konkani and Gujarati languages as minority languages within the state of Karnataka.

**Article 29:**
- It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, shall have the right to conserve the same.
- It grants protection to both religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities.
- However, the Supreme Court held that the scope of this article is not necessarily restricted to minorities only, as use of the word ‘section of citizens’ in the Article includes minorities as well as the majority.

**Article 30:**
It says all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

**Special rights enjoyed by religious minority institutions are:**
- **Under Art 30(1)(a),** such institutions enjoy right to education as a Fundamental Right. In case the property is taken over by state, due compensation to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere.
- **Under Article 15(5),** they are not considered for reservation.
- **Under Right to Education Act,** they are not required to provide admission to children in the age group of 6-14 years upto 25% of enrolment reserved for economically backward section of society.
- **In St Stephens vs Delhi University case, 1992,** SC ruled that these institutions can have 50% seats reserved for minorities.

**Insta Curious:** The Supreme Court, in the TMA Pai Foundation case ruling, had said that the state can introduce a regulatory regime in the national interest to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to achieve excellence in education.

**InstaLinks:**
- Prelims Link: 1. State can regulate minority institutions. 2. Article 30. 3. Article 14.
- Mains Link: Discuss the significance of grant of minority status of a religion in the country.

**10. Delimitation Commission:**
**Context:**
A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court by two Kashmir residents challenging the Centre’s decision to constitute the delimitation commission for redrawing the assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

**What’s the issue?**
The plea sought declaration that the increase of number of seats from 107 to 114 (including 24 seats in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) in Jammu & Kashmir is Ultra vires the Constitutional Provisions such as Articles 14, 81, 82, 170, 330 and 332 and Statutory Provisions particularly under Section 63 of the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.

- The plea said that while Article 170 of the Constitution of India provides that the next delimitation in the country will be taken up after 2026 then why has the UT of Jammu and Kashmir been singled out?

When the was Delimitation Commission set up?
On March 6, 2020, the Union Government, Ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative Department) had issued a notification in exercise of power under Section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002, constituting a Delimitation Commission, with former Supreme Court judge (Retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai as Chairperson, for the purpose of delimitation of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland, for a period of one year.

Constitutional Provisions:
- Under Article 82, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.
- Under Article 170, States also get divided into territorial constituencies as per Delimitation Act after every Census.

To know more about the Delimitation Commission, Composition and its functions, read this.

Insta Curious: The last Delimitation Commission was set up on July 12, 2002, in exercise of powers conferred by Section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002, after the 2001 Census to carry out the exercise throughout the country.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Previous delimitation commissions- powers and functions.
2. Composition of the commission.
3. Who can set up?
4. Are changes allowed in final orders?
5. Which are the constitution provisions related?

Mains Link: How and why delimitation of constituencies is carried out? Discuss.

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

1. SC enforces a landmark ruling on death penalty:

Context:
More than four decades after a landmark ruling on death sentence cases, a bench in the Supreme Court has made psychological evaluation of the condemned prisoner mandatory.

- It has also sought a report on the inmate’s conduct at the time of examining whether the gallows remains the only fitting punishment.

What has the court said?
Taking a cue from the Bachan Singh verdict, justice Lalit, in a series of death sentences cases, has recently held that “complete assistance” to the court in such matters would necessitate the production of not just the evidence but also the latest state of the mental health of the prisoner.

Supreme Court’s verdict in Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980):
This verdict established the doctrine of “rarest of rare” crime in handing down capital punishment while mandating a comparative analysis of aggravating and mitigating circumstances in connection to the accused.

- The judgment laid down that a court must scrutinise both the crime as well as the criminal, and then decide whether death penalty is the only suitable punishment in the facts of the case.
Emphasis is to be also laid on the aggravating and mitigating factors which are dependent upon the facts and circumstances of the case.

**Machi Singh vs State of Punjab (1983):**
In this case, the Supreme Court elucidated the doctrine of “rarest of rare” and set down some guiding principles in the death sentences cases.

- **The aggravating circumstances** included the manner in which the crime was committed, motive for committing the crime, severity of the crime, and the victim of the crime.
- **The mitigating circumstances** consisted of the possibility of reformation and rehabilitation of an accused, his mental health and his antecedents.

**What has the Court said on prolonging death sentences and review petitions?**
- In 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that **unexplained delay in execution was a ground for commutation of death penalty**, and an inmate, his or her kin, or even a public-spirited citizen, could file a writ petition seeking such commutation.
- It held that **prolonging execution of death sentence has a “dehumanising effect” on condemned prisoners** who have to face the agony of waiting for years under the shadow of death during the pendency of their mercy plea. **An inordinate delay would certainly have an agonising effects on their body and mind.**
- In the same year, a Constitution bench also held that **a review petition by a death-row convict will be heard by a three-judge bench in open court.** Such cases were earlier being considered by two-judge benches in the judges’ chamber without any oral arguments.

**Challenges ahead:**
- The enormity of the task before the Supreme Court is captured by the fact that trial courts in India have already sentenced more than 50 people to death in 2022 and often in violation of procedural and substantive laws.
- It is not going to be easy for the Supreme Court to bring about a balance of fairness and consistency in death penalty sentencing across courts in India but the fact that the court has chosen to address it head-on is certainly noteworthy and worthy of our appreciation.

**Insta Curious:** Project 39A is a criminal justice research and legal aid program at National Law University, Delhi that has worked extensively in death penalty cases.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Various benches of the Supreme Court.
2. Law commission- composition, objectives and functions.
3. Appeals against capital punishment.
4. President’s pardoning powers.
5. Relevant Supreme Court judgements.

**Mains Link:** What is Collective conscience? How does it influence the judgments of courts? Discuss.


**2. Criminal justice reforms:**

**Context:**
Aiming to make comprehensive changes in criminal laws, the government has initiated the process of amendment to laws such as Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act in consultation with all stakeholders.

**Suggestions invited:**
The Ministry of Home Affairs has sought suggestions from Governors, Chief Ministers, Lieutenant Governors and Administrators of Union Territories, Chief Justice of India, Chief Justices of various High Courts, Bar Council
of India, Bar Council of various States, various universities, law institutes and all MPs regarding comprehensive amendments in criminal laws.

Current concerns/challenges:
1. The delay in disposal of cases was leading to human rights violations of the under-trials and convicts.
2. Despite the Supreme Court’s directions on police reforms, there had been hardly any changes on the ground.
3. Court orders convicting a person are also taking years to implement.

Suggested Reforms:
- Special laws and fast-track courts could replace certain offences under the Indian Penal Code in order to reduce the piling up of cases at every police station.
- Digitisation of documents would help in speeding up investigations and trials.
- The construction of new offences and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence which have substantially altered in the past four decades.
- The classification of offences must be done in a manner conducive to management of crimes in the future.
- The discretion of judges in deciding the quantum and nature of sentence differently for crimes of the same nature should be based on principles of judicial precedent.

Criminal law in India:
- Criminal Justice System can impose penalties on those who violate the established laws.
- The criminal law and criminal procedure are in the concurrent list of the seventh schedule of the constitution.
- Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay is said to be the chief architect of codifications of criminal laws in India.

Need for reforms:
1. Colonial era laws.
2. ineffectiveness.
3. Pendency of cases.
4. Huge undertrials.

Committee For Reform In Criminal Law:
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has constituted a national level committee for reform in criminal law.
- The committee has been constituted under Ranbir Singh and several other members.
- The committee would be gathering opinions online by consulting experts and collating material for their report to the government.

Previous committees:
Madhav Menon Committee: It submitted its report in 2007, suggesting various recommendations on reforms in the Criminal Justice System of India (CJSI).

Insta Curious: Read about the 2006 Supreme Court ruling on police reforms here.

InstaLinks: 2. Criminal law under 7th schedule of the constitution.
1. Malimath Committee is associated with?
3. Who codified criminal laws in India?

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5. Ranbir Singh Committee was recently constituted for?

Mains Link: Write a note on criminal justice reforms in India.

3. PM CARES:

Context:
The Supreme Court has refused to entertain an appeal challenging an Allahabad High Court order which rejected a challenge to the constitutional validity of the PM-CARES Fund.

What's the issue?
- The High Court had dismissed the PIL which challenged the validity of the PM-CARES Fund and the Prime Minister National Relief Fund in the backdrop of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- The petitioner had contended that the fund was established without statutory backing and was kept beyond the scrutiny of the RTI Act.

Issues surrounding the fund and its functioning:
PM CARES has been under a cloud of suspicion ever since it was announced, with opposition parties demanding transparency over the handling of the funds.

About PM-CARES:
The Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund was set up to accept donations and provide relief during the Covid-19 pandemic, and other similar emergencies.

PM-CARES Fund:
- PM-CARES was set up as a public charitable trust with the trust deed registered on March 27, 2020.
- It can avail donations from the foreign contribution and donations to fund can also avail 100% tax exemption.
- PM-CARES is different from the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund (PMNRF).

Who administers the fund?
Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.
- In 2021, the Delhi High Court was informed that the PM CARES Fund is not a Government of India fund and that the amount collected by it does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a public account?
2. Who administers PM CARES fund?
3. Which organisations are exempted from the ambit of RTI act?
4. What is Consolidated fund of India?
5. What is a charitable trust?
6. About NDRF.

Mains Link:
Discuss why PM CARES fund should be brought within the ambit of RTI act?

Topics: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. National Land Monetization Corporation:

Context:
The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up National Land Monetization Corporation (NLMC).
- The NLMC will be a wholly owned Government of India company with an initial authorized share capital of Rs 5000 crore and paid-up share capital of Rs 150 crore.

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NLMC will undertake monetization of surplus land and building assets of ‘Central Public Sector Enterprises’ (CPSEs) and other Government agencies.

The proposal is in pursuance of the Budget Announcement for 2021-22.

Key functions of NLMC:

- NLMC is expected to own, hold, manage and monetize surplus land and building assets of CPSEs under closure and the surplus non-core land assets of Government owned CPSEs under strategic disinvestment.
- This will speed up the closure process of CPSEs and smoothen the strategic disinvestment process of Government owned CPSEs.
- These assets may be transferred to NLMC to hold, manage and monetize these assets.
- NLMC will also advise and support other Government entities (including CPSEs) in identifying their surplus non-core assets and monetizing them in a professional and efficient manner to generate maximum value realization.
- In these cases, NLMC will undertake surplus land asset monetization as an agency function.
- It is expected that NLMC will act as a repository of best practices in land monetization, assist and provide technical advice to Government in implementation of asset monetization programme.

Composition:
NLMC will have necessary technical expertise to professionally manage and monetize land assets on behalf of CPSEs and other Government agencies.

- The Board of Directors of NLMC: will comprise senior Central Government officers and eminent experts to enable professional operations and management of the company.
- The Chairman, and non-Government Directors of the NLMC will be appointed through a merit-based selection process.

Need for:

- At present, Central Public Sector Enterprises’ (CPSEs) hold considerable surplus, unused and under used non-core assets in the nature of land and buildings.
- For CPSEs undergoing strategic disinvestment or closure, monetization of these surplus land and non-core assets is important to unlock their value.
- NLMC will support and undertake monetization of these assets.

Benefits:

- With monetization of non-core assets, Government would be able to generate substantial revenues by monetizing unused and under-used assets.
- This will also enable productive utilization of these under-utilized assets to trigger private sector investments, new economic activities, boost local economy and generate financial resources for economic and social infrastructure.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. NLMC.
2. Composition.
3. Functions.

Mains Link: Discuss about the roles and functions of NLMC.

Topics: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.

1. Supreme Court declines urgent hearing on VVPAT:

Context:
The Supreme Court has refused urgent hearing on a PIL seeking increase in the number of booths for EVM-VVPAT verification from five per constituency, as mandated by the apex court in 2019, to 25 or more for the March 10 counting of votes in five states.

Supreme Court’s April 18, 2019 directions for VVPAT verification:
In case of general elections, VVPAT slips of five EVMs in each Assembly segment of a Parliamentary Constituency would be subject to physical counting.

In State Assembly elections, the VVPAT verification would extend to five random EVMs in each Assembly constituency.

**Challenges associated with increase in the number of booths for EVM-VVPAT verification:**
Increased VVPAT slip counting would require extensive training and capacity building of election officials in the field. VVPAT slip counting takes place in specially erected VVPAT counting booths under the close monitoring of the returning officer and direct oversight of the observer.

**What is VVPAT?**
- Voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) is a method of providing feedback to voters using EVMs.
- A VVPAT is intended as an independent verification system for voting machines designed to allow voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, and to provide a means to audit the stored electronic results.
- It contains the name of the candidate for whom vote has been cast and symbol of the party/individual candidate.

**Significance and the need for VVPATs:**
- The VVPAT helps to detect potential election fraud or malfunction in the Electronic Voting Machine.
- It provides a means to audit the stored electronic results. It serves as an additional barrier to change or destroy votes.
- The EVMs with VVPAT system ensure the accuracy of the voting system with fullest transparency and restores the confidence of the voters.
- EVMs and VVPATs also speed up the election process as counting votes on EVMs takes much lesser time than counting paper ballots.

**Need of the hour:**
However the cynicism continues to remain, regarding the fallibility of EVMs and thus necessitates an in depth scrutiny to allay any apprehensions regarding the most important feature of a democratic polity- Elections.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. About VVPAT.
2. Features.
3. What are EVMs?
4. About the right to vote.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in Elections.

**2. Registration of political parties:**

**Context:***
The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is the only big winner apart from the BJP this election, with the party, going by trends, set to form the government in Punjab with a lead in 91 seats and opening its account in Goa with two seats and a vote share of 6%.

**Can AAP claim to be a national party?**
Not yet. For a party to be recognised as a ‘national party’ it needs to meet one of the three criteria – and the AAP doesn’t meet any of those.

**Registration of political parties:**
Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.**
A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Election Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

To be eligible for a ‘National Political Party of India:
1. It wins at least two percent seats in the House of the People (i.e., 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different States.
2. Get at least six percent votes in four states in addition to four Lok Sabha seats.
3. Be recognised as a ‘state party’ in four or more states.

To be eligible for a ‘State Political Party:
1. It must secure six percent of the votes during the Assembly elections and two Assembly seats; or
2. Six per cent of votes in the Lok Sabha from the state and an MP from the state; or
3. Three per cent of total Assembly seats or three seats (whichever is greater); or
4. One MP from every 25 Lok Sabha seats or eight per cent of total votes in the state during the Lok Sabha election from the state or the Assembly polls.

Benefits:
1. If a party is recognised as a State Party’, it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a ‘National Party’ it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.
2. Recognised ‘State’ and ‘National’ parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.
3. They also get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
4. The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Registration of Political Parties.
2. Recognised vs Unrecognised political parties.

5. Wo is a star campaigner?
6. Article 324 of the Indian Constitution.
7. Section 29A of RPA 1951.

Link:

3. One Nation, One Election:

Context:
Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra has said that the Election Commission is ready to hold simultaneous elections or ‘One Nation, One Election’.

- Earlier this year, on National Voters’ Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address had raised the topics of ‘One Nation, One Election’ and ‘One Nation, One Voters’ list’, and had said that the continuous cycle of election results is affecting development works.

What is ‘One Nation, One Election’?
It refers to holding elections to Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban local bodies simultaneously, once in five year.

But, what are the challenges posed by frequent elections?
1. Massive expenditure.
2. Policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time.
3. Impact on delivery of essential services.
4. Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.
5. Puts pressure on political parties, especially smaller ones, as elections are becoming increasingly expensive.

Benefits of Simultaneous Elections:
- **Governance and consistency**: The ruling parties will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever.
- **Reduced Expenditure of Money and Administration**.
- **Continuity** in policies and programmes.
- **Efficiency of Governance**: Populist measures by governments will reduce.
- **The impact of black money on the voters** will be reduced as all elections are held at a time.

Impact on Regional parties:
There is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in power in the state and at the Centre in case the Lok Sabha polls and the state elections are held together.

For simultaneous elections to be implemented, **Changes to be made in Constitution and Legislations**:
1. Article 83 which deals with the duration of Houses of Parliament need an amendment.
2. Article 85 (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president).
3. Article 172 (relating to the duration of state legislatures).

The **Representation of People Act, 1951 Act** would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies. This should include the following crucial elements:
1. Restructuring the powers and functions of the ECI to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
2. A definition of simultaneous election can be added to section 2 of the 1951 act.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is Model Code of Conduct?
2. Powers of the Election Commission to conduct elections.
4. Overview of Articles- 83, 85 and 172.

**Mains Link**: Discuss the merits and demerits of the concept of “One nation, One election” for Indian polity.

**Topics**: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. **Governor's address**:

**Context:**
The customary governor’s address on the opening day of the budget session of a state assembly was mired in controversy recently in West Bengal and Telangana.

**What happened in West Bengal?**
The governor of West Bengal, Jagdeep Dhankhar, was unable to deliver his address at the Vidhan Sabha on the first day of the budget session, amid sloganeering, chaos and protests.

**What happened in Telangana?**
In Telangana, the budget session of the state assembly commenced without the customary governor’s address, and the incumbent, Tamilisai Soundararajan, expressed discontent over the state government’s decision to not have the governor’s address at the beginning of the session.

**Governor's Address:**

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Article 176(1) of the Constitution of India enjoins that the Governor shall Address both the Houses assembled together at the commencement of the first Session after each general election to the Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year and inform the Legislature of the causes of its Summons.

What it contains?
The Address of the Governor contains a review of the activities and Achievements of the Government during the previous year and their policy with regard to important internal problems as well as a brief account of the programme of Government Business for the session.

Discussions on Governor's address:
- On the first day on which the discussion on the Address of the Governor begins, a copy of the Address of the Governor is laid on the table of the House.
- The Speaker, in consultation with the Business Advisory Committee, allot time for discussion of the matters referred to in the Governor's Address.
- A motion is moved by a member and seconded by another member thanking the Governor for the Address.
- The occasion provided for General Discussion in respect of any aspect of administration and also the matters referred to in the address.
- Members may move Amendments to the Motion of Thanks in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker.

Do you know about the Motion of thanks to the president?
Read this article to understand.

Insta Curious: Do you know what happens if the President disagrees with the text of the speech? Are they still bound to read it? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Motion of Thanks?
2. Amendments.
3. Its passage.
5. About President’s address.
7. First Constitutional Amendment.
8. What procedures follow the address?
9. If the President disagrees with the text of the speech, are they still bound to read it?

Mains Link: What is Motion of Thanks? Discuss its significance.

2. Women in Judiciary:

Context:
Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana has dubbed it “unfortunate” that only 17 of 37 women recommended by the Supreme Court collegium were appointed as judges in high courts while the rest still remain pending with the government.

Suggestions made by the CJI:
- The appointment of women judges should not be reduced to a mere “symbolic” gesture.
- Women judges add rich experience and bring to the table a nuanced understanding of the differing impacts that certain laws may have on both men and women.

Status of women in Indian judiciary:
- In the 71 years of history of the SC, there have been only 11 women judges (Source: Wikipedia) — the first was Justice Fathima Beevi, who was elevated to the bench after a long gap of 39 years from the date of establishment of the SC.
- The 25 high courts in the states have 81 women among 677 judges - five of them do not have a single female judge.
Benefits of diversity and gender representation in Supreme court:

1. Increased Transparency, inclusiveness, and representation.
2. By their mere presence, women judges enhance the legitimacy of courts, sending a powerful signal that they are open and accessible to those who seek recourse to justice.
3. By elucidating how laws and rulings can be based on gender stereotypes, or how they might have a different impact on women and men, a gender perspective enhances the fairness of the adjudication.
4. Women judges bring those lived experiences to their judicial actions, experiences that tend toward a more comprehensive and empathetic perspective.
5. Improving the representation of women could go a long way towards a more balanced and empathetic approach in cases involving sexual violence.

Challenges to women’s entry into judiciary:

The eligibility criteria to take the entrance exams:

- Lawyers need to have seven years of continuous legal practice and be in the age bracket of 35-45.
- This is a disadvantage for women as many are married by this age.

Further, the long and inflexible work hours in law, combined with familial responsibilities, force many women to drop out of practice and they fail to meet the requirement of continuous practice.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the Supreme Court currently has the highest number of women judges ever in its history? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
- What is collegium?
- How are Judges of Supreme Court and high courts appointed?
- Appointment of retired judges.
- Related constitutional provisions.
- Powers and functions.

Mains Link: Discuss the issues associated with collegium system for the appointment of judges.


3. Appointment and removal of Chief Minster:

Context:

Pushkar Singh Dhami recently took oath as the 12th chief minister of Uttarakhand.

- Since, according to the constitution, the chief minister is appointed by the governor, the swearing in is done before the governor of the state.

Appointment of CM:

The Chief Minister is appointed by the governor.

- Art. 164 of the Constitution provides that there shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at its hand to aid and advise the governor.

Who can be a Chief Minister?

After general election to the State Legislative Assembly, the party or coalition group which secures majority in this House, elects its leader and communicates his name to the Governor. The Governor then formally appoints him as the Chief Minister and asks him to form his Council of Ministers.

- When no party gets a clear majority in the State Legislative Assembly, the Governor normally asks the leader of the single largest party to form the government.

Tenure:

Theoretically, the Chief Minister holds office during the pleasure of the Governor. However, in actual practice the Chief Minister remains in office so long as he continues to be the leader of the majority in the State Legislative Assembly.

- The Governor can dismiss him in case he loses his majority support.
- The State Legislative Assembly can also remove him by passing a vote of no-confidence against him.
Powers and Functions of the Chief Minister:
- To Aid and Advice the Governor.
- The Chief Minister is at the Head of the Council of Ministers.
- He is the Leader of the House.
- He has to communicate to the Governor all the decisions of the council of ministers relating to the administration of the states.
- All the policies are announced by him on the floor of the house.
- He recommends dissolution of legislative assembly to the Governor.
- He advises the Governor regarding summoning, proroguing the sessions of State Legislative Assembly from time to time.

Insta Curious: Did you know that Section 11 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, allows the Election Commission to reduce or remove disqualification “for reasons to be recorded”? Know more about this [here](#).

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who can be a Chief Minister?
2. Role of Governor in appointing a Chief Minister.
3. Council of Ministers.

Mains Link: Discuss the roles and functions of a Chief Minister.

Topics: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights:

Context:
National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) celebrated its 17th Foundation Day, recently.

About the NCPCR:
NCPCR was set up in March 2007 under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005, an Act of Parliament (December 2005).
- The Commission began operational on 5 March 2007.
- NCPCR is a statutory body under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.

Mandate:
- The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Definition of a Child:
Under the CPCR Act, The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.

Functions of NCPCR:
Under the RTE Act, 2009, the NCPCR can:
- Inquire into complaints about violation of the law.
- Summon an individual and demand evidence.
- Seek a magisterial enquiry.
- File a writ petition in the High Court or Supreme Court.
- Approach the government concerned for prosecution of the offender.
- Recommend interim relief to those affected.

Composition of NCPCR:
- This commission has a chairperson and six members.
- Of which at least two should be women.
● These are appointed by Central Government for three years.
● The maximum age to serve in commission is 65 years for Chairman and 60 years for members.

2. What is ‘general consent’ for the CBI, now withdrawn by Meghalaya?

Context:
Meghalaya has withdrawn consent to the CBI to investigate cases in the state, becoming the ninth state to have taken this step.
● Eight other states which had withdrawn consent to the CBI: Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, and Mizoram.

How withdrawal of consent affects investigations?
In November last year, the Supreme Court had expressed concern over a submission by the CBI that since 2018, around 150 requests for sanction to investigate had been pending with the eight state governments who had withdrawn general consent until then.

Why is consent necessary?
The CBI is governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act that makes consent of a state government mandatory for conducting investigation in that state.

There are two kinds of consent:
Case-specific and general— Given that the CBI has jurisdiction only over central government departments and employees, it can investigate a case involving state government employees or a violent crime in a given state only after that state government gives its consent.
● “General consent” is normally given to help the CBI seamlessly conduct its investigation into cases of corruption against central government employees in the concerned state.

What does withdrawal mean?
It simply means that CBI officers will lose all powers of a police officer as soon as they enter the state unless the state government has allowed them.
● The decision means the CBI will now have to get consent from the state government for every case it registers in Maharashtra.

Under what provision can general consent be withdrawn?
In exercise of power conferred by Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, the state governments can withdraw the general consent accorded.

Can withdrawal mean that the CBI can no longer probe any case?
No. The CBI would still have the power to investigate old cases registered when general consent existed. Also, cases registered anywhere else in the country, but involving people stationed in states which have withdrawn consent, would allow CBI’s jurisdiction to extend to these states.

Calcutta High Court verdict:
Calcutta High Court recently ruled in a case of illegal coal mining and cattle smuggling being investigated by the CBI, that the central agency cannot be stopped from probing an employee of the central government in another state. The order has been challenged in the Supreme Court.
● In Vinay Mishra vs the CBI, Calcutta HC ruled in July this year that corruption cases must be treated equally across the country, and a central government employee could not be “distinguished” just because his office was located in a state that had withdrawn general consent.
● The HC also said that withdrawal of consent would apply in cases where only employees of the state government were involved.

Issues with CBI Autonomy:
After the 2018 amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, the Centre has come to exercise power over the CBI not just administratively, but also legally.

- In 2018, the government pushed through Parliament amendments to Section 17A of the Act making it mandatory for the CBI to seek the Centre’s permission before registering a case of corruption against any government servant.

Insta Curious: Suits under Article 131 are filed exclusively in the Supreme Court with regard to disputes between States, or between the Centre and State. Do you know about the original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About CBI and its establishment.

Mains Link: Can withdrawal mean that the CBI can no longer probe any case? Discuss.

3. **Lokpal** fails to give prosecution sanction to anyone in nearly three years:

Context:
The Lokpal has failed to provide prosecution sanction to public servants charged with corruption since its constitution nearly three years ago, according to an RTI reply by the anti-graft ombudsman.

Other issues:
The appointments of directors of inquiry and prosecution, the two top personnel for looking into complaints of corruption and processing prosecution of accused public servants, are yet to be made.

Who is a director of inquiry?
According to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:
- There shall be a director of inquiry, not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.
- He/she shall be appointed by the Central government for conducting preliminary inquiries referred to the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) by the Lokpal.

Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:
1. The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
2. The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
3. The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
4. The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
5. The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
6. The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

Powers:
1. The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
2. As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
3. An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
4. Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

[www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)
Insta Curious: Read Briefly about the origin of the concept of Ombudsman

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Lokpal.
2. Powers.
3. Functions.
4. Selection.

Mains Link: Comment on the changes made to Lokpal Act and its delay in operationalisation.

4. Competition Commission of India (CCI)

What to study?
For prelims: objectives, composition and functions of CCI.
For mains: issues associated with its functioning and the need for reforms.

Context: The Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022 has been introduced that aims to improve regulatory set-up by increasing the CCI’s accountability, giving it flexibility and enforcement efficiency.

Key Changes mentioned in the bill:
Increasing transparency and strengthening the accountability:
• A board with part-time members to supervise CCI activities.
  o This would bring its regulatory architecture at par with that of financial regulators.
• CCI to mandatorily issue penalty guidelines and give reasons in case of any divergence.
  o It will give much-needed certainty in regulatory environment.

Enforcement efficiency:
• CCI could engage in structured negotiations with parties and arrive at mutually-workable solutions without having to go through lengthy formal proceedings.
  ▪ This will bring powers of CCI on par with Sebi, which has been passing settlement orders for over a decade.
  o Previously CCI was only empowered to take action for abuse of dominance or anti-competitive agreements in the form of final orders in proceedings before it.
• CCI can make appeals to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal conditional on a pre-deposit of up to 25% of the penalty imposed by the CCI.
  o This change is likely to deter frivolous appeals.
• Shortening of the merger review period from 210 to 150 days
• Introduction of a green channel for merger applications: Certain categories of mergers that had to wait for CCI approval would be allowed to attain full consummation without any standstill obligation under the new green-channel process.

Flexibility: Previously, only those agreements are allowed if agreements made between businesses at the same level of production (such as competitors that form a cartel) or businesses that are in a directly upstream or downstream market (such as agreements between a manufacturer and distributor). If the parties do not fall in either of these brackets, anti-competitive agreements between them can go unchecked.
• But the bill also recognizes other forms of cartels such as hub-and-spoke cartels, it also has a catch-all provision to enable the CCI to deal with anti-competitive pacts irrespective of the structural relationships between parties.

Limitations:
• The bill does little to address competition concerns in digital markets. e.g., mergers concern in digital markets between entities that do not have significant assets or turnover, but are still very significant (such as Facebook-WhatsApp). The flexibility to introduce new thresholds will let the CCI review such mergers.
• No effective clause for regulating anti-competitive conduct by digital platforms.
• **Delayed**: It was released for public comments in 2020, and given the rapid developments in digital markets and global regulatory responses, it seems to have got dated already.

**Competition Commission of India:**
It is a statutory body of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.

**Objectives of the Commission:**
- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
- To promote and sustain competition in markets.
- To protect the interests of consumers.
- To ensure freedom of trade.

**Functions of the commission:**
- It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

**Insta Curious:**
Comparison of the current bill with 2002 version?
How might cartels be worse than monopolies? Read this.

**InstaLinks:**

Prelims Link:
1. About CCI.
2. Highlights of the Competition Act and amendments to it.

Mains Link: Discuss the roles and functions of CCI.
Sources: Live Mint

5. **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST):**

**Context:**
The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has been dysfunctional for the last four years and has not delivered a single report to Parliament, a parliamentary committee has said in a recent report.

The pending reports include:
- A study by the Commission of the impact of the Indira Sagar Polavaram Project in Andhra Pradesh on the tribal population.
- A special report on rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced tribals because of the Rourkela Steel Plant.

**Challenges/issues associated with the functioning of NCST:**
- Manpower and budgetary shortage.
- Less number of applicants as the eligibility bar is set too high.
- Its rate of pendency of resolution of complaints and cases that it receives is also close to 50 per cent.

**About NCST:**
NCST was established by amending Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003.
By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- (i) the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and (ii) the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

**Composition:** The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge.
- The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.
- They are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
- At least one member should be a woman.
- The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson and the other Members hold office for a term of 3 years.
- The members are not eligible for appointment for more than two terms.

**Powers:** NCST is empowered to investigate and monitor matters relating to safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws or under Govt. order. The Commission is also authorized to inquire into specific complaints relating to rights and safeguards of STs and to participate and advise in the Planning Process relating to socio-economic development of STs and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and States.

**Report:** The commission submits its report to the President annually on the working of safeguards and measures required for effective implementation of Programmers/ Schemes relating to welfare and socio-economic development of STs.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About NCST.
2. About NCSC.
4. About Articles 338 and 338A.
5. Functions.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the functions of NCSC.

**6. National Commission for Women:**

**Context:**
In a move to make legal aid more accessible for women, the National Commission for Women (NCW) in collaboration with Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLSA) has launched a legal aid clinic which will act as a single-window facility for resolving grievances of women by offering them free legal assistance.
- NCW is also planning to set up similar legal services clinics in other State Commissions for Women.

**About the legal aid clinic:**
Under the new legal aid clinic, counseling will be provided for walk-in complainants, women in distress will be given legal assistance, advice and information on various schemes of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)/ DSLSA, assistance in mahila jansunwai, free legal aid, hearings in matrimonial cases and other complaints registered with the Commission will be provided among other services.

**About NCW:**
- Set up in 1992 under the National commission Act.
- It was established to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women.
- It enjoys all the powers of a civil court.

**Presentation of Reports:**
It table reports to the central government, every year and at such other times as the commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.

**Suo motu notice:**
It looks into complaints, and takes Suo Motto notice of matters relating to – deprivation of women’s rights, Non-implementation of the laws and Non-compliance of the policy decisions guaranteeing the welfare for women society.

**Major limitations of National Commission for Women making it toothless:**

1. The NCW is only recommendatory and has no power to enforce its decisions.
2. Commission lacks constitutional status, and thus has no legal powers to summon police officers or witnesses.
3. It has no power to take legal actions against the Internal Complaint Committees that prevent grievance redressal of women facing harassment.
4. Financial assistance provided to the Commission is very less to cater to its needs.
5. It does not have the power to choose its own members. The power selecting members is vested with the Union government leading to political interference at various levels.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that the first Commission was constituted on 31st January 1992 with Mrs. Jayanti Patnaik as the Chairperson?

**InstaLinks:**

Prelims Link:

1. About NCW.
2. Composition.
3. Functions.
4. NALSA.
5. Free legal aid.

**Topics:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**1. Govt has no right to enact law for 3 capitals: HC:**

**Context:**

The Andhra Pradesh high court has ordered Amaravati’s development as the state capital and ruled the government has no right to enact fresh legislation for three capitals.

**What has the Court said?**

The state legislature lacks competence to make any legislation for shifting, bifurcating or trifurcating the capital and heads of departments of the three wings of the government, including the high court, to any area other than the capital city notified under Section 3 of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority Act, 2014 (APCRDA), and the land pooled under the Andhra Pradesh Capital City Land Pooling Scheme Rules, 2015.

- Parliament alone is competent to deal with the setting up of legislature, executive and judicial organs of the state, and this was implicit in the language employed in Article 4 of the Constitution.
  - Article 4 declares that laws made for admission or establishment of new states (under Article 2) and formation of new states and alteration of areas, boundaries, or names of existing states (under Articles 3) are not to be considered as amendments of the Constitution under Article 368.

**What’s the issue?**

In November 2021, the government repealed the legislation saying it will bring in a fresh fool-proof law to ensure no legal hurdles. But the court continued to hear the petitions.

- The Andhra Pradesh Assembly had passed a Bill to repeal the A.P. Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act (aimed at setting up three capitals), and the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) Repeal Act of 2020.

The repeal was intended to impart more clarity to the policy of decentralisation and an exhaustive explanation to all sections of people.
Three-capitals issue:
On July 31, 2021, the state government notified the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Act, 2020, and the AP Capital Region Development Authority (Repeal) Act, 2020. This law paved the way for three capitals for the state.

1. Amaravati—legislative capital.
2. Visakhapatnam—executive capital.

Need for three capitals:
1. Three capitals ensure equal development of different regions of the state.

Why implementing this idea will be difficult?
1. Coordination and logistics fear: Coordinating between seats of legislature and executive in separate cities will be easier said than done, and with the government offering no specifics of a plan, officers and common people alike fear a logistics nightmare.
2. Time and costs of travel: Executive capital Visakhapatnam is 700 km from judicial capital Kurnool, and 400 km from legislative capital Amaravati. The Amaravati-Kurnool distance is 370 km. The time and costs of travel will be significant.

Insta Curious:
Which other Indian states have multiple capitals?

1. Maharashtra has two capitals—Mumbai and Nagpur (which holds the winter session of the state assembly).
2. Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamshala (winter).
3. The former state of Jammu & Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu (winter) as capitals.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a Public Interest Litigation petition?
2. Which Indian states have multiple capitals?
3. AP’s proposed capitals.
4. Various writs under the Indian constitution.

Mains Link: Discuss the idea of multiple state capitals. Explain in what way it may impact the governance of a state in the country? Substantiate with suitable example.

Link: https://epaper.thehindu.com/Home/MShareArticle?OrgId=GT697EO11.1&imageview=0.

2. Defence Acquisition Procedure:

Context:
In a renewed push for self-reliance in the defence sector, the government has given in-principle approval to a raft of indigenous defence projects that will involve design and development by the industry. The defence ministry has cleared nine such projects: four under the ‘Make-I’ and five under the ‘Make-2’ categories of the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020.

- The approved projects include development of light tanks, communication equipment with Indian security protocols, airborne electro-optical pod with ground-based system and airborne stand-off jammers.

DAP 2020:
- The new policy superseded the Defence Procurement Procedure of 2016 from October 1.
- The DAP contains policies and procedures for procurement and acquisition from the capital budget of the MoD in order to modernise the Armed Forces including the Coast Guard.

Highlights of the new policy:
1. Reservations for Indigenous firms:
The policy reserves several procurement categories for indigenous firms.
DAP 2020 defines an “Indian vendor” as a company that is owned and controlled by resident Indian citizens, with foreign direct investment (FDI) not more than 49 per cent.

2. **New Buy (Global–Manufacture in India) category:**
   This stipulates indigenisation of at least 50 per cent of the overall contract value of a foreign purchase bought with the intention of subsequently building it in India with technology transfer.

3. **Greater indigenous content:**
   It promotes greater indigenous content in arms and equipment of the military procures, including equipment manufactured in India under licence. In most acquisition categories, DAP-2020 stipulates **10 per cent higher indigenisation than DPP 2016.**

4. **Import embargo list:**
   The “import embargo list” of 101 items that the government promulgated last month has been specifically incorporated into DAP 2020. (An embargo is a government order that restricts commerce with a specified country or the exchange of specific goods.)

5. **Offset liability:**
   The government has decided **not to have an offset clause in procurement of defence equipment** if the deal is done through inter-government agreement (IGA), government-to-government or an ab initio single vendor.
   - **The offset clause** requires a foreign vendor to invest a part of the contract value in India.

**Insta Curious:** The Union Cabinet, in 2021, approved enhanced delegation of financial powers **for capital procurement** to senior officers below the rank of Vice-Chief of armed forces.

**Under the Other Capital Procurement Procedure of Defence Acquisition Procedure-2020:**
1. Financial powers up to ₹100 crore have been delegated to Army Commanders and equivalent of other services and regional Commanders, Coast Guard.
2. Powers up to ₹200 crore have been delegated to Deputy Chief of Army Staff (CD &S), Master General Sustenance, Chief of Material, Air Officer Maintenance, Deputy Chief, Integrated Defence Staff and additional director general of Coast Guard.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. What is offset liability?
2. What is Base Control Price?
3. Is DAP 2020 applicable for Coast Guard?

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

3. **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Aushadhi Yojana:**

**Context:**
Janaushadhi Diwas week to be observed from 1st March to 7th March 2022.
- **Theme of 4th Janaushadhi Diwas:** “Jan Aushadhi-Jan Upyogi”
- Pharmaceuticals & Medical Devices Bureau of India (PMBI) is the implementing agency of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

**Performance of the scheme:**
- All the districts of the country have been covered under the scheme.
- Effective IT-enabled logistics and supply-chain systems for ensuring real-time distribution of medicines at all outlets have also been introduced.
- Product basket of PMBJP presently comprises 1,451 drugs and 240 surgical instruments.
About PMBJP:
It is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals of the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- It seeks to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendra’s known as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra.
- Initially launched in 2008, the scheme was rechristened in 2015.

Key features of the scheme:
1. Ensure access to quality medicines.
2. Extend coverage of quality generic medicines so as to reduce the out of pocket expenditure on medicines and thereby redefine the unit cost of treatment per person.
3. Create awareness about generic medicines through education and publicity so that quality is not synonymous with only high price.
4. A public programme involving Government, PSUs, Private Sector, NGO, Societies, Co-operative Bodies and other Institutions.
5. Create demand for generic medicines by improving access to better healthcare through low treatment cost and easy availability wherever needed in all therapeutic categories.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the first WHO draft text on GMP was adopted in 1968? In 1969, when the World Health Assembly recommended the first version of the WHO Certification Scheme on the quality of pharmaceutical products moving in the global market, it accepted the WHO GMP as an integral part of the Scheme. Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. When was the scheme launched?
2. When was it renamed?
3. The scheme was launched by which Ministry?
4. About BPPI- establishment and functions.
5. What is a generic medicine?

Mains Link: Discuss the need for and significance of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Priyojana (PMBJP).

4. Data protection Bill:
Context:
The government has said that it is studying the inputs received on the draft data protection bill, and will carefully ensure that any legislation in the digital ecosystem will act as an enabler, fuelling the growth momentum.
- On December 16, 2021, the Joint Committee on Personal Data Protection Bill had tabled its report in both the Houses of Parliament, giving its views on various provisions.

Background:
Nearly two years after it was constituted on 11 December 2019, the Joint Committee on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, headed by BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary, presented its final report on the upcoming bill in both Houses of Parliament on 16 December.

Key recommendations:
1. Remove the word ‘personal’ from the existing title of ‘Personal Data Protection Bill’. This is intended to reflect that the bill, in order to better ensure privacy, will also be dealing with non-personal data, such as personal data that has been anonymised.
2. Amend the section restricting the transfer of personal data outside India to say “sensitive personal data shall not be shared with any foreign government or agency unless such sharing is approved by the central government.

3. No social media platform be allowed to operate in India unless its parent company, which controls the technology powering its services, sets up an office in the country.

4. It proposes a separate regulatory body to be set up to regulate the media.

5. Jail term of up to 3 years, fine of Rs 2 lakh or both if de-identified data is re-identified by any person.

6. The word ‘personal’ ought to be dropped from the name of the Bill.

7. Central government may exempt any government agency from the legislation only under exceptional circumstances.

How do these recommendations compare with EU regulation?
The JCP recommendations on the Personal Data Protection Bill are in some aspects very similar to global standards such as European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation.

Similarities:
Consent: Users must have informed consent about the way their data is processed so that they can opt in or out.

Breach: Authorities must be notified of a breach within 72 hours of the leak.

Transition period: Two-year transition period for provisions of GDPR to be put in place.

Data fiduciary: Under EU law, a Data fiduciary is any natural or legal person, public authority, agency or body that determines purpose and means of data processing. In India, it also includes NGOs.

The committee has recommended the formation of a Data Protection Authority (DPA):
The Data Protection Authority (DPA) will be dealing with privacy and personal data as well as non-personal data.

Composition of DPA: The Chairperson and the members of the DPA shall be appointed by the Union government based on the recommendation of a selection committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.

- Other members of the committee would be the Attorney General of India, the IT and law secretaries.

- Nominated members: An independent expert and a director each from the IIT and the IIM will be nominated by the Centre.

Other Highlights of the Bill:
- The bill proposes to specify the flow and usage of personal data, protect the rights of individuals whose personal data are processed, as it works out the framework for the cross-border transfer, accountability of entities processing data, and moots remedies for unauthorised and harmful processing.

- It also seeks to provide the government with powers to give exemptions to its probe agencies from the provisions of the legislation, a move that has been strongly opposed by the opposition MPs who had filed their dissent notes.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the genesis of this Bill lies in the report prepared by a Committee of Experts headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna? Read this.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Data protection bill.

Mains Link: Comment on the controversial provisions of the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019.

5. Haryana govt’s anti-conversion Bill:
Context:
Dr. Raghuvir Singh Kadian, a six-time MLA, was suspended in Haryana Assembly after he tore a copy of the Bill on the floor of the House.
So far Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have enacted legislations to prevent unlawful religious conversions.

About the Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religious Bill, 2022:
Aim at prohibiting religious conversions which are affected through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage by making it an offense.
Punishment: The Bill provides for greater punishment for such conversions in respect of minor, women, Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
The burden of proof: It also provides for that the burden of proof as to whether a conversion was not affected through misrepresentation, use of force, under threat, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage for the purpose of carrying out conversion lies on the accused.
Declaration: Every individual converting from one religion to another shall submit to the prescribed authority a declaration that the conversion affected through was not misrepresentation, use of force, under threat, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage and such authority shall make an inquiry in such cases.

Rationale behind the introduction of this Bill:
The Constitution confers on each individual the fundamental right to profess, practice and propagate his religion.
- However, the individual right to freedom of conscience and religion cannot be extended to construe a collective right to proselytize; for the right to religious freedom belongs equally to the person converting and the individual sought to be converted.
- Still, there have been umpteen cases of religious conversions, both mass and individual.

Rationale behind the enactment of anti-conversion laws:
1. Threats of forceful conversion.
2. Problem of Inducement or allurement.
3. Religious conversion is not a Fundamental Right.

What do critics say?
Such laws have come under sharp criticism from several legal scholars who had contended that the concept of ‘love jihad’ did not have any constitutional or legal basis.
- They have pointed to Article 21 of the constitution which guarantees individuals the right to marry a person of one’s choice.
- Also, under Article 25, freedom of conscience, the practice and conversion of religion of one’s choice including not following any religion, are also guaranteed.

Supreme Court on Marriage and Conversion:
1. The Apex Court of India in its several judgments has held that the state and the courts have no jurisdiction over an adult’s absolute right to choose a life partner.
2. The Supreme Court of India, in both the Lily Thomas and Sarla Mudgal cases, has confirmed that religious conversions carried out without a bona fide belief and for the sole purpose of deriving some legal benefit do not hold water.
3. Salamat Ansari-Priyanka Kharwar case of Allahabad High Court 2020: The right to choose a partner or live with a person of choice was part of a citizen’s fundamental right to life and liberty (Article 21).

Need of the hour:
1. There is a need for uniformity: Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights mentions everyone has the right to freedom of religion including changing their faith. Since it is a state subject, the Centre can frame a model law like Model law on contract farming etc.

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2. States while enacting anti-conversion laws should not put any vague or ambiguous provisions for the person who wanted to convert of his own will.

3. The anti-conversion laws also need to include a provision to mention the valid steps for conversion by minority community institutions.

4. People also need to be educated about the provisions and ways of Forceful conversions, Inducement or allurement, etc.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA) was enacted to facilitate the marriage of couples professing different faiths? [Reference](#).

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
2. Article 25.

**Mains Link:** The right to choose a partner or live with a person of choice was part of a citizen’s fundamental right to life and liberty. Discuss.

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6. **Equalisation Levy:**

**Context:**
Justifying the 2 per cent equalisation levy (EL) imposed by India on the supply of services by multinational enterprises, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said it is a sovereign right to tax revenues earned from operations in the country.

**About the Equalisation Levy:**
India was the one of the first countries to introduce a 6 per cent equalisation levy in 2016, but the levy was restricted to online advertisement services. However, India introduced the digital tax in April 2020 for foreign companies selling goods and services online to customers in India and showing annual revenues more than INR 20 million.

**Applicability:**
India has expanded the scope of the equalisation levy over the last few years, to tax non-resident digital entities.

- While the levy applied only to digital advertising services till 2019-20 at the rate of 6 percent, the government in April 2020 widened the scope to impose a 2 per cent tax on non-resident e-commerce players with a turnover of Rs 2 crore.
- The scope was further widened in the Finance Act 2021-22 to cover e-commerce supply or service when any activity takes place online.
- Since May 2021, this also includes any entity that systematically and continuously does business with more than 3 lakh users in India.

**When will the tax not apply?**
Offshore e-commerce firms that sell through an Indian arm will not have to pay.

- This means if the goods and services sold on a foreign e-commerce platform are owned or provided by an Indian resident or Indian permanent establishment, they will not be subject to the two percent equalization levy.

**Why was it imposed?**
The equalisation levy was imposed “to give level playing field between Indian businesses who pay tax in India and foreign e-commerce companies who do business in India but do not pay any income tax here.

**Which other countries impose such a levy on digital sellers?**
1. France imposes a three percent digital services tax.
In the ASEAN region, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia impose a digital service tax with Thailand announcing forthcoming plans to tax its foreign digital service providers.

Why the United States Trade Representative (USTR) says that this tax is discriminatory?
1. First, it states that the DST discriminates against US digital businesses because it specifically excludes from its ambit domestic (Indian) digital businesses.
2. USTR also says the DST is discriminatory because it does not extend to identical services provided by non-digital service providers.

Why India says Digital services tax is not discriminatory? And why is it needed?
- Business models employed by non-resident digital service providers obviate the need for a physical presence in India and profits earned here could easily escape the Indian income tax net. Hence, this kind of taxation is necessary.
- Changing International Economic Order: Countries such as India which provide large markets for digital corporations seek a greater right to tax incomes.

Associated Concerns:
1. Eventually the tax may become a burden for Digital Consumers.
2. It could invite retaliatory tariffs (such as the latest one), as similar tariffs were imposed by the US on France.
3. It would also result in double taxation.

Did you know?
In October 2021, G20 countries approved a global deal to adopt a 15 per cent minimum corporate tax and reallocate taxing rights for large profitable multinational enterprises (MNEs) to countries where they sell products and services.

Insta Curious:
1. Think! For clarity on concepts:
   In B2B transactions where the Service Provider is outside India and the Service Receiver is inside India, who is the liable entity for tax? Read Here.

InstaLinks:
1. About the equalization levy.
2. Applicability.
3. Exceptions.
4. Other countries with similar taxes.
5. About OECD.

Mains Link: Discuss the issues associated with the implementation of equalization levy.

7. Raising the age of consent in the Philippines:

Context:
The Philippines has raised its age of sexual consent from 12 years to 16 years. The law is gender-neutral and applies to both male and female children and offenders.
- Until now, it had one of the lowest ages of consent in the world, with roughly one in five children experiencing sexual violence.

What is the "age of consent" in India?
In India, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, defines a “child” as anyone below 18 years of age, and hence, engaging in sexual activity with a ‘child’ is considered sexual assault.

The demand for the review of age of consent in India:
The fact remains that many of the cases of sexual assault reported to the police (under the Pocso Act and other laws) dealing with the 16-18 years-old children are consensual in nature and are generally reported at the behest of girl’s parents who disapprove of the teenagers’ conduct.

- Therefore, the most relevant question to be addressed is whether a teenage girl or boy of this age has the capability to give “free consent”.
- Records show that in most cases in this age group, girls turn hostile because the sexual act was not against their will and they were not allured or induced into indulging in the act.
- It has also been observed that due to a change in the sociocultural environment in recent decades, teenagers are sensible enough to understand the implications of their conduct.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
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.

Mains Link: Do you think minimum age for marriage for men and women should be raised? Discuss.

8. Amendment to Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act:

Context:
The Union Cabinet has approved amendments to the Second Schedule of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 for specifying the rate of royalty in respect of Glaucnite, Potash, Emerald, Platinum Group of Metals (PGM), Andalusite, Sillimanite and Molybdenum.

Significance:
The approval would ensure auction of mineral blocks in respect of Glaucnite, Potash, Emerald, Platinum Group of metals, Andalusite and Molybdenum for the first time in the country.

Did you know?
- Minerals like Glaucnite and Potash are used as fertilizer in agriculture.
- Platinum Group of Metals (PGM) are high value metal used in various industries and new innovative applications.
- Minerals like Andalusite, molybdenum are vital minerals used in industrial applications.

Implications of the move:
- Encouraging indigenous mining of these minerals is in the National interest that would lead to a reduction in imports in potash fertilizers and other minerals.
- This step taken by the Ministry of Mines is also expected to increase the generation of employment in the mining sector.
- It will also ensure increased availability of minerals for the downstream industries and support agriculture.
- The approval will lead to import substitution in respect of many important minerals for the economy of the country thereby saving valuable forex reserves. It will reduce the country’s foreign dependency through the local production of minerals.

Previous amendments:
The Act was amended in 2015 to usher in a new regime of granting mineral concessions through auction to ensure transparency and non-discrimination in the allocation of the mineral wealth of the country. The auction regime has matured since then.

To give further impetus to the mineral sector, the Act has been further amended in 2021. Under the reforms, the Government has given a major boost to the auction of mineral blocks, increasing production, improving ease of doing business in the country and increasing the contribution of mineral production to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
Know more about MMDR Amendment Bill, 2021, [here](#).

**Insta Curious:**

Constitutional Provision Related to Mining:
The entry at serial No. 23 of List II (State List) to the Constitution of India mandates the state government to own the minerals located within their boundaries,
The entry at serial No. 54 of List I (Central List) mandates the central government to own the minerals within the exclusive economic zone of India (EEZ).

- In pursuance to this Mines & Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act of 1957 was framed.
The central government has the ownership over all offshore minerals (ie, minerals extracted from the sea or ocean floor in the Indian maritime zones such as the territorial waters, continental shelf and exclusive economic zones).

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. What are major and minor minerals?
2. How they are regulated?

**Mains Link:** Write a note on Mines and Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

### 9. Model Tenancy Act:

**Context:**

The long-awaited Chandigarh Tenancy Act will now be in queue for enactment by the Parliament.

- The UT administration has decided to send the proposed Act, based on Centre’s Model Tenancy Act, 2021, to the Union government for approval and enactment.

**Background:**

The Union Cabinet, in June 2021, approved the Model Tenancy Act (MTA).

- States and Union territories can now adopt the Model Tenancy Act by enacting fresh legislation or they can amend their existing rental laws suitably.

**Highlights of the Model Law:**

1. Applicable prospectively and will not affect the existing tenancies.
2. Written agreement is a must for all new tenancies. The agreement will have to be submitted to the concerned district 'Rent Authority'.
3. The law also speaks about roles and responsibilities of landlord and tenants.
4. No landlord or property manager can withhold any essential supply to the premises occupied by the tenant.
5. If tenancy has not been renewed, the tenancy shall be deemed to be renewed on a month-to-month basis on the same terms and conditions as were in the expired tenancy agreement, for a maximum period of six months.
6. Compensation in case of non-vacancy: On the expiry of extended period of six months of agreed tenancy period or the termination of tenancy by order or notice, the tenant shall be a tenant in default and liable to pay compensation of double of the monthly rent for two months and four times of the monthly rent thereafter.
7. A landowner or property manager may enter a premise in accordance with written notice or notice through electronic medium served to the tenant at least twenty-four hours before the time of entry.

**Significance:**

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It is an important piece of legislation that promises to ease the burden on civil courts, unlock rental properties stuck in legal disputes, and prevent future tangles by balancing the interests of tenants and landlords.

Need for a law in this regard:
1. Young, educated job seekers migrating to large metropolises often complain of onerous tenancy conditions and obscene sums of money as security deposits that they are asked to fork out to lease accommodation. In some cities, tenants are asked to pay security deposits amounting to 11 months of rent.
2. Also, some house owners routinely breach tenants’ right to privacy by visiting the premises unannounced for sundry repair works.
3. Whimsical rent raises are another problem for tenants, many of whom complain of being squeezed as “captive customers”.
4. Besides, Tenants are often accused of “squatting” on the rented premises, or trying to grab the property.

Insta Curious: Did you know land tenures including the relation of landlord and tenant, and the collection of rents are subjects under the state list of the Indian Constitution (7th Schedule)? Read more here.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About the Model law- Highlights.
2. Role of states.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance and relevance of the Model Tenancy Act.

10. India’s draft medical devices policy:

Context:
Recently, the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers released an Approach Paper for the Draft National Policy for the Medical Devices, 2022.

Highlights of the Draft:
1. Building Competitiveness through fiscal and financial support for stimulating the development of the local manufacturing ecosystem with private sector investments.
2. Incentivise core technology projects and exports through tax refunds and rebates.
3. Adopt Public-private partnerships to reduce the cost of healthcare and drive efficiency.
4. Create a single-window clearance system for licensing medical devices.
5. Identify critical suppliers and promote local sourcing.
6. Encourage cross-industry collaboration.
7. Increase the share of medical technology companies in research and development to around 50%.
8. A dedicated fund for encouraging joint research involving existing industry players, reputed academic institutions and startups.
9. Incorporate a framework for a coherent pricing regulation to make available quality and effective medical devices to all citizens at affordable prices.

This Policy envisions that by 2047:
1. India Will be having few National Institutes of Medical Devices Education and Research (NIMERs) on the lines of National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education & Research (NIPERs).
2. It will be home & originator to 25 high-end futuristic technologies in MedTech (Medical Technology).
3. It will have a MedTech Industry of USD100-300 Bn size with 10-12% of Global Market Share.
• Nearly 80% of the medical devices currently sold in the country are imported, particularly high-end devices. This new policy aims to reduce India’s import dependence to nearly 30% in the next 10 years.
• The policy aims to increase India’s per capita spending on medical devices. India has one of the lowest per capita spend on medical devices at $3 compared to the global average of per capita consumption $47.

Government initiatives so far:
1. PLI Scheme for promoting domestic manufacturing of Medical Devices.
2. Promotion of Medical Devices Parks.
3. Medical devices has been recognised as a sunrise sector under the ‘Make in India’ campaign in 2014.

Insta Curious: The central government notified, in 2020, that all medical devices as ‘drugs’, effective from April 1, bringing a range of products from instruments to implants to even software intended for medical use in human beings or animals under the purview of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-draft-medical-devices-policy-explained-7820757/lite/.

11. What is Par Tapi Narmada river-linking project?

Context:
The tribals in Gujarat are protesting against the Centre’s Par Tapi Narmada river-linking project.

About the Project:
Envisioned under the 1980 National Perspective Plan.
It proposes to link three rivers:
1. Par, originating from Nashik in Maharashtra and flowing through Valsad.
2. Tapi from Saputara that flows through Maharashtra and Surat in Gujarat.
3. Narmada originating in Madhya Pradesh and flowing through Maharashtra and Bharuch and Narmada districts in Gujarat.

The project proposes to transfer river water from the surplus regions of the Western Ghats to the deficit regions of Saurashtra and Kutch.

Benefits:
The surplus water proposed to be diverted through the estimated Rs 10,211 crore Par-Tapi-Narmada link project is expected to irrigate an area of 2,32,175 hectares, of which 61,190 ha is en route to the link canal.

Why is this project being opposed?
According to a report by the NWDA, about 6065 ha of land area will be submerged due to the proposed reservoirs.
• A total of 61 villages will be affected, of which one will be fully submerged and the remaining 60 partly.
• The total number of affected families would be 2,509 of which 98 families would be affected due to the creation of the Jheri reservoir, the only one in Maharashtra, spread over six villages.
• In Gujarat, around 2000 families will be affected by the project. The districts where the project will be implemented are largely dominated, by tribals who fear displacement.

Benefits of interlinking:
1. Enhances water and food security.
2. Proper utilisation of water.
3. Boost to agriculture.
4. Disaster mitigation.
5. Boost to transportation.

Issues and Concerns:

- Interlinking of rivers is a very expensive proposal. It will adversely affect land, forests, biodiversity, rivers and the livelihood of millions of people.
- Interlinking of rivers will lead to destruction of forests, wetlands and local water bodies, which are major groundwater recharge mechanisms.
- It causes massive displacement of people. Huge burden on the government to deal with the issue of rehabilitation of displaced people.
- Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life.

Insta Curious: Do you know about the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers? Reference: read [this](https://www.insightsonindia.com).

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the Project.
2. About Par River.
3. Tapi and Narmada - tributaries and basin states.


12. **What are Foreigners’ Tribunals?**

Context:
A Foreigners’ Tribunal in Assam’s Cachar district has served a notice to a deceased person, asking him to appear before it by March 30 as he had failed to produce valid documents to prove his Indian citizenship.

What is a Foreigners tribunal?
Foreigners’ Tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies established as per the Foreigners’ Tribunal Order, 1964 and the Foreigners’ Act, 1946.

**Composition:** Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) Retired IAS of ACS Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.

Who can set up these tribunals?
The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.

- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.

Who can approach?
The amended order (Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019) also empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals.

- Earlier, only the State administration could move the Tribunal against a suspect.

Who is a declared foreigner?
A declared foreigner, or DF, is a person marked by Foreigners’ Tribunal (FT) for allegedly failing to prove their citizenship after the State police’s Border wing marks him or her as an illegal immigrant.

Insta Curious: Do you know the differences between NRC and NPR? Reference: [www.insightsonindia.com](https://www.insightsonindia.com)
1. Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) (IMDT) Act vs Foreigners Tribunal (Order) 1964.
2. Burden of proof under this order.
3. Powers to approach the tribunal and kind of cases to be decided by the tribunal.
4. Composition of the tribunal.
5. Tribunals vs Courts.
6. Geographical location of Assam and other NE states.
7. Refugee vs illegal Migrants.
8. Fundamental Rights available for Foreigners and other constitutional provisions wrt to Foreigners.

Mains Link: Discuss briefly the laws that are in place to tackle illegal non-citizens in the country. Why was the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 amended? Explain.

13. **Midday meal scheme:**

**Context:**
Congress President Sonia Gandhi Wednesday made a strong demand for restarting *mid-day meals* in schools as they open after the long closure due to the Covid pandemic.

**What's the issue?**
The mid-day meal scheme was stopped when schools were shut down due to the Covid pandemic. Children were given dry rations during the pandemic and food grains were also provided under the National Food Security Act. But for children, dry ration is no substitute for hot cooked meals.

**About the Mid-Day meal scheme:**
The scheme guarantees one meal to all children in government and aided schools and madarsas supported under *Samagra Shiksha*.

- Students up to Class VIII are guaranteed one nutritional cooked meal at least 200 days in a year.
- The Scheme comes under the Ministry of HRD.
- It was launched in the year 1995 as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP – NSPE), a centrally sponsored scheme. In 2004, the scheme was relaunched as the Mid Day Meal Scheme.
- The Scheme is also covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.

**Objective:**
Address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.

**The MDM rules 2015, provide that:**
- The place of serving meals to the children shall be school only.
- If the Mid-Day Meal is not provided in school on any school day due to non-availability of food grains or any other reason, the State Government shall pay food security allowance by 15th of the succeeding month.
- The School Management Committee mandated under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 shall also monitor implementation of the Mid-day meal Scheme.

**Nutritional norms:**
In terms of calorie intake, as per the MDM guidelines, the children in primary schools must be provided with at least 450 calories with 12 grams of protein through MDM while the children in upper primary schools should get 700 calories with 20 grams of protein, as per MHRD.

The food intake per meal by the children of primary classes, as provided by MHRD is 100 grams of food grains, 20 grams of pulses, 50 grams of vegetables and 5 grams of oils and fats. For the children of upper-primary schools, the
mandated breakup is 150 grams of food grains, 30 grams of pulses, 75 grams of vegetables and 7.5 grams of oils and fats.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Origin of MDMS.
2. When was it renamed?
3. Difference between centrally sponsored and Central sector schemes? What kind of scheme of the MDMS?
4. Financing under the scheme.

**Mains Link:**

Discuss the significance of Mid-Day Meal scheme.

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### 14. Mekedatu water project:

**Context:**
Karnataka Assembly has adopted a unanimous resolution seeking clearance for the Mekedatu project.
- This was in response to the resolution adopted by Tamil Nadu opposing the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project proposed by the State.

**Demand by Karnataka:**
- Karnataka Legislative Assembly urges the Central Water Commission and MoEF to approve the Mekedatu project at the earliest.
- The House urges the Central authorities not to finalise the DPR of the Godavari, Krishna, Pennar, Cauvery, Vaigai, and Gundar river-linking project till the share of riparian States is decided and till Karnataka gives its approval.
- It also urges them not to approve the illegal projects of Tamil Nadu and to instruct Tamil Nadu to desist from continuing them.

**Reasons given by Karnataka for taking up the Mekedatu project:**
Mekedatu project, the resolution said:
“The Supreme Court has modified the judgement of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and prescribed confirmation of release of 177.25 tmcft of water at Biligundu (water gauge) in a normal water year.
- To ensure allocation of 24 tmcft for Bengaluru Metropolitan city and consumptive use of 4.75 tmcft as per the Supreme Court’s verdict and also in turn provide for hydel generation, the Mekedatu drinking water and balancing reservoir project has been planned.

**About the Project:**
- Mekedatu is a multipurpose (drinking and power) project.
- It involves building a balancing reservoir, near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district in Karnataka.
- The project once completed is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighboring areas (4.75 TMC) and also can generate 400 MW power.
- The estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore.
Know more about the project here.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know about the Cauvery Management Scheme? What are the components of the scheme? Reference.

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## 15. Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill:

**Context:**
The bill will be tabled in the Parliament.
- It aims to merge the Capital’s three municipal corporations — South, North and East — ten years after the trifurcation of the civic body.
- In 2011, the state government had proposed the trifurcation for better efficiency.

**Need for:**
- Problems of trifurcation: Uneven distribution of property tax between three civic bodies, inefficient management and growing losses, etc.
- Gap in the resources available: Trifurcation was uneven in terms of the territorial divisions and revenue-generating potential of each corporation.

**Constitutional Provisions related to Municipal Corporations:**
- In the Constitution of India, no provision was made for the establishment of local self-government, except the incorporation of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy.
- The 74th Amendment Act, 1992 has inserted a new Part IX-A into the Constitution which deals with the administration of Municipalities and Nagar Palikas.
- It consists of Article 243P to 243ZG. It also added a new twelfth schedule to the Constitution. The 12th schedule consists of 18 items.

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## 16. Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill:

**Context:**
The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill has been introduced in the Lok Sabha.
- After the introduction, the Opposition sought a division, resulting in 120 votes in favour and 58 votes against the Bill.

**Key Provisions:**
1. It seeks to repeal the Identification of Prisoners Act 1920. The said Act, in its present form, provides access to a limited category of persons whose body measurements can be taken.
2. It authorises law enforcement agencies to collect, store and analyse physical and biological samples of convicts and other persons for the purposes of identification and investigation in criminal matters.
3. The Bill also authorises police to record signatures, handwriting or other behavioural attributes referred to in section 53 or section 53A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, for the purposes of analysis.

4. As per the Bill, any person convicted, arrested or held under any preventive detention law will be required to provide "measurements" to a police officer or a prison official.

5. Any state government of Union Territory administration may notify an appropriate agency to collect, preserve and share the measurements of a person of interest in their respective jurisdictions.

6. Resistance to or refusal to allow the taking of measurements under this Act shall be deemed to be an offence under section 186 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The Bill seeks to:
1. Define "measurements" to include finger impressions, palm-print and foot-print impressions, photographs, iris and retina scan, physical, biological samples and their analysis, etc.
2. Empower the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to collect, store and preserve the record of measurements and for sharing, dissemination, destruction and disposal of records.
3. Empower a Magistrate to direct any person to give measurements; a Magistrate can also direct law enforcement officials to collect fingerprints, footprint impressions and photographs in the case of a specified category of convicted and non-convicted persons.
4. Empower police or prison officers to take measurements of any person who resists or refuses to give measurements.

Need for and significance of the Bill:
- The Bill states that it is necessary to expand the "ambit of persons" whose measurements can be taken as this will help investigating agencies gather sufficient legally admissible evidence and establish the crime of the accused person.
- The Bill will not only help investigation agencies but also increase prosecution. There is also a chance of an increase in conviction rates in courts through this.

Opposition:
Opposition members in parliament have termed it as “draconian” and “illegal”.
- It infringed upon the right to privacy.
- It violated Article 20 (3) of the Constitution that safeguards the rights of citizens by providing that “no person accused of an offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself”.
- The proposed law, that also provides for retaining the people’s measurements for 75 years from the date of collection, was in “violation of the Right to be Forgotten enshrined in the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution”.

Insta Curious: Do you know what the Supreme Court has said K.S. Puttaswamy Judgment? Reference: read this.


17. Ghar Ghar Ration Yojna:

Context:
The new scheme was announced by the Punjab Government recently.

Highlights of the new Scheme:
- It provides for home delivery of foodgrains to beneficiaries.
- The government gives 5 kg wheat to every individual beneficiary per month at Rs 2 per kg.
- The Centre will fund the scheme under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 for 1.43 lakh beneficiaries (comprising 36 lakh families).

Beneficiaries:
● The beneficiaries of the Atta-Dal Scheme of the state government, which is a tweaked version of the Centre’s Food Security Act, will get ration at their doorsteps.
● The scheme will be optional and all those who do not want to queue up outside the fair price shops or the ration depots can opt for it.
● There are 1.54 crore individual beneficiaries (in 43 lakh families) of the Atta-Dal scheme in Punjab.

**National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:**
The objective is to provide for food and nutritional security in the human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.

**Key features:**
- **Coverage and entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS):** The TDPS covers 50% of the urban population and 75% of the rural population, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, the poorest of the poor households will continue to receive 35 kg of food grains per household per month under Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AYY).
- **Subsidised prices under TPDS and their revision:** For a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act, Food grains under TPDS will be made available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains.
- **Identification of Households:** The identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs under TDPS determined for each State.
- **Nutritional Support to women and children:** Children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years and pregnant women and lactating mothers will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Malnourished children up to the age of 6 have been prescribed for higher nutritional norms.
- **Maternity Benefit:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers will also be receiving maternity benefit of Rs. 6,000.
- **Women Empowerment:** For the purpose of issuing of ration cards, eldest woman of the household of age 18 years or above is to be the head of the household.
- **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Grievance redressal mechanism available at the District and State levels.
- **Cost of transportation & handling of food grains and Fair Price Shop (FPS) Dealers’ margin:** the expenditure incurred by the state on transportation of food grains within the State, its handling and FPS dealers’ margin as per norms to be devised for this purpose and assistance to states will be provided by the Central Government to meet the above expenditure.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** In order to ensure transparency and accountability, provisions have been made for disclosure of records relating to PDS, **social audits and setting up of Vigilance Committees.**
- **Food Security Allowance:** In case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals, there is a provision for food security allowance to entitled beneficiaries.
- **Penalty:** If the public servant or authority fails to comply with the relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer, penalty will be imposed by the State Food Commission according to the provision.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know the differences between PDS and TPDS? **Read here.**

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About TPDS.
2. Who gets food security allowance under the scheme?
5. Overview of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme.
6. Overview of Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.

In the absence of a central law, several local courts have ruled recently that the right to be forgotten, or to be left alone, is inherent to the right to privacy, which was recognised as a fundamental right by India’s Supreme Court in 2017 (Puttaswamy Judgment).

- It has become a hot-button issue worldwide with the explosive growth in social media and other online platforms, but few countries have legislation that enshrines it.
- A long-awaited data protection bill addresses the right to be forgotten.

Background:
In December, the Centre told the Delhi High Court that “right to be forgotten” is part of the fundamental right to privacy, but added it has no significant role to play in the matter.

- Petitions across courts have been seeking enforcement of this “right” — a legal principle that is not yet backed by statute in India.

What is the right to be forgotten?
It allows a person to seek deletion of private information from the Internet. The concept has found recognition in some jurisdictions abroad, particularly the European Union.

What is the ‘Right to be Forgotten’ in the Indian context?
- The Right to be Forgotten falls under the purview of an individual’s right to privacy, which is governed by the Personal Data Protection Bill that is yet to be passed by Parliament.
- In 2017, the Right to Privacy was declared a fundamental right (under Article 21) by the Supreme Court in its landmark verdict (Puttaswamy case).
- The court said at the time that “the right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution”.

Need for its recognition:
At least eight petitions are pending before Delhi High Court seeking removal of private information from the Internet, court records of previous convictions and proceedings, and news reports of past events. Only a few have been able to get that relief from courts so far.

Which countries have such laws?
- Russia in 2015 enacted a law that allows users to force a search engine to remove links to personal information on grounds of irrelevancy, inaccuracy and violation of law.
- The right to be forgotten is also recognised to some extent in Turkey and Siberia, while courts in Spain and England have ruled on the subject.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the right to be forgotten has been recognised in Europe since 2014 and is also part of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)?

InstaLinks:
3. Highlights of Personal Data Protection Bill.

Prelims Link:
1. About the Right to be forgotten.
2. What is right to privacy?

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of the right to be forgotten.

19. PM-YUVA Scheme:
Context:
The Government has decided that the books selected under the PM-YUVA Scheme are translated into different Indian languages to ensure the exchange of Indian culture and literature in order to promote ‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’.

What is PM Yuva Yojana?
Pradhan Mantri – Mentorships’s Scheme for Young writers (PM-YUVA) has been launched by the Ministry of Education on 29 May 2021 for young writers up to the age of 30 years.

- Aim of this scheme is to create young aspiring writers into skilled writers representing the rich heritage of India.
- Through the scheme, new writers will be allowed to participate and become future writers through a mentorship program.

Key objectives of the scheme are:
1. Engage youth of the country in rich Indian history and culture.
2. Creating a pool of young authors in the country who will be the modern/young ambassadors of our Indian Literature.
3. Create young learners for future leadership roles to represent the country on an international level.
4. To help young authors project their ideas on an international platform, therefore allowing them to promote Indian literature and culture globally.
5. Building skilled writers from new aspiring authors in various genres by providing expert mentoring.

Implementation:
The scheme would be implemented by the National Book Trust under the Ministry of Education. The scheme would be implemented in a phase-wise structure.

- In Phase I- training, the selected candidates would be provided by the NBT for three months.
- In Phase II- The candidates selected would expand their understanding and also hone their skills through an interactive process at various events internationally organized, such as book fairs etc.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Key features of the scheme.
2. Benefits.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of the scheme.

Topics: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

1. Donate a Pension initiative:

Context:
Launched recently by the Labour Ministry.

Key features of the programme:
- Launched under Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM) for people to contribute to the pension fund of their support staff.
- Under this, citizens can donate the premium contribution of their immediate support staff such as domestic workers, drivers, helpers etc.

PM-SYM:
It is a 50:50 voluntary and contributory pension scheme in which the beneficiary makes a stipulated age-specific contribution and the Central Government matches it.

Implementation: The Ministry of Labour and Employment will oversee PM-SYM, which will be implemented by Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSC eGovernance Services India Limited (CSC SPV).

Eligibility: Workers working in the unorganised sector in the age group of 18-40 years can register themselves and deposit a minimum of Rs 660 to 2400 every year depending on their age.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.

Benefits: After attaining the age of 60 years they will receive the minimum assured pension of Rs 3,000 per month.

Beneficiaries:
The unorganised workers mostly engaged as home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, own account workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio-visual workers and similar other occupations whose monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less.

2. **Why the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 alone is not sufficient?**

Context:
The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how older persons face unique challenges.

Challenges/vulnerabilities faced by them include:
- *Ageist attitudes and stereotypes* expose older people to discrimination and negative treatment, which intersect with other forms of stigma based on gender, race and disability.
- *Their diseases and deaths are considered “acceptable”* and often mistaken as a part of ageing.
- *Elder abuse* has exponentially risen during the pandemic based on the published report of HelpAge India.
- *Misinformation and myths* about old age, lack of specific health and policy measures, ageism in society and limited digital literacy contribute to the unique vulnerabilities in older persons.

According to the recently released WHO report on ageism:
1. One in three individuals worldwide share ageist attitudes and stereotypes.
2. This has led to marginalisation of older persons in society and a serious human rights crisis.
3. Rights infringements extend to violations of dignity, autonomy, respect, capacity, inclusion and equality.
4. Social stigma, ageism, elder abuse and rights violations in older persons can lead to adverse health consequences.
5. They increase the risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, strokes and psychiatric disorders (depression, anxiety, insomnia and dementia).
6. Research shows that neglecting older people can increase loneliness, infections, falls, mechanical injuries and premature deaths.
7. Finally, stress and isolation can impact any long-term illness, which is common in old age.

Existing legal provisions to safeguard the rights and health of older persons:
- The *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007*, is the only specific law dedicated to them.
- In pursuance of the *National Policy for Older Persons (NPOP)*, a *National Council for Older Persons (NCOP)* was constituted in 1999 under the chairpersonship of the minister for social justice and empowerment to oversee implementation of the policy and advise the government.

Issues with the present mechanism:
- The paper-to-reality translation is far from smooth. Many of these acts and measures are poorly implemented with minimal awareness among service providers and users alike.
- Recent data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) suggests that only one in five older people are aware of the social security and legal measures available for their benefit.
- Besides, elder abuse is significantly under-reported due to fear of legal hassles and underlying stigma.
- Not to mention the additional plight that older adults with memory issues and mental health problems face.

Overview of the *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007*:
- This Act makes it legally obliging for adult children and heirs to provide for parents by way of a monthly allowance.
- This Act provides an inexpensive and speedy procedure to claim monthly maintenance for parents and senior citizens.
According to this Act, parents could mean biological, adoptive or step-parents.

Under this Act, there are also provisions to protect the life and property of such persons (elderly).

Is it mandatory for the state to set up old-age homes as per the law?
Section 19 of the law says, the State Government may establish and maintain such number of oldage homes at accessible places, as it may deem necessary, in a phased manner, beginning with at least one in each district.

- The State Government may also, prescribe a scheme for management of oldage homes.

Need of the hour:
- At the national as well as the international level, we need specific frameworks to protect the rights of older persons.
- A UN convention can be an apt step and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) is one of the leading advocates.

Insta Curious: The World Health Organization rightly observes, “population ageing is one of humanity’s greatest triumphs”. Why is it so? Read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who are Indigent senior citizens as per the act?
2. Role of states as per the act.

Mains Link: Ageing has become a major social challenge. Comment.

3. Manual scavenging:

Context:
Recently, three labourers in Mumbai, allegedly hired for manual scavenging, died after inhaling toxic fumes in a septic tank.

- Even though manual scavenging is banned in India, the practice is still prevalent in many parts of the country.

What is manual scavenging?
Manual scavenging is the practice of removing human excreta by hand from sewers or septic tanks.

- India banned the practice under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (PEMSR).
- The Act recognizes manual scavenging as a “dehumanizing practice,” and cites a need to “correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the manual scavengers.”

Why is manual scavenging still prevalent in India?
- The lack of enforcement of the Act.
- Exploitation of unskilled labourers.
- The practice is driven by caste, class and income divides.

Constitutional guarantee:
Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees ‘Right to Life’ and that also with dignity. This right is available to both citizens and non-citizens. The ban Manual Scavenging should, therefore, should be implemented in letter and spirit.

Other steps taken:
In 1989, the Prevention of Atrocities Act became an integrated guard for sanitation workers; more than 90% people employed as manual scavengers belonged to the Scheduled Caste. This became an important landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.

Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge: It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on World Toilet Day (19th November) in 2020.
'Swachhta Abhiyan App': It has been developed to identify and geotag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.

**SC Judgement:** In 2014, a Supreme Court order made it mandatory for the government to identify all those who died in sewage work since 1993 and provide Rs. 10 lakh each as compensation to their families.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
4. SC Judgement.
5. Article 21 of the Constitution.

**Mains Link:** Comment on the significance of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

### 4. Social Stock Exchange:

**Context:**
Government has come out in support of the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) crackdown on unregistered advisors making stock-related suggestions on social media platforms.

**What's the issue?**
Many social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, telegram where advisors which are not registered with SEBI are offering advice on stock markets.
- Now, SEBI is going to tighten its hold on such advisors as this often misleads the investors and harm the market.

**Background:**
The proposal to set up SSEs in the country was first floated during the Union Budget in 2019.
- In September 2019, Sebi constituted a working group under the chairmanship of Tata group veteran Ishaat Hussain.
- In September 2020, Sebi set up the TG as it felt further expert advice and clarity was needed on the WG’s recommendation.

**Recommendations made by SEBI’s technical group (TG) on social stock exchanges (SSEs):**

1. **Eligibility:**
   Both for-profit (FP) and not-for-profit organisations (NPO) should be allowed to tap the SSE provided they are able to demonstrate that social intent and impact.
   Corporate foundations, political and religious organisations should be made ineligible to raise funds using the SSE mechanism.

2. **Modes available for fundraising:**
   For NPOs, it shall be equity, zero coupon zero principal bond (ZCZP), development impact bonds, social impact fund, currently known as social venture fund (SVP) with 100 per cent grants-in grants out provision, and donations by investors through mutual funds.
   For FP enterprises, it will be equity, debt, development impact bonds, and social venture funds.

3. **Corpus size of the fund:**
   Minimum corpus size for such funds be reduced from Rs 20 crore to Rs 5 crore and the minimum subscription amount be reduced from Rs 1 crore to Rs. 2 lakh.

4. **The capacity building fund for SSE:**
   It should have a corpus of Rs 100 crore. This fund should be housed under Nabard. Exchanges and other developmental agencies such as SIDBI should be asked to contribute towards this fund.
5. List of broad activities based on those identified by Niti Aayog under sustainable development goals that SEs can engage in:

These include eradicating hunger, poverty malnutrition and inequality; promoting gender equality by empowerment of women and LGBTQIA+ communities; training to promote rural sports; and slum area development, affordable housing.

What is social stock exchange (SSE)?
- It is a novel concept in India and such a bourse is meant to serve private and non-profit sector providers by channelling greater capital to them.
- As per the proposal, SSE can be housed within the existing stock exchange such as the BSE and/or National Stock Exchange (NSE).

Significance:
- With this, Social welfare enterprises and non-profits could soon get to raise so-called social capital on a transparent electronic platform, aiding the process of rebuilding livelihoods ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.
- These recommendations, if implemented as a package, can result in a vibrant and supportive ecosystem, enabling the non-profit sector to realise its full potential for creating social impact.

Need for social capital:
India will need a significant amount of patient capital to repair and rebuild those livelihoods, which are the bedrock of her economy. Conventional capital that prioritises financial returns will not be able to carry such a burden all by itself.
- Social capital, on the other hand, is more suited for this role. It is not only patient but its goal is precisely to support and fortify social structures that are in danger of collapsing because of COVID-19.

What is a social enterprise?
A social enterprise is a revenue-generating business. Its primary objective is to achieve a social objective, for example, providing healthcare or clean energy.
- This in no way means that a social enterprise can’t be highly profitable. In fact, most social enterprises look and operate like traditional businesses. The only catch is that the profit these entities generate is not necessarily used for payouts to stakeholders, but reinvested into their social programmes.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is a social enterprise?
2. What is SSE?
3. What is social capital?
4. SEBI- key functions.

Mains Link: India will need a significant amount of social capital to repair and rebuild those livelihoods, which are the bedrock of her economy. Discuss.

5. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G):
Context:
The Rural Development Ministry has taken the following initiatives to ensure timely completion of the houses under PMAY-G:
1. Regular review of progress at the level of the Ministry to ensure timely completion of targeted houses.
2. Daily monitoring on various parameters like gaps in sanction of houses, cleaning of PWL of PMAY-G.
3. Timely allocation of targets to the States/UTs and release of adequate funds at the level of the ministry.
5. Steps are being taken to increase the coverage of Rural Mason Training (RMT) programme which would increase the availability of trained masons leading to faster construction of quality houses.

Performance of the scheme:
Under the scheme, 2.28 crore houses have been sanctioned to the beneficiaries, out of which 1.75 crore houses have been completed as on 9 March 2022.

About PMAY- G:
Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development.
The erstwhile rural housing scheme Indira Awaas yojana (IAY) has been restructured into Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) from 01.04.2016.
PMAY-G aims at providing a pucca house, with basic amenities, to all houseless householder and those households living in kutcha and dilapidated house, by 2024.
Target: Construction of 2.95 crore houses with all basic amenities by the year 2024.

Cost sharing:
The cost of unit assistance in this scheme is shared between Central and State Governments in the ratio 60:40 in plain areas and 90: 10 for North Eastern and Himalayan States.
The scheme envisages training of Rural Masons with the objective of improving workmanship and quality of construction of houses while at the same time, increasing availability of skilled masons and enhancing employability of such masons.

Selection of beneficiaries:
Based on housing deprivation parameters of Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011, subject to 13 point exclusion criteria, followed by Gram Sabha verification.

6. Ujjwala Yojana
Ujjwala Yojana: Over 1.5 lakh lives saved in a year, 13% reduction in air pollution deaths

What to study?
For Prelims: Key features of the scheme.
For Mains: Significance and performance analysis of the scheme.
Context: The first independent impact assessment of the Ujjwala programme has highlighted its benefits in terms of saving of lives and reduction in air pollution

Key observations:
- **Reduction in Death**: Greater penetration and usage of LPG as a cooking fuel is estimated to have prevented at least 1.5 lakh pollution-related premature deaths in the year 2019 alone.
- **Reduction in pollution**: It also avoided at least 1.8 million tonnes of PM2.5 emissions in 2019 (13% reduction in air pollution deaths)

Other Study by researchers from IIT Kanpur: It had shown a vast improvement not just in prevalence of respiratory diseases but also in general health conditions in villages with high coverage of Ujjwala connections.
- The survey had found 50 per cent improvement in general health conditions in villages of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar with high coverage of Ujjwala connections.

Previously government report had said:
- **Three States have become kerosene free. These include-** Haryana, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Union Territories that have become kerosene-free** are the Union Territories of Delhi, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Dadar & Nagar Haveli, Andaman & Nicobar Island and Puducherry.

Limitations of the Study:
- The study has not estimated health or emission benefits of reduction in outdoor air pollution due to the scheme
• Biomass burning in household cooking could be contributing 30-40 per cent of outdoor air pollution.
• Benefits have been estimated for the year 2019 only.
• Study found that only 65 per cent of the households in 2019 were using LPG as the primary cooking fuel.

About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:
Launched in May 2016.
Aim: To provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households and reduce health risk associated with burning biomass.

Key features: A deposit-free LPG connection is given to eligible with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
Achievement: Government data shows that by January 2022, 9 crore new LPG connections had been rolled out under this scheme, and that 99.8 per cent of the over 28 crore households in India now have access to LPG, up from 61.9 per cent in 2015.

Eligibility criteria:
1. Applicant must a woman above the age of 18 and a citizen of India.
2. Applicant should belong to a BPL (Below Poverty Line) household.
3. No one in the applicant’s household should own an LPG connection.
4. The household income of the family, per month, must not exceed a certain limit as defined by the government of the Union Territories and State Government.
5. Applicant must not be a recipient of other similar schemes provided by the government.

Objectives of the scheme are:
1. Empowering women and protecting their health.
2. Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
3. Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
4. Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

Insta Link:
Prelims Link:
1. LPG Composition; Difference between LPG LNG CNG.
2. How are urban and semi-urban areas differentiated?
3. Differences between central sector, centrally sponsored schemes.
4. Targets and goals under the scheme.
5. States and UTs which became kerosene-free under the scheme.
PM Ujjwala programme aimed at saving lives, and contributing to improvement of health, especially women’s health. How far has this been achieved? Analyze (15M)

Sources: Indian Express

7. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

What to study?
For Prelims: Overview, implementation and bodies established under the act.
For Mains: Significance of the law, performance analysis and ways to improve.

Context: A Parliamentary Standing Committee has asked the Rural Development Ministry to replace caste-based NREGS payment with the earlier mechanism of generation of single Fund Transfer Order

Key observations:
- Parliament’s Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj has asked the government to roll back the system of caste-based wages, under which NREGS workers are paid based on whether they belong to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, or Others.
- It wants government to revert back to the earlier system by which a single Fund Transfer Order was generated without “any sort of segregation on the basis of caste”.
- Create caste rift: NREGS workers are part of the “economically weak populace and can come from any religion/caste, [and] creation of such payment system wherein one specific community is preferred over the other solely on the ground of caste will only give rise to resentment and create rift among the beneficiaries of MGNREGA”

What is the caste-based payment system?
- Under the new system, if 20 individuals (say, six SCs, four STs and 10 others) work together at a site under MG-NREGA, a single muster roll would be issued, but payment would be done by issuing three separate Fund Transfer Orders (FTOs), one for each of the three categories.
- It came into force on April 1, 2021.
- Beneficiaries in the ‘Others’ category, which includes the ‘General’ and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories, especially complained of delays.

Why was the system of caste-based wage payment introduced?
According to the Ministry, the system of category-wise payment of wages was introduced to “accurately reflect on the ground flow of funds to various population groups”. Last October, a process of “streamlining” of the new system was taken up.

About MGNREGA:
The scheme was introduced as a social measure that guarantees “the right to work”. The key tenet of this social measure and labour law is that the local government will have to legally provide at least 100 days of wage employment in rural India to enhance their quality of life.

Key objectives:
1. Generation of paid rural employment of not less than 100 days for each worker who volunteers for unskilled labour.
2. Proactively ensuring social inclusion by strengthening livelihood base of rural poor.
3. Creation of durable assets in rural areas such as wells, ponds, roads and canals.
4. Reduce urban migration from rural areas.
5. Create rural infrastructure by using untapped rural labour.

The following are the eligibility criteria for receiving the benefits under MGNREGA scheme:
1. Must be Citizen of India to seek NREGA benefits.
2. Job seeker has completed 18 years of age at the time of application.
3. The applicant must be part of a local household (i.e., application must be made with local Gram Panchayat).
4. Applicant must volunteer for unskilled labour.

Key facts related to the scheme:
1. The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.
2. Individual beneficiary-oriented works can be taken up on the cards of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, small or marginal farmers or beneficiaries of land reforms or beneficiaries under the Indira Awaas Yojana of the Government of India.
3. Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, wage employment will be provided to the applicant.
4. Right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
5. Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory, which lends to accountability and transparency.
6. The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands.
7. It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

**Insta Links:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Under MGNREGA, what are the roles of Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, States, State Food Commission, Centre?
2. What is caste-based payment system?

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the key features and significance of MGNREGA. What are the recent concerns regarding the implementation of the scheme?

**Sources:** Indian Express

8. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana:

**Context:**
In keeping with the concern and sensitivity towards poor and vulnerable sections of society, the Government has extended the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) scheme for another six months i.e., till September 2022 (Phase VI).

- The Phase-V of PM-GKAY scheme was to end in March 2022.
- It may be recalled that the PM-GKAY has been under implementation since April 2020, as the largest food security program in the world.

**About PMGKAY:**
During the ongoing crisis owing to Covid-19 Pandemic, Union Government announced Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) providing free food grains to the affected population.

PMGKAY is a part of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) to help the poor fight the battle against Covid-19.

- Its nodal Ministry is the Ministry of Finance.
- It was initially announced for a three-month period (April, May and June 2020), covering 80 crore ration cardholders. Later it was extended till November 2020.
- However, in April 2021, the government had announced its decision to restart the scheme as PMGKAY-III.

**The salient features of the scheme are:**

- 80 crore individuals, i.e, roughly two-thirds of India’s population would be covered under this scheme.
- Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh per health worker fighting COVID-19 to be provided under Insurance Scheme.
- 80 crore poor people will to get 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months.
- 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get Rs 500 per month for next three months.
- Increase in MNREGA wage to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182 to benefit 13.62 crore families.
- Government to **front-load Rs 2,000 paid to farmers** in first week of April under existing PM Kisan Yojana to benefit 8.7 crore farmers.

**Expenditure:**
Government of India will bear all expenditure of over Rs. 26,000 crore on account of food subsidy and Central assistance to states/UTs on account of intra-state transportation etc.

**Challenge:**
- A key issue is that the **beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act** are based on the last census (2011).
- The **number of food-insecure people has increased** since then and they remain uncovered.

**InstaLinks:**

- **Prelims Link:**
  3. PMGKY.

- **Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of National Food Security Act.

### 9. Menstruation Benefit Bill 2017:

**Context:**
For five years, **Ninong Ering**, a Congress MLA from Pasighat West in Arunachal Pradesh, has championed legislating menstrual leave into law.
- In November 2017, as a Lok Sabha MP, Ering introduced the **Menstruation Benefit Bill 2017**, a private member's bill, in the Lok Sabha.
- Now again, as an MLA, Ering has tabled the same private member's bill on the first day of the 2022 Budget Session in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

**Highlights of the Bill:**
It seeks to provide leave for menstruating school and college-going girls, women in jobs, better facilities for rest at the workplace during menstruation, and better hygiene provisions for women and adolescent girls.

**Need for paid leave:**
Menstruating can be exhausting and disturbing for women, especially on the first day. Indian states such as Bihar and Kerala already provide the paid leave facility.

**Significance:**
Given that sanitation and menstrual health are essential components of a woman's life, one can reasonably infer that they also come within Article 21, mandating the provision of necessary conditions for women to work with dignity. The case for granting menstrual leave is, thus, a fundamental rights issue and should receive due diligence.

**Who is a Private Member?**
Any MP who is not a Minister is referred to as a private member.
- The purpose of private member’s bill is to draw the government’s attention to what individual MPs see as issues and gaps in the existing legal framework, which require legislative intervention.

**Admissibility of a private member’s Bill:**
The admissibility is decided by the Chairman for Rajya Sabha and Speaker in the case of Lok Sabha.
- Its rejection by the House has no implication on the parliamentary confidence in the government or its resignation.

**The procedure is roughly the same for both Houses:**
- The Member must give at least a month's notice before the Bill can be listed for introduction.
There are any exceptions?
While government Bills can be introduced and discussed on any day, private member’s Bills can be introduced and discussed only on Fridays.

Has a private member’s bill ever become a law?
As per PRS Legislative, no private member’s Bill has been passed by Parliament since 1970. To date, Parliament has passed 14 such Bills, six of them in 1956. In the 14th Lok Sabha, of the over 300 private member’s Bills introduced, roughly four per cent were discussed, the remaining 96 per cent lapsed without a single dialogue.

Labour Codes:

Context:
The long-awaited introduction of four labour codes, originally scheduled to happen at the beginning of the current fiscal year, may take at least three more months because all states have not framed rules on them.

What’s the issue?
Labour is on the Concurrent List of the Constitution. As many as 23 states have framed rules on the codes. Seven states are left.

Background:
The four labour codes are on wages, social security, occupational safety and industrial relations.
- Under these new codes, a number of aspects related to employment and work culture, in general, might change – including the take-home salary of employees, working hours, and the number of weekdays.

Opposition:
- Trade unions, however, have planned to intensify their agitation this week against the codes in the wake of the government’s decision to repeal the three farm laws.

What are the demands by trade unions?
The two codes we accepted — on wages and social security — be implemented immediately and the two to which we had objections — industrial relations and occupational safety — be reviewed.

About the labour codes:
The new set of regulations consolidates 44 labour laws under 4 categories of Codes namely, Wage Code; Social Security Code; Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code; and the Industrial Relations Code.
- The Parliament has already passed all the four Codes and it has also received the President’s assent.

The 4 codes are:
1. The Code on Wages, 2019, applying to all the employees in organized as well as unorganized sector, aims to regulate wage and bonus payments in all employments and aims at providing equal remuneration to employees performing work of a similar nature in every industry, trade, business, or manufacture.
2. The Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020 seeks to regulate the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments with 10 or more workers, and in all mines and docks.
Issues with these codes:
● The work hours provisions for regular workers do not provide flexibility to fix work hours beyond eight hours a day.
● The codes have also missed laying down uniform provisions for part-time employees.
● There are also provisions that impact employee wages.
● The labour codes also chalk out fines on businesses for non-compliance of provisions, second offences and officer-in-default. In the current pandemic situation, a majority of small businesses are in no position to adopt and implement the labour code changes.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About the codes.
2. Key provisions.
Mains Link: Discuss the concerns associated with four labour codes.

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

1. Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana:
Context:
The Odisha government recently distributed smart health cards to beneficiaries under its flagship Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana.

About the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana:
Launched on August 15, 2018.
Aimed at providing Universal Health coverage, with special emphasis on the health protection of economically vulnerable families.
The scheme has two components:
1. One a free health services for all (irrespective of income, status or residence) in all state government healthcare facilities starting from sub center level up to District Head Quarter Hospital level.
2. Two, additional facility of free healthcare beyond District Headquarters hospital level, for over 70 lakh economically vulnerable families in the state.

Eligibility:
After the announcement on Independence day last year, all families covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA) and SFSA also became eligible for BSKY.

Benefits under the scheme:
● Every family enrolled under Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana is eligible for Rs 5 lakh from the state government, while women get cover of Rs 10 lakh under this scheme.
● All health services are free of cost, including free drugs, free diagnostics, free dialysis, free cancer chemotherapy, free OT, free ICU, in-patient admission etc., in all government health institutions up to district headquarters hospital level, for all persons.

BSKY vs Ayushman Bharat:
Almost a month after the launch of BSKY, the central government had launched its health scheme — Ayushman Bharat — on September 28, 2018. Odisha is one of the only four states which has not accepted the health coverage scheme.

Key differences:
● The package cap: Rs 5 lakh a year under Ayushman Bharat but goes upto Rs 10 lakh under BSKY.
● Coverage: BSKY covers over 90 lakh families, Ayushman Bharat can cover only 60 lakh families.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the National Health Authority has also been given the responsibility to implement the National Digital Health Mission? Reference: read this.
InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: 1. Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana. 2. Components of Ayushman Bharat. 3. PMJAY- Key features. 4. Eligibility. 5. About the National Health Agency. 6. SEHAT scheme.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance and potential of PMJAY.


2. WHO's pandemic treaty:

Context:
Members of the World Health Organisation (WHO) held the first round of negotiations towards the pandemic treaty on February 24, 2022.

- The meeting was aimed at agreeing on ways of working and timelines for a “convention, agreement or other international instrument” to prevent further pandemics and to improve the preparedness and response in case of its occurrence.

What is the pandemic treaty?
In December 2021, the Health Assembly adopted a decision titled “The World Together” at its second special session since it was founded in 1948.

- Under the decision, the health organisation established an intergovernmental negotiating body (INB) to draft and negotiate the contents of the pandemic treaty in compliance with Article 19 of the WHO Constitution.
- The pandemic treaty is expected to cover aspects like data sharing and genome sequencing of emerging viruses and equitable distribution of vaccines and drugs and related research throughout the world.

Need for:
- Solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic have seen an inequitable distribution of vaccines so far, with poorer countries at the mercy of others to receive preventive medication.
- Most countries have followed the “me-first” approach which is not an effective way to deal with a global pandemic.

Why is this treaty not a sufficient step to fight present or future pandemics?
- Treaty only provides recommendations for tackling a particular issue while ignoring that the countries especially in the south require resources and capacities to reach the public health targets.
- There is no focus on bridging these deficiencies or capacity inequities. That rich countries have given out far more booster shots in four months than poor countries have given out doses all year, reflects this capacity inequity b/w global North and the South.
- Any global effort must ensure distributed capacities so that countries and regions in the south have sovereignty over essential medicines, materials, manufacturing and supply chains.

Insta Curious:
Article 19 of the WHO Constitution gives the World Health Assembly the authority to adopt conventions or agreements on matters of health. A two-third majority is needed to adopt such conventions or agreements.

- Did you know that the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was set up under Article 19 and it came into force in 2005?

3. Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2020-21:

Context:
The Ministry of Education has released a detailed report on Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2020-21 on school education of India.

About it:
The UDISE+ system of online data collection from the schools was developed by Department of School Education & Literacy in the year 2018-19.

- It was aimed to overcome the issues related to erstwhile practice of manual data filing in paper format and subsequent feeding on computer at the block or district level in the UDISE data collection system since 2012-13.
- In UDISE+ system, improvements have been made particularly in the areas related to data capture, data mapping and data verification.

Highlights of the report:

Students and Teachers in schools:

- In 2020-21 total students enrolled in school education from primary to higher secondary stood at 25.38 crore.
- There is an increase of 28.32 lakh enrolments as compared to the 25.10 crore enrolment in 2019-20.

The GER:

1. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) which measure the general level of participation has improved in 2020-21 at all levels of school education compared to 2019-20.
2. Level wise GER in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20 are: 92.2% from 89.7% in upper primary, 99.1% from 97.8% in elementary, 79.8% from 77.9% in secondary and 53.8% from 51.4% in higher secondary respectively.
3. 96.96 lakh teachers are engaged in school education during 2020-21.
4. This is higher by about 8800 in comparison with number of teachers in school education in 2019-20.

The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR):

1. In 2020-21 the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) stood at 26 for primary, 19 for upper primary, 18 for secondary and 26 for higher secondary, showing an improvement since 2018-19.
2. The PTR for primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary was 28, 20, 21, and 30 respectively during 2018-19.
3. In 2020-21 over 12.2 crore girls are enrolled in primary to higher secondary showing an increase of 11.8 lakh girls compared to the enrolment of girls in 2019-20.

School Infrastructure:

1. Schools with functional electricity have made impressive progress during 2020-21 with net addition of 57,799 schools provided electricity.
2. Now 84% of the total schools have functional electricity facility in comparison with 73.85% in 2018-19 showing remarkable improvement of 10.15% during the period.
3. Percentage of the schools with functional drinking water has increased to 95.2% in 2020-21 from 93.7% in 2019-20.
4. Percentage of the school with functional girl's toilet facility has increased to 93.91% in 2020-21 in comparison with 93.2% in 2019-20 by adding the facility in additional 11,933 schools during the year.
5. Number of schools having functional computers increased to 6 lakh in 2020-21 from 5.5 lakh in 2019-20 showing an increasing of 3. Now, 40% of the schools have functional computers.
6. Number of schools having internet facility increased to 3.7 lakh in 2020-21 from 3.36 lakh in 2019-20 with an increase of 2.6%.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on enrolment:
During 2020-21, 39.7 lakh students of government aided, private school students shifted to Government schools.

4. UGC’s Common Entrance Test for Undergrad Admissions:

Context:
The University Grants Commission (UGC) has announced that admission into undergraduate courses in all centrally-funded universities will henceforth be solely on the basis of a Common University Entrance Test (CUET).

What does this mean for the students and the universities?
● All 45 central universities will have to admit students on the basis of their scores on the test.
● Class 12 Board Exam marks will no longer be considered.

What is CUET?
● The CUET will be a computerised test to be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA).
● Following the exam, the NTA will prepare a merit list on the basis of which these universities will admit students.
● This entrance test is compulsory for all the central universities and may also be adopted by the state/private/deemed to be universities.
● The entrance exam will be offered in 13 languages.
● International students are exempted from CUET; their admissions will be carried out on the existing supernumerary basis.

Need for:
● To level the playing field for aspirants as different examination boards in the country may mark students differently (Some Boards are more generous than others in marking and this gives their students an unfair advantage over others).
● It will save students from the “stress of impossibly high cut-offs for admission”. Last year, eight DU colleges had set cut-offs at 100% marks for 11 courses.
● It is expected to reduce financial burden on parents and students, as candidates will only have to write one exam.

About NTA:
In pursuance of the Budget Announcement 2017-18, the Union Cabinet, in November 2017, approved creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.

Constitution:
● NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by MHRD.
● The CEO will be the Director General to be appointed by the Government.
● There will be a Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions.
● The Director General will be assisted by 9 verticals headed by academicians/experts.

Finances:
NTA will be given a one-time grant of Rs.25 crore from the Government of India to start its operation in the first year. Thereafter, it will be financially self-sustainable.”

InstaLinks:
Mains Link: Discuss the significance of CUET. Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-cuet-indias-campuses-7831832/lite/.

Prelims Link:
1. Education related issues.
2. CUET.
3. UGC.
5. NPPA hikes prices of 800 essential drugs from 1 April:

Context:
The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has announced a hike in prices of around 800 essential drugs from 1 April. These drugs are included in the National Essential List of Medicine (NELM).
- The rise in drug prices works out at around 10.76% based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data.

Basis:
The clause 16 of Drugs Price Control Order 2013, allows NPPA to revise the ceiling price of scheduled formulations as per the annual wholesale price index (WPI) for the preceding calendar year on or before 1 April of every year and notify the same on the first day of April every year.

About the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM):
Under the provisions of Drug Prices Control Order, 2013, only the prices of drugs that figure in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are monitored and controlled by the regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority.
- Essential medicines are those that satisfy the priority healthcare needs of the majority of the population.
- The primary purpose of NLEM is to promote rational use of medicines considering the three important aspects i.e. cost, safety and efficacy.

About NPPA:
- NPPA was constituted by the Government of India in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- It was made to fix/revise prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce price and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995-2013 (DPCO).

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Who can set up PMRUs?
2. Role of states in setting up of PMRUs.
3. Functions of NPPA in context of DPCO regulation.
4. NPPA- functions.

Mains Link: Discuss the role and functions of Price Monitoring & Resource Unit (PMRU).

Topics: Role of civil services in a democracy.

1. Chandigarh employees to be under central civil services rules:

Context:
The Central Government has announced that the central civil services will now apply to the employees of the Chandigarh administration.
- The Union Territory of Chandigarh is the common capital of Punjab and Haryana.

Implications:
1. Enhancement of retirement age from current 58 years to 60 years.
2. Women employees will now have two years of child care leave from the existing one year.
3. It will have other benefits like an increase in child education allowance.
4. Those with the education department, their retirement age will enhance to 65.

Opposition to this decision:
The decision has invited sharp criticism from Punjab leaders who, cutting across party lines, termed it “an encroachment on Punjab's rights”.

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● This is in violation of the spirit of Punjab Reorg Act and must be reconsidered.

Chandigarh status:
So far, the UT employees were covered under Punjab Civil services rules.
● In 1966, when Punjab was split into Punjab and Haryana, with some territory to Himachal Pradesh, both states claimed Chandigarh as their capital. Pending a resolution, the Centre declared Chandigarh a Union Territory.
● As per the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, Chandigarh was to be governed by the Centre but laws in force in undivided Punjab were to be applicable to the UT.
● In 1984, the Punjab governor was made administrator of the city at a time when the region was battling terrorism.

Administration of UTs:
Articles 239 to 241 in Part VIII of the Constitution deal with the union territories and there is no uniformity in their administrative system.
● Every union territory is administered by the President through an administrator appointed by him.

Power of parliament to make laws:
● The Parliament can make laws on any subject of the three lists (including the State List) for the union territories.
● The President can make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu.
● A regulation made by the President has the same force and effect as an act of Parliament.

Insta Curious: Did you know that Chandigarh’s Capitol Complex was in July 2016 declared by UNESCO as World Heritage at the 40th session of World Heritage Conference held in Istanbul?

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Chandigarh Civil Services Rules.
3. Union Territories Administration.

Mains Link: Discuss the concerns associated with the latest changes to the services rules.

Topics: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

1. Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) of the sub-regional Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping:

Context:
A meeting was recently held between three countries - Bangladesh, India and Nepal, to discuss the next steps in operationalising the Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) of the sub-regional Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping for the free flow of good and people between them.
● Bhutan has already announced that it is unwilling to sign this agreement.

Outcomes of the recent meet:
The BBIN meeting was the first such in-person meeting since February 2020 to discuss the MVA since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, and officials finalised the wording of two separate protocols on passenger and cargo movement with an “enabling” agreement.

About MVA:
The original BBIN MVA was signed by all four countries in June 2015, but after objections in Bhutan over sustainability and environmental concerns, the Bhutanese parliament decided not to endorse the plan.
As per the agreement, member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions. Customs and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.

- **Asian Development Bank** has supported the project as part of its **South Asian Subregional Economic Cooperation programme**.

**Why Bhutan has remained out?**
Tiven Bhutan’s “current infrastructure” and top priority to remaining a “carbon-negative” country, it said it would not be possible to consider joining the MVA.

**Significance:**
Operationalising the MVA by concluding the Passenger and the Cargo Protocol will help realise the full potential of trade and people to people connectivity between the BBIN countries by fostering greater sub-regional cooperation.


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### 2. Act East Policy:

**Context:**
A webinar was recently organised on “**Act East Policy**”.

**What is the ‘Act East Policy'?**
India’s ‘Act East’ policy is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.

- It is considered as the **modern version of the ‘Look East Policy’** which was launched in 1991 by then Prime Minister **P.V. Narasimha Rao**.
- The main focus of ‘Look East Policy’ was to **shift the country’s trading focus from the west and neighbors to the booming South East Asian countries**.
- The “**Act East Policy**” was launched at the East Asia Summit in **Myanmar** in November 2014. Under the “Act East Policy” the government is relying on the 3 C's (Culture, Connectivity, and Commerce) to develop better relations with ASEAN nations.
**Key differences between “Look East Policy” and “Act East Policy”:**

- The focus of the “Look East Policy” was to increase economic integration with the South East Asian countries and the area was confined to South East Asia only.
- On the other hand, the focus of the “Act East Policy” is economic and security integration and the focus area increased to South East Asia as well as East Asia.

**Objectives of ‘Act East Policy’:**

1. **Promote economic cooperation**, cultural ties, and develop a strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at regional, bilateral, and multilateral levels.
2. **To increase the interaction** of the North-Eastern Indian states with other neighboring countries.
3. **To find out the alternatives of the traditional business partners** like; more focus on the Pacific countries in addition to the South East Asian countries.
4. **To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region.**

Experts say that under the “Act East Policy” the government is relying on the 3 C’s (Culture, Connectivity, and Commerce) to develop better relations with ASEAN nations.

**Significance:**

Under the Act East Policy (AEP), the India-Japan strategic partnership has been lifted to an entirely new level, underscoring the importance of Indo-Pacific cooperation.

- India believes in an Indo-Pacific that is free, open and inclusive, and one that is founded upon a cooperative and collaborative rules-based order.
- ASEAN’s centrality remains the abiding contemporary characteristic of the Indo-Pacific at the regional level.
- India has placed the ‘Indo-Pacific’ at the heart of its engagement with the countries of South, Southeast and East Asia. Gradually, Act ‘East’ is getting transformed into Act ‘Indo-Pacific’.

**InstaLinks:**

4. Look East Policy.

**Prelims Link:**

1. What is Act East Policy?
2. Indo-Pacific region.
3. SAARC.

**Mains Link:** What is the significance of 'Look East Policy'? Discuss.

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**3. UAE’s Golden Visa:**

**Context:**

Bollywood A-lister Ranveer Singh was bestowed the UAE golden visa on March 29 in Abu Dhabi. He’s the latest Bollywood talent to be granted the ten-year permit.

- So far, more than 10 Bollywood actors have got their UAE golden visas.

**What is it?**

In 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, thereby enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor and with 100 per cent ownership of their business.

**So, what does the Golden Visa offer?**

The Golden Visa system essentially offers long-term residency (5 and 10 years) to people belonging to the following groups:

- investors, entrepreneurs, individuals with outstanding talents the likes of researchers, medical professionals and those within the scientific and knowledge fields, and remarkable students.

**Eligibility requirements (Have a brief overview; need not mug up):**

**For investors:**

- A deposit of at least AED (United Arab Emirates Dirham) 10 million worth of public investment, either in the form of an investment fund or a company.
● 60% of the total investment must not be in the form of real estate.
● The invested amount must not be loaned, or in case of assets, investors must assume full ownership.
● The investor must be able to retain the investment for a minimum of three years.
● May be extended to include business partners, providing that each partner contributes AED 10 million.
● Can also include the holder’s spouse and children, as well as one executive director and one advisor.

For individuals with specialized talents:
The category includes doctors, researchers, scientists, investors and artists. These individuals may be granted a 10-year visa following accreditations granted by their respective departments and fields. The visa also extends to their spouses and children.

Eligibility for a 5-year visa:
● The investor must invest in a property of a gross value of not less than AED 5 million.
● The amount invested in real estate must not be on loan basis.
● The property must be retained for at least three years.

Outstanding students:
● Outstanding students with a minimum grade of 95% in public and private secondary schools.
● University students within and outside the country having a distinction GPA of at least 3.75 upon graduation.

Reasons Behind the Move:
The UAE’s economy has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic and low oil prices, prompting many expatriates to leave.
● The move intends to bring them back now and keep the “talented people and great minds” in the Gulf country and help in nation-building.
● It will attract talented professionals from various fields of expertise and further encourage innovation, creativity and applied research, adding to the appeal of a career in the UAE for the world’s brightest minds.

Significance for India:
● It would attract more Indian professionals and businessmen to the Gulf nation and strengthen the India-UAE Relations.
● It will also facilitate the return of Indians who want to resume work after the relaxation of Covid-19-related restrictions, for which India had requested the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in early November 2020.

Insta Curious: Did you know about UAE mediation between India and Pakistan. Read more about it.

InstaLinks:
**Prelims Link:**
1. Important countries in the Middle East and their location.
2. India and UAE- Bilateral trade and crude oil supply.
3. Indian diaspora in UAE- volume and significance.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of UAE Golden Visa Scheme.

4. What is a Golden Visa?
5. Who is eligible?

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

1. Re-launch of CEPA between India – Canada:

Context:
India – Canada have agreed to re-launch the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations to unlock full potential of bilateral trade.
● They are also considering an Interim Agreement or Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) that could bring early commercial gains to both the countries.

Need for:
● The trade agreement would help in expanding bilateral trade in goods and services through unlocking the potential across sectors.

India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):
In September 2008, the India-Canada CEO Round Table recommended that India and Canada would benefit enormously from CEPA by elimination of tariffs on a substantial majority of the bilateral trade.
● CEPA would cover trade in goods, trade in services, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade and other areas of economic cooperation.

Difference between CECA, CEPA and FTA:
CECA – Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.
CEPA – Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.
The major “technical” difference between a CECA and CEPA is that CECA involve only “tariff reduction/elimination in a phased manner on listed/all items except the negative list and tariff rate quota (TRQ) items.
● CEPA also covers the trade in services and investment and other areas of economic partnership”.
● So CEPA is a wider term that CECA and has the widest coverage.
● Usually, CECA is signed first with a country and after that, negotiations may start for a CEPA.
● It is a kind of free trade pact which covers negotiation on the trade in services and investment, and other areas of economic partnership.
● It may even consider negotiation on areas such as trade facilitation and customs cooperation, competition, and Intellectual Property Rights.
● Partnership agreements or cooperation agreements are more comprehensive than Free Trade Agreements.
● CEPA also looks into the regulatory aspect of trade and encompasses an agreement covering the regulatory issues.

Insta Curious: Did you know that India was the UAE’s largest export destination and second-largest trade partner in 2019 and the eighth biggest investor with a cumulative foreign direct investment of nearly $11 billion so far?

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: 1. About CECA. 2. About CEPA. 3. India’s FTAs with other countries.
Mains Link: Discuss the significance of India-Australia CECA.

2. Bucharest Nine:
Context:
The envoys to India of nine Eastern European countries called Bucharest Nine jointly wrote to acquaint the Indian public with the basic facts on the ground about the “premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression in Ukraine”.
● The B9 countries have been critical of President Vladimir Putin’s aggression against Ukraine since 2014, when the war in the Donbas started and Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula.

What is Bucharest Nine?
The “Bucharest Nine” is a group of nine NATO countries in Eastern Europe that became part of the US-led military alliance after the end of the Cold War.
● The B9 was founded on November 4, 2015, and takes its name from Bucharest, the capital of Romania.
- The group was created on the initiative of Klaus Iohannis, who has been President of Romania since 2014, and Andrzej Duda, who became President of Poland in August 2015.

Members:
Romania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- All members of the B9 are part of the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- All nine countries were once closely associated with the now dissolved Soviet Union, but later chose the path of democracy.

Functions of B9:
- The B9 offers a platform for deepening the dialogue and consultation among the participant allied states, in order to articulate their specific contribution to the ongoing processes across the North-Atlantic Alliance.
- It works in total compliance with the principles of solidarity and indivisibility of the security of the NATO Member States.

Insta Curious: Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria are former signatories of the now-dissolved Warsaw Pact military alliance led by the Soviet Union.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Bucharest Nine.
2. Cold War.
3. European Union.
5. Three Seas Initiative.
6. Location of B 9 Countries.

3. BIMSTEC:
Context:
BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) completes 25 years of the journey this year that began in Bangkok in June 1997.
- The fifth summit of BIMSTEC will be held in Colombo on March 30.

What is BIMSTEC?
In an effort to integrate the region, the grouping was formed in 1997, originally with Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and later included Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. BIMSTEC, which now includes five countries from South Asia and two from ASEAN, is a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It includes all the major countries of South Asia, except Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Why the region matters?
- Over one-fifth (22%) of the world’s population live in the seven countries around it, and they have a combined GDP close to $2.7 trillion.
- The Bay also has vast untapped natural resources. One-fourth of the world’s traded goods cross the Bay every year.

Why is BIMSTEC important for India?
As the region’s largest economy, India has a lot at stake.
- BIMSTEC connects not only South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.

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● For India, it is a natural platform to fulfil our key foreign policy priorities of ‘Neighborhood First’ and ‘Act East’.
● For New Delhi, one key reason for engagement is in the vast potential that is unlocked with stronger connectivity. Almost 300 million people, or roughly one-quarter of India’s population, live in the four coastal states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal).
● From the strategic perspective, the Bay of Bengal, a funnel to the Malacca straits, has emerged as a key theatre for an increasingly assertive China in maintaining its access route to the Indian Ocean.
● As China mounts assertive activities in the Bay of Bengal region, with increased submarine movement and ship visits in the Indian Ocean, it is in India’s interest to consolidate its internal engagement among the BIMSTEC countries.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Bimstec.
2. Members.
3. Objectives.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of Bimstec for India.


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

1. What constitutes a war crime?

Context:
An International Criminal Court prosecutor has launched an investigation on the "situation in Ukraine" following Russia’s invasion.
● There is a reasonable basis to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed in Ukraine since 2014.

What’s the issue?
ICC had received many queries "with respect to the crime of aggression" but could not exercise "jurisdiction over this alleged crime" as neither Russia nor Ukraine were signatories to ICC’s founding Rome Statute.
● But, now ICC believes that it has has jurisdiction because Ukraine had twice accepted the court’s mandate, once in 2014 after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and again in 2015, when it recognised the court’s jurisdiction for “an indefinite duration”.

Has Russia committed war crimes in Ukraine?
● On the morning of February 28th, Russian Grad missiles rained death on the centre of Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second largest city.
● Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president, said the missiles were deliberately targeted at civilians and described the attack as a war crime.

What is a war crime?
According to the United Nations, a war crime is a serious breach of international law committed against civilians or “enemy combatants” during an international or domestic armed conflict.
In contrast with genocide and crimes against humanity, war crimes have to occur in the context of armed conflict.

Geneva Conventions:
The meaning of war crimes was clarified in the four 1949 Geneva Conventions.
● Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention defines war crimes as “wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.
ICC developments:
The Rome Statute of the ICC expanded the list of crimes that constitute war crimes. The statute, for example, recognises forced pregnancy as a war crime.

Proportionality, distinction and precaution:
The three main pillars of humanitarian law are the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. If any or all of these principles are violated, it could be found that a war crime has been committed.

Insta Curious:
1. Ethics and war crime: https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/overview/crimes_1.shtml.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Definition of War Crimes as defined by Geneva Conventions.
2. About ICC.
3. Members and jurisdiction.
4. Ukraine and Russia war.

Mains Link: What constitutes a war crime? What are the international conventions in this regard.

2. CAATSA waiver:

Context:
With tensions escalating between Russia and the West over the Ukraine crisis, India, which has major defence cooperation with Moscow and also with Kyiv, faces uncertainty over timely deliveries in the near future in addition to the lingering threat of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) over the S-400 deal.

What’s the concern?
In the past, tensions between Russia and Ukraine had considerably delayed the modernisation of the AN-32 transport fleet of the Indian Air Force (IAF).
- So, the latest concern is that this war could result in delays in deliveries from Russia both due to their own domestic commitments as well the sanctions imposed by the West.

Overview of India - Russia military trade:
While Russia has been a traditional military supplier sharing platforms and technologies that others wouldn’t, the cooperation has further deepened in recent years.
- For instance, with the $5.43bn deal S-400 air defence systems as well as other big ticket deals, the defence trade between the two countries has crossed $15bn since 2018.
- Even today, over 60% of Indian military inventory is of Russian origin, especially with respect to fighter jets, tanks, helicopters and submarines among others, while several major deals are in the pipeline.

India had also signed a separate deal with Ukraine for eight Zorya-Mashproekt gas turbine engines for the frigates.
- Ukraine is also upgrading over 100 An-32 transport aircraft of the IAF under a deal finalized in 2009.

What is the S-400 air defence missile system? Why does India need it?
The S-400 Triumf is a mobile, surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by Russia.
- It is the most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range SAM (MLR SAM) in the world, considered much ahead of the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).
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.
- Includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia’s defence and intelligence sectors.

What sanctions will be imposed?

1. prohibition on loans to the sanctioned person.
2. prohibition of Export-Import bank assistance for exports to sanctioned persons.
3. prohibition on procurement by United States Government to procure goods or services from the sanctioned person.
4. denial of visas to persons closely associated with the sanctioned person.

Significance of the deal:
The S-400 decision is a very strong example of how advanced our defence and strategic partnership is, and how strong Indian sovereignty is, to choose its international partners, especially when it comes to issues of national interest and national security.

Insta Curious: Do you know about the foundational agreements? There are three agreements called foundational agreements. Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. CAATSA is associated with?
2. Powers of US president under CAATSA.
3. Types of sanctions that can be imposed.
4. Significant defence deals between India and Russia.
5. Overview of Iran Nuclear deal.

Mains Link: Discuss the features and significance of CAATSA.


3. Edible oil prices:

Context:
Due to stringent measures by the government, prices of edible oil have been control for the last two years, despite the Covid situation.
• However, the war in Ukraine has driven the prices of many commodities northwards including the edible oil prices.

What’s the issue?
Most of the sunflower oil supplies to the country was coming from Ukraine, while the domestic production accounts for less than a quarter of the demand. With Ukraine being war-hit, the supplies have completely stopped.
• As sunflower oil supplies dwindle, consumers are invariably moving to groundnut and palm oils, driving up their prices as well.

Previously, What led to increase in oil prices previously?
• Global commodity prices were extremely high. COVID-19 is a major factor, disrupting supply chains, closing down industries.
• There was insufficient labour in the oil production industry in many countries.
• Excessive buying of edible oil by China.
• Many major oil producers were aggressively pursuing biofuel policies and diverting their edible oil crops for that purpose.
• Governmental taxes and duties also make up a major chunk of the retail price of edible oils in India.

India’s Dependence on Edible Oil:
• India is the world's biggest vegetable oil importer.
• India imports about 60% of its edible oil needs, leaving the country’s retail prices vulnerable to international pressures.
• It imports palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyoil from Brazil and Argentina, and sunflower oil, mainly from Russia and Ukraine.

Facts about Edible Oils:
• Primary sources of Edible oil (Soybean, Rapeseed & Mustard, Groundnut, Sunflower, Safflower & Niger) and secondary sources of Edible Oil (Oil palm, Coconut, Rice Bran, Cotton seeds & Tree Borne Oilseeds).
• In India major challenges in oilseed production is
  o Growing in largely rain-fed conditions (around 70% area),
  o high seed cost (Groundnut and Soybean),
  o small holding with limited resources,
  o low seed replacement rate and low productivity.

Insta Curious: Recently the Government announced the National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) to boost domestic oilseed production and make the country self-sufficient in cooking oils.

InstaLinks: 3. Major edible oil importing countries.
Prelims Link:
1. About Edible oil.
2. Primary and Secondary sources of Edible oil.

Mains Link: Why does India have to import edible oils? What is the burden of importing edible oils on the government’s exchequer? What can we do to boost the domestic production of edible oils? Elaborate.


4. What is the Temporary Protection Directive of 2001?

Context:
Over 1.5 million people fled Ukraine in the first 10 days of fighting, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which has described the displacement as the “fastest growing refugee crisis since the Second World War”.


The war in Ukraine is the first time that the EU has invoked the TPD. It is being seen as another sign of European unity against Russia.

What is TPD?
The European Commission describes “temporary protection” under the TPD as an “exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries and those unable to return to their country of origin”.

- The directive applies when “there is a risk that the standard asylum system is struggling to cope with demand stemming from a mass influx risking a negative impact on the processing of claims”.

Importance of establishing standards:
- Having proper standards will reduce the disparities between the policies of European Union (EU) countries on the treatment of potential refugees during mass influx.
- The standards also promote burden-sharing among EU countries regarding receiving a large number of displaced persons in a short duration and bearing the consequences of receiving such persons.

Origin of TPD:
After the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the USSR, Europe witnessed multiple armed conflicts. Due to these conflicts, many people got displaced and sought refuge in other countries. Thus, European Union (EU) brought Temporary Protection Directive in 2001 to address the situation of a mass influx of displaced persons.

Obligations on EU countries
The directive gives certain rights to the beneficiaries of temporary protection. They include:
- A residence permit for the duration of the protection (1-3 years).
- Access to jobs, housing, social welfare, medical treatment, education for minors.
- Opportunities for families to reunite in some circumstances.
- Guarantees for access to the normal asylum procedure.

5. Iran Nuclear Deal:
Context:
Talks on the revival of the Iran nuclear deal have become a casualty of the war in Ukraine after an indefinite pause was announced over last-minute Russian demands.

What’s the issue?
An agreement on the nuclear deal to bring the US and Iran back into compliance would have led to a swathe of US sanctions on Iran being lifted, including Iranian crude oil exports and petrochemicals, in return for limits on Tehran’s nuclear activity.
- In the past week, however, Moscow has insisted Washington pledge not to impose sanctions on any trade between Russia and Iran once an agreement is signed.

Concerns ahead:
Russia has been a key broker of the painstaking talks in Vienna, which have lasted for almost a year. If the impasse is prolonged there is likely to be a debate over whether Moscow can absolutely use its UN veto on the agreement known as the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA).

Russia and JCPOA:
Russia’s most important role in JCPOA implementation would be as the importer of Iran’s excess enriched uranium stockpile, which would be transported to Russia via ship and exchanged for natural uranium.

About the Iran Nuclear Deal:
- Also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, or the EU).
- Under the deal, Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

Significance of the deal for India:
- Removing sanctions may revive India’s interest in the Chabahar port, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
- This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
- Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

Insta Curious: Have you heard about the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)? Is India a member of this treaty? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is JCPOA? Signatories.
2. Iran and its neighbours.

Mains Link: Write a note on JCPOA.

6. ‘Most favoured nation’ status:
Context:
The United States, the European Union, Britain, Canada and Japan are planning to move jointly to revoke Russia’s “most favoured nation” (MFN) status over its invasion of Ukraine.

What is MFN Status?
Most Favoured Nation is a treatment accorded to a trade partner to ensure non-discriminatory trade between two countries vis-a-vis other trade partners.
- Under WTO rules, a member country cannot discriminate between its trade partners. If a special status is granted to a trade partner, it must be extended to all members of the WTO.

Does MFN mean preferential treatment?
In literal explanation, MFN doesn’t mean preferential treatment. Instead it means non-discriminatory trade that ensures that the country receiving MFN status will not be in a disadvantageous situation compared to the granter’s other trade partners.

- When a country receives MFN status, it is expected to lower trade barriers and decrease tariffs.
- It is also expected to open up the market to trade in more commodities and free flow of goods.

Removal of MFN status:
There is no formal procedure for suspending MFN treatment and it is not clear whether members are obliged to inform the WTO if they do so.

- India suspended Pakistan’s MFN status in 2019 after a suicide attack by a Pakistan-based Islamist group killed 40 police. Pakistan never applied MFN status to India.

What are the pros of MFN?
MFN status is extremely gainful to developing countries.

- Provides access to a wider market for trade goods.
- Reduced cost of export items owing to highly reduced tariffs and trade barriers.
- Lead to more competitive trade.
- Cuts down bureaucratic hurdles and various kinds of tariffs are set at par for all imports.
- Increases demands for the goods and giving a boost to the economy and export sector.
- Heals the negative impact caused to the economy due to trade protectionism.

What are the disadvantages of MFN?

- The main disadvantage is that the country has to give the same treatment to all other trade partners who are members of the WTO.
- This translates into a price war and vulnerability of the domestic industry as a result.
- The country is not able to protect domestic industry from the cheaper imports and in this price war, some domestic players have to face heavy losses or growth restrictions.

7. What is ‘Finlandization’?

Context:
The French President has suggested Finlandization might be a realistic outcome for Ukraine if and when the Russia-Ukraine war ends.

What is Finlandization?

- Finlandization refers to the policy of strict neutrality between Moscow (Russia) and the West that Finland followed during the decades of the Cold War.
- The principle of neutrality was rooted in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (or YYA Treaty) that Finland signed with the USSR in April 1948.

Implications:

Article 1 of the treaty reads: “In the eventuality of Finland, or the Soviet Union through Finnish territory, becoming the object of an armed attack by Germany or any state allied with the latter (meaning, essentially, the United States), Finland will, true to its obligations as an independent state, fight to repel the attack.

- Finland will in such cases use all its available forces for defending its territorial integrity by land, sea, and air, and will do so within the frontiers of Finland in accordance with obligations defined in the present agreement and, if necessary, with the assistance of or jointly with, the Soviet Union.
- In such cases, the Soviet Union will give Finland the help that it requires, subject to mutual agreement between the contracting parties.

Ukraine and Finlandization:
Ukraine, formerly a part of the Soviet Union, has increasingly tilted toward the West, economically and politically, while resisting Russian influence.
In 2008, NATO said it planned eventually for Ukraine to join the alliance, a popular idea within the country, though it has never actually applied for membership and NATO officials say it would not happen any time soon.

“Finlandization” would allow Moscow a heavy hand in Ukrainian affairs. It goes against what Ukraine has been striving for, that is joining NATO and the E.U.


8. UN Resolution on Kashmir in 1947:

Context:
There has been some debate on whether India chose the wrong path to approach the UN. In 2019, Home Minister Amit Shah said that had Nehru taken the matter to the UN under Article 51 of the UN Charter, instead of Article 35, the outcome could have been different.

Article 35:
Article 35 only says that any member of the UN may take a dispute to the Security Council or General Assembly.

Article 51:
It says that a UN member has the “inherent right of individual or collective self-defence” if attacked, “till such time that the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security”.

Do you know about Resolution 47?

- In October 1947, following an invasion by soldiers from the Pakistan Army in plainclothes and tribesmen, the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh sought assistance from India and signed the Instrument of Accession. After the first war in Kashmir (1947-1948), India approached the UN Security Council to bring the conflict in Kashmir to the notice of Security Council members.

Who were the UNSC members who oversaw the issue?
The UN Security Council increased the size of the investigating council to include six members along with permanent members of the UNSC. Along with the five permanent members, China, France, UK, US & Russia, non-permanent members included Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Syria and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

What happened at the UNSC?
1. India’s position was that it was ready to hold a plebiscite, a direct vote in which an entire electorate votes on a specific proposal, to know of the people’s desire and accept the results of the vote.
2. Pakistan denied its involvement in the conflict and counter-accused India.
3. In response the UNSC, under Resolution 39 (1948) stated “with a view to facilitating...the restoration of peace and order and to the holding of a plebiscite, by the two Governments, acting in cooperation with one another and with the Commission, and further instructs the Commission to keep the Council informed of the action taken under the resolution.”
4. It also ordered for the conflict to cease and to create conditions for a “free and impartial plebiscite” to decide whether Jammu and Kashmir would accede to India or Pakistan.

What did the UNSC order Pakistan to do?
The UNSC ordered that Pakistan was to withdraw its tribesmen and Pakistan nationals who had entered “the State for the purpose of fighting” and to prevent future intrusions and to prevent “furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State”.
It was also ordered Pakistan to cooperate with maintaining peace and order.
What did the UNSC order India to do?
The UNSC had a more comprehensive set of orders for India.

1. It said that after the Pakistani army and tribesmen had withdrawn from the State and the fighting had ceased, India was to submit a plan to the Commission for withdrawing forces from Jammu and Kashmir and to reduce them over a period of time to the minimum strength required for civil maintenance of law and order.
2. India was ordered to appraise the Commission of the stages at which steps had been taken to reduce military presence to the minimum strength and to arrange remaining troops after consultations with the Commission.
3. Among other instructions, India was ordered to agree that till the time the Plebiscite Administration found it necessary to exercise the powers of direction and supervision over the State forces and police, these forces would be held in areas to be agreed upon with the Plebiscite Administrator.
4. It also directed India to recruit local personnel for law and order and to safeguard the rights of minorities.

How did India & Pakistan react to the UNSC Resolution 47?
Both countries rejected Resolution 47.

Why India rejected?
India’s contention was that the resolution ignored the military invasion by Pakistan and placing both nations on an equal diplomatic ground was a dismissal of Pakistan’s aggression and the fact that the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession. India also objected to the Resolution’s requirement that did not allow India to retain military presence which it believed it needed for defence. The Resolution’s order to form a coalition government, would also put Sheikh Abdullah, the Prime Minister of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, in a difficult position. India also believed that the powers conferred on the Plebiscite Administrator undermined the state’s sovereignty. India also wanted Pakistan to be excluded from the operations of the plebiscite.

Why Pakistan rejected?
Pakistan on the other hand, objected to even the minimum presence of Indian forces in Kashmir, as allowed by the resolution. It also wanted an equal representation in the state government for the Muslim Conference, which was the dominant party in Pakistani-held Kashmir.

Final outcome:
Despite their differences with the provisions of Resolution 47, both India and Pakistan welcomed the UN Commission and agreed to work with it.

Insta Curious: Did you know that there are 12 seats reserved for Refugees in PoK elections? Read Here Briefly

InstaLinks:
- Location of PoK.
- Rivers flowing through.
- Neighbours.

Mains Link: Discuss why PoK is significant for India.

9. Houthis and the war in Yemen:
Context:
Iran has offered its support for a ceasefire plan put forward by rebels it backs in Yemen's war, saying it could be an "appropriate platform" for ending the conflict.
- The Houthi rebels have announced the proposal and offered peace talks on condition Saudi Arabia stops its air strikes and blockade of Yemen and removes "foreign forces".

Need for ceasefire:
The Yemen war has killed hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly and displaced millions, creating what the United Nations has called the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Who are the Houthis?
- Founded in the 1990s by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen’s Shia majority.
- It is a group of Zaidi Shia Muslims who ruled a kingdom in the province for nearly 1,000 years.

What’s the issue?
One of the Arab world’s poorest countries, Yemen has been devastated by a near seven-year civil war, which started after Houthis captured the capital Sana’a, following which Saudi-led forces intervened and fought the rebels with the aim of ending Iranian influence in the region and restoring the former government.
- The UAE joined the Saudi campaign in 2015 and has been deeply involved in the conflict ever since, despite announcing the formal withdrawal of its forces in 2019 and 2020.

The war in Yemen: Background:
- The conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring of 2011, when an uprising forced the country’s long-time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.
- The political transition was supposed to bring stability to Yemen, one of the Middle East’s poorest nations, but President Hadi struggled to deal with various problems including militant attacks, corruption, food insecurity, and continuing loyalty of many military officers to Saleh.
- Fighting began in 2014 when the Houthi Shia Muslim rebel movement took advantage of the new president’s weakness and seized control of northern Saada province and neighbouring areas.

Why is Saudi Arabia in Yemen?
Saudi Arabia interfered in Yemen after the Shia Houthi rebels captured Sana’a, the capital city, and the internationally recognised government of President Hadi moved to the country’s south.
- The rapid rise of the Houthis in Yemen set off alarm bells in Saudi Arabia which saw them as Iranian proxies.
- Saudi Arabia started a military campaign in March 2015, hoping for a quick victory against the Houthis. But the Houthis had dug in, refusing to leave despite Saudi Arabia’s aerial blitzkrieg.
- With no effective allies on the ground and no way-out plan, the Saudi-led campaign went on with no tangible result. In the past six years, the Houthis have launched multiple attacks on Saudi cities from northern Yemen in retaliation for Saudi air strikes.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:

www.insightsonindia.com

1. Who are Houthis?
2. What is the crisis all about?
3. Location of Yemen.  
4. Arab Countries.  
5. UAE.  

**Mains Link:** Discuss the consequences of war in Yemen on India and the World.

**10. South China Sea Dispute:**

**Context:**
The violations of international law, as well as foreign interference in the disputed waters of the South China Sea by China, has led many South-East Asian nations to oppose Beijing’s military activities in the area.

- Countries that share the South China Sea, such as Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Taiwan, feel that China’s “hegemonic” actions affect their economic prospects as well as threaten sovereign rights.
- The conflict is likely to escalate due to the dispute over undecided boundaries.

**Recent faceoffs:**
- Vietnam took a strong exception to the military drill by Chinese forces, as they were carried out in an area that overlaps with Vietnam’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf.
- The Philippines had confronted China over intrusion in EEZ after domestic pressure demanded retaliation.

**What’s the issue?**
Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with several Southeast Asian states in the South China Sea.

- China claims almost all of the resource-rich sea, through which trillions of dollars in shipping trade passes annually, with competing claims from **Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.**
- Beijing has also been accused of deploying a range of military hardware, including anti-ship missiles and surface-to-air missiles there, and ignored a [2016 international tribunal decision](https://www.un.org/press/docs/2016/tribunal.pdf) that declared its historical claim over most of the waters to be without basis.

**Where is the South China Sea?**
- The South China Sea is an arm of western Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia.
- It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo.
- It is connected by Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea and by Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.
- **Bordering states & territories:** the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

**Strategic Importance:**
- This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Strait of Malacca).
- According to the [United Nations Conference on Trade And Development (UNCTAD)](https://unctad.org/en) one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.

**Contesting Claims Over Islands:**
- **The Paracel Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- **The Spratly Islands** are claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei and Philippines.
- **The Scarborough Shoal** is claimed by the Philippines, China and Taiwan.

Since 2010, China has been converting uninhabited islets into artificial islets to bring it under [UNCLOS](https://www.un.org/unclos) (For example, Haven Reef, Johnson South Reef and Fiery Cross Reef).

**2016 ruling:**
The international tribunal in The Hague in 2016 ruled that the said ‘Line’ had no legal basis.
However, after refusing to accept the ruling, China continued with its activities including the creation of artificial islands.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know the meaning of the phrase ‘The Seven Seas’? [Read Here]
Have you given a thought about how seas are names and their associated problems? [Read Briefly]

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.
2. Countries involved in the dispute.
3. What is the nine dash line?
4. Disputed islands and their locations?
5. Important straits, passes and seas in the region.
6. What is UNCLOS?
7. Locate Taiwan strait and Luzon Strait.

**Mains Link:** Write a note on the South China Sea dispute.

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

**1. Can Turkey use the Montreux Convention to block Russian warships?**

**Context:**
Turkey is set to implement the Montreux Convention, an international convention on naval passage through two of its strategic straits, which would allow them to limit the movement of Russian warships between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

**On what grounds can such limitations be announced?**
- In the event of a war, the pact gives Ankara the right to regulate the transit of naval warships and to block the straits to warships belonging to the countries involved in the conflict.
- Turkey’s foreign minister said that the situation in Ukraine had become a war. This declaration authorises Ankara to activate the Montreux Convention and ban Russian war vessels from entering the Black Sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits.

**Significance of the move and its implications on Russia:**
The Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, also known as the Turkish Straits or the Black Sea Straits, connect the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea via the Sea of Marmara.
- It is the only passage through which the Black Sea ports can access the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Over three million barrels of oil, about three per cent of the daily global supply, mostly produced in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, pass through this waterway every day.
- The route also ships large amounts of iron, steel, and agricultural products from the Black Sea coast to Europe and the rest of the world.

**Challenges before Turkey now:**
Russia’s location on the Black Sea complicates the situation. Article 19 of the treaty contains an exception for the countries on the Black Sea that can effectively undermine Turkey’s power in blocking the Russian warships entering or exiting the Black Sea:
- “Vessels of war belonging to belligerent powers, whether they are Black Sea Powers or not, which have become separated from their bases, may return thereto,” it says.

That means warships can return to their original bases through the passage and Turkey cannot prevent it.

**About Montreux Convention:**
- The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, often known simply as the Montreux Convention, is an international agreement governing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits in Turkey.
• Signed on 20 July 1936 at the Montreux Palace in Switzerland, it went into effect on 9 November 1936 and addressed the long-running Straits Question over who should control the strategically vital link between the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Black sea.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of the convention.

Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/turkey-russia-black-sea-7795658/lite/.

2. International Court of Justice (ICJ):

Context:
Ukraine has filed an application before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), instituting proceedings against the Russian Federation concerning “a dispute relating to the interpretation, application and fulfilment of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (the “Genocide Convention”).

What’s the issue?
Ukraine has accused Russia of falsely claiming that “acts of genocide have occurred in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine”, and of using that as a pretext to recognise the independence of these regions and of going to war against Ukraine.

About ICJ:
• ICJ was established in 1945 by the United Nations charter and started working in April 1946.
• It is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, situated at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).
• Unlike the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (USA).
• It settles legal disputes between States and gives advisory opinions in accordance with international law, on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

Structure:
• The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. These organs vote simultaneously but separately.
• In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies.
• In order to ensure a measure of continuity, one third of the Court is elected every three years and Judges are eligible for re-election.
• ICJ is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are English and French.

The 15 judges of the Court are distributed in following regions:
1. Three from Africa.
2. Two from Latin America and Caribbean.
3. Three from Asia.
4. Five from Western Europe and other states.
5. Two from Eastern Europe.

Independence of judges:
Unlike other organs of international organizations, the Court is not composed of representatives of governments. Members of the Court are independent judges whose first task, before taking up their duties, is to make a solemn declaration in open court that they will exercise their powers impartially and conscientiously.

Jurisdiction and Functioning:
ICJ acts as a world court with two fold jurisdiction i.e. legal disputes between States submitted to it by them (contentious cases) and requests for advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by United Nations organs and specialized agencies (advisory proceedings).

Only States which are members of the United Nations and which have become parties to the Statute of the Court or which have accepted its jurisdiction under certain conditions, are parties to contentious cases.

The judgment is final, binding on the parties to a case and without appeal (at the most it may be subject to interpretation or, upon the discovery of a new fact, revision).

The Genocide Convention:
The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide.

According to the Genocide Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace.

The Genocide Convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948 and signified the international community’s commitment to ‘never again’ after the atrocities committed during the Second World War.

The definition of the crime of genocide, as set out in the Convention, has been widely adopted at both national and international levels, including in the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The Rome Statute established four core international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. Those crimes “shall not be subject to any statute of limitations”.

Importantly, the Convention establishes on State Parties the obligation to take measures to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide, including by enacting relevant legislation and punishing perpetrators, “whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals” (Article IV).

Insta Curious:
ICJ is the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), which was brought into being through, and by, the League of Nations, and which held its inaugural sitting at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands, in February 1922.

InstaLinks:
1. Differences between ICJ and ICC.
2. Geographical locations of these organisations and overview of surrounding countries.

Prelims Link:
Mains Link: Write a note on ICJ.


3. **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):**

**Context:**
Russia has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that its military forces have taken control of the territory around Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP).

- The IAEA continues to closely monitor developments in Ukraine, with a special focus on the safety and security of its nuclear power reactors.

**Concern:**
The International Atomic Energy Agency said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine marks the first time a military conflict has taken place amidst the facilities of a large and established nuclear power program.

**About IAEA:**

www.insightsonindia.com
Set up as the world’s “Atoms for Peace” organization in 1957 within the United Nations family. Reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. Headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

Functions:
- Works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
- Seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.

Programs:
1. Program of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT).
2. Human Health Program.

Insta Curious: Do you remember the 123 Agreement and Hyde Act? Read Here (Briefly)

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is IAEA? Relation with the UN.
2. Members of IAEA.
3. Programs of IAEA.
4. Board of Governors- composition, voting and functions.
5. What is Uranium Enrichment?

Mains Link: Discuss the need for bringing back the Iran nuclear deal.

4. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB):
Context:
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has put all activities relating to Russia and Belarus on hold and under review in the wake of the current conflict in Ukraine.
- The AIIB referred to the situation as “war in Ukraine”, the closest to “invasion” that any Chinese government-affiliated institution has until now described the situation in the east European country.

Impact of such sanctions:
After years of life in a growing, globally connected economy, Russians find themselves in a country increasingly unplugged from the world.
- Following President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, a sweeping wave of sanctions by the European Union and the U.S. has combined with an exodus of foreign companies and investors, leaving Russia more isolated and economically restricted.
- For several days, long lines formed near ATMs around Russia as people rushed to withdraw cash — both foreign currency and rubles — amid fears of a breakdown in electronic banking.
- The value of the ruble has plummeted to a record low, less than 1 cent, as many people watched their savings erode.
- The Kremlin has banned all Russians from transferring foreign currency abroad and ordered exporters to exchange 80% of their foreign currency proceeds for rubles.
● On social media, Russian shoppers are noting early price increases for some products, particularly electronics and appliances.
● Many people in Russia who work for foreign companies have been anxious about being able to receive pay, as the first batch of key Russian banks has been booted from the interbank SWIFT system to target oil and gas profits.
● International artists and cultural organizations have also imposed their own restrictions.
● **Impact on oil prices:** Russia is not only the world’s third biggest oil (after the US and Saudi Arabia) and the second biggest natural gas (after the US) producer, besides the No. 3 coal exporter (behind Australia and Indonesia). It is also the second largest exporter of wheat.

**What is AIIB?**
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond. The Parties (57 founding members) to agreement comprise the Membership of the Bank.

- It is **headquartered in Beijing**.
- The bank started operation after the agreement entered into force on 25 December 2015, after ratifications were received from 10 member states holding a total number of 50% of the initial subscriptions of the Authorized Capital Stock.

**Aim:**
By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, it aims to connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

**Membership:**
- There are more than 100 members now.

**Voting Rights:**
- China is the largest shareholder with 26.61 % voting shares in the bank followed by India (7.6%), Russia (6.01%) and Germany (4.2 %).
- The regional members hold 75% of the total voting power in the Bank.

**Various organs of AIIB:**
**Board of Governors:** The Board of Governors consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country. Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.
**Board of Directors:** Non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank’s general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors.
**International Advisory Panel:** The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank’s strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel is currently the vice-president of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)?

[Table: How Global Commodity Prices Have Moved]

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InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. AIIB vs ADB vs WB.
2. Members of AIIB.
3. Top shareholders.
4. Voting powers.
5. AIIB supported projects in India.

Mains Link: Write a note on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).


5. India abstains from Human Rights Council vote to probe Russian actions:

Context:
India has abstained on a vote at the UNHRC resolution which “strongly condemned” aggression by Russia on Ukraine.

What was the resolution about?
It asked the council to set up an international commission of enquiry into Russia’s actions in Ukraine.
- The resolution said it was “gravely concerned” about reports of human rights violations by Russian forces, civilian casualties and the forced displacement of 6,60,000 refugees due to Russian “bombing and shelling” in populated areas.

Supported by?
32 countries, or nearly two-thirds of the Council voted for the resolution.

Absent/against:
India was among 13 countries of the 47-member council elected from UN members that abstained from the resolution, along with China, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Sudan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela.
Only Russia and Eritrea voted against the resolution.
- Russia has denied targeting civilian areas, and Russian President Putin had accused the Ukraine government of attacks and human rights violations in the Eastern Donbas region to justify military operations in Ukraine.

India’s position on Ukraine:
India’s position at the HRC adds to a string of abstentions at the United Nations and multilateral groups since the start of Russian military operations in Ukraine on February 24, even as the continuing Russian military advances in Ukraine have seen more and more countries vote for resolutions that criticise Moscow.
- Indian government has decided to abstain from three votes at the UN Security Council, two at the UN General Assembly in New York, two at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and one at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.

About UNHRC:
UNHRC was reconstituted from its predecessor organisation, the UN Commission on Human Rights to help overcome the “credibility deficit” of the previous organisation.
- Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

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

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

It oversees expert investigation of violations in specific countries (Special Procedures).

Challenges and Need for reforms:
- The human rights record of the member-states such as Saudi Arabia, China and Russia in the council has also not been in line with the aims and mission of the UNHRC, which has led to critics questioning its relevance.
- Despite the continued participation of several western countries in the UNHRC, they continue to harbour misgivings on the understanding of Human rights.
- Non-compliance has been a serious issue with respect to the UNHRC’s functioning.
- Non-participation of powerful nations such as the US.

What’s the concern now?
The Indian decision to abstain from the voting was not siding with anyone; it was in its own national interest, say few.
- However, these decisions have been condoned by most Indian commentators as an attempt to make the best of a bad hand.
- As our largest arms supplier, Russia has been a dependable ally, they say; it has shielded India at the UN over Kashmir, not to mention Bangladesh, back in 1971.
- Moreover, to vote against Russia will push it further into China’s arms, multiplying that country’s security threat to India.

Why shouldn’t India completely rely on Russia?
The above arguments have been out of date since the end of the Cold War three decades ago, and Vladimir Putin’s rise 20 years ago.
- More dangerously still, they reveal a fatalism towards India’s own national security interests that will only damage us further as time goes by.
Yes, Russia is our largest arms provider and our supplies will be hit if we vote against it. But no, Russia is not a reliable arms provider; it has not been one since Putin came to power.
- Arms supplies are frequently long-delayed, and Putin had used the delays to up the prices, sometimes even double them. By contrast, the French deliveries of the Rafael jets have been comparatively speedy.
- Far from helping us, Putin has turned a blind eye to China’s many acts of aggression against India.
- It was Russia that kept us out of Afghan peace negotiations in the very recent past.
- Russia did little to help us when China raised Kashmir at the UNSC in 2019 and 2020. It was the US and European countries that helped then – going against their own human rights principles.


InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About UNHRC.
2. Composition.
3. Functions.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of UNHRC.


6. What are humanitarian corridors?

Context:
They are demilitarized zones, in a specific area and for a specific time — and both sides of an armed conflict agree to them.
The United Nations considers humanitarian corridors to be one of several possible forms of a temporary pause of armed conflict.

What are they used for?
Via these corridors, either food and medical aid can be brought to areas of conflict, or civilians can be evacuated.

Need for and significance of these corridors:
- The corridors are necessary when cities are under siege and the population is cut off from basic food supplies, electricity and water.
- In cases where a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds because the international law of war is being violated, humanitarian corridors can provide crucial relief.

Who sets them up?
In most cases, humanitarian corridors are negotiated by the United Nations. Sometimes they're also set up by local groups.

Concerns over misuse:
They can be used by UN observers, NGOs and journalists to gain access to contested areas where war crimes are being committed.
- However, there is a risk of military or political abuse. For example, the corridors can be used to smuggle weapons and fuel into besieged cities.

Who gets access?
Access to humanitarian corridors is determined by the parties to the conflict. It's usually limited to neutral actors, the UN or aid organizations such as the Red Cross.
- They also determine the length of time, the area and which means of transport — trucks, buses or planes — are allowed to use the corridor.
- In rare cases, humanitarian corridors are only organized by one of the parties to the conflict. This happened with the American airlift after the Berlin blockade by the Soviet Union in 1948-1949.

InstaLinks:
1. What are Humanitarian?
2. Who establishes these corridors?
3. What are they used for?
4. Significance.

Mains Link: Discuss the need for and significance of Humanitarian Corridors.

7. Democracy Report 2022:

Context:
The latest edition of Democracy Report was released recently by the V-Dem Institute at Sweden’s University of Gothenburg.
- The study was titled ‘Democracy Report 2022: Autocratisation Changing Nature?’

About the report:
The report classifies countries into four regime types based on their score in the Liberal Democratic Index (LDI): Liberal Democracy, Electoral Democracy, Electoral Autocracy, and Closed Autocracy.

General Observations:
- More than twice as many countries are undergoing Autocratisation as are witnessing democratization.
- The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 is down to 1989 levels, with the democratic gains of the post-Cold War period eroding rapidly in the last few years.
- Autocratisation is spreading rapidly, with a record of 33 countries autocratising.
- The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 is down to 1989 levels.
While Sweden topped the LDI index, other Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Norway, along with Costa Rica and New Zealand make up the top five in liberal democracy rankings.

India’s performance:
- It classifies India as an electoral autocracy ranking it 93rd on the LDI, out of 179 countries.
- India is one of the top ten ‘autocratisers’ in the world says the report.
- India is part of a broader global trend of an anti-plural political party driving a country’s Autocratisation.
- Ranked 93rd in the LDI, India figures in the “bottom 50%” of countries.
- It has slipped further down in the Electoral Democracy Index, to 100, and even lower in the Deliberative Component Index, at 102.
- In South Asia, India is ranked below Sri Lanka (88), Nepal (71), and Bhutan (65) and above Pakistan (117) in the LDI.

Reasons behind the overall situation:
One of the biggest drivers of autocratisation is “toxic polarisation”: It is a dominant trend in 40 countries, as opposed to 5 countries that showed rising polarisation in 2011.
- Autocratisation is defined as a phenomenon that erodes respect of counter-arguments and associated aspects of the deliberative component of democracy.

Misinformation as a policy tool: The report identified “misinformation” as a key tool deployed by autocratising governments to sharpen polarisation and shape domestic and international opinion.

Repression of civil society and censorship of media: These were other favored tools of autocratising regimes.

Rise of political hate speeches has also impacted the situation.

8. **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):**

   **Context:**
   The government of Madhya Pradesh in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) proposed two inexpensive and ingenious ideas to encourage women to cook balanced meals. These are:
   1. **The ‘7 days 7 plots’ programme:**
      Here, women from the village are taught how to grow different vegetables in their own gardens, seven to be exact, one for each day of the week.
      - By the end of the week, the first plot is ready to be harvested again. This way, families get to eat fresh, affordable vegetables that they can consume for longer and in greater quantity, as against buying from the market, and so reduce sickness.
      - This scheme is an adjunct to the Tejaswini Rural Women Empowerment Programme implemented by the UN-affiliated IFAD in MP.

   2. **Tiranga Thali:**
      To encourage a more balanced meal, the project introduced the concept of the “Tiranga Thali”, where each plate contains ingredients of the three colours from the Indian flag. Saffron — all pulses like yellow split peas, pigeon peas, and split red lentils representing proteins; white — rice, milk and roti representing carbohydrates; and green — leafy vegetables representing vitamins and minerals.

   **About IFAD:**
   1. It is a specialized United Nations agency created in 1977 engaged in providing grants and loans with low interest for allied projects.
   2. The IFAD works with rural people allowing them to enhance their food security, improve nutrition and raise their incomes.
   3. It also helps people to expand their businesses.
   4. The organization is an outcome of the World Food Conference of 1974.
   5. It is headquartered in Rome and headed by a President.
   6. It has 177 member countries.
   7. IFAD brings out the Rural Development Report every year.
The objectives of the IFAD are three-fold:
1. To increase the productive capacity of poor people.
2. To increase benefits for them from market participation.
3. To strengthen the environmental sustainability & climate resilience of their economic activities.

Insta Curious: How roles and functions of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) differ from IFAD? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About IFAD.
2. Objectives.
Mains Link: Discuss about the roles and functions of IFAD.

9. What are the Geneva Conventions guidelines during wartime?

Context:
Russia’s armed invasion of Ukraine starting February 24 has set off a steady escalation in hostilities on Ukrainian soil, and in many cases civilian infrastructure and non-combatants have been impacted.
- There is growing concern surrounding the issue of human rights violations.

What next?
As the evidence of casualties in the civilian population continues to mount, the world will increasingly look to the Geneva Conventions for standards to which the invading Russian forces can be held.
- Ultimately, if there is a compelling case for prosecuting combatants for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression, it is not inconceivable that evidence would be collected for an investigation and trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

What are they?
The Geneva Conventions is a body of Public International Law, also known as the Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts, whose purpose is to provide minimum protections, standards of humane treatment, and fundamental guarantees of respect to individuals who become victims of armed conflicts.

Importance of Geneva Conventions in today’s world of uncertainty:
The Geneva Convention reminds us to look at the individual even in spaces such as war between nations.
1. The agreement set down the rules for the treatment of prisoners taken in a war situation, explicitly putting down that prisoners of war (POWs) would be prisoners of the Power which holds them, and not of the unit that had captured them; and that they must be treated with honour, and allowed to live in humane conditions.
2. The protocol also established that prisoners of war need only truthfully give their names and ranks, and that they cannot be coerced to reveal other details about themselves or the operations they have been involved in.
3. All these caveats are to establish the individual as the linchpin of humanity.
The Geneva Conventions that originally only addressed the treatment of combatants was later expanded to include non-combatants and civilians as well.

Monitoring:
The Geneva Conventions have a system of “Protecting Powers” who ensure that the provisions of the conventions are being followed by the parties in a conflict. In theory, each side must designate states that are
not party to the conflict as their “Protecting Powers”. In practice, the International Committee of the Red Cross usually plays this role.

Which countries are signatories?
The Geneva Conventions have been ratified by 196 states, including all UN member states.
- The four conventions and first two protocols of the Geneva Conventions were ratified by the Soviet Union, not Russia, hence there is a risk of the Russian government of the day disavowing any responsibility under the Conventions in toto.

Insta Curious: Curious about Ethics and war crimes? Read Here.

InstaLinks: 3. Members and jurisdiction.
Prelims Link:
1. Definition of War Crimes as defined by Geneva Conventions.
2. About ICC.
Mains Link: What are war crimes? How are they determined? Discuss.

10. What are White Phosphorus bombs?

Context:
Allegations of white phosphorus munitions being used by Russia and Ukraine are emerging.

What is white phosphorus?
It is a colourless, white or yellow, waxy solid.

Occurrence: It does not occur naturally. It is manufactured using phosphate rocks.
- It is a highly combustible substance that reacts with oxygen in the air.
- It can catch fire at temperatures as low as 10 to 15 degrees above room temperature.
- Due to its combustible nature, every country has strict regulations regarding its manufacturing and handling.

Applications:
It is used mainly in the military, and other applications may include as a component in fertilisers, food additives and cleaning compounds. Initially, it was also used in pesticides and fireworks, but many countries have banned its use in several sectors.

Is White Phosphorus an incendiary or chemical weapon?
WP has not been categorised as an incendiary or chemical weapon by international agencies.
- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is an intergovernmental organisation and the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, has not listed WP in any of the three Schedules of Chemical Weapons.

However, the United Nations considers it as an incendiary chemical.
The general regulations of Protocol III on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons may apply when it is used in military actions.
- Protocol III specifically mentions it is not applicable on munitions that are illuminants, tracers, smoke or signalling systems thus making it confusing for many if the use of WP can be considered a war crime or not. Protocol III specifically does not ban the use of White Phosphorous in military action. It only restricts its use near the civilian population.

Concerns:
The main reason behind WP being considered incendiary is its effect on humans.
- When WP comes in contact with the human skin, it can cause both thermal and chemical burns.
- It can produce several chemicals when it comes in contact with the skin, such as phosphorus pentoxide that reacts with water in the skin and produces phosphoric acid that is highly corrosive.
About OPCW:
1. It is an international organization established by the Chemical Weapons Convention, 1997 to implement and enforce the terms of the non-proliferation treaty, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, or transfer of chemical weapons by signatory states.
2. By the 2001 Relationship Agreement between the OPCW and the United Nations, the OPCW reports on its inspections and other activities to the UN through the office of the Secretary General.
3. The organisation was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize “for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”.

Powers:
- The OPCW is authorized to perform inspections to verify that signatory states are complying with the convention.

The Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits:
1. Developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or retaining chemical weapons.
2. The direct or indirect transfer of chemical weapons.
3. Chemical weapons use or military preparation for use.
4. Assisting, encouraging, or inducing other states to engage in CWC-prohibited activity.
5. The use of riot control agents “as a method of warfare.”

Insta Curious: Did you know? India’s Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has been chosen as the external auditor by the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for a three-year term starting 2021. [Read here](#).

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About OPCW.
2. What is CWC?
3. Members.
4. Functions of the executive council.
5. Roles and functions of the external auditor of OPCW.

Mains Link: Write a note on the chemical weapons convention.

11. World Happiness Report:

Context:
India may be one of the fastest growing economies of the world, but it is among the least happy countries.
- Ahead of the UN International Day of Happiness, observed on March 20, the World Happiness Report 2022 ranked India 136th — tenth from the bottom of the list.

The World Happiness Report:
The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network powered by the Gallup World Poll data.
- The report, which is in its tenth year, uses global survey data to report on how people evaluate their own lives, besides economic and social parameters.
- The rankings are based on average data of a three-year period of 2019-2021.
- World Happiness Report evaluates levels of happiness by taking into account factors such as GDP, social support, personal freedom, and levels of corruption in each nation.

Highlights of the report:
1. Finland topped the list for the fifth time in a row, according to the 10th edition of the World Happiness Report.
2. Finland was followed by Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.
3. Among other western countries, while the United States managed to bag the 16th position, Britain was ranked 17th and France 20th.
4. India continued to fare poorly in the world happiness index, with its position marginally improving to 136 as against last year’s 139.
5. Among the South Asian nations, only Taliban-ruled Afghanistan fared worse than India.
6. Afghanistan was named the most unhappy country in the world, ranking last on the index of 146 countries.
7. Nepal (84), Bangladesh (94), Pakistan (121) and Sri Lanka (127) managed to get better ranks in the list.
8. The Happiness report also stated that India was one among the countries that witnessed, over the past 10 years, a fall in life evaluations by more than a full point on the 0 to 10 scale.

Significance:
- Over the years, happiness has become a key metric to track for not just countries but corporates as well.
- The goal behind the report is to **identify key determinants of well-being**.
- This information is expected to help countries to craft policies aimed at achieving happier societies.

**Interconnections between law, governance and happiness: Why do these connections matter?**
- Happiness has come to be accepted as a goal of public policy. And this discourse has given a fillip to a new narrative where the interconnections between law, governance and happiness are being searched.
- Experiences from several nations confirm that the countries with higher GDP and higher per capita income are not necessarily the happiest countries and there exists a link between the state of happiness and rule of law.

The WHRs, over the years, confirmed that people tend to have:
- Poor mental health.
- A low score of subjective well-being.
- Poor perception about the governance and law and order, despite high income levels.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Rankings of India and neighbours.
2. Rankings in the previous edition.
3. WHR vs GNH- similarities and differences.
4. Top and bottom performers this year.

**Mains Link:**
What is World Happiness Report? How are the countries ranked in this report? Discuss.

### 12. Treaty of the High Seas:

**Context:**
The fourth meeting of the **Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-4)** was held in New York to conclude a draft of the instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biological diversity in areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).
- The IGC-4 is convened under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.

**About BBNJ Treaty:**
- The “BBNJ Treaty”, also known as the “Treaty of the High Seas”, is an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, currently under negotiation at the United Nations.
- **This new instrument is being developed within the framework of the UNCLOS**, the main international agreement governing human activities at sea.
- It will achieve a more holistic management of high seas activities, which should better balance the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
- BBNJ encompasses the high seas, beyond the exclusive economic zones or national waters of countries.

**Significance:**
● According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), these areas account for “almost half of the Earth’s surface”.

● These areas are hardly regulated and also least understood or explored for its biodiversity – only 1% of these areas are under protection.

**The negotiated agreement has five aspects:**
1. Environmental impact assessments for activities taken up on high seas.
2. Conservation of marine genetic resources.
3. Capacity building.
4. Technology transfer.
5. Cross-cutting issues such as institutional structure and financial support.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know about the Convention on the High Seas? Reference: read this.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About Continental Shelf.
2. About International Seabed Authority.
3. About UNCLOS.
4. About EEZ.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance the Treaty of the High Seas.

### 13. **BRICS:**

**Context:**
Leading media groups from the five BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have put together a three-month long training programme for journalists.

● The programme was an initiative of the **BRICS Media Forum**.

**About the BRICS Media Forum:**
- The Forum was established in 2015 by media organisations from the five countries, including The Hindu, Brazil’s CMA Group, Russia’s Sputnik, China’s Xinhua and South Africa’s Independent Media.
- The Forum was “conceived and developed so that it can function as an independent initiative and set of practical activities undertaken within the broad framework of BRICS cooperation”.

**What is BRICS?**
BRICS is the group composed of the five major emerging countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

● It together represents about 42% of the population, 23% of GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the global trade.

● The acronym BRIC was coined by economist ‘Jim O’Neill’ of Goldman Sachs in 2001 to indicate the emerging powers that would be, alongside the United States, the five largest economies of the world in the 21st century.

● In 2006, BRIC countries started their dialogue, which since 2009 takes place at annual meetings of heads of state and government.

● In 2011, with South Africa joining the group, the BRICS reached its final composition, incorporating a country from the African continent.

**Insta Curious:** Have you heard about PARIS21 grouping? Reference: read this.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About BRICS.
2. Summits.
3. Presidency.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance and relevance of BRICS for India.
1. What is the RBI’s MPC?

Context:
Jayant Varma, Member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), who has been opposing the RBI’s accommodative policy stance, has said the “stance carries with it the risk of falling behind the curve in future because the stance limits the MPC’s freedom of action in ensuing meetings”.

What is an accommodative policy stance?
An accommodative stance means the central bank is prepared to expand the money supply to boost economic growth. The central bank, during an accommodative policy period, is willing to cut the interest rates.

About MPC:
The RBI has a government-constituted Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) which is tasked with framing monetary policy using tools like the repo rate, reverse repo rate, bank rate, cash reserve ratio (CRR).

- It has been instituted by the Central Government of India under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act that was amended in 1934.

Functions:
The MPC is entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the different policy rates including MSF, Repo Rate, Reverse Repo Rate, and Liquidity Adjustment Facility.

Composition of MPC:
- The committee will have six members. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.
- The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank.

Selection and term of members:
Selection: The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.
Term: Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

How decisions are made?
Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.
RBI governor’s role: The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie.

What is RBI Monetary Policy?
The term ‘Monetary Policy’ is the Reserve Bank of India’s policy pertaining to the deployment of monetary resources under its control for the purpose of achieving GDP growth and lowering the inflation rate.
The Reserve Bank of India Act 1934 empowers the RBI to make the monetary policy.

What the Monetary Policy intends to achieve?
As per the suggestions made by Chakravarthy Committee, aspects such as price stability, economic growth, equity, social justice, and encouraging the growth of new financial enterprises are some crucial roles connected to the monetary policy of India.
- While the Government of India tries to accelerate the GDP growth rate of India, the RBI keeps trying to bring down the rate of inflation within a sustainable limit.
In order to achieve its main objectives, the Monetary Policy Committee determines the ideal policy interest rate that will help achieve the inflation target in front of the country.

Monetary Policy Instruments and how they are managed?
Monetary policy instruments are of two types namely **qualitative instruments and quantitative instruments**. The list of quantitative instruments include Open Market Operations, Bank Rate, Repo Rate, Reverse Repo Rate, Cash Reserve Ratio, Statutory Liquidity Ratio, Marginal standing facility and Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF).

**Qualitative Instruments** refer to direct action, change in the margin money and moral suasion.

2. What does RBI’s $5 billion dollar-rupee swap mean?

**Context:**
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has conducted a $ 5 billion dollar-rupee swap auction as part of its liquidity management initiative, leading to infusion of dollars and sucking out of the rupee from the financial system.

What is a Dollar–Rupee Swap auction?
It’s a forex tool whereby the central bank uses its currency to buy another currency or vice versa.
- In a Dollar–Rupee buy/sell swap, the central bank buys dollars (US dollars or USD) from banks in exchange for Indian Rupees (INR) and immediately gets into an opposite deal with banks promising to sell dollars at a later date.

Why do Central Banks engage in it?
- Forex swaps help in liquidity management.
- It also, in a limited way, helps in keeping the currency rates in check.
- A dollar–rupee buy/sell swap injects INR into the banking system while sucking out the dollars, and the reverse happens in a sell/buy swap.

Why is RBI resorting to it now?
Surplus liquidity in the system is pegged at Rs 7.5 lakh crore, which needs to be curbed to keep a tab on inflation.
- Usually, the central bank will resort to traditional tools such as increasing the repo rate or increasing the cash reserve ratio (CRR), but this can have a negative implication on the economy.
- Therefore, the RBI used a different toolkit - variable rate reverse repo auction (VRRR) last year.

**Impacts:**
Forex swaps are intended for liquidity management. Therefore, their impact on currency is only incidental. The RBI resorting to selling USD in two tranches will keep a check on Rupee’s volatility and help curb its depreciation to some extent.
For the bond market, the exercise may have a pronounced impact.
- Bonds yields are already on an incline. Liquidity intervention through swaps indicates the RBI’s plan to use a different toolkit rather than the traditional ones, and this leaves room for the central bank to buy bonds when needed. Consequently, the strategy will contain bond yields.

**InstaLinks:**
1. What is currency swap?
2. Impacts.
3. RBI Monetary Policy tools.
4. Bond yields.
5. Bond Yield curve.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of RBI Currency Swap.


3. Unemployment in India:

**Context:**
According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the National Statistical Office (NSO):
India’s urban unemployment rate jumped to 12.6 per cent in the April-June quarter of 2021, compared to 9.3 per cent in the January-March quarter.

It, however, eased from the 20.8 per cent level seen during the first wave of the Covid pandemic.

Impact of the pandemic:
The biggest casualty of the pandemic will be joblessness. The country’s unemployment rate has risen through much of April, having hit 7.4%, and threatens to climb further to around 8% significantly higher than the 6.5% in March, according to CMIE.

- Approximately 10 million salaried jobs have been lost, across urban and rural India, and one is not sure how many people will get back their livelihoods.
- Urban females fared worse than urban males. In the 15-29 age group, the unemployment rate for urban females stood at 31 per cent compared with 24 per cent for males during April-June 2021.
- The unemployment rate for urban females and males stood at 36 per cent and 34.3 per cent, respectively, in April-June 2020.

Types of Unemployment in India:
Disguised Unemployment:
- It is a phenomenon wherein more people are employed than actually needed.
- It is primarily traced in the agricultural and the unorganised sectors of India.

Seasonal Unemployment:
- It is an unemployment that occurs during certain seasons of the year.
- Agricultural labourers in India rarely have work throughout the year.

Structural Unemployment:
- It is a category of unemployment arising from the mismatch between the jobs available in the market and the skills of the available workers in the market.
- Many people in India do not get job due to lack of requisite skills and due to poor education level, it becomes difficult to train them.

Cyclical Unemployment:
- It is result of the business cycle, where unemployment rises during recessions and declines with economic growth.
- Cyclical unemployment figures in India are negligible. It is a phenomenon that is mostly found in capitalist economies.

Technological Unemployment:
It is loss of jobs due to changes in technology. In 2016, World Bank data predicted that the proportion of jobs threatened by automation in India is 69% year-on-year.

Frictional Unemployment:
- The Frictional Unemployment also called as Search Unemployment, refers to the time lag between the jobs when an individual is searching for a new job or is switching between the jobs.
- In other words, an employee requires time for searching a new job or shifting from the existing to a new job, this inevitable time delay causes the frictional unemployment. It is often considered as a voluntary unemployment because it is not caused due to the shortage of job, but in fact, the workers themselves quit their jobs in search of better opportunities.

Vulnerable Employment:
- This means, people working informally, without proper job contracts and thus sans any legal protection. These persons are deemed ‘unemployed’ since records of their work are never maintained.
- It is one of the main types of unemployment in India.

Causes of Unemployment:
www.insightsonindia.com
● Large population.
● Low or no educational levels and vocational skills of working population.
● Inadequate state support, legal complexities and low infrastructural, financial and market linkages to small/ cottage industries or small businesses, making such enterprises unviable with cost and compliance overruns.
● Huge workforce associated with informal sector due to lack of required education/ skills, which is not captured in any employment data. For ex: domestic helpers, construction workers etc.
● The syllabus taught in schools and colleges, being not as per the current requirements of the industries. This is the main cause of structural unemployment.
● Low productivity in agriculture sector combined with lack of alternative opportunities for agricultural worker which makes transition from primary to secondary and tertiary sectors difficult.
● Regressive social norms that deter women from taking/continuing employment.

Impact:
● The problem of unemployment gives rise to the problem of poverty.
● Young people after a long time of unemployment indulge in illegal and wrong activities for earning money. This also leads to increase in crime in the country.
● Unemployed persons can easily be enticed by antisocial elements. This makes them lose faith in democratic values of the country.
● It is often seen that unemployed people end up getting addicted to drugs and alcohol or attempts suicide, leading losses to the human resources of the country.
● It also affects economy of the country as the workforce that could have been gainfully employed to generate resources actually gets dependent on the remaining working population, thus escalating socioeconomic costs for the State. For instance, 1 percent increase in unemployment reduces the GDP by 2 percent.

Steps Taken by Government:
Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched in 1980 to create full employment opportunities in rural areas.
Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM): This scheme was started in 1979 with objective to help unemployed rural youth between the age of 18 and 35 years to acquire skills for self-employment. Priority was given to SC/ST Youth and Women.
RSETI/RUDSETI: With the aim of mitigating the unemployment problem among the youth, a new initiative was tried jointly by Sri Dharmaastha Manjunatheshwara Educational Trust, Syndicate Bank and Canara Bank in 1982 which was the setting up of the “RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SELF EMPLOYMENT TRAINING INSTITUTE” with its acronym RUDSETI near Dharshathala in Karnataka. Rural Self Employment Training Institutes/ RSETIs are now managed by Banks with active co-operation from the Government of India and State Government.

By merging the two erstwhile wage employment programme – National Rural Employment programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) was started with effect from April, 1, 1989 on 80:20 cost sharing basis between the centre and the States.
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA): It is an employment scheme that was launched in 2005 to provide social security by guaranteeing a minimum of 100 days paid work per year to all the families whose adult members opt for unskilled labour-intensive work. This act provides Right to Work to people.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), launched in 2015 has an objective of enabling a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood.
Start Up India Scheme, launched in 2016 aims at developing an ecosystem that promotes and nurtures entrepreneurship across the country.
Stand Up India Scheme, launched in 2016 aims to facilitate bank loans between Rs 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore to at least one SC or ST borrower and at least one women borrower per bank branch for setting up a greenfield enterprise.
4. Ukraine war could cut 1% off global growth: OECD

Context
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently reported that the Russian invasion of Ukraine could reduce the global growth rate by a percentage this year and increase inflation by two-and-a-half percentage points.

What were the other important observations made by OECD?
- War’s impact on European Union could be high because of its high dependence on Russia’s energy imports
- OECD countries through increased government spending by 0.5% could lessen the impact of inflation on these countries

About OECD
Origin
- Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was founded in 1948 to help administer the Marshall Plan
- In 1961, the OEEC was reformed into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and membership was extended to non-European states
- Headquarters — Paris, France
- It works through consensus to develop policy recommendations and other “soft law” instruments to encourage policy reform in member countries

Membership
- Currently, it has 38 members
- India is not a member but a key partner
- It is a forum of countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy
- Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries
- It provides a platform to compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members.

Resources — funded by contributions from member states at varying rates

Governance
- OECD Council — provide direction and guidance to the work of the Organisation. Each member country is represented.
- OECD Substantive Committees — oversee all the work on each theme (publications, task forces, conferences, and so on)
- OECD Secretariat — led by the Secretary-General provides support to Standing and Substantive Committees

Special bodies and entities associated with OECD
- International Transport Forum (ITF) (formally known as the European Conference of Ministers of Transport)
- International Energy Agency
- Nuclear Energy Agency
- Partnership for Democratic Governance (PDG)
- Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC)

Insta curious: Know how OECD is helping to usher green and sustainable growth
Insta links
  1. Prelims link
     • About OECD

www.insightsonindia.com  121  InsightsIAS
What is inflation?

2. **Mains link:** How does the Russia-Ukraine conflict impact the global economy and also the Indian economy? Discuss. (15M)

5. **RSS resolution for labor-intensive economic model:**

**Context:**
The RSS has passed a resolution calling for a **labour-intensive Bharatiya Economic Model** in view of rising unemployment in the country.

**What does the resolution say?**
1. Society must come forward and participate in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat where the economic model is based on Indian values.
2. The model should be human-centric, labour intensive, eco-friendly and lay stress on decentralisation and equitable distribution of benefits.
3. It should augment village economy, microscale, small scale and agro-based industries.
4. Thrust areas as rural employability, unorganised sector employment and employment of women as solutions to unemployment.
5. It also urged the youth to come out of the mentality of seeking only jobs. An environment conducive to encouraging entrepreneurship should be created by educating and counselling people, especially youth.

**Need for:**
- India’s unemployment rate has been rising, and when the effects of demonetisation and the pandemic have hit the economy and dried up opportunities.
- The unemployment rate went up to 7.91% in December 2021 from 6.3% in 2018-19 and 4.7% in 2017-18.
- The manufacturing sector is said to have lost 9.8 million jobs between 2019-20 and December 2021.

**What needs to be done?**
- By pushing the government to support small and medium enterprises in the manufacturing sector.
- By working with the youth at the grassroots to “help them engage into entrepreneurial ventures through agri-allied activities and other self-employment opportunities”.
- There are ample opportunities for creation of jobs in rural India through industrialisation, food processing, agri-allied activities such as animal husbandry, bamboo farming, pisciculture etc.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Unemployment rate in India.
2. Types of Unemployment.
3. Government schemes in this regard.

**Mains Link:** Comment on the significance of a labour-intensive Bharatiya Economic Model.

**Link:**

**Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.**

1. UPI123Pay:

**Context:**
The Reserve Bank of India has launched a **new Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments solution for feature phone users** dubbed ‘UPI123Pay’.

**What is UPI123Pay?**
- UPI ‘123PAY’ is a **three-step method** to initiate and execute services for users which will work on simple phones.
- It will allow customers to use feature phones for almost all transactions except scan and pay.
- It doesn’t need an internet connection for transactions. Customers have to link their bank account with feature phones to use this facility.

The new UPI payments system offers users four options to make payments without internet connectivity:

**Interactive Voice Response (IVR):** Users would be required to initiate a secured call from their feature phones to a predetermined IVR number and complete UPI on-boarding formalities to be able to start making financial transactions like money transfer, mobile recharge, EMI repayment, balance check, among others.

**App-based functionality:** One could also install an app on feature phone through which several UPI functions, available on smartphones, will be available on their feature phone, except scan and pay feature which is currently not available.

**Missed call facility:** The missed call facility will allow users to access their bank account and perform routine transactions such as receiving, transferring funds, regular purchases, bill payments, etc., by giving a missed call on the number displayed at the merchant outlet. The customer will receive an incoming call to authenticate the transaction by entering UPI PIN.

**Proximity sound-based payments:** One could utilise the proximity sound-based payments option, which uses sound waves to enable contactless, offline, and proximity data communication on any device.

**Significance:**
Users will be able to make payments to their friends and family, pay their utility bills, recharge FASTags, pay mobile bills and also check their account balances, the central bank said, adding customers will also be able to link bank accounts, set or change UPI PINs.

**What is UPI?**

**Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** is an instant real-time payment system, allowing users to transfer money on a real-time basis, across multiple bank accounts without revealing details of one’s bank account to the other party.

- UPI is currently the biggest among the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) operated systems including National Automated Clearing House (NACH), Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), Aadhaar enabled Payment System (AePS), Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS), RuPay etc.
- The top UPI apps include PhonePe, Paytm, Google Pay, Amazon Pay and BHIM, the latter being the Government offering.

**Insta Curious:** Do you know about the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and about the services it provides? [Reference](#).

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. Who controls ATMs in the country?
2. What is UPI?
3. What is the National Automated Clearing House (NACH)?
4. What is the National Financial Switch?
5. Three levels of authentication in BHIM.

### 2. Microfinance Regulations:

**Context:**
RBI has released new microfinance lending norms. As per these norms:

1. All entities, banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and microfinance institutions (MFIs) are subject to the same regulations.
2. A microfinance loan is defined by the RBI as a 'collateral-free' loan granted to a household with an annual household income of up to Rs 3 lakh.
3. All collateral-free loans offered to low-income households, regardless of the end-use and mode of application/processing/disbursement, are considered microfinance loans.
4. The financial entities should have a board-approved policy to provide the flexibility of repayment periodicity on microfinance loans as per borrowers’ requirements. They should also have a board-approved policy for the assessment of household income.

**What is Microfinance?**

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Microfinance is a form of financial service which provides small loans and other financial services to poor and low-income households.

MFIs are financial companies that provide small loans to people who do not have any access to banking facilities.

- The definition of “small loans” varies between countries. In India, all loans that are below Rs. 1 lakh can be considered as microloans.

Microcredit is delivered through a variety of institutional channels viz:

1. Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) (including small finance banks (SFBs) and regional rural banks (RRBs)).
2. Cooperative banks.
3. Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).
4. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) registered as NBFCs as well as in other forms.

Significance of Proposal:

- RBI has reposed faith in the maturity of the microfinance sector with this step.
- This is a forward-looking step where the responsibility is of the institution to fix a reasonable interest rate on transparent terms.

Growth of microfinancing:

- In the 1990s, microcredit was given by scheduled commercial banks either directly or via non-governmental organisations to women’s self-help groups, but given the lack of regulation and scope for high returns, several for-profit financial agencies such as NBFCs and MFIs emerged.
- By the mid-2000s, there were widespread accounts of the malpractices of MFIs and a crisis in some States such as Andhra Pradesh, arising out of a rapid and unregulated expansion of private for-profit micro-lending.
- The microfinance crisis of Andhra Pradesh led the RBI to review the matter, and based on the recommendations of the Malegam Committee, a new regulatory framework for NBFC-MFIs was introduced in December 2011.
- A few years later, the RBI permitted a new type of private lender, SFBs, with the objective of taking banking activities to the “unserved and underserved” sections of the population.
- Today, as the RBI’s consultative document notes, 31% of microfinance is provided by NBFC-MFIs, and another 19% by SFBs and 9% by NBFCs.
- These private financial institutions have grown exponentially over the last few years, garnering high profits, and at this pace, the current share of public sector banks in microfinance (the SHG-bank linked microcredit), of 41%, is likely to fall sharply.

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. AgriStack:

Context:
The government is working on a digital 'stack' of agricultural datasets, with its core as land records.

- But, such a centralised stack will use old and inaccurate land records; farmers' personal and financial details will be used without a strong data protection law; and rural areas have a low level of digital literacy. Hence, experts say such an 'AgriStack' is problematic.

What is AgriStack?
The AgriStack is a collection of technologies and digital databases proposed by the Central Government focusing on India’s farmers and the agricultural sector.

- The central government has claimed that these new databases are being built to primarily tackle issues such as poor access to credit and wastage in the agricultural supply chain.

Features and significance:
● Under AgriStack, the government aims to provide ‘required data sets’ of farmers’ personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for ‘smart and well-organized agriculture’.
● The digital repository will aid precise targeting of subsidies, services and policies, the officials added.
● Under the programme, each farmer of the country will get what is being called an FID, or a farmers’ ID, linked to land records to uniquely identify them. India has 140 million operational farm-land holdings.

Issues with the move:
Agriculture has become the latest sector getting a boost of ‘techno solutionism’ by the government.
● But it has, since then, also become the latest sector to enter the whole debate about data privacy and surveillance.
● Since the signing of the MoUs, several concerns related to sharing farmers’ data with private companies are raised.
● The development has raised serious concerns about information asymmetry, data privacy and consent, profiling of farmers, mismanaged land records and corporatization of agriculture.
● The formation of ‘Agristack’ also implies commercialization of agriculture extension activities as they will shift into a digital and private sphere.

Why such concerns?
● The project was being implemented in the absence of a data protection legislation.
● It might end up being an exercise where private data processing entities may know more about a farmer’s land than the farmer himself.
● Without safeguards, private entities would be able to exploit farmers’ data to whatever extent they wish to.
● This information asymmetry, tilted towards the technology companies, might further exploit farmers, especially small and marginal ones.

Need:
● At present, the majority of farmers across India are small and marginal farmers with limited access to advanced technologies or formal credit that can help improve output and fetch better prices.
● Among the new proposed digital farming technologies and services under the programme include sensors to monitor cattle, drones to analyse soil and apply pesticide, may significantly improve the farm yields and boost farmers’ incomes.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is AgriStack?
2. How it works?
3. Implementation.

Mains Link: Discuss the concerns associated with the implementation of AgriStack.

2. Horticulture:

Context:
The India Greenhouse Horticulture market held a market value of USD 190.84 Million in 2021 and is estimated to reach USD 271.25 Million by the year 2030.
● The market is expected to register a growth rate of 4.19% over the projected period. In 2021, India’s greenhouse horticulture production was 27.71 million tonnes.

What is greenhouse horticulture?
Greenhouse Horticulture is also known as protected cropping. It is the production of horticultural crops within, under or sheltered by structures for providing modified growing conditions and/or protection from adverse weather, pests, and diseases.

Growth Influencers:
● Robust increase in population and food demand.
● Rising entrepreneurship under horticulture due to government intervention.
What is Horticulture?
The term horticulture is derived from two Latin words *hortus*, meaning ‘garden’, and *cultura* meaning ‘cultivation’ hence meaning, crops cultivated in a garden cultivation.

- It is a science and art of production, utilisation and improvement of fruits, vegetables, flowers and other plants for human food, non-food uses and social needs.

L.H. Bailey is considered the Father of American Horticulture and M.H. Marigowda is considered the Father of Indian Horticulture.

Significance:
- Diverse agro-climatic conditions in India ensure the production of all types of fresh fruits, vegetables and medicinal plants.
- Horticulture crops perform a vital role in the Indian economy by generating employment, providing raw material to various food processing industries, and higher farm profitability due to higher production and export earnings from foreign exchange.
- The comparative production per unit area of horticultural crops is higher than field crops.
- Such crops are of high value, labour intensive and generate employment throughout the year. It has gained prominence over contributing a growing share in Gross Value Addition of agriculture.
- They have national and international demand and are a good source of foreign exchange.
- It is imperative to cater to the country’s estimated demand of 650 MT of fruits and vegetables by the year 2050.

Data Analysis:
1. India is the second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world after China.
2. Horticultural crops constitute a significant portion of the total agricultural produce in India. They cover a wide cultivation area and contribute about 28 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
3. These crops account for 37 per cent of the total exports of agricultural commodities from India.
4. During the year 2019-20, the country recorded its highest ever horticulture production of 320.77 million tonnes from an area of 25.66 million hectares.

Challenges:
- Faces high post-harvest loss and gaps in post-harvest management due to less or limited input by machinery and equipment.
- Lack of supply chain infrastructures like cold storage and well-connected transport networks.
- Difficulties in setting up due to higher input costs and limited availability of market intelligence, mainly for exports.
- There are no safety net provisions like the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for foodgrains.
- The production of horticultural commodities is far less as compared to the existing demand in the country.

Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):
Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables and other areas.
Under MIDH, Government of India contributes 60% of the total outlay for developmental programmes in all the states (except North Eastern and Himalayan states where GOI contributes 90%) & 40% is contributed by State governments.
It has **five major schemes on horticulture**-
1. National Horticulture Mission (NHM)
2. Horticulture Mission for North East and Himalayan States (HMNEH)
3. National Horticulture Board (NHB)
4. Coconut Development Board (CDB) &
5. Central Institute of Horticulture (CIH), Nagaland.

National Horticulture Board (NHB):
● It was set up in 1984 on the basis of recommendations of the "Group on Perishable Agricultural Commodities", headed by Dr M. S. Swaminathan.
● Headquartered at Gurugram.
● Objective is to improve integrated development of Horticulture industry and to help in coordinating, sustaining the production and processing of fruits and vegetables.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
2. Features.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of National Horticulture Mission.

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. ‘Meri Policy Mere Haath’ campaign:

Context:
‘Meri Policy Mere Haath’ campaign was launched recently in Hassan, Karnataka.

About the Campaign:
● The campaign is part of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.
● It is aimed at motivating all farmers in the country to insure their crops.
● Under this program, every farmer who has taken insurance under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) will get the policy documents at their doorstep.

Significance:
● The campaign empowers the farmers through crop insurance awareness and by bringing the insurance policy to their doorsteps.
● The campaign will also help in increasing the direct communication between the farmers and insurance companies.

About PMFBY:
The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has successfully entered its seventh year of implementation with the upcoming Kharif 2022 season, completing six years of its implementation since its announcement on 18 February 2016.

Performance of PMFBY:
1. Till date, the scheme has insured over 30 crore farmer applications (5.5 crore farmer applications on year-on-year basis).
2. Over the period of 5 years, more than 8.3 crore farmer applications have benefitted from the scheme.
3. Moreover, Rs.95,000 crores claims have been paid as against Rs. 20,000 crore farmers share.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:
● It is in line with the One Nation – One Scheme theme- It replaced National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS).
● Launched in 2016.
● Coverage: All food & oilseed crops and annual commercial/horticultural crops for which past yield data is available.
● Premium: The prescribed premium is 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all rabi crops. In the case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium is 5%.

Objectives:
1. To provide insurance coverage and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crops as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases.

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2. To **stabilise the income of farmers** to ensure their continuance in farming.
3. To encourage farmers to **adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices**.
4. To **ensure flow of credit** to the agriculture sector.

**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 (overhauled PMFBY):**
**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.

**Why is PMFBY criticised?**
Since the beginning, farmers, especially from Maharashtra, have criticised the scheme for various reasons.
- One of the main arguments against it is that it helps insurance companies more than the farmers.
- Farm leaders claim insurance companies have made windfall gains at the behest of the public exchequer and farmers.
- Delayed payouts and denial of claims are other common complaints against insurance companies.
- The insurance companies were also blamed for not conducting enough crop cutting experiments (CCE), which measure the total loss experienced by the farmers.

**Which states have withdrawn from the scheme?**
Gujarat, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Jharkhand have opted out of the scheme.

**Insta Curious:** Several states have their own insurance schemes. Read about them briefly.

**InstaLinks:**
1. Key features of PMFBY.
2. Benefits.
3. Eligibility.
4. PMFBY 2.0.

**Prelims Link:**
1. PMFBY.
2. PMFBY 2.0.

**Mains Link:**
Discuss the significance of PMFBY 2.0.

### 2. Scheme for Women Farmers:

**Context:**
In order to familiarize women with the latest techniques in agriculture and allied sectors, **trainings are being imparted to women farmers** under schemes of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Rural Development.
- The guidelines of the various beneficiary-oriented schemes of the **Department of Agriculture & Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW)**, provide that States and other Implementing Agencies to incur **atleast 30% expenditure on women farmers**.

Following schemes have specific components for the welfare of women farmers:
1. National Food Security Mission,
2. National Mission on Oilseed & Oil Palm,
3. National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture,
4. Sub-Mission for Seed and Planting Material,
5. Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization and

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):
The Department of Rural Development, launched a specific scheme namely ‘Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)’.

- It is a subcomponent of DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana — National Rural Livelihoods Mission).
- This scheme is being implemented since 2011.
- Objectives: To empower women by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also create sustainable livelihoods of rural women.
- Implementation: The program is implemented in project mode through State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) as Project Implementing Agencies.

Need for promotion of women farmer:
Agriculture support system in India strengthens the exclusion of women from their entitlements as agriculture workers and cultivators.

- Rural women form the most productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. More than 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture activities for their livelihoods.
- About 20 per cent of farm livelihoods are female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male emigration.
- Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the International Day of Rural Women is celebrated on October 15 every year? What are its objectives and historical significance? Reference.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Key features of the scheme.
2. Implementation.

Mains Link: Discuss the problems faced by women farmers in India. Also discuss how those problems could be solved.

Topics: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

1. What is Predatory pricing?

Context:
The Competition Commission of India has dismissed allegations of predatory pricing against e-commerce platform Shopee.

What were the allegations of violation of competition norms against Shopee?
Shopee sells various products at extremely low prices with the intention to eliminate competition from small retailers.
- For example, Shopee’s deep discounting tactics, including flash sales of products for Re.1, Rs 9 and Rs 49, were aimed at attracting a large base of customers and consumer preference data which the company could use to its advantage.

What is Shopee?
Shopee is a Singaporean multinational technology company which focuses mainly on e-commerce.
Shopee is owned by **SEA Limited**, which also owns Garena: Free Fire, a popular mobile game that was among the 54 apps restricted in India.

As of 2021, it is widely considered as the largest e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia.

**What has the CCI ruled?**
Shopee did not hold significant market power as it is a relatively new entrant in a market with well established players.

**What is Predatory pricing?**
Predatory pricing is the illegal act of setting prices low to attempt to eliminate the competition.

- Predatory pricing **violates antitrust laws**, as it makes markets more vulnerable to a monopoly.

Establishing that a business is engaging in predatory pricing requires that:
- The enterprise be a dominant player in the relevant market.
- Its goods or services are being marketed below cost.
- Sub-tactics are being used with the intention to eliminate competition.

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**CONSUMER PROTECTION (E-COMMERCE) RULES, 2020**

**PROVISIONS FOR E-COMMERCE FIRMS**

1. Mandatory display of ‘country of origin’ on products
2. Display total price of goods & services offered for sale (+ break-up of other charges)
3. Mention the ‘expiry date’ of goods offered for sale
4. Specify details about return, refund, exchange, warranty and guarantee, delivery and shipment
5. No manipulation of prices for unreasonable profit
6. No cancellation charges
7. Provide information on available payment methods
8. Information about the ‘sellers’ offering goods and services
9. Violation to attract penal action under Consumer Protection Act, 2019

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**About the Competition Commission Of India:**
Established under the **Competition Act, 2002** for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act, and was duly **constituted in March 2009**.

- Chairman and members are **appointed by the central government**.

**Functions of the commission:**
1. To eliminate practices having adverse effects on competition.
2. Promote and sustain competition.
3. Protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.

**The Competition Act:**
The **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 (MRTP Act)** was repealed and replaced by the **Competition Act, 2002**, on the recommendations of the Raghavan committee.

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

**Insta Curious:** How might cartels be worse than monopolies? Read [this](https://www.insightsonindia.com).
2. Export Preparedness Index 2021:

Context:
NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the Institute of Competitiveness, has released the second edition of the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021.

- The first Index was launched in August 2020.

About the Index:
- The Export Preparedness Index is a comprehensive analysis of India’s export achievements.
- It aims to identify the fundamental areas critical for subnational export promotion.
- The coastal states have been adjudged as the best performers in the index.

How were states ranked?
The index ranked states on four key parameters – policy; business ecosystem; export ecosystem; export performance.

- The index also took into consideration 11 sub-pillars — export promotion policy; institutional framework; business environment; infrastructure; transport connectivity; access to finance; export infrastructure; trade support; R&D infrastructure; export diversification; and growth orientation.

Performance of various states:
- Gujarat has topped NITI Aayog’s Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2021 for the second consecutive time.
- Maharashtra has been ranked second and Karnataka has been ranked third.

1. Promoting Inland Waterways in the Country:

Context:
Pandu in Guwahati recently received the maiden voyage of food-grains from Patna to via Bangladesh, ushering a new age for inland waterways in Assam as Brahmaputra (NW2) gets connected with Ganga (National Waterway-1) via Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route.

- MV Lal Bahadur Shastri carrying 200 MT of foodgrains for Food Corporation of India (FCI) completed the maiden pilot run from Patna.
- The vessel sailed of 2,350 km from Patna on NW-1, passed through Bhagalpur, Manihari, Sahibganj, Farakka, Tribeni, Kolkata, Haldia, Hemnagar; Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route through Khulna, Narayanganj, Sirajganj, Chilmari and NW-2 through Dhubri, and Jogighopa.

Inland waterways in India:
To promote inland water transport in the country, 111 ‘Inland Waterways’ has been declared as ‘National Waterways’ under the National Waterways Act, 2016.

- Inland water transport in the country is being promoted as an economical, environment friendly supplementary mode of transport to rail and road.
Did you know?
- Under Entry 24 of the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the central government can make laws on shipping and navigation on inland waterways which are classified as national waterways by Parliament by law.

Important National Waterways of India:

National Waterway 1:
- From Allahabad to Haldia with a distance of 1620 km.
- The NW1 run through the Ganges, Bhagirathi and Hooghly river system with having fixed terminals at Haldia, Farrakka and Patna.
- Floating terminals at the riverside cities like Kolkata, Bhagalpur, Varanasi and Allahabad.
- It is the longest National Waterway in India.

National Waterway 2:
- Brahmaputra River from Sadiya to Dhubri in Assam state.
- The NW2 is the third longest Waterway with a total length of 891 km.

National Waterway 3:
- The West Coast Canal or NW3 is in Kerala state and run from Kollam to Kottapuram.
- The 205 km long West Coast Canal is India’s first waterway with all-time navigation facility.
- The NW3 is consisting of West Coast Canal, Champakara Canal and Udyogmandal Canal.
- It runs through Kottappuram, Cherthala, Thirikkunnapuzha, Kollam and Alappuzha.

National Waterway 4:
- NW4 connects Kakinada to Pondicherry.
- The NW4 is the second longest waterway of India.
- Total length of 1095 km in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

National Waterway 5:
- NW5 connects Odisha to West Bengal.
- It runs through the stretch on Brahmani River, East Coast Canal, Matai River and Mahanadi River.
- The 623 km long canal system handle the traffic of cargo such as coal, fertilizer, cement and iron.

National Waterway 6:
- NW6 is the proposed waterway in Assam.
- It will connect Lakhipur to Bhanga at River Barak.
- The 121 km long waterway will boost trade between Silchar (Assam) to Mizoram.

The Links and The Lengths

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<tr>
<th>Waterway</th>
<th>Links</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW-1</td>
<td>Ganga–Bhagirathi–Hooghly (Haldia–Allahabad)</td>
<td>1,620 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW-2</td>
<td>Brahmaputra River</td>
<td>891 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW-3</td>
<td>West Coast Canal–Champakara Canal–Udyogmandal Canal</td>
<td>205 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW-4</td>
<td>Krishna (Multiyala–Vijayawada)</td>
<td>82 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW-5</td>
<td>Koel–Krishnachandra</td>
<td>31 km</td>
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<td>NW-6</td>
<td>Mokhara</td>
<td>31 km</td>
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<td>NW-7</td>
<td>Kunnar</td>
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<td>NW-8</td>
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<td>NW-9</td>
<td>Tapi</td>
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<td>NW-10</td>
<td>Haritali</td>
<td>226 km</td>
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<tr>
<td>NW-11</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>436 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW-12</td>
<td>Sunderbans Waterways</td>
<td>172 km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Insta Curious: Do you know the locations of NW 1 and NW 2? Which states are connected by NW1? Reference:

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Important waterways.
2. Their locations.
3. About JMVP.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of National Waterways.

2. Reforms-Based and Results-Linked, Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme:

Context:
REC and PFC, the state-run lenders that are the nodal lending agencies for the Rs 3.03 lakh crore revamped distribution sector scheme (RDSS) launched by the Union ministry of power in August last year, will release the first tranche of funds to a host of states including Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya by March 31.

- The funds will be disbursed in the form of ad hoc 10% of grant from the central government, while the rest of the disbursal will depend on the discoms concerned fulfilling various conditions under the scheme.

About the scheme:
It is worth Rs. 3.03 trillion scheme wherein the Centre’s share will be Rs. 97,631 crore.

- It aims to improve the operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of discoms (excluding Private Sector DISCOMs).

Highlights of the scheme:
1. It is a reforms-based and results-linked scheme.
2. It seeks to improve the operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of all DISCOMs/Power Departments excluding Private Sector DISCOMs.
3. The scheme envisages the provision of conditional financial assistance to DISCOMs for strengthening supply infrastructure.
4. The assistance will be based on meeting pre-qualifying criteria as well as upon the achievement of basic minimum benchmarks by the DISCOM.
5. The scheme involves a compulsory smart metering ecosystem across the distribution sector—starting from electricity feeders to the consumer level, including in about 250 million households.
6. Scheme also focuses on funding for feeder segregation for unsegregated feeders.
7. The Scheme has a major focus on improving electricity supply for the farmers and for providing daytime electricity to them through solarization of agricultural feeders.

Implementation:

- Existing power sector reforms schemes such as Integrated Power Development Scheme, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana will be merged into this umbrella program.
- Each state would have its own action plan for implementation of the scheme rather than a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.
- Nodal agencies for the scheme’s implementation are Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Limited and Power Finance Corporation (PFC).

The scheme’s cost is borne by the Centre and state governments in a 3:2 ratio. The state governments will be free to borrow from either REC-PFC or from other financial institutions to mobilise the funds.

Objectives of the scheme:
1. Reduction of average aggregate technical and commercial loss to pan-India levels of 12-15% by 2024-25.
2. Narrow the deficit between the cost of electricity and the price at which it is supplied to zero by 2024-25.
3. Developing institutional capabilities for modern DISCOMs.
4. Improvement in the quality, reliability, and affordability of power supply to consumers through a financially sustainable and operationally efficient distribution sector.

Issues with earlier initiatives are as follows:

**Insufficient Monitoring mechanism:** Due to inadequate metering and data collection system in place, utilities have not been able to conduct energy audit, which is crucial for any energy business.

**Accountability and Technology Issues:** The Schemes could not reduce the high Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses due to high Transmission and Distribution (T&D) losses coupled with low collection efficiency. Low level of collection is attributable to lack of employees’ accountability, inadequate collection facilities, limited usage of advanced technology, billing errors etc.

**Lack of Consumer Records:** Schemes have not put in mechanism for maintaining consumer database and asset database, which can be addressed through IT and communication solutions. Most utilities maintain manual records of consumers. This leads to mismanagement and losses.

**Revenue & Expenditure gaps:** The gap between discoms’ costs (average cost of supply) and revenues (average revenue realised), which was supposed to have been eliminated by now, stands at Rs 0.49 per unit in the absence of regular and commensurate tariff hikes.

**Electrification and Support structure mismatch:** The schemes have not been able to address the gap between increasing electrification and related supporting structural mechanism.

InstaCurious:
Do you know what Energy Mix is? [Read Here]
Do you know what net-zero is? [Read Here]

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About REC.
2. About DDGIY.
3. About IPDS.

**Mains Link:** Write a note on power sector reforms in India.

### 3. FAME India scheme:

**Context:**
Under FAME-India Scheme, incentives are provided to buyers of electric vehicles in the form of an upfront reduction in the purchase price of electric vehicles.

- As per the information received from Department of Revenue, at present the GST rate on electric vehicles is 5%.
- The GST rates are prescribed based on the recommendations of the GST Council.
- Electric vehicles are already at the lowest rate slab of 5%.

**Following steps have been taken by the Government for adoption of electric vehicles in the country:**

- The Government on 12th May, 2021 approved a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing of Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) in the country in order to bring down prices of battery in the country. Drop in battery price will
result in cost reduction of electric vehicles.
- **GST on electric vehicles** has been reduced from 12% to 5%; GST on chargers/ charging stations for electric vehicles has been reduced from 18% to 5%.
- **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH)** announced that battery-operated vehicles will be given **green license plates** and be **exempted from permit requirements**.
- MoRTH issued a notification advising states to **waive road tax on EVs**, which in turn will help reduce the initial cost of EVs.

### About FAME India scheme:
FAME-India Scheme is implementing by Department of Heavy Industry in order to promote manufacturing of electric and hybrid vehicle technology and to ensure sustainable growth of the same.
- FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan.
- Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies.
- (FAME-India) Scheme proposes to give a push to electric vehicles (EVs) in public transport and seeks to encourage adoption of EVs by way of market creation and demand aggregation.

#### It is being implemented in two phases:
1. Phase-I [Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) & Electric Vehicles in India] from 1st April 2015.
2. The Phase-II of the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) & Electric Vehicles.

### FAME-India Scheme Phase-I:
- Under Phase-I of FAME-India Scheme, the **Government has supported about 500 charging stations** to establish electric vehicle charging stations in the country.
- Out of about 500 charging stations sanctioned under Phase-I of FAME-India Scheme about 230 charging stations have been installed.
- Further, **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)** under the Ministry of Power has deployed 65 public charging stations for EVs in the country.

### FAME-India Scheme Phase-II:
- FAME 2 scheme aims to boost electric mobility and increase the number of electric vehicles in commercial fleets.
- The government will provide the incentives for electric buses, three-wheelers and four-wheelers to be used for commercial purposes.
- The centre will invest in setting up charging stations, with the active participation of public sector units and private players.
- Projects for charging infrastructure will include those needed to extend electrification for running vehicles such as pantograph charging and flash charging.
- FAME 2 will also encourage interlinking of renewable energy sources with charging infrastructure.

### Need of the hour:
- India needs auto industry’s active participation to ease electric mobility transition. The auto and battery industries could collaborate to enhance customer awareness and promote domestic manufacturing.
- Government needs to focus on a phased manufacturing plan to promote EVs, provide fiscal and non-fiscal incentives for phased manufacturing of EVs and batteries.

**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. National Science Day:
**Context:**
28th February is celebrated as National Science Day (NSD) in India.
NSD is celebrated to commemorate discovery of the ‘Raman Effect’, which led to **Sir C.V. Raman winning the Nobel Prize**.
- The first National Science Day was celebrated on February 28, 1987.

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What is the Raman Effect?
A phenomenon in spectroscopy discovered by the eminent physicist Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman in 1928. Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.
1. When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than that of the incident (incoming) beam.
2. Most of this scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light; its presence is a result of the Raman Effect.

2. Russia-Ukraine crisis may worsen global chip shortage:
Context:
Russia and Ukraine are important centres of the global semiconductor supply chain, providing rare metals like palladium, and gases like neon, that are needed in the production of the silicon wafers present in almost all modern devices and equipment.
- Amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, it is expected that the situation may worsen global chip shortage.

What’s the issue?
Just as Russia supplies the global semiconductor industry with rare metals, Ukraine supplies (speciality) gases required by the chip-making industry. Thus, there is potential to extend the stress in the supply chain of semiconductors, which are key to manufacturing autos and other electronic equipment in the Asia-Pacific region.

What are Semiconductor Chips?
Semiconductors are materials which have a conductivity between conductors and insulators. They can be pure elements, silicon or germanium or compounds; gallium, arsenide or cadmium selenide.

Significance of Semiconductor Chips:
- They are the basic building blocks that serve as the heart and brain of all modern electronics and information and communications technology products.
- They are now an integral part of contemporary automobiles, household gadgets and essential medical devices such as ECG machines.

Recent Increase in Demand:
- The Covid-19 pandemic-driven push to take sizable parts of daily economic and essential activity online, or at least digitally enable them.
- The pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns across the world also forced shut crucial chip-making facilities in countries including Japan, South Korea, China and the US.

India’s Semiconductor Demand and Related Initiatives:
India currently imports all chips and the market is estimated to touch $100 billion by 2025 from $24 billion now.

Efforts by the government to address the shortage:
- Earmarked Rs 76,000 crore for semiconductors and display manufacturing segment.
- Launched the PLI and other schemes to boost semiconductors.
- Released a vision document for the electronics sector which envisages that the domestic electronic production has potential to reach around Rs 22 lakh crore by 2026.
- Launched the Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS) under which a budget outlay of Rs 3,285 crore is spread over a period of eight years for manufacturing of electronics components and semiconductors.

Challenges ahead:
1. High Investments Required.
3. Lack of Fab Capacities.
4. Insufficient Grants under PLI Scheme.
5. Resource Inefficient Sector.

Insta Curious: Did you know that electronics is recognised as a 'meta-resource' across the world? What is a 'meta-resource'? Reference: read this.

Russia is the world’s largest producer of palladium, the second-largest producer of platinum, and produces nearly 80 percent of all European gold.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is India Semiconductor Mission?
2. India’s Status in Semiconductor Design and manufacturing?
3. Key proposals under the National Policy on Electronics.
4. Production linked incentive scheme- when was it announced?
5. Who will implement it?

Mains Link: Growing importance of Semiconductors or chips/integrated circuits (ICs) and China’s experience with the manufacturing and design of the same provides a strong case for focusing on chip designs in India. Comment.

3. International Maths Day 2022:

Context:
14th March, every year is observed as the International Day of Mathematics.
- The International Day of Mathematics is a project led by the International Mathematical Union with the support of numerous international and regional organizations.
- The first International Day of Mathematics was marked in March 2020.
- March 14 is already celebrated in many countries as Pi Day because that date is written as 3/14 in some countries and the mathematical constant Pi is approximately 3.14.

The theme for the 2022 International Day of Mathematics is Mathematics Unites.

Do you know about the National Mathematics Day?
Context:
Celebrated every year on December 22.
- It is observed to honor the birth anniversary of the famous mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan who greatly contributed towards mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series and continued fractions.
- 2021 marks 134th birth anniversary of Dr Ramanujan.

Highlights of Srinivasa Ramanujan’s life:
- In 1911, Ramanujan published the first of his papers in the Journal of the Indian Mathematical Society.
- Ramanujan traveled to England in 1914, where Hardy tutored him and collaborated with him in some research.
He worked out the Riemann series, the elliptic integrals, hypergeometric series, the functional equations of the zeta function, and his own theory of divergent series.

The number 1729 is known as the Hardy-Ramanujan number after a famous visit by Hardy to see Ramanujan at a hospital. It is the smallest number which can be expressed as the sum of two different cubes in two different ways.

Hardy observed Ramanujan’s work primarily involved fields less known even amongst other pure mathematicians.

Ramanujan’s home state of Tamil Nadu celebrates 22 December as ‘State IT Day’, memorialising both the man and his achievements, as a native of Tamil Nadu.

Ramanujan compiled around 3,900 results consisting of equations and identities. One of his most treasured findings was his infinite series for $\pi$.

The Dev Patel-starrer ‘The Man Who Knew Infinity’ (2015) was a biopic on the mathematician.

Insta Curious:
On March 14, 1879, Albert Einstein was born. He is considered the most influential physicist of the 20th century.

- He developed special and general theories of relativity and also won the Nobel Prize in 1921 for Physics for the explanation of the photoelectric effect.
- He is best known for developing the theory of relativity.
- He is also known for his contributions to the development of quantum mechanics.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link and Mains Link:
1. Key achievements and contributions of Sri Ramanujan.

4. India and the Arctic:

Context:
The government has unveiled India’s Arctic Policy with an aim to combat climate change and protect the environment.

- India holds one of the 13 positions as the Observer in the Arctic Council.

Policy:
The Indian Arctic policy is built on six central pillars:

1. Science and research.
2. Environmental protection.
3. Economic and human development.
4. Transportation and connectivity.
5. Governance and international cooperation.

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. It 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’s engagement with the Arctic began when it signed the Svalbard Treaty in February 1920 in Paris between Norway, the US, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Ireland, and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen. Ever since then, India has been closely monitoring all the developments in the Arctic region.**

- **India initiated its Arctic research program in 2007 with a focus on climate change in the region. The objectives included studying teleconnections between Arctic climate and Indian monsoon, to characterize sea ice in the Arctic using satellite data, to estimate the effect on global warming.**

- **India already has a research station in the Arctic, Himadri, for the research work.**

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.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Himadri.
2. India’s research stations at Arctic and Antarctica.
3. About Arctic Council.
4. Overview of India’s draft ‘Arctic’ policy.

Mains Link: The frigid Arctic, which keeps losing ice due to global warming, is one of the batteries feeding the variations in Indian monsoons. Discuss.


5. The GSAT 7B and India’s other military satellites:

Context:

GSAT-7B satellite, which recently got the acceptance of necessity from the Defence Ministry, will be a dedicated satellite for the Indian Army.

- The satellite would help the Indian Army enhance its surveillance in border areas.

Significance of the satellite:

- The GSAT 7B will primarily fulfil the communication needs of the Army.

- The use of such a satellite would also mean that the Army’s vast array of radio communication equipment could come under a single platform.

GSAT 7 Satellite series:

They are advanced satellites developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to meet the communication needs of the defence services.

- The GSAT 7 satellite has a footprint of nearly 2,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean region.

- The GSAT 7 (Rukmini) is India’s first military satellite. It provides a gamut of services for military communication needs, which includes low bit voice rate to high bit rate data facilities, including multi-band communications.

- The GSAT 7A, launched in 2018, helps in boosting the connectivity between the ground radar stations, airbases and the airborne early warning and control aircraft (AEW&C) of the IAF.
2. GSAT 7 series.
3. GSAT 7A.
4. GSAT 7 B.  

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of GSAT series satellites.

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### 6. Polar Science and Cryosphere (PACER) scheme:

The Polar Science and Cryosphere (PACER) scheme has been approved for continuation during 2021-2026. The PACER scheme:

- Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (PACER) scheme **comprises the Antarctic program, Indian Arctic program, Southern Ocean program and Cryosphere and Climate program.**
- It is being implemented successfully through **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR),** an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

**What is the cryosphere?**

The cryosphere is the frozen water part of the Earth system.

- These are places on Earth that are so cold that water is frozen solid. These areas of snow or ice, which are subject to temperatures below 0°C 32°F for at least part of the year, **compose the cryosphere.**
- The term “cryosphere” comes from the Greek word, “krios,” which means cold.

**Ice and snow on land are one part of the cryosphere.**

- This includes the largest parts of the cryosphere, the **continental ice sheets found in Greenland and Antarctica,** as well as ice caps, glaciers, and areas of snow and permafrost.
- When continental ice flows out from land and to the sea surface, we get shelf ice.

**The other part of the cryosphere is ice that is found in water.** This includes **frozen parts of the ocean,** such as waters surrounding Antarctica and the Arctic. It also includes frozen rivers and lakes, which mainly occur in polar areas.

**Significance of Cryosphere:**

The components of the cryosphere play an important role in the Earth’s climate.

- Snow and ice reflect heat from the sun, helping to regulate our planet’s temperature.
- Because polar regions are some of the most sensitive to climate shifts, the cryosphere may be one of the first places where scientists are able to identify global changes in climate.

**PACER encompasses the following six components.**

1. Construction of polar research vessel
2. Construction of the third research base in Antarctica
3. Indian scientific endeavours in the Arctic
4. Polar expeditions-Antarctica
5. Replacement of Maitri station
6. Southern Ocean

**Objective of PACER scheme:** To improve our understanding of Polar Science and cryosphere system.

**Major achievements of the PACER scheme in the recent three years are:**

1. Executed 39th & 40th Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica.
2. 41st Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica is ongoing.
3. Clear-air atmospheric observatories containing automatic weather stations, a suite of sensors to measure aerosol and greenhouse gas concentrations has been established at **Maitri and Bharati stations.**
4. Twenty-three research projects related to glaciology, marine science, polar biology, and atmospheric science were successfully carried out during 2019-20 Arctic Expedition.

5. IndARC mooring system along with Hydrophone system was successfully retrieved and deployed in Kongsfjorden, Svalbard.

6. Glaciological field campaigns were carried out in six benchmark glaciers in Chandra basin of Lahaul-Spiti region of Western Himalaya.

Topics: Awareness in space.

1. Artemis Program:

Context:
NASA’s first crewed landing of the Artemis program on the moon is expected to take place in 2026. Meanwhile, NASA will launch Artemis 1 in May 2022.

- Reasons for the delay: NASA said it needed time to develop and test the human landing system and NASA’s next generation spacesuits.

What is Artemis?
Artemis stands for Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon’s Interaction with the Sun.

- It is NASA’s next mission to the Moon.

Objective:
To measure what happens when the Sun’s radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it.
Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology.

Significance of the mission:
With the Artemis program, NASA will land the first woman and next man on the Moon by 2024.

Mission details:
1. NASA’s powerful new rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS), will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft nearly a quarter million miles from Earth to lunar orbit.
2. Astronauts will dock Orion at the Gateway and transfer to a human landing system for expeditions to the surface of the Moon.
3. They will return to the orbital outpost to board Orion again before returning safely to Earth.

Artemis 1 vs. 2 vs. 3:
NASA will fly two missions around the Moon to test its deep space exploration systems.
- Artemis 1 is aiming to send an uncrewed spacecraft around the moon using a combination of the never-flown Space Launch System rocket, along with the once-flown Orion spacecraft.
- NASA hopes to extend the program with the moon-orbiting crewed Artemis 2 mission in 2024, then a landing on Artemis 3 in 2025, ahead of other crewed missions later in the 2020s.

Scientific objectives:

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1. Find and use water and other critical resources needed for long-term exploration.
2. Investigate the Moon’s mysteries and learn more about our home planet and the universe.
3. Learn how to live and operate on the surface of another celestial body where astronauts are just three days from home.
4. Prove the technologies we need before sending astronauts on missions to Mars, which can take up to three years roundtrip.

Moon Exploration:
1. In 1959, the Soviet Union’s uncrewed Luna 1 and 2 became the first rover to visit the Moon.
2. Before the USA sent the Apollo 11 mission to the Moon, it sent three classes of robotic missions between 1961 and 1968.
4. In the 1990s, the USA resumed lunar exploration with robotic missions Clementine and Lunar Prospector.
5. In 2009, it began a new series of robotic lunar missions with the launch of the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS).
6. In 2011, NASA began the ARTEMIS.
7. In 2012, the Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (GRAIL) spacecraft studied the Moon’s gravity.
8. Apart from the USA, the European Space Agency, Japan, China, and India have sent missions to explore the Moon. China landed two rovers on the surface, which includes the first-ever landing on the Moon’s far side in 2019.

Insta Curious:
On 20th July, 1969, Neil Armstrong along with Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin became the first human to step on the Moon as part of the Apollo 11 mission.

Insta Links:
1. Prelims Link: Write a note on NASA’s Artemis program.
2. Mains Link: Write a note on NASA’s Artemis program.
The details are yet to be published.

**Significance of the study:**
- The scientists utilised the **solar conjunction event**, when the Earth and Mars are on the opposite sides of the Sun.
- During conjunction events, which **happens once in two years for Mars**, the radio signals from Mangalyaan pass through the solar corona — about 10 solar radii or about 69,57,000 km from the centre of the Sun.
- This provides scientists a unique opportunity to study solar dynamics. Each solar radii is about 6,95,700 km.

**What is Solar Conjunction?**
It is **the period when Earth and Mars**, in their eternal march around the Sun, **are obscured from each other by the fiery orb of the Sun itself.**
- The two planets are temporarily invisible to each other like dancers on either side of a huge bonfire.
- Solar conjunction **occurs every two years**.

**How will it impact space missions?**
Mission controllers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory respond in a variety of ways.
- Before solar conjunction, the mission team sends up any necessary commands.
- They turn off some instruments. They collect data from others and store it.
- In some cases, they continue sending data to Earth, knowing that some data will be lost.
- No one attempts to send new instructions to Mars during solar conjunction.

**Insta Curious:**
Did you know about the Great Conjunction?
Astronomers use the term **great conjunction to describe meetings of the two biggest worlds in the solar system, Jupiter and Saturn.**
- It happens about every 20 years.
- The conjunction is the result of the orbital paths of Jupiter and Saturn coming into line, as viewed from Earth.
- Jupiter orbits the Sun about every 12 years, and Saturn about every 29 years.
- Recently, the **conjunction occurred on 21st December, 2020**— the date of the **December solstice**. It was the **closest alignment of Saturn and Jupiter since 1623, in terms of distance**. The next time the planets will be this close is 2080.

**InstaLinks:**
2. Great conjunction.
3. Solstice.
4. Sun's surface.

**Mains Link:** What is the Great Conjunction? Why is it significant? Discuss.

### 3. Scientists unravell the science behind jets of plasma occurring all over Sun’s chromosphere:

**Context:**
Scientists have unravelled the science behind **the jets of plasma - the fourth state of matter** consisting of electrically charged particles that occur just about everywhere in the sun’s chromosphere, which is the atmospheric layer just above the Sun's visible surface.

**What are the jets of plasma?**
The jets, or spicules, appear as thin grass-like plasma structures that constantly shoot up from the surface and are then brought down by gravity.
The amount of energy and momentum that these spicules can carry is of fundamental interest in solar and plasma astrophysics.

How they are formed? What are the recent findings?
Astronomers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics conducted an experiment to understand the science behind this.

- They found that the physics underlying paint jets when excited on a speaker is analogous to the solar plasma jets.
- When a liquid is placed above a speaker and the music is turned on, the free surface of the liquid becomes unstable beyond a particular frequency and starts vibrating.

The researchers realized that the physics underlying these paint jets must be analogous to the solar plasma jets.
The scientists elaborated that the plasma right below the visible solar surface (photosphere) is perpetually in a state of convection, much like boiling water in a vessel heated at the bottom.

- This is ultimately powered by the nuclear energy released in the hot-dense core. The convection serves almost periodic but there are strong kicks to the plasma in the solar chromosphere.
- The chromosphere is 500 times lighter than the plasma in the photosphere. Therefore, these strong kicks from the bottom shoot the chromospheric plasma outward at ultrasonic speeds in the form of thin columns or spicules.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About Sun’s Surface.
2. Nuclear fusion energy.
3. Chromosphere.
5. Sun’s corona.


Context:
The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is all geared up for the maiden flight of its mini rocket launcher – Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) – in May.

About the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):
- The indigenously developed mini-rocket-launcher is specially designed to carry smaller commercial satellites into the low-earth orbit (LEO) from 200-2,000 km above the Earth’s surface.
- It has a payload capacity of upto 500 kg.
- Designed to bolster the agency’s partnership with the private sector for the launch of commercial satellites.
- The SSLV is the smallest vehicle at 110-ton mass at ISRO.
- It will take only 72 hours to integrate. Only six people will be required to do the job.
- The cost will be only around Rs 30 crore.
- It is best suited for launching multiple microsatellites at a time and supports multiple orbital drop-offs.

Need for?
Launch of small satellites into low earth orbits has become significant in recent years on account of the need for developing countries, private corporations, and universities for small satellites.
About 15 to 20 SSLVs would be required every year to meet the national demand alone.

**What is PSLV?**
The launch of small satellites has until now been dependent on ‘piggy-back’ rides with big satellite launches on ISRO’s work-horse – the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle which has had over 50 successful launches so far.

- PSLV can launch satellites weighing in the range of 1000 kg. But, it takes **70 days to integrate this launch vehicle.**
- It is the third generation launch vehicle of India. It is **the first Indian launch vehicle to be equipped with liquid stages.**

Read More about PSLV [here](#).

**Difference between PSLV and GSLV:**
- India has two operational launchers - Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).
- PSLV was developed to launch low-Earth Orbit satellites into polar and sun synchronous orbits. It has since proved its versatility by launching geosynchronous, lunar and interplanetary spacecraft successfully.
- On the other hand, GSLV was developed to launch the heavier INSAT class of geosynchronous satellites into orbit. In its third and final stage, GSLV uses the indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage.

**Different orbits:**
1. Geostationary orbit (GEO)
2. Low Earth orbit (LEO)
3. Medium Earth orbit (MEO)
4. Polar orbit and Sun-synchronous orbit (SSO)
5. Transfer orbits and geostationary transfer orbit (GTO)
6. Lagrange points (L-points)

For details, refer [this](#).

**Insta Curious:**
Did you know that the Department of Space had also set up a separate commercial arm – New Space India Limited (NSIL) – for commercial tie-ups with the global space market and manage technology transfer from ISRO to industries?

**InstaLinks:**

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</tbody>
</table>

**5. Coronal Mass Ejections:**

**Context:**
Indian researchers have developed a simple technique of separating the constant background of the Solar Corona and revealing the dynamic corona.

- The technique has been developed jointly by the Aryabhatta Research Institute and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

**What is the technique?** (NOT MUCH RELEVANT FROM THE EXAMINATION POINT OF VIEW).
The simple approach of subtracting the constant background can improve efficiency of identification of Coronal Mass Ejections (CME).

**What are Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs)?**
Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs) are large expulsions of plasma and magnetic field from the Sun's corona.

- They can eject billions of tonnes of coronal material and carry an embedded magnetic field (frozen in flux) that is stronger than the background solar wind interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) strength.

**Speed:**
- CMEs travel outward from the Sun at speeds ranging from slower than 250 km per second (km/s) to as fast as near 3,000 km/s.
- The fastest Earth-directed CMEs can reach our planet in as little as 15-18 hours. Slower CMEs can take several days to arrive.
- They expand in size as they propagate away from the Sun, and larger CMEs can reach a size comprising nearly a quarter of the space between Earth and the Sun by the time it reaches our planet.

**Impacts:**
- They cause radio and magnetic disturbances on the Earth.
- They can drive the Space Weather in near-Earth space.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. What are solar flares?
2. What are sunspots?
3. How solar flares affect earth’s magnetic field?
4. What is sun’s 11-year cycle?
5. What are CMEs?

**Mains Link:** What are CMEs? What are their impacts on the Earth?

### 6. What is ExoMars?

**Context:**
The European Space Agency’s ExoMars 2022 mission has been delayed after the agency suspended all cooperation with Russia’s space program Roscosmos.

**About ExoMars:**
It was a joint endeavour between ESA and the Russian space agency, Roscosmos.

- The primary goal of the ExoMars programme is to address the question of whether life has ever existed on Mars.

**Components of the mission:**
The programme comprises two missions.

- The first launched in March 2016 and consists of the Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO) and Schiaparelli, an entry, descent and landing demonstrator module.
- TGO’s main objectives are to search for evidence of methane and other trace atmospheric gases that could be signatures of active biological or geological processes. The Schiaparelli probe crashed during its attempt to land on Mars.
- The second, comprising a rover and surface platform, is planned for 2022. Together they will address the question of whether life has ever existed on Mars.

**Objective:**
- The primary aim of the mission is to check if there has ever been life on Mars and also understand the history of water on the planet.
- The main goal is to land ESA’s rover at a site which has high-potential for finding well-preserved organic material, particularly from the history of the planet.

**Other Mars Missions:**
1. NASA’s Perseverance Rover.
2. UAE’s Hope Mars Mission (UAE’s first-ever interplanetary mission).
3. India’s Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) or Mangalyaan.

Insta Curious: Did you know that ESA and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) were the original ExoMars collaborators, but NASA dropped out in 2012 due to budgeting problems? Russia took NASA’s place in the project in 2013.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. InSight vs ExoMars vs Mangalyaan-objectives.
2. Environmental composition of Mars vs Earth.
3. Soft landing mission on Mars so far.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance and objectives of ExoMars mission.

7. NASA Voyager spacecraft:

Context:
Both Voyager spacecraft are rushing away from Earth and into interstellar space. Yet for a portion of every year, both spacecrafts’ distances to Earth decrease.

Why is it so?
- The answer is that for a few months each year, Earth in its orbit moves toward the spacecraft faster than they’re moving away. Earth’s motion around the sun is faster than the motion of the Voyager spacecraft.
- Earth moves through space at a speed of 67,000 miles per hour (30 km/s). Voyager 1 moves at a speed of 38,210 miles per hour (17 km/s). Voyager 2 moves at a speed of 35,000 miles per hour (15 km/s).
- So, for a portion of the year, Earth comes around the side of the sun and is speeding toward the spacecraft faster than they’re moving away. Therefore their distances to Earth are getting closer, if only temporarily. They never change their outward motion. It is we who change.

Watch this video for reference.

About Voyager mission:
- Launched in the 1970’s, and the probes sent by NASA were only meant to explore the outer planets – but they just kept on going.
- Voyager 1 departed Earth on 5 September 1977, a few days after Voyager 2 and left our solar system in 2013.
- The mission objective of the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM) is to extend the NASA exploration of the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun’s sphere of influence, and possibly beyond.
- The Voyager spacecraft are the third and fourth human spacecraft to fly beyond all the planets in our solar system. Pioneers 10 and 11 preceded Voyager in outstripping the gravitational attraction of the Sun but on February 17, 1998, Voyager 1 passed Pioneer 10 to become the most distant human-made object in space.

Accomplishments so far:
Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys. It is the second man-made object to leave our planet.
Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune’s mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa’s ice shell, and ring features at every planet.
What is Interstellar space?
Scientists use the heliopause to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth’s orbit.

The Heliosphere:
The heliosphere is a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind. That heliosphere is the region influenced by the dynamic properties of the sun that are carried in the solar wind—such as magnetic fields, energetic particles and solar wind plasma. The heliopause marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Voyager Missions.
2. Voyager 1.
4. Heliosphere.

Mains Link: Discuss the significance of Voyager Missions.

8. GSLV-F10 launch and EOS-03 satellite:
Context:
The GSLV-F10/EOS-03 mission, which lifted off from Sriharikota on August 12 last year failed due to ‘deviation in the performance’ of the cryogenic upper stage (CUS) of the launch vehicle, a national-level Failure Analysis Committee (FAC) constituted in the aftermath has found.
- GSLV-F10 was ISRO’s eighth flight with indigenous cryo, 14th GSLV flight and 79th launch from Sriharikota.

What is EOS-03?
1. EOS-3 was the first state-of-art agile Earth Observation Satellite which would have been placed in a geo-synchronous orbit around the Earth.
2. It was expected to provide near real-time imaging, which could be used for quick monitoring of natural disasters, episodic events and any short-term events.
3. The mission life of the satellite was 10 years.

What is a GSLV Rocket?
1. The GSLV expands to a geosynchronous satellite launch vehicle.
2. The GSLV Mark II is the largest launch vehicle built by India.
3. As its name suggests, it can launch satellites that will travel in orbits that are synchronous with the Earth’s orbit.
4. These satellites can weigh up to 2,500 kg and are first launched into transfer orbits that have a distance from Earth of 170 km at closest approach and about 35,975 km at furthest approach which is close to the height of the geosynchronous orbit.

Difference between PSLV and GSLV:
India has two operational launchers- Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).
1. PSLV was developed to launch low-Earth Orbit satellites into polar and sun synchronous orbits. It has since proved its versatility by launching geosynchronous, lunar and interplanetary spacecraft successfully.
2. On the other hand, GSLV was developed to launch the heavier INSAT class of geosynchronous satellites into orbit. In its third and final stage, GSLV uses the indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage.

Geosynchronous vs Sun- synchronous:
1. When satellites are about 36,000 km from the Earth’s surface, they enter what is called the high Earth orbit. Here, it orbits in sync with the Earth’s rotation, creating the impression that the satellite is stationary over a single longitude. Such a satellite is said to be geosynchronous.
2. Just as the geosynchronous satellites have a sweet spot over the equator that allows them to stay over one spot on Earth, polar-orbiting satellites have a sweet spot that allows them to stay in one place. This orbit is a Sun-synchronous orbit, which means that whenever and wherever the satellite crosses the equator, the local solar time on the ground is always the same.

Insta Curious: What does the three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle mean? What are the fuels used in different stages? Reference:

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. What is a geostationary orbit?
2. What is a geosynchronous orbit?
3. What is a polar orbit?

Mains Link: What are communication satellites? Discuss their significance for India.

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. IPCC Report:
Context:
The second part of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report was released recently.
- This second part of the report is about climate change impacts, risks and vulnerabilities, and adaptation options.
- The first part of the report was released in August last year. That one was centred around the scientific basis of climate change.

What is the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)?
The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the sixth in a series of reports intended to assess scientific, technical, and socio-economic information concerning climate change.
- This report evaluates the physical science of climate change – looking at the past, present, and future climate.
- It reveals how human-caused emissions are altering our planet and what that means for our collective future.

The Assessment Reports, the first of which had come out in 1990, are the most comprehensive evaluations of the state of the earth’s climate.

Highlights of the report:
www.insightsonindia.com
• The latest report has, for the first time, made an assessment of regional and sectoral impacts of climate change.
• It has included risks to, and vulnerabilities of, mega-cities around the world. For example, it has said Mumbai is at high risk of sea-level rise and flooding, while Ahmedabad faces serious danger of heat-waves.

Impact on health:
For the first time, the IPCC report has looked at the health impacts of climate change.
• It has found that climate change is increasing vector-borne and water-borne diseases such as malaria or dengue, particularly in sub-tropical regions of Asia.
• It has also said deaths related to circulatory, respiratory, diabetic and infectious diseases, as well as infant mortality, are likely to increase with a rise in temperature.
• Increasing frequency of extreme weather events like heat waves, flooding and drought, and even air pollution was contributing to under-nutrition, allergic diseases and even mental disorders.

India specific study:
The report identifies India as one of the vulnerable hotspots, with several regions and important cities facing very high risk of climate disasters such as flooding, sea-level rise and heat-waves. Mumbai is at high risk of sea-level rise and flooding. Ahmedabad faces serious danger of heat-waves.
• Several cities, including Chennai, Bhubaneshwar, Patna and Lucknow, are approaching dangerous levels of heat and humidity.
• Infrastructure, including transportation, water, and sanitation and energy systems has been compromised by extreme and slow-onset events, with resulting economic losses, disruptions of services and impacts to well-being.
• Urban India is at greater risk than other areas with a projected population of 877 million by 2050, nearly double of 480 million in 2020.
• At present, wet-bulb temperatures in India rarely exceed 31 degrees C, with most of the country experiencing maximum wet-bulb temperatures of 25-30 degrees C, according to IPCC.

Significance of IPCC Reports:
IPCC reports form the scientific basis on which countries across the world build their policy responses to climate change.
• These reports, on their own, are not policy prescriptive: They do not tell countries or governments what to do. They are only meant to present factual situations with as much scientific evidence as is possible.
• And yet, these can be of immense help in formulating the action plans to deal with climate change.
• These reports also form the basis for international climate change negotiations that decide on the responses at the global level. It is these negotiations that have produced the Paris Agreement, and previously the Kyoto Protocol.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):
• It is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change.
• It was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
• Headquarter: Geneva, Switzerland.
• Function: To provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

Insta Curious: Wet-Bulb Temperatures is a measure that combines heat and humidity. A wet-bulb temperature of 31 degrees Celsius is extremely dangerous for humans, while a value of 35 degrees is unsurvivable for more than about six hours, even for fit and healthy adults.
2. **UNEA plastic pollution resolution:**

**Context:**
A resolution at the recent fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) held in Nairobi sought to end plastic pollution and forge an international legally binding agreement by 2024. It was hosted by the UN Environment Programme.

- The resolution will pertain to marine ecosystems as well, and will include both binding and voluntary approaches from member states.

**Need for a binding resolution to limit plastic pollution:**
Plastic production has risen exponentially in the last decades and now amounts to some 400 million tons per year—a figure set to double by 2040.

The impacts of plastic production and pollution on the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution are a catastrophe in the making:

1. Exposure to plastics can harm human health, potentially affecting fertility, hormonal, metabolic and neurological activity, and open burning of plastics contributes to air pollution.
2. By 2050 greenhouse gas emissions associated with plastic production, use and disposal would account for 15 percent of allowed emissions, under the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C (34.7°F).
3. More than 800 marine and coastal species are affected by this pollution through ingestion, entanglement, and other dangers.
4. Some 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow annually into the oceans. This may triple by 2040.

A shift to a circular economy can reduce the volume of plastics entering oceans by over 80 per cent by 2040; reduce virgin plastic production by 55 per cent; save governments US$70 billion by 2040; reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent; and create 700,000 additional jobs—mainly in the global south.

**Outcomes of the meet on ending plastic pollution:**
- The world’s ministers for the environment agreed to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) with the mandate to forge an international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution.
- INC will begin its work in 2022, with the ambition of completing a draft global legally binding agreement by the end of 2024.
- This development is considered the most important environmental deal since the 2015 Paris Agreement.

**About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP):**
- UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment.
- It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

To know more about UNEP, read this.

**What is the United Nations Environment Assembly?**
- It is the governing body of the UN Environment Programme.
- It is the world’s highest-level decision-making body on the environment.
- The Assembly is made up of the 193 UN Member States and convenes every two years to advance global environmental governance.
- It was created in June 2012, during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as RIO+20.
3. “Species richness” survey:

Context:
Every year, the Wildlife Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation, Punjab, conducts waterbirds census exercise in six major and most biodiverse wetlands, which include the Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary, the Ropar Conservation Reserve, the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary, the Kanjli Wetland, the Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve and the Ranjit Sagar Conservation Reserve.

- However, the census could not be done this year on account of dense fog conditions. Instead a “species richness” survey was conducted by the Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation with the support from the WWF-India.

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.

Highlights of the survey:
- 91 species of waterbirds were recorded from the six protected wetlands.
- The waterbird count was highest in the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary followed by the Keshopur–Miani Community Reserve, Ropar Conservation Reserve and Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Wetlands like Keshopur–Miani and Shallpattan are the only wetlands in Punjab to host the migratory population of common crane and resident population of the Sarus crane.
- The Ropar and Nangal wetlands host the three migratory water species of the family Podicipedidae i.e., black-necked Grebe, Horned Grebe and Greater Crested Grebe along with the resident Little Grebe.
- Eurasian Coot was one of the most common waterbird spotted in almost all protected wetlands of Punjab during the survey.

The species of high conservation significance recorded during the survey include:
Central Asian flyway:
Every winter, the birds make their way to India through the central Asian flyway, which covers a large continental area of Europe–Asia between the Arctic and the Indian Oceans.

What is migration? Why is it significant?
Migration is an adaptation mechanism to help birds overcome weather adversities and unavailability of food in colder regions.
- The importance of bird migrations on the health of the ecosystems is well-established.
- Saving migratory birds means saving the wetlands, terrestrial habitats and saving of an ecosystem, benefiting communities dependent on wetlands.

Challenges faced by migratory birds:
1. Accelerated habitat loss globally during the last decade.
2. Decreased area under water bodies, wetlands, natural grasslands and forests.
3. Increased weather variability, and climate change have resulted in loss of biodiversity for the migratory birds.

What is a flyway?
A flyway is a geographical region within which a single or a group of migratory species completes its annual cycle – breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding.

About the Central Asian Flyway:
- Central Asian Flyway (CAF) covers a large area of Eurasia between the Arctic and Indian Oceans.
- Including India, there are 30 countries under the Central Asian Flyway.
- The CAF comprises several important migration routes of waterbirds, most of which extend from the northernmost breeding grounds in Siberia to the southernmost non-breeding wintering grounds in West Asia, India, the Maldives and the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Why do countries need to protect Flyways?
- Approximately one in five of the world’s 11,000 bird species migrate, some covering enormous distances. Conserving migratory birds requires cooperation and coordination along the entire flyway between countries and across national boundaries.
● Safeguarding flyways means protecting the birds from poachers, rejuvenating wetlands among others. Saving the wetlands, terrestrial habitats help in fulfilling the bigger purpose of saving an ecosystem.

Insta Curious: Did you know that India has already launched a national action plan for the conservation of migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway? Reference: read this.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About Central Asian Flyway.
2. Migratory birds in India.
3. About the Convention on the conservation of migratory species.

Mains Link: What is Waterbird Census in India? Discuss.


4. Tiger Density in India:

Context:
Preliminary findings of a study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) suggest that the density of tigers in the Sunderbans may have reached the carrying capacity of the mangrove forests, leading to frequent dispersals and a surge in human-wildlife conflict.

● This high density will force tigers to move out of forests in search for new areas. Recently, around eight tigers have entered into villages in Sunderbans and all of them were captured and released into the wild.

Capacity:
● In Terai and Shivalik hills habitat — Corbett tiger reserve, for example — 10-16 tigers can survive in 100 sq km.
● This comes down to 7-11 tigers per 100 sq km in the reserves of north-central Western Ghats such as Bandipur.
● According to the 2018 All-India Tiger report, the carrying capacity in the Sunderbans is at around 4 tigers per 100 sq km.

Factors that determine tiger density:
● Availability of food and space.
● Tolerance levels exhibited by the locals who live around them to policymakers who decide management strategies.

Causes for human wildlife conflict:
Physical (space) and biological (forest productivity) factors have an obvious influence on a reserve’s carrying capacity of tigers. More so when different land uses overlap and a good number of people depend on forest resources for livelihood.

What is the way ahead to avoid conflict in tiger density areas?
● Artificially boosting the prey base in a reserve.
● Tiger corridors: Create safe connectivity among forests and allow tigers to disperse safely to new areas.

Key facts related to tiger population:
1. As per the World Wide Fund for Nature, the number of tigers dropped by 95 per cent over the past 150 years.
2. India is the land of royal tigers and current tiger population stands at 2967 which is 70 per cent of the global tiger population.
3. Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442).
4. Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh is the first tiger reserve in India to officially introduce a mascot, Bhoorsingh the Barasingha.
Conservation efforts- National and Global:
1. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has launched the M-STrIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status), a mobile monitoring system for forest guards.
2. At the Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan ‘T X 2’.
3. The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.
4. Over the years, the initiative has institutionalised itself as a separate entity in the form of the Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), with its two arms—the Global Tiger Forum and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program.
5. The Project Tiger, launched way back in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country’s geographical area.

Protection Status:
1. Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I.

Insta Curious: Did you know that the fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation 2018 has entered the Guinness World Record for being the world’s largest camera trap wildlife survey? How is tiger survey carried out in India? Reference:

India’s 14 Tiger Reserves got Global CA/TS recognition for good Tiger Conservation. What does the accreditation of the Global Conservation Assured|Tiger Standards (CA|TS)? Reference:

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Differences between National Parks, wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere reserves.
2. M-STrIPES is related to?
3. What is GTIC?
4. When was project tiger launched?
5. NTCA- composition and functions.
6. Why the fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation 2018 entered Guinness Record book recently?
7. State with highest number of tigers.
8. State with highest tiger density.

Mains Link: The centrality of tiger agenda is an ecological necessity for the sustainability of our environment. In this context, examine the steps taken by India to conserve tigers?
5. **Yamuna river pollution:**

**Context:**
According to estimates made by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi generates 3,800 million litres of sewage per day. NMCG is looking into ways to prevent this.

**Background:**
The over 1,300-km-long Yamuna is among the most polluted rivers in the country and also provides water to more than half of the national capital.

- Just 2% or 22 km of Yamuna falls in Delhi, but 98% of pollution in the Yamuna comes from the national capital due to untreated or semi-treated industrial effluents or sewage that is being discharged into the river in the 22 km stretch.

**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.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that the Article 21, the right to clean the environment, and further, pollution-free water, has been protected under the broad rubric of the right to life?

**InstaLinks:**

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<td>3. Acceptable maximum limit of ammonia in drinking water?</td>
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<td>6. The desirable level of faecal coliform.</td>
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6. **India plans Rs 24,000 crore sovereign green bond issuance:**

**Context:**
India will issue at least Rs 24,000 crore ($3.3 billion) in sovereign green bonds as the country marks a shift towards a low-carbon economy.

**Need for:**
India's maiden foray into the green bond space comes as it plans to fund renewable energy projects that will help meet its **goal of net-zero emissions by 2070.**

- The planned issuance comes amid a global boom in sustainable investments.
- **India is the world’s third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases** and plans to more than quadruple its renewable power generation capacity by 2030.

**What Is a Green Bond?**
A green bond is a type of fixed-income instrument that is specifically earmarked to raise money for climate and environmental projects.
These bonds are **typically asset-linked and backed by the issuing entity's balance sheet**, so they usually carry the same credit rating as their issuers’ other debt obligations.

- Green bonds may come with tax incentives to enhance their attractiveness to investors.
- The World Bank is a major issuer of green bonds. It has issued 164 such bonds since 2008, worth a combined $14.4 billion. In 2020, the total issuance of green bonds was worth almost $270 billion, according to the Climate Bond Initiative.

**How Does a Green Bond Work?**

Green bonds work just like any other corporate or government bond.

- Borrowers issue these securities in order to secure financing for projects that will have a **positive environmental impact**, such as ecosystem restoration or reducing pollution.
- Investors who purchase these bonds can expect to make as the bond matures.
- In addition, there are often tax benefits for investing in green bonds.

**What is the Significance of Sovereign Guarantee to Green Bonds?**

- Sovereign green issuance sends a powerful signal of intent around climate action and sustainable development to governments and regulators.
- It will catalyze domestic market development and provides impetus to institutional investors.
- It will provide benchmark pricing, liquidity and a demonstration effect for local issuers, helping to support the growth of a local market.

**Green Bonds Vs Blue Bonds:**

**Blue bonds** are sustainability bonds to finance projects that **protect the ocean and related ecosystems**.

- This can include projects to support sustainable fisheries, protection of coral reefs and other fragile ecosystems, or reducing pollution and acidification.
- **All blue bonds are green bonds, but not all green bonds are blue bonds.**

**Green Bonds Vs Climate Bonds:**

"Green bonds" and "climate bonds" are sometimes used interchangeably, but some authorities use the latter term specifically for **projects focusing on reducing carbon emissions** or alleviating the effects of climate change.

**Insta Curious:** Yes Bank was the first Indian Bank to issue Green Infrastructure Bonds (GIBs) in India. It had issued India’s first-ever GIBs worth 1,000 crore rupees in 2015.

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. About Green Bonds.
2. How do they operate?
3. Features.

4. How are they different from Blue Bonds.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of Green Bonds.

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**7. India unveils its Arctic policy, focusses on combating climate change**

**Context**

The Centre released India’s Arctic Policy, with the aim of enhancing the country’s cooperation with the resource-rich and rapidly transforming region.

**Need for such a Policy**

The relevance of Arctic for India can be broadly explained under three categories:

(A) **Scientific Research, Climate Change and Environment**

- **Monsoons**
  - The changes occurring in the Arctic are yet to be understood fully, but it is clear that they have been impacting global weather, climate and ecosystems including the monsoons in India.
During the monsoons, India receives over 70 per cent of its annual precipitation. India’s agriculture, which is the primary source of livelihood for about 58 per cent of India’s population and contributes around 20 per cent to the GDP,4 is directly dependent on monsoons

- **Rising Sea Level**
  - The ice loss in the Arctic is a major contributor to global sea-level rise6 and it can have a significant impact on India, especially over its 1,300 island territories and maritime features

- **Himalayas**
  - The Arctic and the Himalayas, though geographically distant, are interconnected and share similar concerns. The Arctic meltdown is helping the scientific community to better understand the glacial melt in the Himalayas, which has often been referred to as the ‘third pole’ and has the largest freshwater reserves after the North and South poles
  - The study of Arctic is therefore critical to Indian scientists.

(B) Economic and Human Resources

- **Mineral Resources and Hydrocarbons**
  - Arctic region has rich deposits of coal, gypsum and diamonds and also substantial reserves of zinc, lead, placer gold and quartz.10 Greenland alone possesses about a quarter of world’s rare earth reserves.
  - India is the third-largest energy-consuming country in the world, the third-largest oil importer (83 per cent) and the fourth-largest importer of gas which caters to almost half of the total gas consumption.
  - Arctic can therefore potentially address India’s energy security needs and deficiency of strategic and rare earth minerals.

**History of India’s Arctic Research**

- **1920**: Signed the Svalbard Treaty in Paris
- **2007**: First scientific expedition to Arctic
- **2008**: Established Research Base Hamadry at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard
- **2014**: Deployed IndArc, multi-sensor moored observatory in Kongfjorden
- **2016**: Grunnebret Laboratory setup at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard

**India’s Arctic Policy**

- **Science and Research**
- **Economic and Human Development Cooperation**
- **Climate and Environmental Protection**
- **Transportation and Connectivity**
- **Governance and International Cooperation**
- **National Capacity Building**

**The Objectives of the Policy**

- Strengthening national capabilities and competencies in science and exploration, climate and environmental protection, maritime and economic cooperation with the Arctic region. Institutional and human resource capacities will be strengthened within Government and academic, research and business institutions.
- Inter-ministerial coordination in pursuit of India’s interests in the Arctic.
- Enhancing understanding of the impact of climate change in the Arctic on India’s climate, economic, and energy security.
• Contributing better analysis, prediction, and coordinated policymaking on the implications of ice melting in the Arctic on India’s economic, military and strategic interests related to global shipping routes, energy security, and exploitation of mineral wealth.
• Studying linkages between polar regions and the Himalayas.
• Deepen cooperation between India and countries of the Arctic region under various Arctic forums, drawing expertise from scientific and traditional knowledge.
• Increase India’s participation in the Arctic Council and improve understanding of the complex governance structures in the Arctic, relevant international laws, and geopolitics of the region.

Does this India’s Arctic Policy Address the Gaps?

• **Scientific Orientation**: India’s Arctic Policy has gone beyond the hitherto purely scientific approach. While the primary focus is still scientific, the six pillars address all the aspects of Arctic relevant to India, including climate change and environment, economic and human resources and geopolitical and strategic aspects. This would likely make India’s engagement with the Arctic more broad-based and enable a holistic approach.
• **Funding**: The Policy declares that its implementation will be based on allocation of requisite resources. With the enhancement of a multidisciplinary approach to the Arctic, it is hoped that budgetary support to India’s scientific Arctic endeavours will be substantially augmented.
• **Polar Research Vessel**: The intent articulated in the Arctic Policy of acquiring a dedicated ice-class Polar Research Vessel will hasten the process and provide impetus to India’s Arctic Programme.
• **Whole-of-Government Focus**: The objectives outlined in India’s Arctic Policy are to be implemented through an Action Plan and a governance and review mechanism consisting of an inter-ministerial Empowered Arctic Policy Group (EAPG).

This mechanism is likely to enable better analysis, prediction and coordinated approach in the Government of India, lend policy coherence to the region and will result in better realisation of India’s strategic, military and economic interests.

On the whole, India’s Arctic Policy is timely and is likely to provide a direction to India’s policy-makers on contours of India’s engagement with the region. It is the first step towards developing a whole-of-government approach on India’s engagement with the region.

• The Policy is likely to have a *multiplier effect* towards a more synergised and focused scientific research including an enhanced understanding of linkages between monsoons and climate change in the Arctic, and between polar studies and the Himalayas.
• Thus, India’s Arctic Policy is deftly dovetailed, enmeshed and in synergy with the broader policy framework of the Government of India.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
India’s Arctic Policy History
Benefits of Arctic Policy

Mains Link: The recent Arctic Policy has overcome the gaps in earlier related Interventions of India. Do you agree? Comment

Source: The Indian Express

8. What is Extinction Rebellion?

Context:
World over activists of Extinction Rebellion are staging protests in various formats.

What is the Extinction Rebellion, also referred to as ‘XR’?

• Initially, launched in the United Kingdom on October 31, 2018, as a response to a report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
• Now, it is a global movement which seeks to “rebel”, and asks groups to “self-organise”, without the need for
anyone’s permission, to come up with collective action plans as long as they adhere to the group’s core principles and values.

- It is a decentralised, international and politically non-partisan movement using non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The group has “three core demands” of governments around the world.

- It wants governments to “Tell the Truth”, to “Act Now”, and to “Go Beyond Politics” in order to confront the climate and ecological emergency that the world is faced with.

What activities have XR done so far?

- The group had announced a “Declaration of Rebellion” at launch, involving a public act of civil disobedience in London, demanding that the government reduce carbon emission to zero by 2025.
- The eventual plan was to coordinate actions in other countries and to engage in an “International Rebellion” in March 2019.
- The XR global website, however, states that the movement is “strictly non-violent”, and that they are “reluctant law-breakers”.
- In April 2019, Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish climate activist, lent her support to the group by speaking to its members in London.

XR and India:

- The movement claims to have been inspired by 15 major civil disobedience movements around the world, including, apart from Women’s Suffrage and the Arab Spring, India’s struggle for Independence.
- It refers to Mahatma Gandhi’s Salt March in 1930.
- XR’s website says there are 19 groups in the country, including in the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and Chennai.

9. Cheetah reintroduction project:

Context:
The cheetah, which became extinct in India after Independence, is all set to return with the Union Government launching an action plan.

Under the ‘Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India’, 50 of these big cats will be introduced in the next five years.

- The action plan was launched at the 19th meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

What is reintroduction and why reintroduce Cheetah now?

- ‘Reintroduction’ of a species means releasing it in an area where it is capable of surviving.
- Reintroductions of large carnivores have increasingly been recognised as a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions.
- The cheetah is the only large carnivore that has been extirpated, mainly by over-hunting in India in historical times.
- India now has the economic ability to consider restoring its lost natural heritage for ethical as well as ecological reasons.

Facts:

- The cheetah, Acinonyx jubatus, is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.
- The cheetah is also the world’s fastest land mammal.
- African Cheetah is listed as vulnerable in IUCN red listed species.
- The country’s last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.

www.insightsonindia.com
The Asiatic cheetah is classified as a “critically endangered” species by the IUCN Red List, and is believed to survive only in Iran.

Cheetah reintroduction programme in India:
The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹260-crore cheetah re-introduction project seven years ago.
- India has plans to reintroduce cheetahs at the Kuno National Park in Sheopur and Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh’s Gwalior-Chambal region.
- This could be the world’s first inter-continental cheetah translocation project.

Reasons for extinction:
- The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man’s interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
- The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse.
- With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.

What has the Supreme Court said?
The 2013 order of the Supreme Court quashed plans to introduce African cheetahs in India and more specifically at Kuno national park in Madhya Pradesh.
- African cheetahs are not required to perform the role of the top predator in these habitats when the site (Kuno) that they have identified already has a resident population of leopards, transient tigers and is also the site for the translocation of Asiatic lions as ordered by the Supreme Court.
- Last year (2021), the Supreme Court lifted its seven-year-long stay on a proposal to introduce African Cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat.

Insta Curious:
Do you know about the NTCA?
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. It was constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation.

10. International Day of Forests - 21st March:
Context:
Observed on: 21st March every year since 2021.
The organizers are the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with Governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other relevant organizations in the field.

Background:
The occasion was established, and the date fixed, on November 28, 2012, by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The aim behind observing the International Day of Forests is to ‘celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests.’

Theme 2022:
- “Forests and sustainable production and consumption”.

Did you know?
- Forests are home to about 80% of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity, with more that 60,000 tree species.
- Around 1.6 billion people depend directly on forests for food, shelter, energy, medicines and income.
- The world is losing 10 million hectares of forest each year - about the size of Iceland.

State of Forest Report 2021:
www.insightsonindia.com
The biennial report by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) is an assessment of the country's forest resources.

Highlights of the Report:
- India's forest and tree cover has risen by 2,261 square kilometers in the last two years with Andhra Pradesh growing the maximum forest cover of 647 square kilometers.
- The total tree-and-forest cover in the country includes an increase of 1,540 square kilometres of forest cover and 721 sq km of tree cover compared to the 2019 report.
- India's total forest and tree cover is now spread across 80.9 million hectares, which is 24.62 per cent of the geographical area of the country.
- The top five states in terms of increase in forest cover are Andhra Pradesh (647 sq km), Telangana (537 sq km), Karnataka (515 sq km) and Jharkhand (110 sq km).
- The gain in forest cover or improvement in forest canopy density may be attributed to better conservation measures, protection, afforestation activities, tree plantation drives and agroforestry.
- Among the mega cities in the country, Ahmedabad has been the biggest loser when it comes to forest cover.

States with maximum forest cover:
- Area-wise, Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.
- 17 states/UTs have above 33 per cent of the geographical area under forest cover.

Challenges:
- The north-east did not show positive results as the current assessment showed a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 1,020 sq km in the region.
- Arunachal Pradesh lost the maximum forest cover of 257 sq km, followed by Manipur which lost 249 sq km, Nagaland 235 sq km, Mizoram 186 sq km and Meghalaya 73 sq km.
- In total 140 hill districts of the country, the forest cover has been reduced by 902 sq km in the last two years. In the 2019 report, the forest cover in the hill regions had increased by 544 sq km.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link: 1. About the international day of forests. 2. Celebrated by? 3. Themes. 4. State of forest cover in India- latest findings.
Mains Link: Discuss the significance of forests in the growth of a country’s economy.

11. National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants:
Context:
Commission for Air Quality Management recently reviewed the progress of Biomass Co-firing.
- Though some progress has been made towards co-firing, the CAQM finds the progress not up to the desired levels.

Background:
In May 2021, to address the issue of air pollution due to farm stubble burning and to reduce carbon footprints of thermal power generation, Ministry of Power decided to set up a National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants.

Objectives of the mission:
(a) To increase the level of co-firing from present 5% to higher levels to have a larger share of carbon neutral power generation from the thermal power plants.
(b) To take up R&D activity in boiler design to handle the higher amount of silica, alkalis in the biomass pellets.
(c) To facilitate overcoming the constraints in supply chain of bio mass pellets and agro- residue and its transport upto to the power plants.
(d) To consider regulatory issues in biomass co-firing.
Implementation:
1. The Mission would have a Steering Committee headed by Secretary (Power) comprising of all stakeholders including representatives from Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG), Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) etc.
2. The Executive Committee would be headed by Member (Thermal), CEA. NTPC will play a larger role in providing logistic and infrastructure support in the proposed National Mission.

What is Biomass Cofiring?
It refers to the concurrent blending and combustion of biomass materials with other fuels such as natural gas and coal within a boiler, which reduce the use of fossil fuels for energy generation and emissions without significantly increasing costs and infrastructure investments.

Benefits of Cofiring:
1. Biomass cofiring is a promising technology to decrease the use of fossil fuels for energy generation and hence mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Coal and biomass cofiring accounts for the relevant advantages of a relative ease of implementation and an effective reduction of CO2 and other pollutant (SOx, NOx) emissions to the atmosphere.
3. Cofiring biomass with coal may record no loss in total boiler efficiency after adjusting combustion output for the new fuel mixture.

Insta Curious: Are there any purely natural gas based thermal plants in India? Read Here.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. What is Biomass Cofiring?
2. Benefits.
3. Issues.
4. Gases released from stubble burning.

Mains Link: Write a note on biomass Cofiring.

12. Fly Ash:
Context:
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has issued directives to form a committee for surveillance of pollution problems caused by Koradi and Khaparkheda coal-fired power plants in Nagpur. Both the plants have also been directed to ensure 100% utilization of fly-ash.

What is Fly Ash?
Popularly known as Flue ash or pulverised fuel ash, it is a coal combustion product.

Composition:
Composed of the particulates that are driven out of coal-fired boilers together with the flue gases.
- Depending upon the source and composition of the coal being burned, the components of fly ash vary considerably, but all fly ash includes substantial amounts of silicon dioxide (SiO2), aluminium oxide (Al2O3) and calcium oxide (CaO), the main mineral compounds in coal-bearing rock strata.
- Minor constituents include: arsenic, beryllium, boron, cadmium, chromium, hexavalent chromium, cobalt, lead, manganese, mercury, molybdenum, selenium, strontium, thallium, and vanadium, along with very small concentrations of dioxins and PAH compounds. It also has unburnt carbon.

Health and environmental hazards:
**Toxic heavy metals present:** All the heavy metals found in fly ash—nickel, cadmium, arsenic, chromium, lead, etc—are toxic in nature. They are minute, poisonous particles accumulate in the respiratory tract, and cause gradual poisoning.

**Radiation:** For an equal amount of electricity generated, fly ash contains a hundred times more radiation than nuclear waste secured via dry cask or water storage.

**Water pollution:** The breaching of ash dykes and consequent ash spills occur frequently in India, polluting a large number of water bodies.

**Effects on environment:** The destruction of mangroves, drastic reduction in crop yields, and the pollution of groundwater in the Rann of Kutch from the ash sludge of adjoining Coal power plants has been well documented.

**However, fly ash can be used in the following ways:**

1. Concrete production, as a substitute material for Portland cement, sand.
2. Fly-ash pellets which can replace normal aggregate in concrete mixture.
3. Embankments and other structural fills.
4. Cement clinker production—(as a substitute material for clay).
5. Stabilization of soft soils.
6. Road subbase construction.
7. As aggregate substitute material (e.g. for brick production).
8. Agricultural uses: soil amendment, fertilizer, cattle feeders, soil stabilization in stock feed yards, and agricultural stakes.
9. Loose application on rivers to melt ice.
10. Loose application on roads and parking lots for ice control.

**Components | Composition (wt %)**
--- | ---
SiO₂ | 18.9
Al₂O₃ | 15.2
Fe₂O₃ | 10.6
Na₂O | 0.988
CaO | 1.18
K₂O | 2.23
TiO₂ | 0.468
SO₃ | 0.366
MgO | 0.348
SiO₂/Al₂O₃ | 1.2

**InstaLinks:**

4. Potential applications.

**Prelims Link:**

1. What is fly ash?
2. Sources.
3. Pollutants.

**Mains Link:** What is fly ash? What are its effects on human health and environment?

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**13. World Water Day:**

**Context:**

- Observed on 22 March every year.
- Observed since 1993.
- Coordinated by UN-Water—the UN’s inter-agency collaboration mechanism for all freshwater related issues—in collaboration with governments and partners.
- The World Water Development Report is also released by the UN every year around World Water Day.
- Theme of World Water Day 2022: “Groundwater, making the invisible visible” is the theme for this year’s World Water Day.

**Water, a human right:**

- In 2010, the UN recognized “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right” that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”
- The human right to water entitles everyone, without discrimination, to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use; which includes water for drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, and personal and household hygiene.
People are left behind without safe water for many different reasons. Some of them include:
1. Sex and gender.
2. Race, ethnicity, religion, birth, caste, language, and nationality.
3. Disability, age and health status.
4. Property, tenure, residence, economic and social status.
5. Other factors, such as environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, conflict, forced displacement and migration flows can also disproportionately affect marginalized groups through impacts on water.

**Why conserve groundwater?**
1. Groundwater reserves are already under pressure as the global population explodes and crop production rises in lockstep.
2. Extreme weather events such as drought and record rainfall — have both made worse by our heating planet — could have another long-lasting impact on how quickly reserves replenish.
3. Only half of all groundwater supplies are likely to fully replenish or re-balance within the next 100 years — potentially leading to shortages in drier areas.
4. The process through which rainwater is filtered through bedrock and accumulated underground can take centuries and varies greatly by region.
5. As climate change delivers longer droughts and bigger superstorms, the extremes of rainfall become more pronounced, impacting groundwater reserves for generations to come.

**Insta Curious:**
- **Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6)** aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water for all by 2030. By definition, this means leaving no one behind.
- In addition to it, the **International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028)** is being observed.

**InstaLinks:**
**Prelims Link:**
1. World water day - date.
2. Significance.
3. Theme.

**Mains Link:** Discuss the significance of the World Water Day.

**14. Mercury Pollution:**

**Context:**
Consensus is building among various stakeholders meeting in Bali, Indonesia, to adopt a **non-binding declaration** that will enhance international cooperation and coordination for combating illegal trade in mercury, a major pollutant globally.
- The Government of Indonesia as well as the United Nations have sought support and commitment from parties to the **Minamata Convention for a Bali Declaration on combating Global Illegal Trade of Mercury**.

The non-binding declaration calls upon parties to:
1. Develop practical tools and notification and information-sharing systems for monitoring and managing trade in mercury.
2. Exchange experiences and practices relating to combating illegal trade in mercury, including reducing the use of mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
3. Share examples of national legislation and data and information related to such trade.

**Basics about Mercury:**

**Sources:** Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is found in air, water and soil. Released into the atmosphere through natural processes such as weathering of rocks, volcanic eruptions, geothermal activities, forest fires, etc. Mercury is also released through human activities.

**Mercury may have toxic effects** on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.

**Chemical of major public health concern:**

Mercury is considered by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as one of the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern. 

**Minamata Disease:** A disorder caused by methylmercury poisoning that was first described in the inhabitants of Minamata Bay, Japan and resulted from their eating fish contaminated with mercury industrial waste.

**About the Minamata Convention:**

- The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury and its compounds.
- It was agreed at the **fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in Geneva, Switzerland 2013.** It entered into force in 2017.
- **Controlling the anthropogenic**

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**Main global potential sources of mercury emissions**

There are many different potential sources of mercury releases into the environment, including both natural sources and anthropogenic sources. Anthropogenic sources can be further split into releases from intentional uses, where mercury is a specific raw material used in a process (e.g. dentistry), and unintentional releases, where mercury is not specifically used in a process, but is released as a result of being present as an impurity in a raw material (e.g. coal burning).
releases of mercury throughout its lifecycle is one of the key obligations under the Convention.

- It is a UN treaty.
- The Convention also addresses interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues.
- India has ratified the Convention.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. About Mercury- Source, contamination and effects on health.
3. What is Minamata convention?
4. What is WHO ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern?

Mains Link: Write a note on mercury contamination and discuss international efforts to address the issue.

15. World Air Quality Report 2021:

The 2021 World Air Quality Report was released, the report presented an overview of the state of global air quality in 2021.

- Released by IQAir, a Swiss group that measures air quality levels based on the concentration of Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5.

Key findings:
- Bangladesh was the most polluted country in the world in 2021. Bangladesh recorded an average PM2.5 level of 76.9 micrograms per cubic metre in 2021 against the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended maximum permissible level of 5 micrograms per cubic metre.
- Earlier, in 2018, 2019 and 2020 also Bangladesh was found to be the most polluted country in the world.
- The data reveals that not a single country in the world managed to meet the WHO’s air quality standard in 2021.
- All over the world, 93 cities reported PM 2.5 levels at 10 times the recommended level.
- Among the cities, Dhaka was the second most polluted city in the world with a PM 2.5 level of 78.1 just below New Delhi which had a PM 2.5 level of 85.1 in 2021.

Performance of India:
- New Delhi continues to be the world’s most polluted capital city for the fourth consecutive year.
- As per the report, in 2021, India was home to 11 of the 15 most polluted cities in Central and also in South Asia.
- 35 Indian cities have been listed by the index under the worst air quality tag for 2021.
- Bhiwadi, Rajasthan topped this list and was followed Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Concerns associated with air pollution:
- Air pollution is now considered to be the world’s largest environmental health threat, accounting for seven million deaths around the world every year.
- Air pollution causes and aggravates many diseases, ranging from asthma to cancer, lung illnesses and heart disease.
- The estimated daily economic cost of air pollution has been figured at $8 billion (USD), or 3 to 4 per cent of the gross world product.

What can governments do?
1. Decrease air pollution emissions.
2. Pass legislation to incentivize the use of clean air vehicles for personal and industrial use.
3. Invest in renewable energy sources.
4. Provide financial incentives, such as trade-in programs, to limit the use of internal combustion engines.
5. Provide subsidies to encourage the use of battery and human-powered transportation methods.
6. Expand public transportation and power with clean and renewable energy sources.

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. About the report released by, criteria for ranking.
4. Relative performance of India.

Mains Link: Why despite efforts at various levels, Delhi is ranked as the most polluted capital in world?
Comment.

16. Lead poisoning:

Context:
Recently, high levels of lead were found in the blood of thousands of children living around the Kabwe mine in Zambia.

How lead affects children?
1. Lead is a potent neurotoxin that causes irreparable harm to children’s brains.
2. It is particularly destructive to babies and children under the age of 5 as it damages their brain before they have had the opportunity to fully develop, causing them lifelong neurological, cognitive and physical impairment.
3. Childhood lead exposure has also been linked to mental health and behavioural problems and an increase in crime and violence.
4. Older children suffer severe consequences, including increased risk of kidney damage and cardiovascular diseases in later life.

How it costs countries?
Childhood lead exposure is estimated to cost lower- and middle-income countries almost USD $1 trillion due to lost economic potential of these children over their lifetime.

Factors contributing to lead poisoning:
1. Informal and substandard recycling of lead-acid batteries.
2. Increase in vehicle ownership, combined with the lack of vehicle battery recycling regulation and infrastructure.
3. Workers in dangerous and often illegal recycling operations break open battery cases, spill acid and lead dust in the soil.
4. They also smelt the recovered lead in crude, open-air furnaces that emit toxic fumes poisoning the surrounding community.

Need of the hour:
A coordinated and concerted approach across the following areas:
1. Proper Monitoring and reporting.
2. Prevention and control measures.
3. Management, treatment and remediation.
4. Public awareness and behaviour change.
5. Legislation and policy.

**Conclusion:**
It is clear from evidence compiled that lead poisoning is a much greater threat to the health of children than previously understood. Although much more research needs to be conducted, enough data have recently emerged for decisive action to begin – and it must begin now.

**Insta Facts:**
1. Lead in the body is distributed to the brain, liver, kidney and bones. It is stored in the teeth and bones, where it accumulates over time.
2. Lead in bone is released into blood during pregnancy and becomes a source of exposure to the developing foetus.
3. WHO has identified lead as 1 of 10 chemicals of major public health concern.
4. WHO has joined with the United Nations Environment Programme to form the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint.

**Insta Curious:** Did you know that lead is a naturally occurring toxic metal found in the Earth’s crust?

**InstaLinks:**

**Prelims Link:**
1. 10 chemicals of major public health concern identified by WHO.
2. Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint has been launched by?

**Mains Link:** Write a note on lead poisoning and ways to prevent it.

17. What is Earth Hour?

**Context:**
Every year, Earth Hour is observed on the last Saturday of March at 8:30 pm. And while previously it brought the public out onto the roads to mark the hour, this year the famous environmental initiative went digital as many countries are in lockdown.

The topic for Earth Hour 2022 will be "Shape Our Future." This is a pivotal year for everyone and our world. It is up to us to #ShapeOurFuture by raising awareness about the serious issues impacting our world today.

**What is Earth Hour?**
Dating back to 2007, Earth Hour is an annual event organized by the World Wildlife Fund that promotes conservation and sustainable energy. During this time, civilians are encouraged to switch off their lights for one hour to help reduce the effect of global warming and raise awareness for climate change and wildlife conservation.

**Background:**
It was famously started as a lights-off event in Sydney, Australia in 2007. Since then it has grown to engage more than 7000 cities and towns worldwide. Today, Earth Hour engages a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues. The one-hour event continues to remain the key driver of the now larger movement.

**What’s the difference between Earth Hour and Earth Day?**
Whereas Earth Hour stands as a climate change initiative where people reduce their electricity usage, Earth Day (April 22) celebrates our natural environment by inspiring people to plant trees, recycle regularly and keep the planet tidy.

**Why do we need earth hour?**
● Global warming and climate change have dominated the scientific discourse in the past more than one decade. With ever rising population of the world, the climate change has put the humankind at a great risk along with other species.
● Global warming, rising levels of pollution due to ever increasing industrialisation, declining forest cover and rising sea levels are some of the dangers that drastically affect the workings of life on the earth.
● Though the largest polluters are big industries, the WWF tries to make the masses more and more aware about the impending dangers of adverse climate so that they could put pressure on the respective governments to frame environment-friendly policies and laws.
● With Earth Hour, the WWF aims to engage people across the globe to adopt more sustainable lifestyle. Turning off lights for an hour is just an annual reminder that if the world does not mend its ways, it will be heading to a dark age, literally.

18. Permanent Body constituted to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks:

Context:
The Union Environment Ministry has constituted a “permanent coordination committee” that includes the Ministry of Railways and the Environment Ministry to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks.

Background:
19 elephants were killed across the country on railway tracks in 2018-19, 14 in 2019-20 and 12 in 2020-21.

Concern:
Railway collisions were the second-largest reason for the unnatural deaths of elephants despite tracts being specifically demarcated and notified as elephant passages.

Key measures taken:
1. Setting up of a Permanent Coordination Committee between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.
2. Clearing of vegetation along railway tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots.
3. Using signage boards at suitable points to alert loco pilots about elephant presence.
4. Moderating slopes of elevated sections of railway tracks.
5. Setting up underpass/overpass for safe passage of elephants.
6. Regulation of train speed from sunset to sunrise in vulnerable stretches.
7. Regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches of railway tracks by frontline staff of the Forest Department and wildlife watchers.

Eco Bridges as a solution:
1. Eco Bridges are wildlife corridors also known as wildlife crossing that are a link of wildlife habitat which connects two larger areas of similar wildlife habitat.
2. It connects wildlife populations that would otherwise be separated by human activities or structures such as roads and highways, other infrastructure development, or logging and farming, etc.
3. Eco Bridges aims at enhancing wildlife connectivity.
4. These are made up of native vegetation i.e., it is overlaid with planting from the area to give a contiguous look with the landscape.

InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. IUCN conservation status of Asian Elephants.
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?
7. State with highest elephant population in India.

Mains Link: Discuss the measures suggested by the Environment Ministry to manage man-elephant conflicts.
19. What causes coral bleaching at the Great Barrier Reef?

Context:
Scientists have warned that the Great Barrier Reef will face a critical period of heat stress over the coming weeks, following the most widespread coral bleaching the natural world has ever endured.

About Great Barrier Reef:
The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which spreads across a length of over 2,300 km and is roughly the size of Italy, is home to about 3,000 coral reefs, 600 continental islands, 1,625 type of fish, 133 varieties of shark and rays and 600 types of soft and hard corals. It is a world heritage site.

What are Coral reefs?
Coral reefs are important hotspots of biodiversity in the ocean. Corals are animals in the same class (Cnidaria) as jellyfish and anemones. They consist of individual polyps that get together and build reefs.

Significance:
Coral reefs support a wide range of species and maintain the quality of the coastal biosphere. Corals control the level of carbon dioxide in the water by converting it into a limestone shell. If this process does not take place, the amount of carbon dioxide in the ocean water would increase significantly and affect ecological niches.

Threats:
- Coral reefs are threatened by climate change.
- When the sea surface temperature increases beyond a tolerable limit, they undergo a process of bleaching.

What is bleaching?
Basically bleaching is when the corals expel a certain algae known as zooxanthellae, which lives in the tissues of the coral in a symbiotic relationship. About 90% of the energy of the coral is provided by the zooxanthellae which are endowed with chlorophyll and other pigments. They are responsible for the yellow or reddish brown colours of the host coral. In addition the zooxanthellae can live as endosymbionts with jellyfish also.
When a coral bleaches, it does not die but comes pretty close to it. Some of the corals may survive the experience and recover once the sea surface temperature returns to normal levels.

Insta Link:

Prelims Link:
1. About the Great Barrier Reef, location and significance.
2. What is a World Heritage site?

Mains Link: What is Coral bleaching? How it is affecting coral reefs across the world. Discuss.

Topics: Disaster and management.

1. What are cluster bombs and thermobaric weapons?

Context:
Russia has resorted to the use of dangerous thermobaric bombs — or vacuum bombs — in Ukraine.

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● Cluster weaponry has been banned by the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions; however, neither Ukraine nor Russia were signatories at the convention.

**Thermobaric weapons:**
These are called vacuum bombs as they suck in oxygen from surrounding areas to generate high-voltage explosions.
- The blast wave is of a greater intensity and duration than conventional bombs and can vapourise humans.
- While they cannot be used in taking down tanks and other such military vehicles, they can dismantle civilian spaces, like residential or commercial complexes.

**Cluster bombs:**
Cluster munitions are non-precision weapons that are designed to injure or kill human beings indiscriminately over a large area, and to destroy vehicles and infrastructure such as runways, railway or power transmission lines.
- They can be dropped from an aircraft or launched in a projectile that spins in flight, scattering many bomblets as it travels.
- Many of these bomblets end up not exploding, but continue to lie on the ground, often partially or fully hidden and difficult to locate and remove, posing a threat to the civilian population for long after the fighting has ceased.

**Convention on Cluster Munitions:**
It is an international treaty that prohibits all use, transfer, production, and stockpiling of cluster bombs, a type of explosive weapon which scatters submunitions ("bomblets") over an area.
- Additionally, the Convention establishes a framework to support victim assistance, clearance of contaminated sites, risk reduction education, and stockpile destruction.
- The convention was adopted on 30 May 2008 in Dublin.
- As of date, there are 110 state parties to the convention, and 13 other countries have signed up but are yet to ratify it.

**Insta Curious:** Vacuum bombs are not prohibited by any international law or agreement, but their use against civilian populations in built-up areas, schools or hospitals, could attract action under the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.


### 2. Disaster Management Plan of Ministry of Panchayati Raj:

**Context:**
Union Minister of Panchayati Raj has released the “Disaster Management Plan of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (DMP-MoPR)”.

**Areas covered under the Plan:**
1) Institutional arrangement for Disaster Management.
2) Hazard Risk, Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis.
3) Coherence of Disaster Risk Management across Resilient Development and Climate Change Action.
4) Disaster Specific Preventive and Mitigation Measures-Responsibility Framework.
5) Mainstreaming of Community Based Disaster Management Plan of Villages and Panchayats and so on.

**Highlights of the plan:**
- It aims to develop a culture of disaster resilience at the grassroots level among the Panchayats and Rural Local Bodies.
- It seeks to establish a framework to align the disaster management measures in rural areas to that of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).
● Under the Plan, every Indian village would have a “Village Disaster Management Plan” and every Panchayat would have their Disaster Management Plan.

● All stakeholders including PRIs, elected representatives and functionaries of Panchayats etc. would participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

Need for Panchayati Level Plans:
Panchayat-level and village-level Disaster Management Plans to mitigate the challenges in the event of disaster form a foundational level.
The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), the representative body of the people, is the most appropriate institution from village to the district level in view of:
● Its proximity.
● Universal coverage.
● Enlisting people’s participation on an institutionalised basis.
Their close involvement will be able to make people more prepared for countering natural disasters as well as involve them in all possible preventive and protective activities so that the impact of the disasters are mitigated and the people are able to save their lives and property.

3. Disaster Management Act:

Context:
Since March 24, 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been issuing orders and guidelines for the containment of Covid-19 under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Under what section of The Disaster Management Act has the MHA been issuing orders on containment measures for Covid-19?
It is under Section 10 of The Disaster Management Act that the Union Home Ministry has been issuing guidelines for the containment of Covid-19.

Section 10 of The Disaster Management Act deals with the powers and functions of this national executive committee.
● This section also empowers the National Executive Committee to lay down guidelines for or give directions to, the concerned Ministries or Departments of the Government of India, the State Governments and the State Authorities regarding measures to be taken by them in response to any threatening disaster situation or disaster.

About the Disaster Management Act, 2005:
● The stated object and purpose of the DM Act is to manage disasters, including preparation of mitigation strategies, capacity-building and more.
● It came into force in India in January 2006.
● The Act provides for “the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”
● The Act calls for the establishment of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), with the Prime Minister of India as chairperson.
● The Act enjoins the Central Government to Constitute a National Executive Committee (NEC) to assist the National Authority.
● All State Governments are mandated to establish a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA).

Powers given to the Centre:
Power bestowed by DM Act on Central Government and NDMA are extensive.
● The Central Government, irrespective of any law in force (including over-riding powers) can issue any directions to any authority anywhere in India to facilitate or assist in the disaster management.
● Importantly, any such directions issued by Central Government and NDMA must necessarily be followed the Union Ministries, State Governments and State Disaster Management Authorities.
● In order to achieve all these, the prime minister can exercise all powers of NDMA (S 6(3)). This ensures that there is adequate political and constitutional heft behind the decisions made.
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. **National Register of Citizens (NRC):**

Context:
The Assam Government has formed a cabinet subcommittee to look into the problem of 19 lakh people, whose names were not included in the supplementary list National Register of Citizens (NRC), published in August, 2019.

What's the issue?
- The biometric details of these people are locked and could not get Aadhaar cards thereby they are not able to get welfare scheme benefits. Therefore, there's a need to resolve the issue at the earliest.

Background:
More than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam were excluded from the final draft register published on August 31, 2019, which cost ₹1,220 crore.
- The government had rejected the NRC in its current form and demanded re-verification of at least 30% names in areas bordering Bangladesh and 10% in the rest of the State.

Background:
The Supreme Court had monitored the exercise of updating the NRC of 1951 in Assam. About 19.06 lakh out of 3.3 crore applicants were excluded from the updated draft.

About NRC:
- At its core, the NRC is an official record of those who are legal Indian citizens. It includes demographic information about all those individuals who qualify as citizens of India as per the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The register was first prepared after the 1951 Census of India and since then it has not been updated until recently.

NRC in Assam:
So far, such a database has only been maintained for the state of Assam.
- The exercise was a culmination of Assam Accord of 1985 signed between the Centre and the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) for detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners.

Why was NRC updated for Assam?
In 2013, the SC ordered the updation of the NRC, in accordance with Citizenship Act, 1955 and Citizenship Rules, 2003 in all parts of Assam. The process officially started in 2015.

Issues present:
- Lakhs of people were left out of the complete draft of Assam’s National Register of Citizens (NRC) published in 2018.
- As per the Supreme Court mandated rules, those left out of the draft NRC list had to mandatorily submit their biometrics during the hearings of ‘claims’ (to include themselves in the NRC) and ‘objections’ (to object to someone else’s inclusion) process.
27 lakh people who were left out from the list published in 2018 submitted their biometric details and amongst these only 8 lakh people made it into the draft list published in 2019. However, these 8 lakh people are struggling to get Aadhaar, and concerned about benefits linked to it.

Lack of clarity and inability to enjoy the full benefits emanating from Aadhar has caused significant mental pressure on individuals.

This situation has arisen primarily due to the lack of clarity over the NRC exercise since the government is withholding assigning Aadhar to these newly added individuals since the complete and final NRC list is yet to be published.


InstaLinks:
Prelims Link:
1. Relation between Census and National Population Register.
2. NPR vs NRC.
3. How NRC is related to Assam accord.
4. Constitutional provisions wrt to grant and revocation of citizenships.
5. Who carries out Census?

Mains Link: Discuss why a nationwide NRC exercise may not be feasible.

2. Boundary dispute along the Manipur-Nagaland border:

Context:
Southern Angami Public Organisation (SAPO), a tribal body of Nagaland, has announced bandh from March 24 over Manipur’s failure in withdrawing armed personnel and permanent structures from the disputed Kezoltsa area.

Impact of the Bandh:
- The National Highway-2, which connects the two states and is a lifeline for Manipur, runs through the area.
- The bandh is likely to cause inconvenience to the travellers to Manipur and transportation of essential commodities to the state.

What's the dispute all about?
At the root is an old land ownership dispute between three Naga tribes — the Angamis of Nagaland, and the Maos and Marams of Manipur.
- Kezoltsa is a thickly forested area on the periphery of the picturesque Dzukou Valley, bordering Nagaland and Manipur.
- Dzukou Valley, spread over the two states, has traditionally been a bone of contention between the Mao Nagas of Senapati (Manipur) and the southern Angami Nagas of Kohima (Nagaland).

The dispute: current context:
- Kezoltsa (also called Kozuru/Kazing) is not a part of Dzukou Valley, but has become a flashpoint in recent times with both the Marams and Maos claiming it belongs to Manipur’s Senapati district.
- The Angamis say it is part of the Angami tribal ancestral land, and was “unfairly” made a part of Manipur by the British in the colonial era.

What next?
The claim that the entire Dzukou Valley belongs to Nagaland is made by Southern Angami Public Organisation, not by the Nagaland state.
- If the need arose, the Centre may play the part of mediator in resolving the issue.


3. Assam-Meghalaya border dispute:

Context:
Assam and Meghalaya have partially resolved a 50-year-old border dispute in six of the 12 sectors along their 885-km boundary.

- Both states signed a “historic” agreement for a closure in six disputed sectors that were taken up for resolution in the first phase.

The six disputed sectors are:
Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pillangkata and Racheterra under the Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro) and Cachar districts of Assam and the West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and East Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya.

What’s the dispute?

Assam and Meghalaya share an 885-km-long border. Meghalaya was carved out of Assam under the Assam Reorganisation Act, 1971, a law that it challenged, leading to disputes.

- As of now, there are 12 points of dispute along their borders. These include the areas of Upper Tarabari, Gazang reserve forest, Hahim, Langpih, Borduar, Boklapara, Nongwah, Matamur, Khanapara-Pillangkata, Dessdemoreah Block I and Block II, Khanduli and Racheterra.

Langpih:
A major point of contention between Assam and Meghalaya is the district of Langpih in West Garo Hills bordering the Kamrup district of Assam.

- Langpih was part of the Kamrup district during the British colonial period but post-Independence, it became part of the Garo Hills and Meghalaya.
- Assam considers it to be part of the Mikir Hills in Assam. Meghalaya has questioned Blocks I and II of the Mikir Hills -now Karbi Anglong region - being part of Assam. Meghalaya says these were parts of erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts.

Efforts to solve the dispute:

- Both Assam and Meghalaya have constituted border dispute settlement committees.
- Recently, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma decided to set up two regional committees to resolve the border disputes in a phased manner.
- Sarma recently said five aspects were to be considered in resolving the border dispute. They are historical facts, ethnicity, administrative convenience, mood and sentiments of the people concerned and the contiguity of the land.

Assam and border issues:

- The states of the Northeast were largely carved out of Assam, which has border disputes with several states. Assam’s border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are pending in the Supreme Court.
- Assam’s border disputes with Meghalaya and Mizoram are currently in the phase of resolution through negotiations. The border dispute with Mizoram recently turned violent, leading to intervention from the Centre.

Topics: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

1. Major upgrade for India infrastructure along LAC:

Context:
According to the report of the department-related parliamentary standing committee on home affairs:

- The infrastructure on the Indo-China border is undergoing a major upgrade, more so in the aftermath of the border row that led to skirmishes with the Chinese troops in Galwan in 2020.
- 18 border roads are already complete and operational, 7 are about to be completed and work on 8 roads under Phase 11 of the Indo-China Border Roads project.
- Under the vibrant village initiative under the border area development programme, development will be pushed in the border villages by building roads, mobile towers, banks etc.

Why is infrastructure development along the LAC significant?
Latest border tensions with China at multiple points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are more serious than past incidents, indicating China’s planning and the likelihood of a protracted stand-off.

- Therefore, the creation of infrastructure “would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders”.

India- China Border:

- India and China share a 3,488 km long boundary. Unfortunately, the entire boundary is disputed. The line, which delineates the boundary between the two countries, is popularly called the McMahon line, after its author Sir Henry McMahon.
- In 1913, the British-India government had called a tripartite conference, in which the boundary between India and Tibet was formalized after a discussion between the Indian and the Tibetans. A Convention was adopted, which resulted in the delimitation of the Indo-Tibetan boundary. This boundary is, however, disputed by China which terms it as illegal.
- In 1957, China occupied Aksai Chin and built a road through it. This episode was followed by intermittent clashes along the border, which finally culminated in the border war of 1962.
- The boundary, which came into existence after the war, came to be known as Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is a military held line.

The Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- The BADP was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1986-87 as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.
- It was initiated for ensuring balanced development of border areas through development of infrastructure and promotion of a sense of security among the border population.
- The States covered are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

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?

Mains Link: Creation of infrastructure would help integrate border areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders. Discuss.
GENERAL STUDIES – 4

1. The code of ethics and procedure, and safeguards in relation to the digital media:

Context:
The Information & Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has approached the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) of all the State and Union Territory governments to initiate an awareness drive for sensitising their officials to the code of ethics and procedure, and safeguards in relation to the digital media.

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which was notified by the Central government on February 25, 2021, relates to the digital news publishers.
- It is administered by the Information & Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry Ministry.

Overview of the rules:
The Rules provide for:
1. A code of ethics to be followed by digital news publishers and OTT platforms.
2. A three-tier grievance redress mechanism, which includes self-regulation by publishers at the first level, self-regulation by self-regulating bodies of the publishers and an oversight mechanism by the Central government.
3. Procedures for them to furnish the required information.
4. Significant social media firms have to appoint a chief compliance officer and have a nodal contact person who can be in touch with law enforcement agencies 24/7.
5. A grievance officer: Social media platforms will also have to name a grievance officer who shall register the grievance within 24 hours and dispose of it in 15 days.

What is a significant social media intermediary and benefits obtained under it?
Social media companies with more than 50 lakh registered users will be considered ‘significant social media intermediaries’, as per the new norms.

What happens in case of non compliance?
- Social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp messenger could face a ban if they do not comply with the new Information Technology rules.
- They also run the risk of losing their status as “intermediaries” and may become liable for criminal action if they do not comply with the revised regulations.

What are the Concerns being raised?
1. Various industry bodies have written to the government for up to a one-year compliance window, particularly in view of the pandemic.
2. Concerns have also been expressed over potential unavailability of ‘safe harbour’ protection given to intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act, under the new rules.
3. They have requested a re-think over a clause in the new rules which can lead to imposition of criminal liability upon the employees for non-compliance by intermediaries, asking for it to be dropped in the interest of ease of doing business.
4. Originator traceability mandate in end-to-end encrypted platforms could end up weakening the security architecture of the platform. This could render the entire citizenry susceptible to cyberattacks by hostile actors.
5. Additionally, the extant data retention mandate entailed risking privacy of users in India and abroad in addition to security risks and technical complexities which requires a lot of time for development and testing before integration with the existing ecosystem.

Insta Curious:
Did you know that on February 25, 2021, the Centre framed the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, in the exercise of powers under section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000 and in supersession of the earlier Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011?

InstaLinks:

Prelims Link:
1. Overview of the new rules.
2. Who are intermediaries as per the definition?
3. What is safe harbour protection?
4. Grievance redressal mechanism as provided under the new rules.

Mains Link: What are the concerns being raised against the new IT rules? Discuss ways to address these concerns.


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FACTS FOR PRELIMS

1. Antonov AN-225 or ‘Mriya’:
The world’s largest cargo aircraft, the Antonov AN-225 or ‘Mriya’, has been destroyed by Russian troops during an attack on an airport near Kyiv.
- It was 84 meters long and could transport up to 250 tonnes of cargo at a speed of 850 kilometres per hour.

2. International Monsoons Project Office (IMPO):
Union Minister of Science & Technology has launched the International Monsoons Project Office (IMPO).
- IMPO will be hosted at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, an institution under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Govt of India, initially for five years.
- It would encompass activities and connections related to international monsoon research that would be identified and fostered under the leadership of the World Climate Research Programme.

3. Operation Ganga:
The Government of India has launched a ‘multi-pronged’ initiative named ‘Operation Ganga’.
- It is an evacuation mission to bring back all the Indian nationals who are currently stranded in Ukraine.
- There were around 20,000 Indians including students stuck in Ukraine.

4. Avalokiteshvara Padmapani (Buddha):
Prominent artefact that went missing two decades ago, the idol of Avalokiteshvara Padmapani (Buddha) at the Devisthan Kundalpur temple in Bihar, was handed over to the Indian consulate in Milan.
- The statue was created between the 8th and 12th centuries, and smuggled out of the country around the year 2000.
- Avalokiteshvara means one who can see all. He represents infinite compassion and mercy. He is the most popular Bodhisattva of all. He represents the ideal of welfare in which he postpones his own transformation into Buddha to help others.
- A bodhisattva is someone who has compassion within himself or herself and who is able to make another person smile or help someone suffer less.

5. What are Participatory Notes?
Participatory Notes or P-Notes (PNs) are financial instruments issued by a registered foreign institutional investor (FIIs) to an overseas investor who wishes to invest in Indian stock markets without registering themselves with the market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- P-Notes are Offshore Derivative Investments (ODIs) with equity shares or debt securities as underlying assets.
- They provide liquidity to the investors as they can transfer the ownership by endorsement and delivery.
- While the FIIs have to report all such investments each quarter to SEBI, they need not disclose the identity of the actual investors.
6. Suez Canal:
- The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt, to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
- The canal separates the African continent from Asia.
- It provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans.
- It is one of the world’s most heavily used shipping lanes, carrying over 12% of world trade by volume.

Why in the News?
Cash-strapped Egypt has increased transit fees for ships passing through the Suez Canal with hikes of up to 10%.

7. India’s First Dugong Reserve in Palk Bay:
- India’s first Dugong conservation reservewill be built in Tamil Nadu’s Palk Bay for the conservation of Dugong.
- It would be established in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay between India and Sri Lanka, for the conservation of the animals.
- The reserve will spread over an area of 500 km in Palk Bayon the southeast coast of Tamil Nadu.
Dugongs are on the verge of extinction, as in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands their population is less than 100.
- Both in the Gulf of Mannar and the Gulf of Kutch, there are very few sporadic records.

Dugong: The sea cow:
- Dugong or the sea cow is the State animal of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- This endangered marine speciessurvive on seagrass and other aquatic vegetation found in the area.
- They are marine mammals and have to surface every four minutes to breathe.
- It is the only herbivorous mammal that is strictly marine and is the only extant species in the family Dugongidae.
- Vulnerable under IUCN red list.

8. Visva-Bharati University:
- Visva-Bharati is a public research central university and an Institution of National Importance located in Santiniketan, West Bengal, India.
- It was founded by Rabindranath Tagore who called it Visva-Bharati, which means the communion of the world with India.
- Visva-Bharati was declared to be a central university and an institution of national importance by an Act of Parliament in 1951.

9. SIMBA to give distinct identity to each Asiatic lion:
The Gujarat forest department has developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based photo-identification software, specially designed to distinguish patterns/marks to identify Asiatic lions individually.
- The software is named SIMBA (Software with Intelligence Marking Based identification of Asiatic lions.)
- The SIMBA works with a deep machine learning technique that matches a point-pattern for pairwise comparisons and that automates the individual identification, based on the variability in the individual’s whisker spot pattern, the presence of scars on the face, notches on the ears and other metadata of the photograph.
- The software also extracts the uniqueness from the photograph and can cluster similar patterns.
- Listed as ‘Endangered’ under the IUCN Red List.
10. Furlough:
Furlough is given in case of long-term imprisonment. While furlough is seen as a matter of right, to be granted periodically irrespective of any reason and merely to enable the prisoner to retain family and social ties, parole is not a matter of right and may be denied to a prisoner even when he makes out a sufficient case.

Granting authority:
- Parole and furlough are covered under the Prison Act of 1894. Since prison is a subject of the state, the Prison Act of the particular state government defines the rules under which parole is granted.
- Parole is granted by the state executive. If parole is rejected, the convict can move the High Court challenging the order of the competent authority.
- Also, apart from regular parole, the superintendent of a jail can also grant parole up to a period of seven days in emergent cases.

11. Watts on the Moon Challenge:
NASA’s Watts on the Moon Challenge seeks solutions for energy distribution, management, and/or storage that address NASA technology gaps and can be further developed for space flight and future operation on the lunar surface.
- **Significance:** Not only could novel solutions make a difference in lunar and space exploration, but technologies discovered during NASA’s Watts on the Moon competition could help facilitate new power options on Earth.
- The Challenge is managed by NASA’s Glenn Research Center in Cleveland and is part of Centennial Challenges, based at the agency’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

12. Konark temple town to be a 100 percent solar town:
Odisha plans to make the coastal temple town a 100 per cent solar town and also place it among India’s first few zero emission cities or towns.

**About the Temple:**
1. Built in the 13th century, the Konark temple was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with 12 pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses.
2. It was built by King Narasimhadeva I, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty.
3. The temple was included in UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 for its architectural greatness and also for the sophistication and abundance of sculptural work.
4. The temple is a perfect blend of Kalinga architecture, heritage, exotic beach and salient natural beauty.
5. It is protected under the National Framework of India by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act (1958) and its Rules (1959).

6. The Konark is the third link of Odisha’s Golden Triangle. The first link is Jagannath Puri and the second link is Bhubaneswar (Capital city of Odisha).

7. This temple was also known as ‘BLACK PAGODA’ due to its dark color and used as a navigational landmark by ancient sailors to Odisha. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the “White Pagoda”.

8. It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the Chandrabhaga Mela around the month of February.

13. **What is co-location?**
   - Co-location allows brokers to operate closer to their servers upon payment of additional fees.
   - Co-location facility provides infrastructure such as power supply, bandwidth, and cooling for setting up servers and storage of data.
   - It helps brokers secure an advantage over others due to proximity to exchange servers as data transmission takes less time.
   - Orders reach exchange servers faster than those who have not availed of the facility.

**Context:**
The issue of co-location has come into the limelight once again in the wake of the latest order by the market’s regulator sanctioning former National Stock Exchange (NSE) MD and CEO over decisions taken by her under the alleged influence of a mysterious ‘yogi’.

14. **Samarth Ramdas:**
Several politicians from Maharashtra expressed their disapproval of remarks by state Governor B S Koshyari, that **Samarth Ramdas was the guru of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.**
   - Samarth Ramdas was also known as Sant (saint) Ramdas or Ramdas Swami.
   - He was an Indian Marathi Hindu saint, poet, philosopher, writer and spiritual master.
   - He was a devotee of Hindu deities Rama and Hanuman. He was previously famous as Narayan.
   - He was born at Jamb, which is a village in present-day Jalna district of Maharashtra.
   - **His literary works include** Karunashtakas, Dasbodh, Yuddhakand, Sunderkand, Poorvarambh, Antarbhav, Chaturthman, Aatmaaram, Panchamanch, Manpanchak, Janaaswabhawgosavi, etc.
   - Ramdas served an inspiration for several Indian thinkers, historians and social reformers from 19th and 20th-century, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Rajwade, Keshav Hedgewar, and Ramchandra Ranade.
15. Jammu to get Village defence groups:
Residents from the villages of Jammu and Kashmir will be enrolled for local defence before the delimitation process of Union Territory starts. The government has approved the village defence groups’ (VDG) formation.
- VDGs will be created so that they can respond to threats in areas where the local police presence is thin.
- Each VDG will consist of 8 to 10 members of the same rank and pay, which the government will credit to their accounts every month.
- The present system of assigning 1 or 2 special police officers with VDGs will be discontinued.
- The VDGs will also operate in parts of Kashmir valley.

16. Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which was recently in News, is located in?
- It is located in Ukraine.
- It is the largest in Europe.
- It is among the 10 largest in the world.
- It was built by the Soviet Union.
- It is located on the southern shore of the Kakhovka Reservoir on the Dnieper river.

Why in News?
Russia has seized this nuclear plant.

17. Advanced version of BrahMos missile:
The Indian Navy successfully test-fired a naval variant long-range version of the BrahMos cruise missile recently.
About BrahMos:
- Jointly developed by India and Russia.
- Extended range: 350 to 400-km.
- Speed: Flies almost three times the speed of sound at Mach 2.8.
- Types: Can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft or land.
- Nomenclature: The name BrahMos is a blend formed from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.
- Engine: First stage: Solid rocket booster; Second stage: Liquid ramjet (airbreathing jet engine).
- Significance: It is the world’s fastest Anti-Ship Cruise Missile currently in operation.
- Future plans: In 2016, as India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), India and Russia are now planning to jointly develop a new generation of BrahMos missiles with 800 Km range.

18. Northern River Terrapin:
It is a species of riverine turtle native to Southeast Asia.
IUCN Status: Critically endangered.
Habitat: Currently found in Bangladesh and India (in the Sunderbans), Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia. It is regionally extinct in Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
Context:
Experts and forest officials had installed GPS transmitters on Northern River Terrapin in Indian Sundarbans.
- In just six weeks after the release, at least three of the ten individuals have travelled hundreds of kilometers and are now in Bangladesh.
19. **Kavach:**

It is an indigenously developed technology that can prevent two trains from colliding.

- It is also called the Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), which got rechristened to Kavach or “armour”.

**How it works?**

It is a set of electronic devices and Radio Frequency Identification devices installed in locomotives, in the signalling system as well the tracks, that talk to each other using ultra high radio frequencies to control the brakes of trains and also alert drivers, all based on the logic programmed into them.

20. **HANSA-NG:**

- It is a first of its kind, indigenously developed aircraft trainer.
- Developed by the CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL).
- It has recently completed sea level trials at Puducherry, a necessary prelude to it being evaluated by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- HANSA-NG is designed to meet the need for trainer aircraft by flying clubs in India.
21. **Boltzmann medal:**
Deepak Dhar, physicist, from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, has been selected for the Boltzmann medal.
- He has become **the first Indian to win this award.**
- Boltzmann medal is awarded by the **Commission on Statistical Physics (C3)** of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics. It was initiated in 1975.
- The medal, which honours outstanding achievements in the field of statistical physics, has been given to one or two persons, once in three years.
- It is given only once to a person and on the condition that that person has not won the Nobel prize so far.

22. **Who are Houthis?**
Houthis are an armed rebel group belonging to the Zaidi Shia sect fighting against the government of Yemen. Traditionally, the Houthis have been concentrated in the northwestern Saada Province of Yemen.

23. **SLINEX:**
- The **Ninth Edition of India - Sri Lanka Bilateral Maritime Exercise SLINEX (Sri Lanka–India Naval Exercise)** is being conducted at Visakhapatnam.
- It aims to enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime operations between both navies.

Do you know about the other Exercises between India and Sri Lanka?
1. Exercise MITRA SHAKTI (Military Exercise).
2. Dosti Trilateral Exercise (Coast guard India, Maldives and Sri Lanka).

24. **Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP):**
Implemented by **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana –National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development, as a sub-scheme since 2016.**

**Focus of the scheme:** Providing self-employment opportunities with financial assistance and training in business management and soft skills while creating local community cadres for promotion of enterprises.
- **Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Ahmedabad** is the technical support partner of SVEP.
- **SVEP promotes both individual and group enterprises**, set-up and promote enterprises majorly on manufacturing, trading and service sectors.

**Who are community resource persons – enterprise promotion?**
The programme seeks to develop pool of community resource persons – enterprise promotion (CRP-EP) who are local and support entrepreneurs setting-up rural enterprises.
- The CRP-EPs are certified and provides business support services to the entrepreneurs.

**Why in News?**
The Union Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and the National Institute of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD) have signed a memorandum understanding (MoU) to develop a sustainable model for promoting entrepreneurship at the grass roots by initiating the 'start-up village entrepreneurship programme' (SVEP).

25. **International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP):**
The virtual International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP) 2022 was **hosted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) for Election Management Bodies (EMBs) from nearly 32 countries and four international organisations.**
Since the 2012 elections, India has hosted the International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP), which invites international delegates to visit polling stations and observe electoral processes.

26. “SAMARTH” Special Entrepreneurship Promotion Drive for Women:
Recently, on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2022, the Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), launched a Special Entrepreneurship Promotion Drive for Women -"SAMARTH". Under the Samarth initiative of the Ministry, following benefits will be available to aspiring and existing women entrepreneurs:
- 20% Seats in free Skill Development Programs organised under skill development schemes of the Ministry will be allocated for Women.
- 20% of MSME Business Delegations sent to domestic & international exhibitions under the schemes for Marketing Assistance implemented by the Ministry will be dedicated to women owned MSMEs.
- 20% Discount on annual processing fee on National Small Industries Corporation’s (NSIC) Commercial Schemes.
- Special Drive for registration of women-owned MSMEs under Udyam Registration.

27. PARAM Ganga:
The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) has deployed “PARAM Ganga”, a supercomputer at IIT Roorkee, with a supercomputing capacity of 1.66 Petaflops.
- The system is designed and commissioned by C-DAC under Phase 2 of the build approach of the NSM.

The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM):
It is being steered jointly by the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeiTY) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and implemented by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.
- The four major pillars of the NSM are, namely, Infrastructure, Applications, R&D, and HRD.

28. WHO Global Centre for traditional medicine:
The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO GCTM) in Jamnagar, Gujarat by signing a Host Country agreement between the Government of India and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The WHO GCTM will be established in Jamnagar under the Ministry of AYUSH.
- This would be the first and only global outposted Centre (office) for traditional medicine across the globe.

29. Nari Shakti Puraskar:
- Initiated in the year 1999.
- The awards are given away by the President of India every year on 8 March, International Women’s Day.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national level awards for eminent women, organisations and institutions.
- The Nari Shakti Puraskar carries a cash award of Rs.1 Lakh and a certificate for individuals and institutions.

Eligibility Criteria:
1. Open to individuals, groups and institutions for outstanding work towards empowerment of women.
2. Individual applicant must be at least 25 years of age.
3. Institutions must have at least 5 years of relevant experience.

Institutional categories:
Each of the six institutional categories is named after an eminent woman in Indian history.
1. Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar Award for Best Private Sector organization/ Public sector undertaking in promoting the well-being and welfare of women, named after Ahilyabai Holkar, 18th-century ruler of the Malwa kingdom.
2. **Kannagi Devi Award for Best State which has appreciably improved Child Sex Ratio (CSR),** named after Kannagi, the central character of the Tamil epic Silapathikaram.

3. **Mata Jijabai Award for Best Urban Local body for providing services and facilities to women,** named after Mata Jijabai, mother of Shivaji, who founded the Maratha Empire in the 17th century.

4. **Rani Gaidinliu Zeliang Award for Best Civil Society organization (CSO) doing outstanding work for the welfare and well-being of women,** named after Rani Gaidinliu, a 20th-century Naga spiritual and political leader.

5. **Rani Lakshmi Bai Award for Best Institution for Research & Development in the field of women empowerment,** named after Lakshmibai, one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and erstwhile queen of Jhansi.


**Context:**
On International Women's Day on Tuesday, President Ram Nath Kovind conferred the Nari Shakti Puraskars on 29 outstanding individuals for 2020 and 2021.

### 30. Dharma Guardian:
- Exercise Dharma Guardian is an annual exercise between Indian Army and Japanese Ground Self Defence Force.
- The latest edition was concluded at Belgaum recently.
- To promote military cooperation between India and Japan, the first edition of the Dharma Guardian was held at Counter Insurgency Warfare School of the Indian Army at Vairengte in November 2018.

### 31. Mankading:
- Mankading is a method of run out where a bowler dismisses a non-striker by hitting the bails before bowling when the latter is outside the crease.
- Though this is a legally permissible dismissal, it is considered against the spirit of the game. The method is named after legendary Indian bowler Vinoo Mankad.

**Why in News?**
The Marylebone Cricket Club has announced its new code of laws, under which Mankading has been made a normal mode of running out the non-striker.

### 32. Rashtriya Raksha University:
Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently dedicated to the nation the building of Rashtriya Raksha University near Gandhinagar in Gujarat.
- Rashtriya Raksha University- an institution of National Importance is established by the Indian Parliament Act.
- The University aims to become an academic-research-training ecosystem for national security and police.

### 33. Chilika lake:
The Odisha government has proposed to ban movement of mechanised fishing boats in the Mangalajodi area of the Chilika lake, an important haunt of migratory birds, to provide the winged guests an undisturbed ecosystem for six months every year.
- Mangalajodi is recognised as globally important for the conservation of birds. Migratory birds arrive there for roosting.

**About Chilika:**
- Chilika is 64 kilometres long in the north-south direction and 13.5 km wide in the east-west direction.
- The sea connected with the lake near Satapada through a shallow and narrow channel.
● The connecting channel was obstructed by shoals, sand spits and sandbars, thus restricting the outflow of water and also checking the tidal flow into the lake.
● Chilika is Asia's largest and world's second largest lagoon.
● It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent and is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals.
● In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
● Major attraction at Chilika is Irrawaddy dolphins which are often spotted off Satpada Island.
● The large Nalabana Island (Forest of Reeds) covering about 16 sq km in the lagoon area was declared a bird sanctuary in 1987.
● Kalijai Temple - Located on an island in the Chilika Lake.

34. Museum of the Future:
The Museum of the Future in Dubai was recently thrown open to the public.
● The Museum of the Future is an exhibition space for innovative and futuristic ideologies, services, and products.
● The goal of this museum is to promote technological development and innovation, especially in the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI).

35. Nutraceuticals products:
- Nutraceuticals is a broad umbrella term that is used to describe any product derived from food sources with extra health benefits in addition to the basic nutritional value found in foods.
- They can be considered non-specific biological therapies used to promote general well-being, control symptoms and prevent malignant processes.
- The term “nutraceutical” combines two words – “nutrient” (a nourishing food component) and “pharmaceutical” (a medical drug).

Context:
Aimed at providing accessible, standardised and affordable generic medicines, the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) Kendras have added nutraceuticals products, including protein powder and bar, malt-based food supplements and immunity bar for its customers.

36. International Arbitration Centre in Hyderabad:
CJI lays foundation for International Arbitration Centre in Hyderabad:
- Proposed by the International Arbitration and Mediation Centre Trust.
- IAMC-Hyderabad is India’s first arbitration centre for alternate dispute resolution.

What is Arbitration?
Arbitration is an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) procedure in which a dispute is submitted, by agreement of the parties, to one or more arbitrators who make a binding decision on the dispute. In choosing arbitration, the parties opt for a private dispute resolution procedure instead of going to court.
What is Conciliation?
Conciliation is an alternative dispute resolution instrument where parties seek to reach an amicable dispute settlement with the assistance of the conciliator, who acts as a neutral third party. It is a voluntary proceeding, where the parties involved are free to agree and attempt to resolve their dispute by conciliation.

37. Syllipsimopodi bideni:
Encouraged by his plans to address climate change and to mark the beginning of his presidency, researchers have named a newly discovered fossilized vampire squid after Joe Biden.
- **Syllipsimopodi bideni**, has been described as an exceptionally well-preserved vampyropod.
- The fossil was discovered from the Mississippian Bear Gulch Lagerstätte of Montana.
- The species possesses a gladius and ten robust arms, bearing biserial rows of suckers.

**Significance of the discovery:**
- It is the only known vampyropod to retain the ancestral ten-arm condition.
- The specimen is a completely new genus and species that dates to about 328 million years old—making it the oldest known vampyropod and extending the fossil record of the group by about 82 million years.
- This is the first and only known vampyropod to possess 10 functional appendages.

38. Gallium Nitride:
Gallium Nitride Ecosystem Enabling Centre and Incubator (GEECI) has been set up in Bengaluru.
- The facility has been jointly set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and IISc Bengaluru.
- It is aimed at establishing GaN based Development Line Foundry facility, especially for RF and power applications, including strategic applications.

**About Gallium Nitride:**
Gallium Nitride (GaN) is believed to be the second most important material after silicon for electronics chips.

**Properties of Gallium Nitride:** High heat capacity, Sensitivity to ionizing radiation is low, faster-switching speed, higher thermal conductivity and lower on-resistance.

**Applications:**
- GaN is a semiconductor commonly used in blue light-emitting diodes (LEDs).
- Gallium Nitride Technology is of strategic importance with its application in the field of 5G, space and defense.
- Gallium Nitride (GaN) plays a key role in enabling e-vehicles and wireless communication.

39. International Day to Combat Islamophobia:
- The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to proclaim March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.
- However, India expressed concern over phobia against “one religion being elevated to the level of an international day”.

40. Bahini scheme:
To be announced by the Sikkim government.
It seeks to install vending machines to provide free sanitary pads in all its 210 secondary and senior secondary government schools across the state.

- The scheme aims at providing “100 percent access to free and safe sanitary pads to secondary and senior secondary school going girls”.
- It aims to curb dropout of girls from schools and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene.
- This is the first time that a state government has taken a decision to cover all girls studying in Classes 9-12.

41. MANPADS:
The US and NATO allies are rushing arms shipments to Ukraine to help Ukrainian troops counter the Russian military’s attacks, which includes US-made Stinger Missiles, which are a type of shoulder-fired Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS).

- Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems are short-range, lightweight and portable surface-to-air missiles that can be fired by individuals or small groups to destroy aircraft or helicopters.
- They help shield troops from aerial attacks and are most effective in targeting low-flying aircrafts.
- MANPADS can be shoulder-fired, launched from atop a ground-vehicle, fired from a tripod or stand, and from a helicopter or boat.
- Range: MANPADS have a maximum range of 8 kilometres and can engage targets at altitudes of 4.5 km.

42. Phool dei:
It is celebrated in the Garhwal and Kumaun regions of Uttarakhand every year in the flowering season (March-April) for about a month.

- The local belief is that placing flowers at the doorsteps of houses for the gods will bring prosperity and blessings.
- The groups of children, known as Phoonlyari, bring flowers daily to the households and receive money and sweets in return from each family on the last day of spring.
- The festival also symbolises peace and harmony among the communities.

43. Rejuvenation Of 13 Major Rivers Through Forestry Interventions:
Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate Change and Union Minister of Jal Shakti has released the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) on Rejuvenation of thirteen Major Rivers through Forestry Interventions.

- The rivers identified for forestry interventions include Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, Luni, Narmada, Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna, and Cauvery.
- The 13 rivers collectively represent 57.45% of the geographical area of the country.
- Funded by: The project will be funded by the National Afforestation and Eco-development Board.

The river rejuvenation project seeks to achieve the following four goals:
1. Sustainable management of rivers and their landscapes.
2. Biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration.
3. Improving sustainable livelihoods.
4. Knowledge management.

44. Maternal Mortality Rate:
Kerala tops in maternal and child health, recording the lowest Maternal Mortality Ratio in the country.

- It has 30 per one lakh live births in the country. Kerala is way ahead of the national MMR of 103.

Overall, the MMR of India has declined by 10 points. It has declined from 113 in 2016-18 to 103 in 2017-19 (8.8% decline).
The country had been witnessing a progressive reduction in the MMR from 130 in 2014-2016, 122 in 2015-17, 113 in 2016-18, and to 103 in 2017-19.

**Maternal mortality** is the maternal death of a woman during pregnancy or after pregnancy, including post-abortion or post-birth periods.

45. **Daylight Saving Time (DST)**

- U.S. Senate passed a law (Sunshine Protection Act) to make daylight saving time (DST) permanent. This will scrap the practice of changing clocks forward and back twice a year.
- Daylight Saving Time (DST), also known as summertime in some countries, is a mechanism to save energy and it involves resetting the clocks.

**Benefit:**
In summer, the sun rises earlier and sets later, thus there will be more daylight hours. Thus, if the clocks are advanced in the summer months, there will be more usable hours of daylight. Hence, there will be longer evening daytime or an extra hour of daylight for activities, which ensures lower consumption of electricity and other forms of energy.
In fall or autumn, as the duration of daylight becomes shorter, clocks are set back to standard time.

46. **Dishnaak**

Dishaank is an application developed by Karnataka to ensure easy access to land records.

- The Dishaank app is developed under the **Geographical Information System (GIS) program** of the Karnataka State Remote Sensing Applications Center (KSRSAC).
- The KSRSAC provides satellite data to agencies such as the SSLR unit for innovative use.
- Dishaank leverages Karnataka’s decision to digitize land records under the Bhoomi project.
- The objective of this app is to enable citizens to avail the information about the land and its ownership as recorded in the Bhoomi database.

47. **Kamikaze drones**

- Also called Switchblade drones, these are small unmanned aircraft that are packed with explosives that can be flown directly at a tank or a group of troops that are destroyed when it hits the target and explodes.
- Weighing just five-and-a-half pounds, including its small warhead, the Switchblade can be taken into battle in a backpack and fly up to 7 miles to hit a target. They are called Switchblade because their bladelike wings spring out on launch.
- The Switchblade also has cameras that show a target seconds before impact.
- Although the Kamikaze might be the most advanced form of this genre of drones, Russia, China, Israel, Iran and Turkey all have some version of it.

48. **India’s first hydrogen-powered fuel cell electric car project**

Recently, Union Ministry for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari inaugurated a pilot project for Hydrogen-based advanced Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV).

**About the project:** Toyota Kirloskar Motor Pvt. Ltd. along with International Center for Automotive Technology (ICAT) initiated this Pilot project to study and evaluate the world’s most advanced FCEV Toyota Mirai which
The aim is to spread awareness regarding Hydrogen, Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV) technology, and disseminate the benefits to support a hydrogen-based ecosystem.

About FCEV: Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV) is powered by hydrogen. FCEV is environment-friendly, as it has zero tailpipe emissions. Thus it is one of the best zero-emission solutions.

49. First cyclone of 2022 named Asani:
- A low pressure area that formed over the southwest Indian Ocean is expected to intensify into a cyclone this week.
- The Cyclone has been named Asani. The name was suggested by India’s southern neighbour Sri Lanka.
- It is expected to travel along and off the coast of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands before it intensifies into a depression.

50. Man Booker International Prize:
Recently, Delhi-based writer Geetanjali Shree’s 2019 novel Ret Samadhi became the first Hindi work of fiction, among 13 books, to be longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize. The novel has been translated into English by painter, writer and translator, Daisy Rockwell under the title Tomb of Sand.
About the Prize:
- Man Booker International Prize is an international literary award hosted in the United Kingdom.
- The introduction of the International Prize to complement the Man Booker Prize was announced in June 2004.
- Sponsored by the Man Group, from 2005 until 2015 the award was given every two years to a living author of any nationality for a body of work published in English or generally available in English translation.
- Since 2016, the award has been given annually to a single book translated into English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland, with a £50,000 prize for the winning title, shared equally between author and translator.

51. India’s first rapid rail for Delhi to Meerut corridor:
- India’s first rapid rail for the Delhi to Meerut corridor was unveiled by the National Capital Regional Transport Corporation (NCRTC) recently.
- The Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) train will run on the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor and cover a distance of 82 km in just 55 minutes.
- It will also be the first in the country to have a business or ‘premium’ coach on a regional corridor.
52. Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary:
- Located in Tamil Nadu.
- The sanctuary was notified as RF (Reserve Forest) in 1963 under the Madras Act 1882.
- Finally in 1998, the sanctuary was notified under section 26(i) of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.
- There are about 28,000 land and water birds visiting this prestigious wetland sanctuary.
- It is home to migratory birds such as pintail, garganey, grey wagtail, blue-winged teal, common sandpiper and the like.
- It is the oldest bird sanctuary in the country.
- Vedanthangal in Tamil language means 'hamlet of the hunter'.

Why in the News?
Keeping in mind “ecological security and habitat ecology” of the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department has decided to withdraw a controversial proposal that sought to reduce the core area of the sanctuary.

53. Forest elephants:
Across the African continent the populations of both species of African elephants — forest and savanna — have been declining due to habitat loss, poaching and human-wildlife conflict.
- Forest elephants are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as “Critically Endangered” — a category for species that have declined over 80 per cent within three generations.
- And it has listed savanna elephants as “Endangered” — indicating a decline of over 50 per cent within three generations.

Forest elephants:
- It is native to humid forests in West Africa and the Congo Basin.
- It is the smallest of the three living elephant species, reaching a shoulder height of 2.4 m (7 ft 10 in).

54. World Sparrow Day:
Every year March 20 is observed as World Sparrow Day to raise awareness about the bird.
- The first World Sparrow Day was celebrated in 2010 in different parts of the world.
- The theme for this year is “Monitor the Sparrows & other common birds”.

World Sparrow Day is an initiative of the Nature Forever Society, which is a non-government organisation (NGO) run by Mohammed Dilawar, who's an internationally acclaimed conservationist.
Sparrow is a very social bird and is gregarious at all seasons when feeding, often forming flocks with other types of bird.
- House sparrows are becoming extinct everywhere, including in India. Experts say there's a need to spread awareness on their conservation.

55. Zojila tunnel:
- Zojila pass provides all-year connectivity between Srinagar valley and Leh.
- Located at more than 11,500 feet above sea level.
- Zoji La means the "mountain pass of blizzards".
- **Located in the Dras**, the pass connects the Kashmir Valley to its west with the Dras and Suru valleys to its northeast and the Indus valley further east.

56. **What are Kamikaze drones?**

These are unmanned aircraft that are part of the tranche of weapons that are being sent by the US to Ukraine to assist their fight against Russia.
- Also called **Switchblade drones**, these are small unmanned aircraft that are packed with explosives that can be flown directly at a tank or a group of troops that are destroyed when it hits the target and explodes.

57. **Boma technique:**

**Africa’s Boma technique** was undertaken at **Keoladeo National Park** in Rajasthan’s Bharatpur district recently for capturing and translocating spotted deer.
- The aim is to improve the prey base in Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve, situated 450 km away.
- The move will lead to herbivores populating the forests ahead of the proposed shifting of two tigers to Mukundara.

**What is Boma Technique?**
- The Boma capturing technique, which is popular in Africa, involves luring of animals into an enclosure by chasing them through a funnel-like fencing.
- The funnel tapers into an animal selection-cum-loading chute, supported with grass mats and green net to make it opaque for animals, which are herded into a large vehicle for their transport to another location.

58. **Bihar to become the first state to implement dynamic map to track land ownerships:**

- Bihar has become the first state in the country to introduce the concept of the dynamic map for villages.
- The dynamic map will automatically get updated, each time land ownership changes hands.
- The objective of the move is to reduce legal disputes.

59. **Ol Chiki script:**

India’s Constitution has been translated into Ol Chiki script for the first time.
- The Ol Chiki script, also known as **Ol Chemet’, Ol Ciki, Ol, and sometimes as the Santali alphabet**, is the official writing system for **Santhali**, an Austroasiatic language recognized as an official regional language in India.
• In 2003, the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act added Santhali to Schedule VIII to the Constitution of India, which lists the official languages of India, along with the Bodo, Dogri and Maitili languages. Santhals are the largest scheduled tribe in the Jharkhand state of India in terms of population and are also found in the states of Assam, Tripura, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal.

60. Mahatma Gandhi Green Triangle:  
As part of the ‘Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav’ to commemorate India’s 75th year of independence, a “Green Triangle” named after Mahatma Gandhi was jointly inaugurated in Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo.
• The green triangle highlights Gandhi’s vision regarding reducing consumerism and aiming for sustainable development.
• The word green in the plaque (a flat piece of stone or metal) signifies their commitment to sustainable development and saving the environment.

61. LAMITIYE-2022:  
• An Indian Army contingent has arrived in Seychelles for the ninth edition of the Joint Military Exercise Lamitiye 2022 between the Indian Army and Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF).
• Seychelles is an Archipelago in the western Indian Ocean, comprising about 115 islands.
• Lamitiye, which in Creole means friendship, is a biennial training event being conducted in Seychelles since 2001.
• The aim is to build and promote bilateral military relations in addition to exchanging skills, experiences and good practices between both armies.

62. Navroz:  
• Navroz is the new year celebrations for Parsis (Zoroastrians) and Muslims (both Shia and Sunni).
• It is celebrated on 21st March every year.
• In 1079 AD, a Persian (Iranian) king named Jalaluddin Malekshah introduced this festival to generate revenue and collect taxes from people.
• It was observed on March 21 to mark the beginning of spring and the day of equinox.
• It is inscribed in the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of India.
• In India it is known as Jamshed Navroz.

63. Abel Prize 2022:  
It has been awarded to Professor Dennis Parnell Sullivan.
• He was awarded the prize "For his groundbreaking contributions to topology in its broadest sense, and in particular its algebraic, geometric and dynamical aspects."
The Abel Prize is awarded annually to outstanding mathematicians.
• It was established by the Norwegian Government in 2002, and is managed by The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.
• The first Abel Prize, awarded in 2003, went to French mathematician Jean-Pierre Serre.
• The only person of Indian origin to have won this prize is Srinivasa S.R. Varadhan. He is at the Courant Institute, New York University, and won it in 2007.
• So far, the prize has gone to only one woman mathematician, Karen Keskulla Uhlenbeck of University of Texas, U.S.A.

64. Kuki tribe:  
• The Kuki people are an ethnic group native to the Mizo Hills (formerly Lushai) in Mizoram.
• In northeast India, they are present in all states except Arunachal Pradesh.
• The Kuki Rising, 1917-1919’ — also seen as the anti-colonial freedom struggle of the Kukis — was fought against the British to preserve their land. During WWII, the Kukis joined the Indian Army to fight the British again.
Demand for a separate State: The community today feels that despite never bowing to the British, their contribution in overthrowing the colonialists has never been acknowledged, rather it has left them vulnerable even after India gained Independence.

65. Doxxing:
- It is publishing and analysing others' personal information on the internet with a malicious intent that can reveal the person's real identity making them victims of harassments and cyber-attacks.

66. Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary:
- The sanctuary is a component of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (5,520 sq km) and is a vital component of the Elephant Reserve No. 7 of South India.
- It is the only sanctuary of Kerala where sightings of four-horned antelopes have been reported.
- Presence of Egyptian vulture, Himalayan griffon, and Cinereous vultures are also reported in the sanctuary and the two species of vultures, red-headed and white-backed vultures, once common in Kerala, are now restricted to the Wayanad plateau.
- The Nagarhole-Bandipur-Mudumalai-Wayanad forest complex is also one of the most important tiger habitats in the country.
- The forests of the wildlife division form the major catchments for the tributaries of the Kabini river system.

67. Manda buffalo:
- It is found in the Eastern Ghats and plateau of Koraput region of Odisha.
- The Manda are resistant to parasitic infections, less prone to diseases and can thrive on modest resources.
- The National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR) had, in 2021, recognised the Manda buffalo as the 19th unique breed of buffaloes found in India.

68. State Legislatures have power to tax lotteries organised by other states: SC:
The Supreme Court has held that a lottery conducted by Government of India, states or authorised by a state or conducted by private entities is an activity falling within the nomenclature of 'betting and gambling'.
- And hence, the State Legislature has the competence to tax lottery scheme which is gambling being conducted not only by the Government of India or the Government of any State or by any other agency or instrumentality of a particular State but also by a private entity within the State as gambling.
- Thus, the apex court allowed the appeals filed by Karnataka and Kerala governments and set aside the orders of Karnataka and Kerala High Courts which held that they lacked the legislative competence to levy tax on the lotteries.

The tax sought to be imposed by the State Legislatures of Karnataka and Kerala by way of the impugned Acts, is traceable to the power conferred on the State Legislatures under Entry 62 of List II. 
Note: The Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India defines and specifies allocation of powers and functions between Union & States. It contains three lists; i.e. 1) Union List, 2) State List and 3) Concurrent List. Originally there was 97 subjects in union list but now it is 100 subjects in union list.

69. Exports cross $400- bn annual target:
India’s annual goods exports crossed the $400 billion mark for the first time ever, buoyed by an increase in shipments of merchandise including engineering products, apparel and garments, gems and jewellery and petroleum products.
Key Drivers:
A massive rise in oil prices, across-the-board uptick in global prices of industrial commodities, a resurgent agri-sector and a higher share of manufactured goods are the main reasons behind India reaching the government’s annual export target.

Expansionary monetary policy by developed economies in response to the economic impact of the pandemic has also boosted demand for Indian exports.

70. **Dare2eraD TB:**
Union Minister of Science & Technology announced the launch of Data-Driven Research to Eradicate TB—“Dare2eraD TB” by the Department of Biotechnology, M/o Science & Technology, on the occasion of World TB Day (March 24).

**Dare2eraD TB will be the umbrella TB program of DBT comprising of following key initiatives:**
1. InTGS - Indian Tuberculosis Genomic Surveillance Consortium.
2. InTBK Hub- Indian TB Knowledge Hub- Webinar Series.
3. Host Directed therapies against TB and developing an evidence-based regimen for treating extra-pulmonary Tuberculosis.

71. **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH):**
Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das inaugurated the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH) in Bengaluru which is intended to encourage and nurture financial innovation in a sustainable manner through an institutional set-up.

- The RBI has set up hub as a wholly owned subsidiary with an initial capital contribution of ₹100 crore. The new unit has an independent board with S. Gopalakrishnan as Chairman.
- RBIH aims to create an ecosystem that focusses on promoting access to financial services and products for the low-income population in the country.

72. **INS Valsura:**
President Ram Nath Kovind recently presented the President’s Colour to INS Valsura, the Navy’s premier technological training establishment.

- The President’s Colour is bestowed on a military unit in recognition of the exceptional service rendered to the nation, both in peace and in war.
- INS Valsura, is a premier technological training institution, of the Indian Navy based in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

73. **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH):**
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor inaugurated the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH) in Bengaluru.

- It has been set up as a Section 8 company under the Companies Act, 2013 with an initial capital contribution of Rs. 100 crore.
- It is is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RBI.
- RBIH aims to create an ecosystem that focuses on promoting access to financial services and products for the low-income population in the country.

74. **H2Ooooh:**
- It was launched by UNESCO in July 2021, jointly with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and others.
- H2Ooooh! is a unique program crafted for Indian school students from Standard 1-8.

**Objectives:**

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- It aims to increase awareness about the limited availability of water, its sustainable use, its conservation, its exploitation and much more.
- It seeks to enable the students to share their own experiences and proposals for the protection of the environment.
- Divided in three phases, the project aims to spur creativity and raise awareness on water conservation and its sustainable use for students between the age of 6-14 years, by providing training and encouraging them to submit paintings and story ideas for the animated short films.

75. Rajasthan govt’s law to curb cheating in exams:
The state government has tabled The Rajasthan Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, 2022 to deter use of unfair means in public examinations with strict provisions of punishment up to 10-year imprisonment and penalties in the form of fine up to Rs 10 crore and attachment/ confiscation of property.

Need for:
- A fair and reasonable process of selection to posts, subject to the norm of equality of opportunity under Article 16 (1) of the Constitution, is a constitutional requirement.
- A fair and reasonable recruitment process is a fundamental requirement of Article 14 as well.

76. Olive Ridley Turtles:
- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- They inhabit warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- These turtles, along with their cousin the Kemps ridley turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- Rushikulya rookery coast in the Ganjam district of Odisha, Gahirmatha beach and the mouth of the Debi River, are the major nesting sites in Odisha.
- IUCN status: Vulnerable.

Every year, the Indian Coast Guard’s “Operation Olivia”, initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.

77. Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM):
- It is a high response, quick reaction, vertically launched supersonic missile, designed to neutralize enemy aerial threats – missiles, aircraft, guided bombs, helicopters.
- This MRSAM version is a Surface-to-Air Missile developed jointly by DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Israel for use by the Indian Army.

78. What is a stablecoin?
- A stablecoin is a type of cryptocurrency that is typically pegged to an existing government-backed currency.
- The majority of the dozens of stablecoins that currently exist use the dollar as their benchmark asset, but many are also pegged to other fiat currencies issued by governments like the euro and yen.
- As a result, the price of stablecoins fluctuates very little, unlike high-profile cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and ethereum that are prone to sudden ups and downs.
- Stablecoins are useful because they allow people to transact more seamlessly in cryptocurrencies that function as investments, such as Bitcoin. They form a bridge between old-world money and new-world crypto.
- The first stablecoin, created in 2014, was Tether, which many other stablecoins are modeled after.

79. Pensilungpa Glacier:
- The Pensilungpa Glacier is located in Zanskar, Ladakh.
- It is retreating due to an increase in the temperature and decrease in precipitation during winters.
- The Zanskar Range is a mountain range in the union territory of Ladakh that separates Zanskar from Ladakh.
- Geologically, the Zanskar Range is part of the Tethys Himalaya.
80. Amarnath Yatra:
- Amarnath cave is a Hindu shrine located in Jammu and Kashmir, India.
- Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims make the trek up to the shrine.
- **Location:** The cave is situated at an altitude of 3,888 m about 141 km from Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Inside the Amarnath cave, a **stalagmite** is formed due to freezing of water drops that fall from the roof of the cave on to the floor and grow up vertically from the cave floor. It is considered to be a **Shiva Linga** by Hindus.

According to a Hindu religious beliefs:
- This is the place where Shiva explained the secret of life and eternity to his divine consort, Parvati.
- The Amarnath temple is one of 18 Maha Shakti Peethas, that commemorate the location of fallen body parts of the Hindu deity Sati.

81. Kerala govt issues ‘dies-non’ order:
Hours after the Kerala High Court directed the Left administration in the state to take steps to prevent its employees from abstaining from duty as part of the two-day nationwide strike, the government has issued a **dies-non** order.
- The “unauthorised absence of employees participating in the strike will be treated as dies-non”, under **Rule 14 A of Part 1 of Kerala Service Rules**.

**What is dies-non?**
As per Rule 14 (A) of Part I of Kerala Service Rules, the period of unauthorised absence of an officer on account of participation in a strike shall be treated as dies-non (no work, no pay).

**Background:**
The strike — on March 28 and 29 — has been called by the joint platform of central trade unions against “the anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national policies” of the central government.

**What is alopecia areata?**
Alopecia areata is a condition that causes sudden hair loss in patches.
- **The condition is developed after the immune system attacks the hair follicles**, resulting in hair loss, which cannot be observed easily.
- It mostly occurs in people who have a family history of auto-immune conditions, such as diabetes and thyroid.

82. UNESCO’s City of Literature:
Kozhikode was proposed by the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) to be branded as a ‘City of Literature’ with the help of UNESCO.
- **UNESCO’s City of Literature programme** is part of the wider Creative Cities Network.
- The Network was launched in 2004, and now has member cities in seven creative fields.
The other creative fields are: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Media Arts, and Music. A city designated as ‘Creative City of Literature’ must have a sufficient number of institutions taking care of its literary life.

83. October 5 to be designated as National Dolphin Day:

- October 5th has been designated as National Dolphin Day to be celebrated every year as a historic step in creating awareness for conservation of Dolphins.
- The decision to designate a National Dolphin Day was taken by the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

For more details on Dolphins, read this.

84. The Frontier 2022 report:

The UNEP Annual Frontier Report 2022 was released recently.
- It was titled 'Noise, Blazes and Mismatches'.

Highlights of the report:
- Dhaka has been ranked as the noisiest city in the world which is followed by Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.
- Five Indian cities have been ranked in this list of being among the noisiest cities of the world which are Asansol, Jaipur, Kolkata, New Delhi, and Moradabad.
- Irbid, Jordan has been ranked as the world’s quietest city and it is followed by Lyon, France, and Madrid, Spain.

85. One-Horned Rhino:

The population of one-horned rhinoceros increased by 200 over the last four years in Assam’s Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.
- The rhino counts at Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve stood at 2613 comprising 866 males, 1049 females, 273 unsexed, 279 juveniles and 146 calves.

About Rhinoceros:
- Only the Great One-Horned Rhino is found in India.
- Also known as Indian rhino, it is the largest of the rhino species.
- It is identified by a single black horn and a grey-brown hide with skin folds.
- They primarily graze, with a diet consisting almost entirely of grasses as well as leaves, branches of shrubs and trees, fruit, and aquatic plants.

Protection Status:
1. IUCN Red List: Vulnerable.
2. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Appendix I (Threatened with extinction and CITES prohibits international trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, for instance for scientific research).

Other Conservation Efforts by India:
- The five rhino range nations (India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia) have signed a declaration ‘The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019’ for the conservation and protection of the species.
- The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has begun a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country.
- National Rhino Conservation Strategy: It was launched in 2019 to conserve the greater one-horned rhinoceros.

86. Sariska Tiger Reserve:

- Located in: This tiger reserve is located in Alwar district, Rajasthan.
- It became part of India’s Project Tiger in 1978.
- Tiger relocation: It is the first reserve in the world with successfully relocated tigers.

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● It is an important biodiversity area in the Northern Aravalli leopard and wildlife corridor.
● It is rich in mineral resources, such as
● It is a part of the Aravalli Range and the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests eco-region.

87. **P-8I:**
● Navy recently commissioned second P-8I squadron INAS 316 ‘Condors’ in Goa.
● The Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 316, will operate four P-8I aircraft procured as part of the optional clause in 2016 in a deal worth over $1 bn.
● The squadron has been named ‘Condors’, one of the largest flying land birds with a massive wingspan.

88. **India's space economy:**
● The estimated size of India's space economy, as a percentage of the GDP, has slipped from 0.26% in 2011-12 to 0.19% in 2020-21.
● In relation to GDP, India’s spending is more than that of China, Germany, Italy and Japan, but less than the U.S. and Russia.
● The Indian space sector has been globally recognized for building cost-effective satellites, launching lunar probes and taking foreign satellites to space.
● The global space economy is estimated at ~US$ 423 billion. Currently, India constitutes 2-3% of the global space economy and is expected to enhance its share to >10% by 2030 at a CAGR of 48%.

89. **Ecuador grants Legal Rights To Wild Animals:**
Ecuador, a South American country has become the first country in the world to give legal rights to wild animals.

90. **Aphasia:**
● It is a brain disorder that leads to problems with speaking, reading and writing.
● A stroke, tumor, head injury or other damage to the language centers of the brain can cause aphasia. A brain infection or Alzheimer’s disease can trigger it.

91. **Bamiyan Buddhas:**
The Taliban regime in Afghanistan has said it would protect the ancient Buddha statues in Mes Aynak, also the site of a copper mine where the Taliban are hoping for Chinese investment.
● Previously, they brought down the centuries-old Buddha statues in Bamiyan using artillery, explosives, and rockets.
● The apparent change of heart over the Mes Aynak statues seems to be driven by economic interests, with the regime in desperate need of the income Chinese investment in the copper mines could generate.

The ancient Bamiyan Buddhas:
The Bamiyan valley, in the Hindu Kush mountains and along the river Bamiyan, was a key node of the early Silk Routes, emerging as a hub of both commercial and cultural exchange.
- The Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
- They are said to date back to the 5th century AD.
- They were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.
- They were called Salsal and Shamama.
- Salsal means “light shines through the universe”; Shamama is “Queen Mother”.
- UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003.

92. Harichand Thakur:
On the occasion of the 211th birth anniversary of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the Matua community virtually, during the opening of the "Matua Dharma Maha Mela 2022". Harichand Thakur worked among the untouchable people of the Bengal presidency. He was born in 1812 in Orakandi, Bangladesh.
- The family of Thakur was Vaishnavite Hindus who founded a sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism known as Matua.
- Members of the Namasudra community adopted this, and they were then also called by the common pejorative name of Chandalas. They were considered untouchables.
- This sect opposed caste oppression and later attracted adherents from other communities that were marginalised by the upper castes, consisting of Malis and Telis.
- The followers of Thakur consider him God and also call him Thakur, an avatar of Vishnu or Krishna. Therefore, he came to be known as Sri Sri Harichand Thakur.

93. Shrinkflation:
Shrinkflation is the practice of reducing the size of a product while maintaining its sticker price.
- It is a form of hidden inflation.
- Raising the price per given amount is a strategy employed by companies, mainly in the food and beverage industries, to stealthily boost profit margins or maintain them in the face of rising input costs.
- Shrinkflation is also referred to as package downsizing in business and academic research.