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After the Communists took power in 1917 Russian Revolution and created the Soviet Union it was decided to divide Central Asia into ethnically-based republics in a process known as National Territorial Delimitation (or NTD).

This was in line with 2 things

1. **Communist theory that nationalism was a necessary step** on the path towards an eventually communist society, and
2. **Joseph Stalin’s definition of a nation** as being “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”.

Historians regard NTD as a deliberate measure by Stalin to maintain Soviet hegemony over the region by artificially dividing its inhabitants into
separate nations and with borders deliberately drawn so as to leave minorities within each state.

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- Furthermore NTD also aimed to create ‘viable’ entities, with economic, geographical, agricultural and infrastructural matters also to be taken into account and frequently trumping those of ethnicity.
- The attempt to balance these contradictory aims within an overall nationalist framework proved exceedingly difficult and often impossible, resulting in the drawing of often tortuously convoluted borders, multiple enclaves and the unavoidable creation of large minorities who ended up living in the ‘wrong’ republic.
NTD of the area along ethnic lines had been proposed as early as 1920. At this time Central Asia consisted of two Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) within the Russian SFSR:

1. The Turkestan ASSR, created in April 1918 and covering large parts of what are now southern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as Turkmenistan, and
2. The Kirghiz ASSR, which was created on 26 August 1920 in the territory roughly coinciding with the northern part of today's Kazakhstan (at this time Kazakhs were referred to as ‘Kyrrgyz’ and what are now the Kyrgyz were deemed a sub-group of the Kazakhs and referred to as ‘Kara-Kyrgyz’ i.e. mountain-dwelling ‘black-Kyrgyz’).

There were also the two separate successor ‘republics’ of the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva, which were transformed into the Bukhara
On 25 February 1924 the Politburo and Central Committee of the Soviet Union announced that it would proceed with NTD in Central Asia. The process was to be overseen by a Special Committee of the Central Asian Bureau, with three sub-committees for each of what were deemed to be the main nationalities of the region (Kazakhs, Turkmen and Uzbeks), with work then exceedingly rapidly. There were initial plans to possibly keep the Khorezm and Bukhara PSRs, however it was eventually decided to partition them in April 1924, over the often vocal opposition of their Communist Parties (the Khorezm Communists in particular were reluctant to destroy their PSR and had to be strong-armed into voting for their own dissolution in July of that year). Originally the border was much longer, as the Uzbek SSR included the Khojand region as well as the rest of what is now Tajikistan as the Tajik ASSR. The border assumed its current position in 1929, with Tajikistan gaining Khojand and becoming a full SSR. The Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast was originally within the Russia SSR in October 1924, with borders matching those of modern Kyrgyzstan. In 1925 it was renamed the Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast in May 1925, then became the Kirghiz ASSR in 1926 (not to be confused with the Kirghiz ASSR that was the first name of Kazak ASSR), and finally it became the Kirghiz SSR in 1936. The boundary became an international frontier in 1991 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of its constituent republics. There were tensions in the post-independence era over border delimitation and policing, and especially after an Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) incursion into Kyrgyzstan from Tajik territory in 1999/2000.

Source: TH
The genesis of the issue lies in World History and the disintegration of USSR. (Given below also)

The latest conflict erupted when Tajik officials attempted to mount surveillance cameras to monitor the water supply facility in Kok-Tash area amid the tensions over water distribution, and Kyrgyz residents opposed the move. Both sides began hurling stones at each other and troops quickly entered the fray.

Kok-Tash is an area which is claimed by both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which has a water supply facility. This dispute is dating back decades to when they were both part of the Soviet Union.

The current configuration of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is the product of Soviet mapmakers drawing the dividing lines for Soviet republics, after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in late 1991.

The meandering boundary between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is particularly tense as over a third of its 1,000-km length is disputed.

Restrictions on access to land and water that communities regard as theirs have often led to deadly clashes in the past.

Recent updates
A ceasefire on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan largely held on Friday following a day of intense fighting between the two ex-Soviet Central Asian neighbours that killed 39 people and wounded more than 175.

More than 7,000 Kyrgyz residents have been evacuated from the area engulfed by the fighting as troops from the two countries exchanged gunfire around a water supply facility near the village of Kok-Tash, located in western Kyrgyzstan on the border with Tajikistan.

A large part of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border remains unmarked, fuelling fierce disputes over water, land and pastures.

Prelims PT Pointers

- Capitals
  1. Kazakhstan – Nur us Sultan
  2. Uzbekistan – Tashkent.
  3. Turkmenistan – Ashgabat
  4. Kyrgyzstan – Bishkek
  5. Tajikistan – Dushanbe

- Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan borders Uzbekistan and China.
- Communism peak is a mountain between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- Issyk Kul is in Kyrgyzstan.
- Ishfara is a city in Tajikistan.
- Lake Balkash is in Kazakhstan.
- Aral Sea is shrinking and it is between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- Amu Darya and Syr Darya drain in Aral Sea.
- Ust-Urt plateau is between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- Only Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan borders Caspian sea.
- Karakum Desert is in Turkmenistan.

World History – Central Asia division

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Source: TH

Air Pollution in Delhi UPSC
Air Pollution and AQI

Context: UPSC GS Paper III – Air Pollution (Prelims – Mains – Interview)

What is the National Air Quality Index?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Code</th>
<th>AQI Value</th>
<th>Actions to Protect Your Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Good (0-50)</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Moderate (51-100)</td>
<td>Unusually sensitive people should reduce prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)</td>
<td>Sensitive groups should reduce prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors: People with heart and lung disease Children and older adults People that are active outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Unhealthy (151-200)</td>
<td>Sensitive groups should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors. Everyone should reduce prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Very Unhealthy (201-300)</td>
<td>Sensitive groups should avoid all physical activity outdoors. Everyone should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Launched in 2014 with outline ‘One Number – One Color -One Description’ for the common man to judge the air quality within his vicinity.
- The measurement of air quality is based on eight pollutants, namely:
Particulate Matter (PM10), Particulate Matter (PM2.5), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2), Sulphur Dioxide (SO2), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Ozone (O3), Ammonia (NH3), and Lead (Pb).

- AQI has six categories of air quality. These are: Good, Satisfactory, Moderately Polluted, Poor, Very Poor and Severe.
- It has been developed by the CPCB in consultation with IIT-Kanpur and an expert group comprising medical and air-quality professionals.
- It is a part of Swachh Bharat Mission. It is not for all India.
- It has 5 color coding. It takes 24 hour average.

**EPCA (Environment Pollution Control Authority)**

- It is a SC-mandated body established in 1998 under Environment Protection Act, 1986 to control Air Pollution.
- GRAP (Graded Response Action Plan) = When the concentration of pollutants reaches at a certain level, which action to take is recommended by it. It is prepared by EPCA.
- Air Quality Early Warning System is designed to predict extreme Air Pollution events and give alerts as per GRAP. It is for Delhi and Developed by IITM, Pune and National Center for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, Noida.

**Delhi’s Air Quality**

- Delhi’s air quality deteriorated from ‘moderate’ to ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’ on April 29. It will be oscillating between ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’ for the next three days, according to the SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research) system of the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- The air quality index (AQI) in Delhi was 287, an improvement from Wednesday’s 312 and Thursday’s 296.
- Delhi’s air typically worsens in October-November and improves by March-April.
- Current weather conditions are not unfavourable, unlike in winter. Hence, apart from local emissions, the deterioration in air quality is being attributed to an increase in fire counts, mostly due to burning of wheat crop stubble in northern India.

On 29 April, the estimated fire counts were 1,500, up from 1,300 a day ago.
Satellite images released by the United States National Aeronautical and Space Administration revealed high fire counts on Friday in areas like Patiala, Bhatinda, Sangrur, Jalandhar, Faridkot, Barnala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Karnal, Sonipat, Panipat, Rohtak.

Fires were also spotted Lahore, Gujranwala and Hafizabad in Pakistan.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast that the air quality would remain ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ the next few days due to transported dust and biomass-burning aerosol in the National Capital region and surroundings.

- Deteriorating air quality is worrying amid an increasing number of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and deaths. Medical experts have, from time to time, raised concerns about how high pollution levels can worsen the situation and aggravate respiratory conditions of the public.
- An official of the Haryana Pollution Control Board said the department was unable to monitor fires as it wasn’t receiving satellite data from the state’s agriculture department: “Directions to field officials have been issued but nothing can be done until we know active fire locations.”
- The delay in getting data is due to a change in remote-sensing agency. The state agriculture department and the Haryana Space Applications Centre (HARSAC) have been at loggerheads over fire data after the former said data provided by HARSAC was misleading and the fire locations were not found during field visits.
- Following this, the department decided to directly collect data through Indian Agricultural Research Institute.
- “Earlier, at least there was EPCA [Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority] that shared data with until it was dismantled. Currently, we are not being able to monitor,” the official said.
- Officials also blamed a shortage of workers to cut wheat straw and lockdown-like measures in various areas.
- In Punjab, district-level committees were monitoring stubble burning, claimed
Krunesh Garg, member-secretary, Punjab Pollution Control Board:
- “There are district level committees with different nodal officers who are supposed to visit places where such farm fires happen, based on satellite information, and impose an environment compensation / fine but so far due to COVID one or two fines have been made because there is already panic among farmers.”
- The wheat season is not followed by intensive farm fires, unlike paddy harvesting, as managing wheat stubble is comparatively easy and wheat straw is processed into cattle feed by most farmers, he added.
- Delhi should look at local emissions instead of focusing on farm fires, according to him: “Even the wind direction is not towards Delhi. So how come Punjab fires are impacting Delhi air quality?”
- According to SAFAR modeling, transport-level wind direction was not very favourable for fire-related intrusion, which has led to improvements in air quality in Delhi in the last two days.

Source: Down to Earth

Sikhism

- Guru Nanak Devji (contemporary of Babur) created a separate sect
  - Birthplace: Nankana Sahib (Pakistan). Gurudwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur, Pakistan: Guru Nanak Dev spent the last 18 years of his life. Hence Kartarpur corridor connect Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Punjab with Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Narowal district.
  - He advocated the 'Nirguna' form of bhakti. He rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims. Sikhs believe in one God. They believe they should remember God in everything they do. This is called simran. The Sikhs call their faith Gurmat. They turned to Farming. Sikhism was egalitarian in character and liberal and progressive for its age. It was secular as Guru's army had Muslim soldiers as well.
  - He advocated the 'Nirguna' form of bhakti. He rejected sacrifices,
ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims.
- He set up rules for congregational worship (Sangat) involving collective recitation.
- He appointed one of his disciples, Guru Angad, to succeed him as the preceptor (guru).
- Then Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das succeeded.
- Guru Ram Das founded Amritsar in 1577 on the land granted by Akbar.
  He started the construction of Golden Temple/Swarna mandir at Amritsar.

- Guru Arjan Singh (contemporary of Jahangir)
  - He completed the establishment of Amritsar as the Capital of Sikh world.
  - He compiled Baba Guru Nanak’s hymns along with those of his 4 successors and also other religious poets, like Baba Farid, Ravidas (aka Raidas) and Kabir, in Adi Granth Sahib in 1604. These hymns, called ‘Gurbani’, are composed in many languages.
  - Jahangir imprisoned Guru Arjan Singh Jahangir as he helped rebel prince Khusrau.
  - He led to the completion of construction of Golden temple.
  - He was acclaimed as Shaheeden-de-Sartaj.
  - He was executed by Jahangir on charges of helping prince Khusrau.

- Guru Hargobind Singh
  - He encouraged militarization of community.
  - He tried to build up an army. When Jahangir came to know, he imprisoned Guru Hargovind Singh also.
  - He led to the transformation of the Sikh Community into a Military community. He is known as “Soldier Saint”.
  - He led to the establishment of Akal Takht and fortified the Amritsar City.
  - He waged wars against Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

- Aurangzeb
  - Dara Shikoh (after battle with Aurangzeb) got support from Sikh Guru Harirai.
  - He named his son Guru Tej Bahadur as the successor who was executed by Aurangzeb. He founded Anandpur Sahib.

- Guru Gobind Singh
  - He transferred itself to the sacred scripture of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib aka the Adi Granth (First Volume), which thereafter was regarded as the sole Guru.
  - He asked the Sikhs to take up arms and established the Khalsa order (Soldier saints). Sikhism does not have priests, which were abolished by him.
  - He founded a warrior community known as Khalsa in 1699.
He introduced a new rite "Pahul".
He joined Bahadur Shah’s as a noble.
He was the last Sikh Guru in human form and he passed the Guruship of Sikhs to the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Sikh administration**
- Before Ranjit Singh, Sikhs were distributed horizontally in the form of Misls and whenever a misl conquered a new territory, it was divided among its members - from top to bottom and of course unequally.
- Ranjit Singh continued much of the Mughal administration system (including the nomenclature) and the jagir system (as much as 40% LR went to jagirs).
- He did not infringe upon power of local khaps and chiefs and even at Center he maintained a delicate balance between Punjabi nobles and non Punjabi nobles.
- Land revenue was major source of income.

**Sikhism summary**

- The word 'Sikh' in the Punjabi language means 'disciple'. Sikhs are the disciples of God who follow the writings and teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus.
- Sikhs believe in one God. They believe they should remember God in everything they do. This is called simran.
- There are over 25 million Sikhs worldwide, the great majority of them living in the Indian state of Punjab.
- The Sikhs call their faith Gurmat (Punjabi: “the Way of the Guru”). According to Sikh tradition, Sikhism was established by Guru Nanak (1469–1539) and subsequently led by a succession of nine other Gurus.
- All 10 human Gurus, Sikhs believe, were inhabited by a single spirit. Upon the death of the 10th, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the spirit of the eternal Guru transferred itself to the sacred scripture of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib (The Granth as the Guru), also known as the Adi Granth (First Volume), which thereafter was regarded as the sole Guru.
- Sikhism was well established by the time of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru. Guru Arjan completed the establishment of Amritsar as the capital of the Sikh world and compiled the first authorised book of Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth.

**Sikh Philosophy and Beliefs**

- There is only One God (Ek Onkar "Ek" is One and "Onkar" is God). He is the...
same God for all people of all religions.

- The soul goes through cycles of births and deaths before it reaches the human form. The goal of our life is to lead an exemplary existence so that one may merge with God.
- Sikhs should remember God at all times and practice living a virtuous and truthful life while maintaining a balance between their spiritual obligations and temporal obligations.
- The true path to achieving salvation and merging with God does not require renunciation of the world or celibacy, but living the life of a householder, earning an honest living and avoiding worldly temptations and sins.
- Sikhism condemns blind rituals such as fasting, visiting places of pilgrimage, superstitions, worship of the dead, idol worship etc.
- Sikhism preaches that people of different races, religions, or sex are all equal in the eyes of God. It teaches the full equality of men and women. Women can participate in any religious function or perform any Sikh ceremony or lead the congregation in prayer.
Source: IE
National Policy on Biofuels

About Ethanol:

- About 5% of the ethanol produced in the world in 2003 was actually a petroleum product.
- It is made by the catalytic hydration of ethylene with sulfuric acid as the catalyst.
- It can also be obtained via ethylene or acetylene, from calcium carbide, coal, oil gas, and other sources.
- Bio-ethanol is usually obtained from the conversion of carbon-based feedstock. Agricultural feedstocks are considered renewable because they get energy from the sun using photosynthesis, provided that all minerals required for growth (such as nitrogen and phosphorus) are returned to the land.
- Ethanol can be produced from a variety of feedstocks such as sugar cane, bagasse, miscanthus, sugar beet, sorghum, grain, switchgrass, barley, hemp, kenaf, potatoes, sweetpotatoes, cassava, sunflower, fruit, molasses, corn, stover, grain, wheat, straw, cotton, other biomass, as well as many types of cellulose waste and harvesting, whichever has the best well-to-wheel assessment.
- An alternative process to produce bio-ethanol from algae is being developed by the company Algenol.

National Policy on Biofuels-2018

The National Policy on Biofuels-2018 approved by the Government envisages an indicative target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol and 5% blending of bio-diesel in diesel by 2030.

National Policy on biofuels- salient features:

- **Categorization**: The Policy categorises biofuels as “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
- **Scope of raw materials**: The Policy expands the scope of raw material for
ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.

- **Protection to farmers**: Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

- **Viability gap funding**: With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.

- **Boost to biodiesel production**: The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

**Expected benefits:**

- **Import dependency**: The policy aims at reducing import dependency.
- **Cleaner environment**: By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.
- **Health benefits**: Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.
- **Employment Generation**: One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.
- **Additional Income to Farmers**: By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same.

**Significance of Biofuels:**
Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels. Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation.

Classification of Biofuels:

- **1st generation biofuels** are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first generation biofuel.

- **2nd generation biofuels** are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called “advanced biofuels.”

- **3rd generation biofuels** are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

Major Types of Biofuels

**Bioethanol**

- It is derived from corn and sugarcane using fermentation process.
- A litre of ethanol contains approximately two thirds of the energy provided by a litre of petrol.
- When mixed with petrol, it improves the combustion performance and lowers the emissions of carbon monoxide and sulphur oxide.

**Biodiesel**

- It is derived from vegetable oils like soybean oil or palm oil, vegetable waste
oils, and animal fats by a biochemical process called “Transesterification.”

- It produces very less or no amount of harmful gases as compared to diesel.
- It can be used as an alternative for the conventional diesel fuel.

Biogas

- It is produced by anaerobic decomposition of organic matter like sewage from animals and humans.
- Major proportion of biogas is methane and carbon dioxide, though it also has small proportions of hydrogen sulfide, hydrogen, carbon monoxide and siloxanes.
- It is commonly used for heating, electricity and for automobiles.

Biobutanol

- It is produced in the same way as bioethanol i.e. through the fermentation of starch.
- The energy content in butanol is the highest among the other gasoline alternatives. It can be added to diesel to reduce emissions.
- It serves as a solvent in textile industry and is also used as a base in perfumes.

Biohydrogen

- Biohydrogen, like biogas, can be produced using a number of processes such as pyrolysis, gasification or biological fermentation.
- It can be the perfect alternative for fossil fuel.

Ethanol Blending Policy

- With the vision to boost agricultural economy, to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuel, to save foreign exchange on account of crude oil import bill & to reduce the air pollution, Government has fixed target of 10% blending of fuel grade ethanol with petrol by 2022 & 20% blending by 2025.
- With a view to support sugar sector and in the interest of sugarcane farmers, the Government has also allowed production of ethanol from B-Heavy Molasses, sugarcane juice, sugar syrup and sugar; and encouraging sugar mills to divert excess sugarcane to ethanol.
- In previous sugar season 2019-20 about 9 LMT of sugar was diverted to ethanol. In current sugar season 2020-21, it is likely that more than 20 LMT
of excess sugar would be diverted to ethanol.

- By 2025, it is targeted to divert 50-60 LMT of excess sugar to ethanol, which would solve the problem of high inventories of sugar, improve liquidity of mills thereby help in timely payment of cane dues of farmers. In past 3 sugar seasons about Rs. 22,000 cr revenue was generated by sugar mills/distilleries from sale of ethanol to OMCs.

- To increase production of fuel grade ethanol and to achieve blending targets, the Govt of India has allowed use of maize and rice with FCI for production of ethanol.

- Government has declared that rice available with FCI would continue to be made available to distilleries in coming years.

- The extra consumption of surplus food grains would ultimately benefit the farmers as they will get better price for their produce and assured buyers; and thus will also increase the income of crores of farmers across the country.

- Government has fixed price of ethanol from maize as Rs 51.55/litre & rice available with FCI as Rs 56.87/litre for ethanol supply year 2020-21. For FY 2020-21, Government has fixed the price of FCI rice to Rs 2000/quintal for production of ethanol.

- For FY 2021-22, Government has decided to continue the price of FCI rice to Rs 2000/quintal for production of ethanol.

- This will give confidence to industry about the stability in raw material price and its availability. For the purpose of supply of surplus rice for the production of ethanol, distilleries are at liberty to choose the nearest FCI depot as per requirement/logistics.

- In current ethanol supply year (ESY) 2020-21 (December to November) to achieve 8.5% blending target, about 325 Cr ltrs ethanol is required to be supplied to OMCs.

- As on 26.04.2021, about 349 cr ltrs ethanol have been allocated by OMCs to sugar mills/distilleries, out of which contracts of about 302 cr ltrs have been signed by distilleries &124 cr ltrs have been supplied. Efforts are being made by DFPD &MoPNG / OMCs to ensure achievement of blending target. Also, in next ESY 2021-22, it is likely to supply more than 400 cr ltrs of ethanol to OMCs to achieve 10 % blending.

- With a view to increase existing capacities further, DFPD has notified modified interest subvention scheme on 14.01.2021 for setting up new grain-based distilleries/ expansion of existing grain-based distilleries, dual feed distilleries & molasses-based distilleries to produce ethanol & production of ethanol from other 1G feed stocks. 422 proposals with a capacity of 1684 cr
Itrs for a loan amount Rs. 42000 crore have been approved by DFPD. It is expected that from the proposals approved, more than 600 cr ltrs may come up in next 2 to 4 years. Thus, the ethanol distillation capacity from these projects and ongoing projects may reach to 1500 cr ltrs by 2024-25 which would be sufficient to achieve 20% blending target.

- **Sugarcane and ethanol is produced mainly in three states viz Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka**: Transporting ethanol to far flung States from these three states involves huge transportation cost.
- By bringing new grain based distilleries in the entire country would result in distributed production of ethanol and would save a lot of transportation cost and thus prevent delays in meeting the blending target & would benefit the farmers across the country.
- For production of ethanol, there is sufficient availability of feed stocks; & Govt. has also fixed remunerative prices of ethanol derived from various feed stocks. Moreover, OMCs being the assured buyer for ethanol has given comfort for purchase of ethanol from distilleries for next 10-15 years.
- Hence, these ethanol projects are viable. Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change has also streamlined the process of getting environment clearance (EC) for ethanol projects. Department of Financial Services and State Bank of India have also issued Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for sanctioning and disbursal of loans for ethanol projects which would expedithe sanctioning and disbursal of loans.
- Production of ethanol would not only facilitate diversion of excess sugar to ethanol but would also encourage farmers to diversify their crops to cultivate particularly maize/corn which needs lesser water.
- It would enhance production of ethanol from various feed stocks thereby, facilitate in achieving blending targets of ethanol with petrol and would reduce import dependency on crude oil, thereby, realizing the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- It will also enhance income of farmers as setting up of new distilleries would not only increase demand of their crops but would assure farmers of getting better price for their crops.

Source: PIB
Positron and Antimatter

What is Matter?

- Matter is made up of atoms, which are the basic units of chemical elements such as hydrogen, helium or oxygen.
- **Atoms** are the basic units of matter and the defining structure of elements. Atoms are made up of three particles: **Protons, Neutrons and Electrons**.

What is Antimatter?

- Antimatter is the opposite of normal matter.
- More specifically, the sub-atomic particles of antimatter have properties opposite those of normal matter.
- So atoms in the anti matter are made of subatomic particles which have opposite characteristic as of Electrons also known as Anti Electrons or **Positrons**.
- Positron is a subatomic particle whose mass is the same as that of an electron and numerically equal but positively charged particle. The positron was discovered in 1932.
What is in the news?

- Over the years astronomers have observed an excess of positrons (or the antimatter counterpart of the electron) having an energy of more than 10 giga-electronvolts, or 10 GeV. For an estimate, this is the energy of a positively charged electron accelerated across a 10,000,000,000 volt battery!
- Positrons with energy more than 300 GeV, however, are lower in comparison to what astronomers expect.
- This behaviour of positrons between 10 and 300 GeV is what astronomers call the ‘positron excess’.
- Researchers from the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bengaluru, an autonomous institution of the Department of Science and Technology have resolved the mystery in a new study published in the Journal of High Energy Astrophysics.
- Cosmic rays are atom fragments that rain down on the Earth from outside of the solar system. They blaze at the speed of light and have been blamed for electronics problems in satellites and other machinery. They were Discovered in 1912.

What is the explanation?

- Their proposal is simple — cosmic rays while propagating through the Milky Way galaxy interact with matter producing other cosmic rays, primarily electrons and positrons.
- The authors Agnibha De Sarkar, Sayan Biswas and Nayantara Gupta argue that these new cosmic rays are the origin of the ‘positron excess’ phenomenon.
- The Milky Way consists of giant clouds of molecular hydrogen.
- They are the seats of the formation of new stars and can be as massive as 10 million times the Sun’s mass.
- They can extend up to 600 light-years, the distance that would take light 600 years to travel.
- Cosmic rays produced in supernovae explosions propagate through these clouds before they reach the Earth.
- Cosmic rays interact with molecular hydrogen and can give rise to other cosmic rays.
- As they propagate through these clouds, they decay from their original forms and intermix, lose their energy by energising the clouds, and may also get re-energised.
- The researchers from RRI studied all these astrophysical processes via a code they set up on the computer, using a publicly available code.
The code considers 1638 molecular hydrogen clouds in the Milky Way that other astronomers have observed across different wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum.

“We have followed three different catalogues to construct a comprehensive one,” explains Agnibha De Sarkar, PhD student at RRI and one of the authors of the study.

The combined catalogue consists of ten molecular clouds in the immediate neighbourhood of our Sun. These galactic clouds provide the astronomers a crucial img — the number of giga-electronvolt cosmic rays. These help them determine the excess number of positrons that reach the Earth.

The computer code the researchers used, by taking into account the exact number of nearby galactic molecular clouds, was successfully able to reproduce the observed number of positrons at giga-electronvolt energies.

“We consider all mechanisms via which cosmic rays interact with the molecular clouds to show that nearby molecular clouds can be a viable contributor to the positron excess phenomenon,” said Agnibha De Sarkar.

Not only the positron excess, the computer code accurately reproduces the spectra of protons, antiprotons, boron, carbon, and all other components of cosmic rays.

“Our method explains all the observed numbers without running into any contradiction,” said Agnibha De Sarkar, comparing it with the currently available explanations invoking pulsars that run into contradictions.

Nevertheless, the researchers considered simple geometrical structures of the molecular clouds, whereas real molecular clouds have complex geometries. They plan to address these shortcomings in their future work.

“Along with a more realistic environment inside the molecular clouds, we plan to include more cosmic ray data from other satellites to establish our idea beyond any doubt,” he pointed out.

Source: PIB
What is an Earthquake?

- A fault is the sharp break in the crustal rocks. When lithospheric plates move, the surface of the Earth vibrates (release of Energy and the Energy waves travel in all directions). Earthquake is the sudden release of the Energy in Earth’s crust that creates seismic waves.
- **Energy accumulation site** is identified with deformed rocks caused by tension or compression.
- The subterranean spot at which rocks begin to shift/rupture is **Focus or Hypocenter of Earthquake**, whereas the point vertically over the Focus is **Epicenter**, which experiences the 1st waves and the greatest damage which decreases as we go outwards.
- The waves generated by an Earthquake are called seismic waves recorded by an instrument **Seismograph**. The magnitude (Energy that is released) of the Earthquake is measured by **Richter Scale** whereas the intensity (Damage caused) is measured by **Mercalli Scale**.
- During Earthquake, the rocks in the path of P waves get compressed/expanded in the direction of propagation so it affects their volume rather than shape. In case of S waves, it changes the shape and not volume.
- Earthquakes are by far the most unpredictable and highly destructive of all...
Earthquakes that are of tectonic origin have proved to be the most devastating and their area of influence is also quite large than other causes.

Body Waves

Body waves are generated due to focus of the Earth and move through the body / interior of Earth in all directions.

- **Primary (P) waves:**
  1. They are longitudinal waves so can pass through both solids and liquids.
  2. They travel parallel to the direction of wave thus it creates density difference in the material leading to stretching and squeezing of the material.
  3. Also as the density of medium increases their velocity also increases. But they travel slowly through liquids, so at the depth of 2900 km, they reach liquid molten core so their velocity reduces.
  4. As they reach inner core (which is a solid) their velocity increases again. They are similar to sound waves.

- **Secondary (S) waves:**
1. They are transverse waves so can't pass through liquids.
2. They travel perpendicular to the direction of wave thus it creates crests and troughs.
3. They travel to a depth of 2900 km after which they get deflected since they reach outer core which is liquid.

Surface Waves

- The body waves interact with the surface rocks and generate a new set of waves which move along the surface, thus called Surface waves.

Love (L) waves

- They are surface waves and don't go deeper into the earth. The travel perpendicular to the direction of propagation.
- L waves are most destructive. In L waves movement of particles takes place in the horizontal plane only but @ 90° to the direction of propagation of the wave.
- L waves move like a Snake. The surface waves get significantly amplified when they pass through a soft ground like alluvial deposits.
- There is compression and rolling over of soft alluvial deposits which is
called liquefaction.

**Raleigh (R) waves:**

- R waves are analogous to sea waves i.e. movement of particles takes place in the vertical plane. L waves are faster than R waves so the sequence of arrival is PSLR.

### Causes of Earthquakes

- **Plate Movements:** Ex. Himalayan region having C-C convergence.
- **Faulting and Folding:** Ex. Bhuj & Latur earthquake.
- **Volcanic Eruptions.**
- **Gaseous Expansion and Contraction inside the Earth**
- **Hydrostatic pressure** (Ex. Reservoir induced) Ex. Koyna Dam Earthquakes in MH.
- **Anthropogenic Causes:** Mining & drilling.

### Types of Earthquakes
Tectonic EQs: Most common. Generated due to sliding of rocks along fault lines.

Volcanic EQs: A special class of Tectonic EQ confined to the areas of volcanoes.

Induced EQs: Occurs in the areas of large reservoirs.

Distribution of Earthquakes in the World

- Tectonic EQs: Most common. Generated due to sliding of rocks along fault lines.
- Volcanic EQs: A special class of Tectonic EQ confined to the areas of volcanoes.
- Induced EQs: Occurs in the areas of large reservoirs.
The World's distribution of Earthquakes coincides very closely with that of volcanoes. 

~70% of Earthquakes occur in Circum pacific belt. ~20% occur in Mediterranean- Himalayan belt including Asia Minor, Himalayas and parts of North west China. Elsewhere Earth's crust is relatively stable and is less prone but not immune to earth tremors.

Earthquake prone areas in India
The entire region covering fourteen states (located in western and central Himalayas, northeast, and parts of Indo-Gangetic basin) is highly prone to earthquakes. Some of the most vulnerable states are J&K, HP, UK, SK and Darjeeling, all NE states.
The hilly regions are also prone to earthquake-induced landslides. The other seismically active regions of the country include the Gulf of Khambhat and Rann of Kutch in Western Gujarat (1819, 1956, 2001), parts of peninsular India like MH (1967, 1993), the islands of LD and A&N.

Impacts of Earthquake

1) Impact on ground:
   - Slope instability and Landslides or Avalanches (often cause obstructions in
the flow of rivers and channels resulting in the formation of reservoirs).
- Liquefaction, Fires in some areas, Deformation on ground surface.
- Fissures on the upper layers of the earth’s crust through which water and other volatile materials gush out, inundating the neighbouring areas.
- Sometimes, rivers also change their course causing floods and other calamities in the affected areas.

2) Impact on

- **manmade infrastructure**: Damage to settlements, infra, industries.
- **On water**: Flash floods, Tsunamis (waves generated by tremors and not an EQ), Hydro-Dynamic Pressure.
- **On Biodiversity**: Loss of human and animal lives, Robs the population of their material and socio-cultural gains that they have preserved over generations. It renders them homeless, unemployed, increases poverty.

**Earthquake Disaster Management**:

- In our present state of knowledge, earthquakes can neither be prevented nor predicted in terms of their magnitude, or place and time of occurrence. Also, unlike other disasters, the damages caused by it are more devastating.
- So, the most effective measures of risk reduction are pre-disaster mitigation, preparedness & preventive measures. Since it also destroys transport and communication links, providing timely relief to the victims becomes difficult. Hence the above methods should be combined w expeditious & effective rescue and relief actions immediately after the occurrence of the earthquake.
- Establishing earthquake monitoring centers for regular monitoring and fast dissemination of information among the people in the vulnerable areas. Use of GPS can be of great help in monitoring the movement of tectonic plates.
- Preparing a vulnerability map of the country and dissemination of vulnerability risk information among the people.
- Educating the people about the ways and means minimizing the adverse impacts of disasters.
- Modifying the house types and building designs in the vulnerable areas and discouraging construction of high-rise buildings, large industrial establishments and big urban centers in such areas.
- Finally, making it mandatory to adopt earthquake-resistant designs and use light materials in major construction activities in the vulnerable areas.

Source: Aspire IAS Notes, NCERTs
Jal Jeevan Mission

- JJM is a flagship programme of the Union Government being implemented in partnership with the States with the objective to provide tap water connection in every rural household by 2024.
- The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water and will include extensive Information, Education and communication as a key component of the mission.
- The Mission was launched on August 15, 2019.
- Under Jal Jeevan Mission, in 2021-22, in addition to Rs 50,011 Crore budgetary allocation, there is also Rs 26,940 Crore assured fund available under the 15th Finance Commission tied-grant to RLB/ PRIs for water & sanitation, matching State share and externally aided as well as State funded projects.
- Thus, in 2021-22, more than Rs. 1 lakh Crore is planned to be invested in the country on ensuring tap water supply to rural homes.
- JJM focuses on development of Village Action Plan (VAP) and formation of Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) for every village so that the local village community plays a key role in planning, implementation as well as operation and maintenance of the in-village water supply infrastructure created for them.
- This ensures bottom-up approach with the participation of the local community.
- Through community engagement, the resources created in the villages/habitations are handed over to the Panchayats or VWSC for monitoring, surveillance and upkeep.
- Under JJM, water quality testing laboratories at district & State levels are given priority and community is being encouraged for surveillance of water quality.
- ‘Jal Shakti Vibhag’ is facilitating to empower and engage with the community.

The broad objectives of the Mission are:

- To provide FHTC to every rural household.
To prioritize provision of FHTCs in quality-affected areas, villages in drought-prone and desert areas, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) villages, etc.

To provide functional tap connection to Schools, Anganwadi centres, GP buildings, Health centres, wellness centres and community buildings.

To monitor functionality of tap connections.

To promote and ensure voluntary ownership among local community by way of contribution in cash, kind and/or voluntary labour (shramdaan).

To assist in ensuring sustainability of water supply system, i.e. water source, water supply infrastructure, and funds for regular O&M.

To empower and develop human resource in the sector such that the demands of construction, plumbing, electrical, water quality management, water treatment, catchment protection, O&M, etc. are taken care of in short and long term.

To bring awareness on various aspects and significance of safe drinking water and involvement of stakeholders in manner that make water everyone's business.

The following components are supported under JJM

- Development of in-village piped water supply infrastructure to provide tap water connection to every rural household.
- Development of reliable drinking water sources and/or augmentation of existing sources to provide long-term sustainability of water supply system.
- Wherever necessary, bulk water transfer, treatment plants and distribution network to cater to every rural household.
- Technological interventions for removal of contaminants where water quality is an issue.
- Retrofitting of completed and ongoing schemes to provide FHTCs at minimum service level of 55 lpcd.
- Greywater management.
- Support activities, i.e. IEC, HRD, training, development of utilities, water quality laboratories, water quality testing & surveillance, R&D, knowledge centre, capacity building of communities, etc.
- Any other unforeseen challenges/ issues emerging due to natural disasters/calamities which affect the goal of FHTC to every household by 2024, as per guidelines of Ministry of Finance on Flexi Funds.

Source: PIB
Goods and Service Tax

- Through 101st Amendment Act guided by Art 301 Govt introduced GST includes both Goods and Services
- Art 279 A is introduced to make GST workable. Enforced from 1 July 2017.
- Exceptions
  1. Except Alcohol and Electricity all items included.
  2. 5 Petroleum products are temporarily out of GST (to control losses to the State): Crude Oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and Natural Gas.
- **GST Council**
  1. Constitutional Body. Responsible for Tax rates, listing of items and any dispute resolution among States and provide participation of all States and UTs.
  2. Headed by FM. Represented by FM of States. Vice Chairperson from respective State FM.
  3. Voting: 2/3rd State and 1/3rd Center. Decision is based on majority voting.
  4. Quorum = 50% and Majority = 75% members present.
- It preserves Principle of Cooperative Federalism. But if Tax rates are decided States have no autonomy to modify it which goes against Cooperative Federalism.
- GST tried to provide Single Tax for supply of all goods and services (solved problem of multiple taxation).
- It is a destination based tax (opposite of VAT) guided by 1 Tax 1 Nation 1 Market to decrease cascading effect and decrease cost of production and increase export and control inflation.
- GST is based on IT technology hence minimum interface between tax official and citizens.
- It is a part of Ease of Doing Business by doing away with multiple taxation, multiple filling and multiple compliance. Now all firms can file same tax, get GST number to get the benefit of Input Tax Credit.

For PAN India Company a person should take different GST number in different States because State has State GSTs.

**Taxes subsumed under GST**

1. Central Taxes = Excise Duty (Medicinal and Toiletry Goods), Additional Duties of Excise (Goods of special importance), Additional Custom Duties, Special Additional Custom duties, Service Tax, Central
Surcharges and Cess.


Provisions of GST

1. As it is a Destination Based Tax, Chances is that UP Govt (Destination State) can earn more GST than Maharashtra which is manufacture state. Hence Govt came up with Cess @ 15% on more luxurious goods to compensate lossmaking states at 15% over peak rate of 28% but at times the effective rate is < 40%. Hence, effective rate of cess is 12%.
2. Exemption limit in plain area increased from 20 to 40 lakh rs. and in Northeast and Hilly regions, increased from 10 to 20 lakhs.
3. Govt introduced GST Composition Scheme:
   1. If a Trader, manufacturer and restaurant; if annual turnover <= 1.5 crore then the Trader and Manufacture must pay 1% of GST and Restaurant can pay 5% of GST. But they are not eligible for img tax credit mechanism.
   2. In service sector 18% is GST but if any enterprise has turnover of 50 lakhs then you can pay 6% They are not eligible for img tax credit off. Under it Center and State share is 50:50.
4. 4 Types of GST: CGST, SGST, UTGST and IGST imposed on imported goods or custom duties and interstate trade distributed to state as per FC recommendations.
5. Rates
   1. 0% = Essential goods. Unbranded. Unpacked. Export and supplies to SEZ are 0 rated.
   2. 5% = Packed essential goods. Branded. Important for consumption of masses.
   3. 12% = Daily health and hygiene. Basic Raw material for industries, few construction items (except Cement).
   4. 18% = Majority services.
   5. 28% = Luxury goods and Cement.
   6. Separate rate for precious metals = 3% and semi precious stones = 0.25%.
   7. For administrative convenience, if a Business have turnover < 1.5 crore 90% belongs to State and 10% = Central. But if Business > 1.5 crore turnover then Centre: State share has 50:50.
8. Now J&K is also a part of GST.
5. Exceptions
• Except Alcohol and Electricity all items included.
• 5 Petroleum products are temporarily out of GST (to control losses to the State): Crude Oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and Natural Gas.

6. Input Tax Credit Off of State GST will be adjusted from State GST.
7. e-filing of returns from e-payment, netbanking, RTGS.
8. Refund of taxes to be sought by taxpayers or any other person is within 2 years time period from date.
9. Self assessment of tax payable by registered person provided by audit and he should comply provisions.
10. Formation of advanced ruling authority in every State to enable tax payers to seek a binding clarity on taxation matter, Center should adopt such authority.
11. GST Appellate Tribunal = Head Commissioner Level to solve disputes relating to GST amount.
12. Anti Profiteering Clause: To ensure that benefit of GST and Input Tax credit off can pass to consumers like Monetary Transmission of RBI.
13. 3 Tier Structure

1. Standing Committee on Anti Profiteering
2. Screening Committee at State Level
3. NAPA: (National Anti Profiteering Authority) to ensure that benefits that occur to entities due to decreased cost are passed on to customers. Entities that hike prices to get profits will be checked.

14. They will 1st identify business and ask him to comply. They can ensure payment of compensation to consumers at 18% from date of imposing high prices. If they do not accept, they can cancel its licence.

Source: TH
Myanmar, aka Burma, is a country in South East Asia. It neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India. Myanmar is a diverse country, with the state recognizing more than one hundred ethnic groups. Forming roughly two-thirds of the population, ethnic Burmans, known as the Bamar, have enjoyed a privileged position in society and hold a majority of government and military positions. Many ethnic minority groups, on the other hand, have faced systemic discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities and development in their regions, minimal representation in government, and abuses at the hands of the military. Since independence, discrimination has been ingrained in Myanmar’s laws and political system. Anti-Muslim sentiment has also been on the rise in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. (Rohingya crisis) Buddhist extremists, who promote the supremacy of Buddhism, have attacked Muslims and spread hate speech.

Historical Background for Myanmar

- The country gained independence from Britain in 1948. Since then, Myanmar has been ruled by a military junta.
- The Union of Burma began as a parliamentary democracy, like most of its newly independent neighbors on the Indian subcontinent. But representative democracy only lasted until 1962, when General U Ne Win led a military coup and held power for the next 26 years.
- By 1988, widespread corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar’s currency, and food shortages led to massive student-led protests. But it was crushed by the army. In the aftermath of the 1988 crackdown, Ne Win resigned as chairman of his party, although he remained active behind the scenes as another military junta took power.
- The new ruling military changed the country’s name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital to Nay Pyi Taw, a city it built-in central Myanmar.
- In 2007, the Saffron Revolution, widespread anti-government protests that were sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-colored robes worn by participating Buddhist monks—and international pressure prompted shifts in Myanmar.
- The junta pushed forward a new constitution in 2008, which is still in
The military junta unexpectedly officially dissolved in 2011 and established a civilian parliament for a transitional period, during which former army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed president. In 2015, Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty elections—considered to be the freest and fairest elections in decades—since the country’s transition away from military rule.

Suu Kyi became Myanmar’s de facto leader in 2015.

What is the news?

- General Min Aung Hlaing led a Military coup in February 2021.
- By arresting President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the rest of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership, and declaring military rule under a state of emergency for at least a year, General Min Aung Hlaing has made it clear that it is the military that is in charge, and he is not particularly concerned about the opposition to or condemnation of the move.

What led to 2021 Military coup?

- In 2020, Myanmar held its second national elections under civilian rule, which Ms Suu Kyi’s NLD party overwhelmingly won.
- The military suffered a major blow in the elections: the USDP won just 33 of 476 available seats, while the NLD won 396.
- The immediate reason for the coup was that the newly elected National Assembly was due to meet in Naypyidaw, despite the Tatmadaw’s (Army’s) claims that the November general elections had several irregularities, and its contestation of the NLD’s landslide victory.
- Ms. Suu Kyi had refused to bow to Gen. Hlaing’s demand that the results, which also saw the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party with a reduced strength in Parliament, be set aside.
- Clearly, the Army, which still nominates a fourth of the parliamentary seats and retains the important Defence, Borders and Interior portfolios, felt it was better to dismiss the NLD government before it increased its clout.
- Gen. Hlaing is due to retire this year, and it is possible that the move was meant to extend his longevity in power.
- Backed by a silent Beijing, the junta leadership may also have gambled that it was better to take drastic action against the democratic leaders before the new U.S. administration finds its feet.
Role of Aung Suu Kyi

1. The return to Army rule was also helped to some extent by Ms. Suu Kyi, who came to office in 2015, but has lost opportunities to put her country more firmly on the road to democracy. **She has accepted a dual power system in the state.**
2. Daw Suu, as she is known, has also failed to bring democracy to her party, and been criticised for her autocratic style.
3. Her refusal to rein in the Generals when the Tatmadaw unleashed a pogrom on the Rohingya between 2016-17, had lost the Nobel Peace laureate much international support.

Impact on India

- The crisis had its spillover impacts on the borders as well.
- At least 300 Myanmarese, including police officers, are estimated to have since crossed into India.
- Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga took up the issue with the Foreign Minister and India has shut the border for now, but it would be difficult for New Delhi to turn a blind eye to the border if the situation in Myanmar turns worse.

PT Pointers for India- Myanmar

- Biggest Ethnic Population- **Bamar people**
- Has been ravaged by Extremely Severe Cyclone **Nargis** in the past
- **Kyaukphyu port** in Myanmar is being developed by China as part of Belt & Road Initiative
- India & Myanmar are doing multimodal **Kaladan** project that connects India’s North East border with Myanmar's **Sittwe** Port.

India’s Stand

- India had cultivated a careful balance, between nudging along the democratic process by supporting Ms. Suu Kyi, and working with the military to ensure its strategic interests to the North East and deny China a monopoly on Myanmar’s infrastructure and resources, the developments are unwelcome.
- India expressed “deep concern” over the reports of an unfolding military
India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar.

The country believes that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld.

India had shown a commitment to building robust relationships with Myanmar over the past two decades which intensified after the democratic process began in 2011.

India has sealed its border to Myanmar: click here for further news.

Click here for the Jakarta Summit – Myanmar and ASEAN after coup.
Justice Prafulla Chandra Pant, a former Supreme Court judge, has been appointed the Acting Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) with effect from April 25, the commission said on Monday. Justice Pant was appointed a member of the NHRC on April 22, 2019.

The post of Chairperson has been vacant since the former Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu completed his tenure on December 2.

National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commission, 1993

What is the news?

- The Calcutta High Court has directed the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to constitute a committee to examine complaints of post-poll violence in West Bengal.
- A Bench of five judges directed that the committee “shall examine all the cases, and maybe by visiting the affected areas, and submit a comprehensive report to this court about the present situation”.
- The court asked the committee to suggest “steps to be taken to ensure confidence of the people that they can peacefully live in their houses and also carry on their occupation or business to earn their livelihood”. The order, issued on June 18, directed that “the persons prima facie responsible for crime and the officers who maintained calculated silence on the issue be pointed out”.

NHRC and SHRC, 1993

- Both are Statutory Autonomous bodies established under Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- It is the watchdog of Human Rights in India. They are Rights w.r.t. Life, Liberty, Equality & dignity guaranteed by Constitution or of International Covenants. Accordingly 25 States have constituted SHRCs through official Gazette Notifications.
**NHRC**

1. **Composition** of NHRC: Chairman, 4 members and 4 Ex-officio members.
2. **Qualifications** for NHRC:
   1. Chairperson should be a Retd. CJI and
   2. Members should be Serving or Retired Judge of SC, a Serving or Retd CJHC and 2 persons having practical experience of Human Rights.
3. **4 Ex-officio members** are Chairmen Of National Commission of Minorities, SCs, STs, Women.
4. **Appointment** by Prez on the recommendations of a 6 member Committee: PM as its head, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Leader of Opposition in both Houses of Parliament and Home Minister.

**SHRC**

1. **Composition** of SHRC: Chairperson & 2 members.
2. **Qualifications** for SHRC:
   1. Chairperson should be a Retd. CJHC and
   2. Members should be serving or Retd. Judge of HC or Dist Judge in the State for > 7 years’ experience and having knowledge or practical experience of human rights.
3. **Appointment by Gov (but removal by Prez)** on the recommend of a Committee consisting of CM as its head, Speaker of Legislative Assembly, State Home Minister and Leader of Opposition of Legislative Assembly. If State has LC, then the committee also has Chairman of LC and Leader of Opposition of LC. Further, a sitting JoHC or a sitting Dist Judge can be appointed only after consultation of CJHC of the State concerned.

- **Tenure (of both NHRC & SHRC): 5 years or 70 years** whichever is earlier. **Not eligible for further Employment** under Center or States.
- **Removal (of both NHRC & SHRC) by Prez**: (Same as of UPSC, CVC, CIC) Removal is done only by Prez under the following conditions:
  1. If he has gone bankrupt or if, according to Prez, he is of unsound mind or if he is involved in paid employment outside the duties of office.
  2. Prez can also remove her in case of Misbehavior or incapacity (defined in Constitution), Prez refers this matter to SC. SC’s decision is binding on Prez. Then he may remove. During the
course of enquiry by the SC, Prez can suspend them.

- The salary, allowances & service conditions are determined by C / S govt & can’t be varied to his disadvantage post appointment.

**Functions of Both:**

1. To strengthen the institutional arrangements through which human rights could be addressed in their entirety and in a more focused manner.
2. To inquire into any violation of Human Rights, either *suo motu* or on a petition presented to it or an order of a Court. **SHRC can only enquire into matters related w State List or Concurrent List** of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution. However if any such cases is enquired by NHRC or any other Statutory Commission, then SHRC doesn’t inquire into that case.
3. To intervene in any proceeding involving allegation of violation of Human rights pending before a Court.
4. To **visit jails or detention places**, study the living conditions of inmates and make recommendations.
5. To review the Constitution and legal safeguards for the protection of HRs and make recommendations.
6. To review the factors including acts of terrorism that inhibit the enjoyment of rights and recommend remedial measures.
7. To spread human rights literacy and encourage the efforts of NGOs working in this direction.
8. To study **treaties and international agreements** on Human Rights and make recommendations.
9. To undertake and promote research in the field of Human Rights.
10. To undertake such other functions as it may consider necessary for the promotion of human rights.

**Working:**

1. *It can’t by itself punish the guilty*. That is the responsibility of courts. It makes independent and credible enquiry into any case of violation of human rights. Also if any govt officer neglects.
2. It regulates its own procedure. It has all the powers of a **Civil Court** and its proceedings have a judicial character. **It may call for info or reporty from C & S govs or any subordinate authority.**
3. The NHRC has its own nucleus of working staff for investigation. Besides, it is empowered to utilize the services of any officer or investigating agency of C or S govt. It has also established effective coop with NGOs with 1st hand info about HR violations.
4. It can only look into the matter of violation **within 1 year of its occurrence** and not after that.
5. After enquiry, It may recommend the concerned government or authority
1. To make payment of compensation or damages to the victim.
2. The initiation of proceedings or any other action against the guilty public servant.
3. For the grant of immediate interim relief to the victim.
6. It may approach the SC or HC concerned for the necessary directions, orders and writs.
7. It can summon witnesses, question any govt official, demand any official paper, visit any prison for inspection or send its own team for on the spot inquiry.

**Criticisms:**
1. It has no power to punish the violators of Human Rights nor can it provide any relief to the victim.
2. The functions are mainly recommendatory in nature. Not binding. But it should be informed about the action taken on its recommendations within 1 month.
3. The Commission has a limited role, powers and jurisdiction wrt violation of human rights by the member of Armed forces. In this sphere NHRC may seek a report from Govt and make recommendations. Center has to inform on actions taken within 3 months.
4. Yet the govt considers cases forwarded by it. It is therefore improper to say that the Commission is powerless. It enjoys great material authority and no govt can ignore its recommendations.
5. NHRC submits its annual report to Central govt and State govt concerned. SHRC submits to State govt.

**Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 also provides for the establishment of Human Rights Courts:**
1. Acc to the act, HRC can be est in every district for speedy trial of violation of Human Rights.
2. These Courts can be set up by the State govt only w the concurrence of concerned CJHC.
3. For every HRC, State govt specifies a public prosecutor or appoints an advocate (practice > 7 years) as a special public prosecutor.

4. **Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2006**
   1. NHRC can undertake visits to jails even without intimation to State Govt.
   2. Chariman and members of NHRC resign to Prez, and SHRC resign to Guv.
   3. NHRC can transfer complaints received by it to SHRCs.
About OPEC

- It is an intergovernmental organization of 13 nations, founded in 1960 in Baghdad by the first five members (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela). HQ is in Vienna, Austria.
- It aims to manage the supply of oil in an effort to set the price of oil in the world market, in order to avoid fluctuations that might affect the economies of both producing and purchasing countries.
- The current OPEC members are the following:
  1. South America: Venezuela (Ecuador left).
  3. Asia: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia (the De facto leader).
- Former OPEC members are Ecuador, Indonesia and Qatar.
- OPEC membership is open to any country that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.
- They have an estimated 44% of global oil production and 81.5% of the world's "proven" oil reserves. India sources about 86% of crude oil, 75% of natural gas and 95% of LPG from OPEC member nations.
- A larger group called OPEC+ was formed in late 2016 to have more control on global crude oil market. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the demand for OPEC oil has fallen to a 30-year low in second quarter of 2020.
The non-OPEC countries which export crude oil along with the 14 OPECs are termed as OPEC plus countries. OPEC plus countries are Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan, and Sudan. India is not a member of OPEC + countries. OPEC member countries produce about 40 percent of the world’s crude oil. Equally important to global prices, OPEC’s oil exports represent about 60 percent of the total petroleum traded internationally. Saudi and Russia, had three-year alliance of oil producers known as OPEC Plus — which now includes 11 OPEC members and 10 non-OPEC nations — that aims to shore up oil prices with production cuts.

What is the news?

- OPEC’s share of India’s oil imports fell to the lowest in at least two decades in the year to the end of March as overall purchases by Asia’s third-largest economy fell to a six-year low, data obtained from industry and trade sources showed.
- Total crude imports by the world’s third-biggest oil importer fell to 3.97 million barrels per day (bpd) in FY21, down 11.8% from a year earlier, data showed.
- India bought more U.S. and Canadian oil at the expense of that from
Africa and West Asia: reducing purchases from members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to about 2.86 million bpd and squeezing the group’s share of imports to 72% from about 80% previously. That is the lowest share since at least FY02, before which crude import data is not available.

- U.S. and Canadian oil accounted for about 7% and 1.3% respectively of India’s imports compared to 4.5% and 0.60% a year earlier.
- The U.S. emerged as the fifth-biggest supplier, up two places from FY20.

Source: TH

SVAMITVA Scheme

SVAMITVA Scheme

- SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.
- SVAMITVA, a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was nationally launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April 2021 after successful completion of the pilot phase of the Scheme in 9 States.
- SVAMITVA Scheme aims to provide property rights to the residents of rural inhabited areas in India by using Drone survey and CORS Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cms.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of the SVAMITVA scheme.
- In the States, the Revenue Department/Land Records Department will be the Nodal Department and shall carry out the scheme with the support of State Panchayati Raj Departments.
- **Aim**: To provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India.
  1. It is a scheme for mapping the land parcels in rural inhabited areas using drone technology and Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS).
  2. The mapping will be done across the country in a phase-wise manner.
over a period of four years - from 2020 to 2024.

- The program is currently being implemented in **six states** - Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Source: PIB
A new study has added shifting of Earth’s axis to the list of consequences of climate change, which already includes rising sea levels, heat waves, melting glaciers and storms. While this change is not expected to affect daily life, it can change the length of the day by a few milliseconds.

### Earth’s Axis

- The Earth’s axis of rotation is the line along which it spins around itself as it revolves around the Sun. The points on which the axis intersects the planet’s surface are the geographical north and south poles.
- The location of the poles is not fixed, however, as the axis moves due to changes in how the Earth’s mass is distributed around the planet.
- Thus, the poles move when the axis moves, and the movement is called “polar motion”.
- Generally, polar motion is caused by changes in the hydrosphere, atmosphere, oceans, or solid Earth.
- According to NASA, data from the 20th century shows that the spin axis drifted about 10 centimetres per year.

As per the study, since the 1990s, climate change has caused significant glacial ice to melt into oceans, which in turn has caused the Earth’s poles to move in new directions.

- Other causes may include terrestrial water storage change in non-glacial regions due to climate change and unsustainable consumption of groundwater and other anthropogenic activities.
- The North Pole has shifted in a new eastward direction since the 1990s, because of changes in the hydrosphere.
- The calculations were based on satellite data from NASA’s Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) mission and estimates of glacier loss and groundwater pumping going back to 1980s.

### What is climate change?

Climate Change is a periodic modification of Earth’s climate brought about due to...
the changes in the atmosphere as well as the interactions between the atmosphere and various other geological, chemical, biological and geographical factors within the Earth’s system.

Climate change can make weather patterns less predictable. These unforeseen weather patterns can make it difficult to maintain and grow crops, making agriculture-dependent countries like India vulnerable.

Natural Factors:

There are numerous natural factors that cause the Earth’s climate to change. They affect the climate over a period of thousands to millions of years.

Continental Drift:

The present-day continents were not the same prior to 200 million years. They have formed millions of years ago when the landmass began to drift apart due to plate displacement. This movement had an impact on climate change due to the change on the landmass’s physical features and position and the change in water bodies’ position like the change in the follow of ocean currents and winds. The drifting of the landmass is continued today. The Himalayan range is rising approximately 1 millimetre every year as the Indian landmass is moving towards the Asian landmass.

Variation of the Earth’s orbit:

The Earth’s orbit has an impact on the sunlight’s seasonal distribution that is reaching the Earth’s surface. A slight change in the Earth’s orbit can lead to variation in distribution across the world.

There are three types of orbital variations – variations in Earth’s eccentricity, variations in the tilt angle of the Earth’s axis of rotation and precession of Earth’s axis. These together can cause Milankovitch cycles, which have a huge impact on climate and are well-known for their connection to the glacial and interglacial periods. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finding showed that the Milankovitch cycles had influenced the behaviour of ice formation

Plate tectonics:
Due to the change in the temperature in the core of the Earth, the mantle plumes and convection currents forced the Earth’s Plates to adjust leading to the rearrangement of the Earth Plate. This can influence the global and local patterns of climate and atmosphere. The oceans’ geometry is determined by the continents’ position. Therefore, the position of the continents influences the pattern of the ocean.

The location of the sea also plays a crucial role in controlling the transfer of heat and moisture across the globe and determines the global climate. The recent example of the tectonic control on ocean circulation is the formation of the Isthmus of Panama about 5 million years ago, leading to the prevention of direct mixing of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

**Volcanic Activity:**

When a volcano erupts, it emits gases and dust particles, causing a partial block of the Sunrays. This can lead to the cooling of the weather. Though the volcanic activities last only for a few days, the gases and ashes released by it can last for a long period, leading to it influencing climate patterns.

Sulphur oxide emitted by the volcanic activities can combine with water to form tiny droplets of sulphuric acid. These droplets are so small that many of them can stay in the air for several years.

**Ocean Currents:**

Ocean current is one of the major components of the climate system. It is driven by horizontal winds causing the movement of the water against the sea surface. The temperature differences of the water influence the climate of the region.

**Anthropogenic Factors:**

Global warming, the long-term rise in the average temperature of the Earth’s climate system, is a major aspect of climate change. It is mainly a human-caused increase in global surface temperature. The anthropogenic factors causing climate change are as follows:

**Greenhouse Gases:**
The greenhouse gases absorb heat radiation from the sun. Following the initiation of the Industrial Revolution, the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere has increased exponentially. **This has led to more absorption and retaining the heat in the atmosphere.** This resulted in an increase in Global Temperature. The greenhouse gases mostly do not absorb the solar radiation but absorb most of the infrared emitted by the Earth’s surface.

The main greenhouse gases include:

- **Water vapour** (the majority of the GHG in the atmosphere but the impact is less)
- **Carbon dioxide** released due to natural and anthropogenic factors spends more time in the atmosphere, leading to an increase in its impact. There has been a 30% increase in the concentration of CO$_2$ since the start of the industrial revolution. Apart from the industrial revolution, deforestation also contributes to the increase in the CO
- **Chlorofluorocarbons**, used for industrial purposes, especially in refrigerants and air conditioning, is a man-made compound regulated under the Montreal Protocol due to their adverse effects on the Ozone layers.
- **Methane** is released due to decomposition of organic matter. It is stronger than CO$_2$ because of its capacity to absorb more heat.
- **Nitrous oxide** is produced by the agricultural sector, especially in the production and use of organic fertilizers and while burning fossil fuels.

**Change in the land use pattern:**

Half of the land-use change is said to have happened during the industrial era. Most of the forests were replaced by agricultural cropping and grazing of lands.

The increased albedo (reflectivity of an object in space) in the snow-covered high altitude regions due to deforestation led to the cooling of the planet’s surface. The lower the albedo, the more of the Sun’s radiation gets absorbed by the planet and the temperatures will rise. If the albedo is higher and the Earth is more reflective, the more of the radiation is returned to space, leading to the cooling of the planet.

The tropical deforestation changes the evapotranspiration rates (the amount of water vapour put in the atmosphere through evaporation and transpiration from trees), causes desertification and affects soil moisture characteristics.

**Atmospheric aerosols:**
Aerosols can directly affect climate change by absorbing or reflecting solar radiation. They can also produce indirect effects by modifying the cloud’s formation and properties. They can even be transported thousands of kilometres away from its source through wind and upper-level circulation in the atmosphere.

There are two types of aerosols – Natural aerosols and Anthropogenic aerosols. The sources of natural aerosols include volcanic eruptions (produces sulphate aerosols) and biogenic sources like planktons (can produce dimethyl sulphide).

The anthropogenic aerosols include: The ammonia used for fertilizers or released by the burning of plants and other organic materials forms a major source for Nitrate aerosols. Burning of coal and oil produces sulphur dioxide that forms a major source of sulphate aerosols. Burning of biomass can release a combination of organic droplets and soot particles.

India’s response to Climate Change

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** outlines existing and future policies and programs addressing climate mitigation and adaptation. The Action Plan identifies eight core “national missions” running through to 2017: Solar Energy; Enhanced Energy Efficiency; Sustainable Habitat; Water; Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem; Green India; Sustainable Agriculture; and Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change. Most of these missions have strong adaptation imperatives.

- **National Clean Energy Fund:** The Government of India created the National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF) in 2010 for financing and promoting clean energy initiatives and funding research in the area of clean energy in the country. The corpus of the fund is built by levying a cess of INR 50 (subsequently increased to INR 100 in 2014) per tonne of coal produced domestically or imported.

- **Paris Agreement:** Under the Paris Agreement, India has made three commitments. India’s greenhouse gas emission intensity of its GDP will be reduced by 33-35% below 2005 levels by 2030. Alongside, 40% of India’s power capacity would be based on non-fossil fuel sources. At the same time, India will create an additional ‘carbon sink’ of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Co2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

- **International Solar Alliance:** ISA was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris on 30 November 2015 by India and France, in the presence of Mr. Ban Ki Moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

- **Bharat Stage (BS) Emission Norms:** Emissions from vehicles are one of the
top contributors to air pollution, which led the government at the time to introduce the BS 2000 (Bharat Stage 1) vehicle emission norms from April 2000, followed by BS-II in 2005. BS-III was implemented nationwide in 2010. However, in 2016, the government decided to meet the global best practices and leapfrog to BS-VI norms by skipping BS V altogether.

For Climate Change News:
https://www.aspireias.com/search/climate%20change

Source: TE

Mobile Phone Technologies
GS-III | 05 May,2021

Mobile Phone Technologies

1G Technology

- The development of 1G mobile phones took place in late 1970s.
- The 1G mobile devices sent only the “analogue voice information” via amplitude modulation (AM), which varies the amplitude of the carrier signal, and frequency modulation (FM), which changes the Frequency of the carrier signal.
- In electronics, the analog signal devices were followed by Analog to Digital convertors.
- The most important 1G system were

  1. Advanced Mobile Phone System (AMPS)
  2. Nordic Mobile Telephone (NMT)
  3. Total Access Telephone System (TACS).

- The devices of the 1G included the Cordless Phone, Paging Systems, Private Mobile Radio, Some primitive mobile systems as mentioned above.
2G Technology

- The 2G phase **began in the 1990s** and much of this technology is still in use. The 2G cell phone features digital voice encoding.
- Examples include CDMA and GSM.

**Terminologies**

- **GSM**: GSM is a TDMA based wireless network technology which make use of a SIM card to identify the user's account. In India GSM networks operate on the 900MHz and 1800MHz frequency bands.
- **CDMA**: Code-Division Multiple Access, a digital cellular technology that uses spread-spectrum techniques. Unlike competing systems, such as GSM, that use TDMA, CDMA does not assign a specific frequency to each user. Instead, every channel uses the full available spectrum. Individual conversations are encoded with a pseudo-random digital sequence.
- **Bandwidth**: Determines the rate at which information can be transmitted across that a medium. The rates are measured in bits (bps), kilobits (kbps), megabits (Mbps), or gigabits per second (Gbps).
- **EDGE (Enhanced Data Rates for GMS Evolution)**: EDGE (Enhanced Data GSM Environment), a faster version of the Global System for Mobile (GSM) wireless service, is designed to deliver data at rates up to 384 Kbps and enable the delivery of multimedia and other broadband applications to mobile phone and computer users.
- **GPRS (General Packet Radio Service)**: GPRS is a packet-based wireless communication service that promises data rates from 56 up to 114 Kbps and continuous connection to the Internet for mobile phone and computer users. The higher data rates will allow users to take part in video conferences and interact with multimedia Web sites and similar applications using mobile handheld devices as well as notebook computers.
- **Wideband CDMA** is a third-generation (3G) wireless standard which allows use of both voice and data and offers data speeds of up to 384 Kbps. WCDMA is also called UMTS and the two terms have become interchangeable.
- **LTE (Long Term Evolution)**: LTE is the next-step of the evolution
of UMTS (3G) and HSDPA (3.5G). It's the only wireless network technology that's correctly called 4G.

- **Wi-Fi** is a mechanism for wirelessly connecting electronic devices. A device such as a personal computer, video game console, smartphone, or digital audio player, when enabled with Wi-Fi, can connect to the Internet via a wireless network access point. It uses radio frequency (RF) technology.
- **WiBro**: WiBro (Wireless Broadband) communication technique uses radio waves (frequency of 2.3 GHz) and allows a maximum theoretical speed of 30 megabits per second over a range between 1 and 5 kilometers.

- Since its inception, 2G technologies have steadily improved, with increased bandwidth, packet routing, and the introduction of multimedia.
- GSM is most popular standard for mobile telephony systems spread in more than 200 countries / territories. GSM is a cellular network, which means that mobile phones connect to it by searching for cells in the immediate vicinity.
- The worldwide presence of GSM means that subscribers can use their phones throughout the world, enabled by international roaming arrangements between mobile network operators.
- GSM networks operate in a number of different carrier frequency ranges and most 2G GSM networks operate in the 900 MHz or 1800 MHz bands.
- GSM provides the voice and limited data services and uses the digital modulation for improved audio quality. So this was the beginning of the SMS. The rate was 10 Kbps/user.

### 2.5G Technology

- The GPS was succeeded with GPRS i.e. General Packet Radio Service. This is called 2.5G. This enhanced the data transmission capacity of the GSM and added the packet switched capabilities to the existing mobile telephony.
- So now the systems were able to send emails and Graphics rich data as a higher speed. 2.5 G or GPRS set the preparatory stage for the 3G
- Applications in 2.5 G are : Digital voice and limited data

### 3G Technology

- 3G, 4G and 5G are the generic names for a set of mobile technologies. These use a host of high-tech infrastructure networks, handsets, base stations, switches and other equipment to allow mobile phones to offer
broadband wireless Internet access, data, video, live TV and CD-quality music services.

- The 3G wireless networks use technologies such as
  1. General Packet Radio Service (GPRS);
  2. Enhanced Data Rates for Global Evolution (EDGE);
  3. UMTS Wideband CDMA (WCDMA) and

- The 3G technology is capable of transferring data at theoretical top speed of just 7.2Mbps.

4G Technology

- 4G is the short term for fourth-generation; it is a wireless data transmission network.
- The data transfer speeds here are four time that of 3G making IPTV and interactive gaming a reality on mobile phones.
- All this will make the mobile phone much like a digital Swiss Knife: a single wireless device for all our needs.
- The technology uses Carriers that use orthogonal frequency-division multiplexing (OFDM) instead of time division multiple access (TDMA) or code division multiple access (CDMA).

5G Technology

India’s National Digital Communications Policy 2018

- It highlights the importance of 5G when it states that the convergence of a cluster of revolutionary technologies including 5G, the cloud, Internet of Things (IoT) and data analytics, along with a growing start-up community, promise to accelerate and deepen its digital engagement, opening up a new horizon of opportunities.
- It aims to reach 100% teledensity, high-speed internet highways and delivery of citizen-centric services electronically.

- Millimeter wave spectrum: The 5G networks will operate in the millimeter wave spectrum (30-300 GHz) which have the advantage of sending large amounts of data at very high speeds because the frequency is so high, it
Upgraded LTE: 5G is the latest upgrade in the long-term evolution (LTE) mobile broadband networks.

Internet speed: In the high-band spectrum of 5G, internet speeds have been tested to be as high as 20 Gbps (gigabits per second) as compared to the maximum internet data speed in 4G recorded at 1 Gbps.

5G network speeds should have a peak data rate of 20 Gb/s for the downlink and 10 Gb/s for the uplink.

Bands in 5G: 5G mainly work in 3 bands, namely low, mid and high frequency spectrum — all of which have their own uses as well as limitations.

Low band spectrum: It has shown great promise in terms of coverage and speed of internet and data exchange however the maximum speed is limited to 100 Mbps (Megabits per second).

Mid-band spectrum: It offers higher speeds compared to the low band, but has limitations in terms of coverage area and penetration of signals.

High-band spectrum: It has the highest speed of all the three bands, but has extremely limited coverage and signal penetration strength.

Applications: High-Speed mobile network, Entertainment and multimedia, Internet of Things, Smart cities, Smart farming, Telemedicine services, Controlling of critical infrastructure and vehicles and Industrial applications.

Steering Committee on 5G

- The committee was set up in September 2017 and submitted its report on August 24, 2018, under the chairmanship of AJ Paulraj to suggest road map for 5G adoption.
- It gave wide-ranging recommendations to Department of Telecommunication for areas like spectrum policy, regulatory policy, standards and education.
- It has asked for setting up a Standing Committee with five-year term to advice on building Spectrum Technology Infrastructure.
- It has proposed promulgation of key norms on regulatory matters by March 2019 in order to facilitate early deployment of 5G technology and noted that 5G technologies will start entering service globally beginning 2019 and advance to full range of services by 2024.
- It recommended deployment classification of 5G into three phases based on technologies and expects that economic impact of 5G to
What is in the news?

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) gave permission to **Telecom Service Providers (TSPs)** to conduct trials for the use and application of 5G technology.
- This formally leaves out Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE from the 5G race in India.
- The applicant TSPs include Bharti Airtel Ltd., Reliance JioInfocomm Ltd., Vodafone Idea Ltd. and MTNL. These TSPs have tied up with original equipment manufacturers and technology providers, which are Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung and C-DOT.
- In addition, Reliance JioInfocomm Ltd. will also be conducting trials using its own indigenous technology.
- The duration of the trials is for six months, which includes a time period of **two months** for the procurement and setting up of the equipment.
- “The permissions have been given by DoT as per the priorities and technology partners identified by the TSPs themselves,” it stated.
- Each TSP will have to conduct trials in rural and semi-urban settings also, in addition to urban settings, so that the benefit of 5G technology proliferates across the country and is not confined to the urban areas, the statement said.

Source: TH

Cabinet approves strategic disinvestment of IDBI Bank Limited

GS-III | 05 May,2021
Cabinet approves strategic disinvestment of IDBI Bank Limited

About Disinvestment

1. Disinvestment refers to sale or liquidation of an assets or subsidiary of an organization or government but any condition Govt share should not go below 51%.
2. It is done by Dept of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), Ministry of Finance from 2016.
3. Industrial Policy Resolution, 1956 talks about the growth of the country through PSUs. Hence, from 2nd Five Year Plan we started focusing on PSEs.
4. Salient Features of Disinvestment Policy
   1. PSUs are wealth of Nation and it ensures that wealth rests in hands of people, promote public ownership of CPSEs.
   2. Govt must retain at least 51% of shareholding and management control of PSUs.
   3. Strategic disinvestment by way of sale of substantial portion of Govt in identified CPSEs upto 50% or more along with transfer of management control.

Phases of Disinvestment

- **Phase I**: In 1991 PVNR Govt initiated disinvestment: In 1991 policy it was announced that government would disinvest upto 20% of its equity in selected PSUs mainly through MFs and FIIs (Financial institutions investors).
- **Phase II**: More people allowed in disinvestment like FII, Employees of the Company etc.
- **Phase III**: The Govt appointed C Rangarajan Committee: who recommended ~49% of disinvestment.
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee adopted major disinvestment policy HINDALCO, BALCO. It talked about Stake Sale.
- **Stake sale** is a larger share that can be sold to LIC or other profitable PSUs not individual investors.
- PSUs were bifurcated into 2: Strategic (defense, atomic) and Non strategic.
2005: Govt came out with National Investment Fund under Public Accounts of India.
- Purpose of the fund was to receive disinvestment proceeds of CPSEs.
- Money from disinvestment is put upon this money is invested in stock market or other investment instruments the income of which
  - 75% of returns are used in social sector NREGA, Housing for All, AIBP, Health, Education, Employment etc.
  - 25% can be utilized for Profitable PSUs and revival of PSUs.
- This fund was professionally managed by 3 Fund Managers: UTI, SBI and LIC. But CCEA restructured the NIF and decided to do away with the management of the disinvestment proceeds by the Fund Managers of NIF. Now from 2013, all the money is credited to Public Accounts.
- Special NIF
  - It is kept outside the CFI to transfer the shares of only certain loss making CPSEs which are non-compliant with the rule that minimum 10% of shares issued be held by public.
  - Only shares are transferred here and not receipts from the sale of shares of CPSEs

Phase IV: Current Disinvestment:
1. In last 3 years, Govt is increasing their disinvestment targets from 80000 crore rs to 1.05 lakh crore rupees.
2. But as per Economists, Hyper Disinvestment because of declining revenues of Govt due to GST and Demonetization to achieve targets of FD and to achieve poll promises is not good. This led to disinvesting BPCL, Concor etc. even breaching the 51% limit.

Strategic Disinvestment in 5 PSEs
- Government to sell entire stake in Bharat Petroleum (BPCL), Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), Container Corporation of India (CONCOR).
  - Also THDCIL and North East Electric Power Corporation (to NTPC). Disinvestment done because of massive shortfall in revenue and capital receipts (according to Controller General of Accounts).
- BPCL was a profitable, yet they disinvested it. This is a concern. Numaligarh refinery is in Assam.
- How the Government completes the transaction is a concern – from appointment of advisers, to deciding the pricing mechanism and initiating a transparent bidding process before finalizing a buyer - is a big question.

Bharat Bond ETF (Exchange Traded Fund) to be India’s 1st Corporate
Bond ETF
- ETF to comorise basket of bonds issues by CPSEs, CPSUs, CPFIs and other government entities and all will be initially rated AAA with ₹1000 for each unit to attract retail investors.
- DIPAM (Department of Industry and Public Asset Management) is responsible for disinvestment in the country.
- Each ETF will have a fixed maturity dates initially to be issued in 2 series of 3 years and 10 years.
- Benefits
  - Bond ETF will provide safety (issued by CPSEs & govt owned agencies), liquidity (tradability on exchange), additional source of funding for issuers (apart from banks) and predictable tax efficient returns.
  - It would help deepen India’s bond market as it will encourage participation of those retail investors who are currently not participating in bond markets including HNI participants.
- In Budget 2020, FM announced to sell a part of its 100% stake in LIC by an IPO.
  - LIC was established in 1956 through an Act of Parliament.
  - Before Govt divests a part of its stake through a public issue, it will have to ensure that it amends the LIC Act, which ensures a sovereign guarantee for all policies under Section 37 of the Act.

What is the news?
- Chief Economic Adviser Krishnamurthy Subramanian has expressed confidence that the ₹1.75-lakh crore disinvestment target of this fiscal will be achieved, with a good part coming from the proposed IPO of insurance behemoth LIC and privatisation of Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL).
  - While LIC’s public issue and BPCL privatisation are expected to contribute a chunk of the target, from a signalling perspective, Air India’s privatisation is also very important, on which too work is happening, the CEA said.

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has given its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank Ltd.
- The extent of respective shareholding to be divested by GoI and LIC shall be decided at the time of structuring of transaction in consultation with RBI.
- Government of India (GoI) and LIC together own more than 94% of equity of
IDBI Bank (GoI 45.48%, LIC 49.24%). LIC is currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with Management Control and GoI is the co-promoter.

- LIC’s Board has passed a resolution to the effect that LIC may reduce its shareholding in IDBI Bank Ltd. through divesting its stake along with strategic stake sale envisaged by the Govt. with an intent to relinquish management control and by taking into consideration price, market outlook, statutory stipulation and interest of policy holders.

Source: PIB
Maratha quota unconstitutional, violates right to equality, says SC

The Supreme Court struck down the findings of the Justice M.G. Gaikwad Commission, which led to the enactment of the Maratha quota law, and set aside the Bombay High Court judgment which validated the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act of 2018. It declared the Maharashtra law unconstitutional.

Only Centre is empowered to identify SEBC

The Centre alone is empowered to identify Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) and include them in the Central List for claiming reservation benefits.

“The President (that is the Central government) alone, to the exclusion of all other authorities, is empowered to identify SEBCs and include them in a list to be published under Article 342A (1), which shall be deemed to include SEBCs in relation to each State and Union Territory for the purposes of the Constitution.

Justice Bhat said the States could only make suggestions to the President or the statutory commissions concerned for inclusion, exclusion or modification of castes and communities to be included in the List.

The Central List is to be the “only list” for the SEBC. Once published, under Article 342A (1), the list can only be amended through a law enacted by Parliament, by virtue of Article 342A (2).

In the task of identification of SEBCs, the President shall be guided by the Commission (National Commission for Backward Classes) set up under Article 338B; its advice shall also be sought by the State in regard to policies that might be framed by it.

If the commission prepares a report concerning matters of identification, such a report has to be shared with the State.
government, which is bound to deal with it, in accordance with provisions of Article 338B.

- However, the final determination culminates in the exercise undertaken by the President (i.e. the Central Government, under Article 342A (1).
- However, “the President’s prerogative as far as the identification and inclusion of SEBCs in the List would not affect the States’ power to make reservations in favour of particular communities or castes, the quantum of reservations, the nature of benefits and the kind of reservations, and all other matters falling within the ambit of Articles 15 and 16”.

- The Bench found there was no “exceptional circumstances” or “extraordinary situation” in Maharashtra, which required the State government to break the 50% ceiling limit to bestow quota benefits on the Maratha community.
- “We have found that no extraordinary circumstances were made out in granting separate reservation for Maratha community by exceeding the 50% ceiling limit of reservation... The Marathas are in the mainstream of the national life. It is not even disputed that Marathas are a politically dominant caste.
- The High Court, in June 2019, reduced the quantum of reservation for Marathas from the 16% recommended by the Gaikwad Commission to 12% in education and 13% in employment.
- The Supreme Court concluded that even the reduced percentages were ultra vires.
- In fact, the Supreme Court held that a separate reservation for the Maratha community violated Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law).
- Most important, the top court declined to revisit its 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment, which fixed the reservation limit at 50%.
- The judgment of Indra Sawhney has stood the test of time and has never been doubted by any judgment of this court.
- The ceiling of 50% with the ‘extraordinary circumstances’ exception, is the just balance — what is termed as the ‘Goldilocks solution’ — i.e. the solution containing the right balance that allows the State sufficient latitude to ensure meaningful affirmative action to those who deserve it and at the same
Assam Earthquake

What is an Earthquake?

- An earthquake is a natural event which is caused due to release of energy, which generates waves that travel in all directions.
- The vibrations called **seismic waves** are generated from earthquakes that travel through the Earth and are recorded on instruments called seismographs.
- The location below the earth's surface where the earthquake starts is called the **hypocenter**, and the location directly above it on the surface of the earth is called the **epicenter**.

Earthquake zones of India
The major reason for the high frequency and intensity of the earthquakes is that the Indian plate is driving into Asia at a rate of approximately 47 mm/year.

Geographical statistics of India show that more than 50% of the land is vulnerable to earthquakes.

The latest version of seismic zoning map of India divides India into 4 seismic zones (Zone 2, 3, 4 and 5).
Zones of Seismicity

- **Zone 1**: Currently the Division does not include a Zone 1. NO area of India is classed as Zone 1.
- **Zone 2**: This region is liable to MSK VI or less and is classified as the Low Damage Risk Zone.
- **Zone 3**: This zone is classified as Moderate Damage Risk Zone which is liable to MSK VII.
- **Zone 4**: This zone is called the High Damage Risk Zone and covers areas liable to MSK VIII. Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, the parts of Indo-Gangetic plains (North Punjab, Chandigarh, Western Uttar Pradesh, Terai, North Bengal, Sundarbans) and the capital of the country Delhi fall in Zone 4.
- **Zone 5**: Zone 5 covers the areas with the highest risks zone that suffers earthquakes of intensity MSK IX or greater. The region of Kashmir, the Western and Central Himalayas, North and Middle Bihar, the North-East Indian region, the Rann of Kutch and the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands fall in this zone.

Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT)

- The **Main Frontal Thrust (MFT)**, also known as the Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT) is a geological fault in the Himalayas that defines the boundary between the Indian and Eurasian Plates.
- The fault is well expressed on the surface thus could be seen via satellite imagery.
- It is the youngest and southernmost thrust structure in the Himalaya deformation front. It is a splay branch of the Main Himalayan Thrust (MHT) as the root décollement.
- It runs parallel to other major splays of the MHT; Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) and Main Central Thrust (MCT).
- The MFT accommodates almost the entire rate of subduction of the Indian Plate therefore, it is no surprise that numerous earthquakes have occurred along this fault, and is expected to produce very big earthquakes in the future.
- Many earthquakes associated with the MFT has resulted in visible ground ruptures, as seen in the Bihar earthquake of 1934 and 1505 magnitude 8.9 earthquake.
Kopili Fault Zone:

- The Kopili fault zone is a 300 km long and 50 km wide lineament (linear feature) extending from the western part of Manipur up to the tri-junction of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- The area is seismically very active falling in the highest Seismic Hazard zone V associated with collisional tectonics where Indian plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate.
- Subduction is a geological process in which one crustal plate is forced below the edge of another.
- Squeezed between the subduction and collision zones of the Himalayan belt and Sumatran belt, the North East is highly prone to earthquake occurrences.
Reasons for Assam Earthquake

- According to the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) report, the tremors have been attributed to Kopili Fault zone closer to Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT).
- **NCS is the nodal agency** of the Government of India for monitoring earthquake activity in the country. It comes under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- An earthquake of magnitude 6.4 on the Richter scale hit Assam.
- The primary earthquake had its epicentre at latitude 26.690 N and longitude 92.360 E, about 80 km northeast of Guwahati, and a focal depth of 17 km.
- The events are located near to **Kopili Fault** closer to Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT).
- The Kopili Fault is a 300-km northwest-southeast trending fault from the **Bhutan Himalaya to the Burmese arc**.
- The fault is a fracture along which the blocks of crust on either side have moved relative to one another parallel to the fracture.
- The area is seismically very active falling in the highest Seismic Hazard zone V associated with collisional tectonics where Indian plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate the NCS report said.
- The area is seismically very active falling in the highest Seismic Hazard zone V associated with collisional tectonics where Indian plate subducts beneath the Eurasian Plate.
- When an earthquake occurs on one of these faults, the rock on one side of the fault slips with respect to the other. The fault surface can be vertical, horizontal, or at some angle to the surface of the earth.

What is the news?

- An unfamiliar lineament is among four factors behind frequent earthquakes in northern **Assam’s Sonitpur area**.
- A lineament is a linear feature in a landscape dictated by an underlying geological structure such as a fault.
- According to the Geological Survey of India (GSI), Sonitpur district lies within a tectonically complex triangular area bounded by the east-west trending **Atherkhet Fault**, the northwest-southeast trending **Kopili Fault** and a north-south trending lineament.
- The two faults and the lineament, along with the oblique convergence of the Indian plate, have caused frequent earthquakes.
- The National Centre of Seismology recorded 29 earthquakes of magnitude
varying from 2.6 to 4.7 in Sonitpur after the 6.4 tremblor on April 28 that damaged several buildings, bridges and a river embankment.

- The last of these 29 earthquakes with Sonitpur as the epicentre was recorded early Wednesday morning. Five more of magnitudes 2.6-3.2 were also recorded in neighbouring districts during this period.
- Sonitpur was the epicentre of this huge 6.4 earthquake after 33 years because of the tectonic complexity. The Atherkhet and Kopilli faults, the north-south lineament and the oblique convergence of the Indian plate is causing repetitive earthquakes.
- Both the Atherkhet and Kopilli are active but we do not know about the nature of the lineament involved.
- Atherkhet and Kopilli are not the only faults that impact the Sonitpur region. The Siang Fracture, Yemla Fault, Namula Thrust and Canyon Thrust are spread across the northeast and are active along with Main Himalayan Thrust, Main Boundary Thrust, Main Central Thrust and several subsidiary faults.
- The northeast is demarcated as Seismic Zone V, which indicates a zone with high vulnerability. The Indian plate is moving northeast toward the Eurasian plate in the Himalayan region, their oblique collision and release of stress and strain accumulated in the local tectonic or fault environments lead to earthquakes.
- He also explained why water was oozing out of the fault in Sonitpur and adjoining affected areas after the April 28 earthquake.
- This was a result of severe liquefaction [the process of making something liquid] from the unconsolidated substratum [underlying layer of soil/rock].
- The GSI specialist advised people not to heed earthquake predictions.
- Unlike a landslip, a surficial process that can be constrained, an earthquake is a process deep inside the earth. But scientists worldwide are trying for a breakthrough. The work to understand the strain localisation of future earthquakes is under progress.

Source: TH

India â€“ Sri Lanka issues
GS-II | 06 May,2021
India – Sri Lanka issues

- The tragic death of four fishermen from Tamil Nadu — one of them a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living in India — allegedly when the Sri Lankan Navy was about to arrest them last week, is yet another instance of the unresolved fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay taking an unacceptable toll of lives.
- India has lodged a strong protest with the Sri Lankan authorities, who have set up a committee to find a permanent solution to the incursions by Indian fishermen.
- It was less than a month ago that the two countries resumed discussions through their Joint Working Group on fisheries after a three-year gap. India sought the early release of fishermen arrested in Sri Lankan waters, as well as the boats in Sri Lankan custody.
- Sri Lanka underscored the need to curb the illegal fishing, which adversely affects the livelihood of its war-affected fishermen.
- When the two sides decided to create a joint working group some years ago, they had agreed that there would be no violence or loss of life in the handling of the fishermen and that a hotline would be established between the respective Coast Guards. It is unfortunate that the hotline is yet to be operationalised, and deaths continue to occur.
- The humanitarian approach that has been expected to be the cornerstone of the approach to this conflict has not always been discernible.
- The plan to wean away Tamil Nadu fishermen from the tendency to exploit the remaining fishery resources on the Sri Lankan side by replacing their trawlers with deep sea fishing vessels has not really taken off.
- Attempts to forge a negotiated settlement through direct talks involving fishermen from both sides have also reached a stalemate.
- Sri Lanka favours joint patrolling by both countries, and a ban on unsustainable fishing practices by Tamil Nadu fishermen — such as bottom trawling — but the latter want a lengthy phase-out period.
- Political leaders in Tamil Nadu rarely acknowledge that the State's fishermen contribute immensely to the problem by crossing territorial waters.
- Nor is there sufficient recognition that the incursion into Sri Lankan waters is driven by trawler owners who force their poor employees to do so, who then get killed or arrested, leading to the festering conflict.
- So far there has not been enough political resolve to end this conflict.

What is the solution?
A comprehensive solution, one that would severely curtail unauthorised fishing and help in an orderly sharing of and sustainable use of resources by fishermen from both sides, is long overdue.

India – Sri Lanka relationship

Historical relations

• The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is more than 2,500 years old. It started from the time of Mauryan Empire when Ashoka sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. It continued in Chola Empire when Rajaraja Chola first time started to conquer Sri Lanka or Ceylon and Rajendra Chola (his son) conquered the Ceylon.
• Both countries have a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction.
• In recent years, significant progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects has further cemented the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

Geopolitical Significance of Sri Lanka

• Sri Lanka is located in the geostrategic zone of Indian zone where all the major powers are converging in 21st century.
• It is located at the center of geopolitics of USA through Pivot towards Asia policy, China through Belt and Road Initiative and Japan through Asia Africa Growth Corridor.
• China is building state of the art gigantic modern ports all along the Indian Ocean to the south of it, in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh, Kyauk Phru (Myanmar) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka). China is using Sri Lanka as a tool to encircle India through Maritime Silk Road Initiative and the erstwhile String of Pearl Strategy.
• Sri Lanka’s Colombo Port is the 25th busiest container port in the world and the natural deep water harbor at Trincomalee is the fifth largest natural harbour in the world.

Importance of Sri Lanka for India

• Sri Lanka is the nearest maritime neighbor of India. Hence in the situation where all the major powers are trying to pluck the low hanging fruits of Indian
ocean, the dominance of India in the Indian Ocean region is a must.

- Sri Lanka is a member of regional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and SAARC in which India plays a leading role.
- Sri Lanka is important to neutralize efforts of China and OBOR in the Indian Ocean Region.
- It is also important for the cooperation in the Terrorism and in the sphere of maritime security and surveillance.
- Recently, India helped Sri Lanka in providing various medicines of COVID-19 and we are also sending them COVID-19 vaccines as a Confidence Building measure and India’s principle of Vasudeva Kutumbakam.
- Recently, India has invited leaders of BIMSTEC member countries to attend the swearing-in of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his council of ministers. This is in line with the government’s focus on its ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy.
- Sri Lanka is one of India’s largest trading partners among the SAARC countries. India in turn is Sri Lanka’s largest trade partner globally.
- India is a net exporter to Sri Lanka. India’s exports to Sri Lanka amounted to $5.3 billion in 2015-17 whereas its imports from the country were at $743 million.
- Trade grew especially after India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement which came into force in March 2000. Sri Lanka was the 1st country to sign FTA with India (Prelims Pointer).

India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA)

- India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) was signed in 1998 and entered into force in March 2000.
- The basic premise in signing the ISFTA was asymmetries between the two economies, local socio-economic sensitivities, safeguard measures to protect domestic interests, and revenue implications so as not to impact high revenue generating tariff lines in the short term.
- In order to receive ISFTA benefits, the merchandise exported between India and Sri Lanka should comply with the Rules of Origin criteria.
- The agreement CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) which is yet to be signed between the countries, seeks to build on the momentum generated by the FTA and take the two economies beyond trade in goods towards greater integration and impart renewed impetus and synergy to bilateral economic
The investments are in diverse areas including petroleum retail, IT, financial services, real estate, telecommunication, hospitality & tourism, banking and food processing (tea & fruit juices), metal industries, tires, cement, glass manufacturing, and infrastructure development (railway, power, water supply).

Tourism also forms an important link between India and Sri Lanka and **India is the largest source market for Sri Lankan tourism**. In tourism, India is the largest contributor with every fifth tourist being from India.

The Cultural Cooperation Agreement signed by the two Governments on 29 November, 1977, forms the basis for periodic Cultural Exchange Programmes between the two countries.

The **People of Indian Origin (PIOs)** comprise Sindhis, Borahs, Gujaratis, Memons, Parsis, Malayalis and Telugu speaking persons who have settled down in Sri Lanka (most of them after partition) and are engaged in various business ventures.

India and Sri Lanka conducts joint Military (‘Mitra Shakti’) and Naval exercise (SLINEX). – (Prelims Pointers)

India also provides defence training to Sri Lankan forces.

A **trilateral maritime security cooperation agreement** was signed by India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives to improve surveillance, anti-piracy operations and reducing maritime pollution in Indian Ocean Region.

**Issues and Conflicts**

**China angle**

- China’s relationship with Sri Lanka has been a challenge for India since years. In recent years, China has extended billions of dollars of loans to the Sri Lankan government for new infrastructure projects, which is not good for India’s strategic depth in Indian Ocean Region.
- Sri Lanka also handed over the strategic port of Hambantota, which is expected to play a key role in China’s Belt and Road Initiative, to China on a 99-year lease.
- China has also supplied arms as well as provide huge loans to Sri Lanka for its development.
- China also invested sufficiently in the infrastructure of Sri Lanka, which
Fishermen issue

- Given the proximity of the territorial waters of both countries, especially in the Palk Straits and the Gulf of Mannar, incidents of straying of fishermen are common.
- Indian boats have been fishing in the troubled waters for centuries and had a free run of the Bay of Bengal, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar until 1974 and 1976 when treaties were signed between the two countries to demarcate International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).
- However, the treaties failed to factor in the hardship of thousands of traditional fishermen who were forced to restrict themselves to a meagre area in their fishing forays.
- The small islet of Katchatheevu, hitherto used by them for sorting their catch and drying their nets, fell on the other side of the IMBL.
- Fishermen often risk their lives and cross the IMBL rather than return empty-handed, but the Sri Lankan Navy is on alert, and have either arrested or destroyed fishing nets and vessels of those who have crossed the line.
- Both countries have agreed on certain practical arrangements to deal with the issue of bona fide fishermen of either side crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line.
- Through these arrangements, it has been possible to deal with the issue of detention of fishermen in a humane manner.
- India and Sri Lanka have agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India and Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka as the mechanism to help find a permanent solution to the fishermen issue.
However, the relation between Sri Lanka and India are improving.

- In order to allay Indian concerns that the Hambantota port will not be used for military purposes, the Sri Lankan government has sought to limit China’s role to running commercial operations at the port while it retains oversight of security operations.
- The two countries have signed civil nuclear cooperation agreement which is Sri Lanka’s first nuclear partnership with any country.
- India is also investing into Sri Lanka’s infrastructure development in the Northern and Eastern provinces.
- India is also planning to build Trincomalee Port to counterweight the Chinese developments at Hambantota Port.

**Way Forward**
As both countries have a democratic setup there is scope for broadening and deepening the ties. Both countries should try to work out a permanent solution to the issue of fishermen through bilateral engagements. Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) must be signed to improve the economic cooperation between both countries. India needs to focus more on its traditional and cultural ties to improve relations with Sri Lanka. Starting of ferry services between India and Sri Lanka can improve people to people linkages. Mutual recognition of each other’s concerns and interests can improve the relationship between both countries.

Source: TH

Workers’ income fell by 17% from March to Dec 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially increased informality in employment, leading to a decline in earnings for the majority of workers, and consequent increase in poverty in the country, according to ‘State of Working India 2021: One Year of Covid-19’, a report brought out annually by Azim Premji University’s Centre for Sustainable Employment, Bengaluru. This year’s report, which covers the period March 2020 to December 2020, dwells on the impact of one year of COVID-19 on employment, incomes, inequality and poverty.

Regarding employment, the report notes that 100 million jobs were lost nationwide during the April-May 2020 lockdown. Though most of these workers had found employment by June 2020, about 15 million remained out of work.

As for income, “for an average household of four members, the monthly per capita income in Oct 2020 (?4,979) was still below its level in Jan 2020 (?5,989).”.

The study found that post-lockdown, nearly half of salaried workers had
moved into informal work, either as self-employed (30%), casual wage (10%) or informal salaried (9%).

- The fallback option varied by caste and religion. “General category workers and Hindus were more likely to move into self-employment while marginalised caste workers and Muslims moved into daily wage work,”.

- Education, health and professional services saw the highest exodus of workers into other sectors, with agriculture, construction and petty trade emerging as the top fallback options.

- Due to the employment and income losses, the labour share of the GDP fell by 5 percentage points, from 32.5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 to 27% in the second quarter of 2020-21.

- “Of the decline in income, 90% was due to reduction in earnings, while 10% was due to loss of employment. This means that even though most workers were able to go back to work, they had to settle for lower earnings.”.

- Monthly earnings of workers fell on an average by 17% during the pandemic, with self-employed and informal salaried workers facing the highest loss of earnings.

- While the poorest 20% of households lost their entire incomes in April-May 2020, “the richer households suffered losses of less than a quarter of their pre-pandemic incomes.”

- During the period from March to October 2020, an average household in the bottom 10% lost ₹15,700, or just over two months’ income.

- Significantly, the study has found a clear correlation between job losses and the COVID-19 case load, with States showing higher case load, such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi, “contributing disproportionately to the job losses”.

- Women and younger workers were more affected by the pandemic-related measures. During the lockdown and in the post-lockdown months, 61% of working men remained employed while 7% lost their job and did not return to work. But in the case of women, only 19% remained employed while 47% suffered a permanent job loss, “not returning to work even by the end of 2020”.

- With 230 million falling below the national minimum wage threshold of ₹375 per day during the pandemic, poverty rate has “increased by 15 percentage points in rural and nearly 20 percentage points in urban areas,” the report said.

- Households coped with the loss of income by decreasing their food intake, selling assets and borrowing informally from friends, relatives and money-lenders. The report notes that 20% of those surveyed said that their food
intake had not improved even six months after the lockdown.

- These findings are a serious cause for concern in the absence of an inclusive social welfare architecture.
- Among other ameliorative policy measures, the report calls for extending free rations under the Public Distribution System till the end of 2021, expansion of MGNREGA entitlement to 150 days, and a “Covid hardship allowance” for the 2.5 million Anganwadi and ASHA workers.

Source: TH

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**RBI announced measures to protect Small businesses, MSMEs to get relief**

**GS-III | 06 May, 2021**

**RBI announced measures to protect Small businesses, MSMEs to get relief**

- RBI announced measures to **protect small and medium businesses and individual borrowers** from the adverse impact of the intense second wave of COVID-19 buffeting the country.
- In an unscheduled address, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das unveiled a **Resolution Framework 2.0 for COVID-related stressed assets** of individuals, small businesses and MSMEs and also expressed the central bank’s resolve to do everything at its command to ‘save human lives and restore livelihoods through all means possible’.

**Eligibility criteria**

- Considering that the resurgence of the pandemic had made these categories of borrowers most vulnerable, the RBI said those with **aggregate exposure of up to ₹25 crore**, who had not availed restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks (including under last year’s resolution framework), and whose loans were classified as ‘standard’ as on March 31, 2021, were eligible for restructuring under the proposed framework.
- In respect of individual borrowers and small businesses who had already
availed restructuring under Resolution Framework 1.0, lenders have been permitted to use this window to modify such plans to the extent of increasing the period of moratorium and/or extending the residual tenor up to a total of two years.

- In respect of small businesses and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institutions have been permitted as a one-time measure, to review the working capital sanctioned limits, based on a reassessment of the working capital cycle and margins.

Credit support

- To provide further support to small business units, micro and small industries, and other unorganised sector entities adversely affected during the current wave of the pandemic, the RBI decided to conduct special three-year long-term repo operations (SLTRO) of ₹10,000 crore at the repo rate for Small Finance Banks. The SFBs would be able to deploy these funds for fresh lending of up to ₹10 lakh per borrower. This facility would be available till October 31.
- In view of the fresh challenges brought on by the pandemic and to address the emergent liquidity position of smaller MFIs, SFBs are now being permitted to reckon fresh lending to smaller MFIs (with asset size of up to ₹500 crore) for onlending to individual borrowers as priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022.

State governments

- To enable the State governments to better manage their fiscal situation in terms of their cash flows and market borrowings, maximum number of days of overdraft (OD) in a quarter is being increased from 36 to 50 days and the number of consecutive days of OD from 14 to 21 days, the RBI said.

Source: TH
RBI measures against COVID-19

The RBI Governor Shri Shaktikanta Das today announced a series of measures to support the nation’s fight against the second wave of COVID-19 infections.

1. Term Liquidity Facility of ₹50,000 crore to Ease Access to Emergency Health Services
   - Term Liquidity Facility of Rs. 50,000 crore with tenure of up to 3 years, at repo rate, to ease access to emergency health services, for ramping up COVID-related health infrastructure & services.
   - Banks can give fresh lending support to variety of stakeholders under this facility.
   - This lending facility will be available up to March 31, 2022. Banks will be provided incentives to provide credit under this facility.

2. Special Long Term Repo Operations for Small Finance Banks
   - In order to provide further support to micro, small and other unorganized sector entities, 3-year repo operations of Rs. 10,000 crore at repo rate, for fresh lending up to Rs 10 lakh per borrower; facility is available up to 31 October, 2021.

3. Lending by Small Finance Banks (SFBs) to MFIs for on-lending to be classified as priority sector lending
   - In view of fresh challenges, SFBs are now permitted to regard fresh on-lending to MFIs with asset size up to Rs. 500 crore, as priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to 31 March, 2022.

4. Credit flow to MSME Entrepreneurs
   - To further incentivize inclusion of unbanked MSMEs into banking system, exemption provided in February, 2021 wherein scheduled banks were allowed to deduct credit given to new MSME borrowers from Net Time & Demand Liabilities for calculation of CRR, is now extended to December 31, 2021.

5. Stress Resolution Framework 2.0 for Individuals, Small Businesses and
Following set of measures have been announced to relieve stress faced by most vulnerable categories of borrowers – namely individuals, borrowers and MSMEs.

- Individuals, borrowers and MSMEs with aggregate exposure up to Rs. 25 crore, who have not availed restructuring under any previous frameworks, who were classified as standard on 31 March, 2021, will be eligible to be considered under Resolution Framework 2.0. Restructuring under new framework can be invoked till September 30, 2021 and will have to be implemented within 90 days after invocation.
- For individuals and small businesses who have availed restructuring of loans under Resolution Framework 1.0, where moratorium of less than 2 years was permitted, lending institutions can now increase the period and/or extend residual tenure up to a total period of 2 years.
- In respect of small businesses and MSMEs restructured earlier, lending institutions are now permitted to review working capital sanction limits, as a one-time measure.

### 6. Rationalization of KYC norms for enhanced customer experience

Steps being proposed include:

- Extending scope to video KYC for new customer categories such as proprietorship firms,
- Conversion of limited KYC accounts to fully KYC compliant accounts,
- Introduction of more customer-friendly options in KYC updating and
- enabling the use of KYC Identifier of Centralised KYC Registry (CKYCR) for V-CIP and submission of electronic documents as identify proof

### 7. Floating Provisions and Countercyclical Provisioning Buffer

- Banks can now use 100% of floating provisions held by them, as on December 31, 2020, for making specific provisions for NPAs; such utilization is permitted up to March 31, 2022.

### 8. Relaxation of overdraft facility for states

- Maximum number of days of overdraft in a quarter for state governments has been increased from 36 to 50 days. The number of consecutive days of OD has been increased from 14 to 21 days; facility available up to September 30, 2021.
Global economy is showing signs of recovery

- IMF has in April, 2021 revised global growth projections for 2021 to 6% from 5.5%, on the assumption of availability of vaccines in advanced economies (Aes) and some emerging market economies (EMEs) by the summer of 2021 and in most other countries by the second half of 2022.
- Agriculture sector continues to be resilient with a record food grain production in 2020-21, which provides food security and support to other sectors.
- IMD’s forecast of normal monsoon is also expected to sustain rural demand and overall output in 2021-22, thereby soothing inflationary pressures.
- Localized and targeted containment measures are enabling businesses and households to adapt. Hence, effect on aggregate demand is expected to be moderate in comparison to last year.
- CPI inflation is dubbed to 5.5% in March, 2021 from 5.0% in February, 2021, on the back of a pick-up in food and fuel inflation and Normal monsoon should help contain food price pressures, especially in cereals and pulses.
- Merchandise imports and exports continue to witness robust growth performance, even in April 2021.
- Foreign exchange reserves give us confidence to deal with global spill-over
- Domestic financial conditions will remain easy, given abundant surplus liquidity
- Given the positive market response, he announced that second purchase of Government securities for Rs. 35,000 crore will be conducted on May 20, 2021.

Source: PIB

Special Kharif Strategy for self-sufficiency in Pulses

Progress until now

- From a meagre production of 14.76 million tonnes in 2007-08, the figure has
now reached **24.42 million tonnes in 2020-2021** (2nd advance estimates) which is a phenomenal increase of 65%.

- This success is largely attributed to several significant interventions at the central level.
- The Government has consistently been focusing on bringing new areas under pulses along with ensuring that productivity is also increased in the existing areas under cultivation.
- Therefore, the production and productivity of pulses must be further sustained and increased through the approach of both horizontal and vertical expansion.

- **From the year 2014-15, there has been a renewed focus on increasing the production of pulses through**
  1. enhancing the budgetary outlays,
  2. focussing on special programmes in the different states/seasons,
  3. special action plans in low productivity districts,
  4. targeting rice fallow areas,
  5. technology transfer through the increased front line and cluster demonstrations,
  6. diversified production approaches such as demonstrations on ridge-furrow, tur transplanting/ intercropping, tur on rice bunds, etc.

- **Further, 119 of FPOs for pulses were also formed in 11 states for value addition chain development and marketing.**
- **From 2016-17 onwards, under the National Food Security Mission, 644 districts have been included in the pulses programme.**
- However, the most significant img for increasing production and productivity has been the focus of providing quality seeds to the farmers.
- **A major push towards this effort was made in 2016-17 with the creation of 150 pulses seed hubs in 24 states, covering Krishi Vigyan Kendras in 97 districts, 46 State Agricultural Universities and 7 ICAR institutions to provide location-specific varieties and quality seed quantities.**
- **Along with this effort, Breeder Seed Production Centres’ infrastructure at 12 ICAR/SAU centres in 08 states was created for increasing Varietal Replacement and Seed Replacement.**

**Features of the strategy**

- With an aim to attain self-sufficiency in the production of pulses, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has formulated a special Kharif strategy for implementation in the ensuing Kharif 2021 season.
- Through consultations with the state governments, a detailed plan for both
area expansion and productivity enhancement for Tur, Moong and Urad has been formulated.

- Under the strategy, **utilising all the high yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds** that are available either with the Central Seed Agencies or in the States will be distributed free of cost to increase area through intercropping and sole crop.
- For the coming Kharif 2021, it is proposed to distribute 20,27,318 (almost 10 times more seed mini kits than 2020-21) amounting to Rs. 82.01 crores.
- The **total cost for these mini-kits will be borne by the Central Government** to boost the production and productivity of tur, moong and urad.

The following mini-kits will be given:

- 13,51,710 mini kits of arhar containing certified seeds of HYVs of arhar released during last ten years and productivity not less than 15 qtl/ha- for intercropping.
- 4,73,295 mini kits of moong containing certified seeds of HYVs of moong released during last ten years but productivity not less than 10 qtl/ha- for intercropping.
- 93,805 mini kits of urad containing certified seeds of HYVs of urad released during last ten years but productivity not less than 10 qtl/ha- for intercropping.
- 1,08,508 mini kits of urad containing certified seeds of uradHYVs of Urad released during last 15 years and productivity not less than 10 qtl/ha - for Sole Crop.

The above mini-kits used for intercropping and urad sole crop will cover an area of 4.05 lakh hectare in the Kharif season 2021 to be funded by the Central Government. In addition to this, the usual programme of intercropping and area expansion by the states will continue on a sharing basis between the Centre and State.

- Tur intercropping will be covered in 11 states and 187 districts. The states are Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.
- Moong intercropping will be covered in 9 states and 85 districts. The states are Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.
Urad intercropping will be covered in 6 states in 60 districts. The states are Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Urad sole cropping will be covered in 6 states.

- For effective implementation of the Kharif mini kit programme, a massive outreach with the concerned district will be held both through a series of webinars by the central government and state governments concerned to ensure that there are no hiccups.
- District level training programmes during the crop season will be organized through the District Agriculture Office and the ATMA network for good agriculture practices and the use of new seeds in subsequent seasons as well.
- The Agricultural Technology Application Research Institutes (ATARIs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras will also be roped in for effective implementation and training to the farmers.

Source: PIB

Supreme Court declines EC plea to restrain media reports

**Supreme Court declines EC plea to restrain media reports**

- **Real-time reportage of court proceedings**, including the oral exchanges in courtrooms between judges and lawyers, is part of the **right to freedom of speech**, the Supreme Court held in a judgment.
- “With the advent of technology, we are seeing reporting proliferate through social media forums which provide real-time updates to a much wider audience. This is an extension of the freedom of speech and expression that the media possesses. **This constitutes a virtual extension of the open court.**” a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in a judgment.
- Such live reporting of court proceedings is a cause of celebration rather than apprehension.

**Madras HC remarks**

- The court declined a plea made by the Election Commission of India to...
restrain the media from reporting oral remarks made by a Division Bench of the Madras High court.

- The HC judges had said that poll body officials should be charged with “murder” for allowing rallies and mass gatherings during the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.
- The judges had remarked that the EC was solely responsible for the COVID surge.
- In the judgment, Justice Chandrachud said the case posed a delicate balancing of powers between the HC and the ECI, which are both constitutional authorities.
- The court said that except in cases of child sexual abuse and marital issues, the phenomenon of free press should extend to court proceedings.
- “Citizens have a right to know about what transpires in the course of judicial proceedings. The dialogue in a court indicates the manner in which a judicial proceeding is structured... Arguments addressed before the court, the response of opposing counsel and issues raised by the court are matters on which citizens have a legitimate right to be informed,” Justice Chandrachud observed.
- The court referred to how the Gujarat High Court had recently introduced live-streaming of its proceedings in a bid to enhance public participation in the dispensation of justice.
- “In this backdrop, it would be retrograde for this court to promote the rule of law and access to justice on one hand, and shield the daily operations of the High Courts and this court from the media in all its forms, by gagging the reporting of proceedings,” Justice Chandrachud said.
- The court said oral observations made during course of a hearing do not bind the parties and do not form a part of the judgment. An exchange of views was intrinsic to the applicability of mind and the process of judging.

Source: TH
Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA): Iran Nuclear Deal

What is JCPOA? About Iran nuclear deal?

- Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
- Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.
Why did Iran agree to the deal?

- It had been hit with devastating economic sanctions by the United Nations, United States and the European Union that are estimated to have cost it tens of billions of pounds a year in lost oil export revenues. Billions in overseas assets had also been frozen.

Iran’s objective

- By doing so, Iran is trying to increase the pressure on Britain, France and Germany in particular to find some arrangement that will allow them to sell the oil they were buying when Iran was not under sanctions. That requires some level of US support to waive sanctions against European firms by the United States. So far, the US has no agreed to do that.
- Iran is now operating 60 IR-6 advanced centrifuges. Such a centrifuge can produce enriched uranium 10 times as fast as the first-generation IR-1s.
allowed under the accord.
• By starting up these advanced centrifuges, Iran further cuts into the one year
  that experts estimate Tehran would need to have enough material for building
  a nuclear weapon – if it chose to pursue one.

Why did US pull out of the deal?

• Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran
  access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran’s support for groups
  the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah.
• They note it also doesn’t curb Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and
  that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear
  program in the past.

Impact of escalated tensions between Iran and the US:

• Iran can make things difficult for the U.S. in Afghanistan as also in Iraq and
  Syria.
• The U.S.’s ability to work with Russia in Syria or with China regarding North
  Korea will also be impacted.
• And sooner or later, questions may be asked in Iran about why it should
  continue with other restrictions and inspections that it accepted under the
  JCPOA, which would have far-reaching implications for the global nuclear
  architecture.
• Coming after the rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris
  climate change accord and the North American Free Trade Agreement,
  President’s decision further diminishes U.S. credibility.

Implications for India:

• Oil and Gas: The impact on world oil prices will be the immediately visible
  impact of the U.S. decision. Iran is presently India’s third biggest supplier
  (after Iraq and Saudi Arabia), and any increase in prices will hit both inflation
  levels as well as the Indian rupee.
• It would impact the development of Chabahar port.
• International North–South Transport Corridor: New U.S. sanctions will
  affect these plans, especially if any of the countries along the route or
  banking and insurance companies dealing with the INSTC plan also decide to
  adhere to U.S. restrictions on trade with Iran.
• Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: China may consider inducting Iran
into the SCO. If the proposal is accepted by the SCO, which is led by China and Russia, India will become a member of a bloc that will be seen as anti-American, and will run counter to some of the government’s other initiatives like the Indo-Pacific quadrilateral with the U.S., Australia and Japan.

- **Rules-based order**: By walking out of the JCPOA, the U.S. government has overturned the precept that such international agreements are made by “States” not just with prevailing governments or regimes.

**What role does the U.N. Security Council play in this crisis?**

- The Security Council adopted a resolution in 2015 that endorsed the nuclear agreement and ended U.N. sanctions against Iran.
- The resolution, 2231, includes what is known as a “snapback” provision that could reinstate those sanctions if other parties to the agreement complained that Iran was cheating. Such a step would likely doom the agreement.

**Global Implications:**

1. Down trends in global economy.
2. Fuel prices would reach high points.
3. Iran may block Strait of Hormuz which is a strategic choke point which in turn would affect global trade.
4. Giant economy like India, China and Russia will suffer.
5. US has cancelled airlines from US to India because they pass over Iran which would affect airspace industry.


**Source:** TH
India-UK virtual summit strengthens STI cooperation

India and UK agreed on a common vision of a new and transformational **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** between the UK and India, and adopted an ambitious **India-UK Roadmap to 2030** to steer cooperation for the next 10 years.

Some of the key points to strengthen STI cooperation between two countries are:

- Enhance cooperation between India and the UK on strengthening the role of women in STEM at schools, universities, and research institutions and creating an enabling environment for equal participation of women in STEM disciplines through collaboration on new initiatives like **Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI)** project.

**GATI Project**

- The DST is incorporating a system of grading institutes depending on the enrolment of women and the advancement of the careers of women faculty and scientists.
- It will be called GATI (Gender Advancement through Transforming Institutions).
- The concept borrows from a programme started by the UK in 2005 called the Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network), which is now being adopted by many countries.
- The DST will soon launch a pilot, which the British Council has helped it develop.

**Athena SWAN Charter**

- The Athena SWAN Charter is an evaluation and accreditation programme in the UK enhancing gender equity in **science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM)**.
- Participating research organisations and academic institutions are required to analyse data on gender equity and develop action plans for improvement.
- Signatories commit to addressing various issues such as –
1. Unequal gender representation;
2. Tackling the gender pay gap;
3. Removing the obstacles faced by women in career development and progression;
4. Discriminatory treatment often experienced by trans people;
5. Gender balance of committees and zero tolerance for bullying and sexual harassment.

- Develop collaborations between Industry, Academia and the Government to foster innovation among school students by focusing on teacher training, mentoring and sharing of global best practices through initiatives like the India Innovation Competency Enhancement Program (IICEP).
- Build on the two countries’ existing bilateral research, science and innovation infrastructure and governmental relationships to continue to support high-quality, high-impact research and innovation through joint processes. Position the UK and India as mutual partners of choice and a force for good in the world in areas of shared priority, including health, the circular economy, climate, clean energy, urban development and engineering healthier environments, waste-to-wealth, manufacturing, cyber physical systems, space and related research.
- Forge partnership across the pipeline of research and innovation activity, from basic research to applied and interdisciplinary research and through to translation and commercialisation across government departments to optimise impact, utilize expertise and networks and minimise duplication.
- Leverage and build on existing, long-standing bilateral partnerships such as on education, research and innovation, to stimulate a joint pipeline of talent, excellent researchers and early-career innovators and explore new opportunities for student and researchers exchanges by establishing joint centres and facilitating access to state-of-the-art facilities.
- Work together to share knowledge and expertise regarding artificial intelligence, scientific support to policies and regulatory aspects including ethics, and promote a dialogue in research and innovation. Through Tech Summits, bring together tech innovators, scientists, entrepreneurs and policy makers to work together on challenges including the norms and governance of future tech under the cross-cutting theme of ‘data’.
- Grow programmes such as the Fast Track Start-Up Fund to nurture innovation led, sustainable growth and jobs, and tech solutions that benefit
both countries. Explore partnerships with joint investment to enable the growth of technology-enabled innovative businesses and increase the number of start-ups and MSMEs growing and scaling-up internationally, for example in relation to climate and the environment, med tech devices, industrial biotech and agriculture, and sustainable development, helping to achieve the Global Goals by 2030.

Other decisions in Virtual summit

- They welcomed the signing of the new UK-India MoU on Telecommunications/ICT and the Joint Declaration of Intent on Digital and Technology, the establishment of new high-level dialogues on tech, new joint rapid research investment into Covid19, a new partnership to support zoonotic research, new investment to advance understanding of weather and climate science, and the continuation of the UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI).
- They agreed to expand and enhance the existing UK-India vaccines partnership, highlighting the successful collaboration between Oxford University, Astra Zeneca and the Serum Institute of India on an effective Covid19 vaccine that is ‘developed in UK’, ‘Made in India’ and ‘distributed globally’.
- They emphasized that the international community should learn lessons and agreed to work together to reform and strengthen WHO and the global health security architecture to strengthen pandemic resilience.

Source: PIB

Jal Jeevan Mission UPSC

Jal Jeevan Mission

- JJM is a flagship programme of the Union Government being implemented in partnership with the States with the objective to provide tap water connection in every rural household by 2024.
- The programme will also implement source sustainability measures as
The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community approach to water and will include extensive Information, Education and communication as a key component of the mission.

The Mission was launched on August 15, 2019.

Under Jal Jeevan Mission, in 2021-22, in addition to Rs 50,011 Crore budgetary allocation, there is also Rs 26,940 Crore assured fund available under the 15th Finance Commission tied-grant to RLB/ PRIs for water & sanitation, matching State share and externally aided as well as State funded projects.

Thus, in 2021-22, more than Rs. 1 lakh Crore is planned to be invested in the country on ensuring tap water supply to rural homes.

JJM focuses on development of Village Action Plan (VAP) and formation of Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) for every village so that the local village community plays a key role in planning, implementation as well as operation and maintenance of the in-village water supply infrastructure created for them.

This ensures **bottom-up approach** with the participation of the local community.

Through community engagement, the resources created in the villages/ habitations are **handed over to the Panchayats or VWSC** for monitoring, surveillance and upkeep.

Under JJM, **water quality testing laboratories at district & State levels are given priority** and community is being encouraged for surveillance of water quality.

‘Jal Shakti Vibhag’ is facilitating to empower and engage with the community.

The broad objectives of the Mission are:

- To provide FHTC to every rural household.
- To prioritize provision of FHTCs in quality affected areas, villages in drought prone and desert areas, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) villages, etc.
- To provide functional tap connection to Schools, Anganwadi centres, GP buildings, Health centres, wellness centres and community buildings
- To monitor functionality of tap connections.
- To promote and ensure voluntary ownership among local community by way of contribution in cash, kind and/ or labour and voluntary labour (shramdaan)
- To assist in ensuring sustainability of water supply system, i.e. water source, water supply infrastructure, and funds for regular O&M
To empower and develop human resource in the sector such that the demands of construction, plumbing, electrical, water quality management, water treatment, catchment protection, O&M, etc. are taken care of in short and long term.

To bring awareness on various aspects and significance of safe drinking water and involvement of stakeholders in manner that make water everyone's business.

The following components are supported under JJM:

- Development of in-village piped water supply infrastructure to provide tap water connection to every rural household.
- Development of reliable drinking water sources and/or augmentation of existing sources to provide long-term sustainability of water supply system.
- Wherever necessary, bulk water transfer, treatment plants and distribution network to cater to every rural household.
- Technological interventions for removal of contaminants where water quality is an issue.
- Retrofitting of completed and ongoing schemes to provide FHTCs at minimum service level of 55 lpcd.
- Greywater management.
- Support activities, i.e. IEC, HRD, training, development of utilities, water quality laboratories, water quality testing & surveillance, R&D, knowledge centre, capacity building of communities, etc.
- Any other unforeseen challenges/ issues emerging due to natural disasters/ calamities which affect the goal of FHTC to every household by 2024, as per guidelines of Ministry of Finance on Flexi Funds.

Source: PIB
PLI Scheme for the Food Processing Industry

Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has launched an online portal for ‘Production Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry’ (PLISFPI). This Central Sector Scheme ‘PLISFPI’ will be implemented for the period from 2021-22 to 2026-27. It is a part of Prime Minister’s announcement of Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Key Points

- It will support creation of global food manufacturing champions commensurate with India’s natural resource endowment and support Indian brands of food products in the international markets.
- The scheme has two components,
  1. It will provide sales based incentives for manufacturing of four major food product segments - Ready to Cook/ Eat (RTC/ RTE) foods, Processed Fruits & Vegetables, Marine Products, Mozzarella.
  2. It will provide grants for undertaking Branding & Marketing activities abroad.
- The sales based incentive would be paid from 2021-22 to 2026-27 on incremental sales over the base year. For the first 4 years, 5th & 6th years, base year would be 2019-20, 2021-22 & 2022-23 respectively.
- Applicants will be extended grant @ 50% of expenditure on branding & marketing abroad subject to a maximum grant of 3% of Sales of food products or Rs 50 crore per year, whichever is less.

Beneficiaries

- Applicants may be Proprietary Firm or Partnership Firm or Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or a Company registered in India (or) Co-operatives (or) SME. They will apply only through online portal.
- Category-I - Applicants are large entities who apply for Incentive based on Sales Exports, and Investment Criteria.
- Category-II - SMEs Applicants manufacturing innovative/ organic products who apply for PLI Incentive based on Sales, their product uniqueness, level of product development etc.
- Category-III - Applicants applying solely for grant for undertaking Branding & Marketing activities abroad.
DCGI approves anti-COVID drug- BY DRDO & Clinical Trials

GS-Paper-3:  S&T - Innovation – UPSC PRELIMS – Mains Application

Context: An anti-COVID-19 therapeutic application of the drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has been developed by Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy’s Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad.

An anti-COVID-19 therapeutic application of the drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) has been developed by Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy’s Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad.

Clinical trial results have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence.

Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in COVID patients. The drug will be of immense benefit to the people suffering from COVID-19.

- Pursuing Prime Minister call for preparedness against the pandemic, DRDO took the initiative of developing anti-COVID therapeutic application of 2-DG.
- In April 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, INMAS-DRDO scientists conducted laboratory experiments with the help of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad and found that this molecule works effectively against SARS-CoV-2 virus and inhibits the viral growth.
Based on these results, Drugs Controller General of India’s (DCGI) Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) permitted Phase-II clinical trial of 2-DG in COVID-19 patients in May 2020.

**DCGI**

The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) is the head of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) in India.

- **CDSCO is the central drug authority in India.**
  - CDSCO is a national level regulatory body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
  - The body is responsible for approving licenses for certain categories of drugs.
  - It is headquartered in New Delhi.
  - There are six functioning central drug testing laboratories under CDSCO.
- The DCGI also establishes standards for the manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India.
- The DCGI also regulates medical and pharmaceutical devices.
- In case of any dispute with respect to the quality of the drug, the DCGI is the appellate authority.
- The DCGI prepares and maintains the national reference standard for drugs.
- He ensures that there is uniformity in the implementation of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- He is responsible for the training of Drug Analysts deputed by State Drug Control Laboratories and other Institutions.
- He is also in charge of the analysis of cosmetics received from the CDSCO as survey samples.
- The DCGI is also the central licensing authority for medical devices which fall under the Medical Device Rules 2017.

**The CDSCO is responsible for the following:**

- Drug approval under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- Conducting clinical trials. Setting standards for drugs.
- Quality control over drugs imported into the country.
- Coordinating activities of the state drug control organisations.
- Registration of foreign manufacturers of drugs and medical devices whose products are to be imported into the country.
- Grant of licences to import drugs by Government hospitals or Medical Institutions for the use of their patients.
- Recommend banning of drugs considered harmful or sub-therapeutic under section 26A drugs and Cosmetics Act.
The DRDO, along with its industry partner DRL, Hyderabad, started the clinical trials to test the safety and efficacy of the drug in COVID-19 patients. In Phase-II trials (including dose ranging) conducted during May to October 2020, the drug was found to be safe in COVID-19 patients and showed significant improvement in their recovery. Phase II was conducted in six hospitals and Phase IIb (dose ranging) clinical trial was conducted at 11 hospitals all over the country. Phase-II trial was conducted on 110 patients.

No clinical trials-for new drugs

- Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has allowed waivers on conducting trials for new drugs in India in case the drug is approved and marketed in countries specified by — the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

Regulation

- New drugs approved for use in select developed markets will be automatically allowed in India provided global trials included Indian patients.
- This waiver would also extend to drugs that receive these marketing approvals even while a trial is underway in India.
- Data generated(clinical trial) outside the country will be acceptable.
- Providing post-trial access of the drugs to the patients that require it have been defined for the first time.
- It removed a clause in the clinical trials that mandated the sponsor (the entity initiating the trial) to pay 60% of compensation upfront in case of death or permanent disability of a patient.
- Now companies will pay the total amount once it is proven that the injury occurred because of the trial.
- Compensations in cases of death and permanent disability, or “other” injuries to a trial participant will be decided by Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).
- It removed regulations on tests conducted on animals in case of drugs approved and marketed for more than two years in well-regulated overseas drug markets.

Significance of New Rules

- It will end the unnecessary repetition of trials and speed up the availability of new drugs in the country.
- It will lower the cost of drugs.
- It will improve the ease of doing business for drug makers.
Criticism of new regulations

- India is a country of vast ethnic diversity and most of the trials are done in the West. There is need of bridging trials for ethnically diverse populations to check drug suitability population.
- Waiver should be only for drugs required urgently for national emergency.
- Proving injury due to the trial is problematic and it is prone to manipulation.

- In efficacy trends, the patients treated with 2-DG showed faster symptomatic cure than Standard of Care (SoC) on various endpoints. A significantly favourable trend (2.5 days difference) was seen in terms of the median time to achieving normalisation of specific vital signs parameters when compared to SoC.
- Based on successful results, DCGI further permitted the Phase-III clinical trials in November 2020. The Phase-III clinical trial was conducted on 220 patients between December 2020 to March 2021 at 27 COVID hospitals in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- The detailed data of phase-III clinical trial was presented to DCGI. In 2-DG arm, significantly higher proportion of patients improved symptomatically and became free from supplemental oxygen dependence (42% vs 31%) by Day-3 in comparison to SoC, indicating an early relief from Oxygen therapy/dependence.

The similar trend was observed in patients aged more than 65 years. On May 01, 2021, DCGI granted permission for Emergency Use of this drug as adjunct therapy in moderate to severe COVID-19 patients. Being a generic molecule and analogue of glucose, it can be easily produced and made available in plenty in the country.

Conclusion

The drug comes in powder form in sachet, which is taken orally by dissolving it in water. It accumulates in the virus infected cells and prevents virus growth by stopping viral synthesis and energy production. Its selective accumulation in virally infected cells makes this drug unique. In the ongoing second COVID-19 wave, a large number of patients are facing severe oxygen dependency and need hospitalisation. The drug is expected to save precious lives due to the mechanism of operation of the drug in infected cells. This also reduces the hospital stay of
COVID-19 patients.

### Phases of CLINICAL TRIALS

Clinical trial is a long and careful research process which is conducted in a step-by-step exercise usually comprising of the following phases:

- **Phase-0/Pre-clinical testing**: The clinical trial often starts in a laboratory with the scientists finalising their ideas. If they are convinced, they start with animal testing. After all the things seems to be working well, the research on humans is needed.

- **Phase-1**: It is the first study conducted on people in the clinical trial process. Here, the healthy participants (a small number) are given a fixed dosage and are watched closely. The aim of the study is to find the safest dose and the best treatment that can be given. It identifies side effects and studies how the dose works with other medicines or food.

- **Phase-2**: In this phase, the study builds upon the results of Phase-1. It further tests the safety of drug along with its effectiveness. Here, more participants are involved. Now either all the participants are given the same experimental dose or sometimes the participants are divided into groups and given different treatment doses to compare. This phase can last for several years.

- **Phase-3**: In this phase, the participant size is in hundreds to thousands. Here, tests are conducted to find if the treatment is better than the standard treatment available. It then compares side effects, survival rate and quality of life between the two. This phase runs over a long period of time.

- **Phase-4/ Post-marketing trials**: In this phase, the participant size is in thousands. The studies are conducted only after the treatment has been registered with the drug regulator. This is usually done by pharmaceutical companies that manufacture the product. The study helps to identify how well the treatment is working when used widely. The long-term benefits and risks are also monitored. It further looks for the other uses of the drug or treatment other than intended ones.

Source: PIB

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**National Electricity Policy-Revision**
National Electricity Policy-Revision

GS-Paper-3: Economic reform – UPSC PRELIMS – Mains Application

The government has decided to revise the National Electricity Policy-NEP by invoking Section 3 of the Electricity Act, 2003. The 2003 Act mandates that the central government shall prepare the NEP in consultation with the state governments and the Central Electricity Authority.

The government has constituted a committee now. It would finalise the draft NEP which has been circulated, after seeking views of stakeholders. The first NEP was formulated in 2005.

Progress since 2005:

- Between 2005 and 2021, generation capacity (inclusive of renewable capacity) has gone up by about 251 GW.
- The renewable generating capacity has gone up to 94 GW (from wind, solar, small hydro and biomass) from almost nothing.
- This led to about 10% of generation from renewable sources.
- An additional 2.5 lakh circuit-km of transmission lines (above 220 kV) were added during this time.
- Per capita consumption has almost doubled from 630 units to approximately 1,200 units today.
- Besides, peak and energy shortages have come down from double digit figures to about half a percentage point.
- Rural electrification is almost complete with near 100% electricity access to households (not necessarily 24 hours supply).

Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020

Recently, the Central government has introduced the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 to amend various provisions in the Electricity Act 2003.

Why?
To address critical issues weakening the commercial and investment activities in the electricity sector.

The current challenges plaguing the Indian power sector is derived from negligence in addressing the structural issues. These include operational and
financial inefficiencies of power generation, transmission and distribution utilities, access and quality of power supply, political interference, lack of private investments, inadequate public infrastructure and lack of consumer participation. Bringing transparency and accountability to protect the interest of consumers and ensuring healthy growth of the power sector.

Objectives:

1. Ensure consumer centricity,
2. Promote Ease of Doing Business,
3. Enhance sustainability of the power sector,
4. Promote green power.

Amendments:

National Selection Committee: Instead of the separate Selection Committee (for appointment of Chairperson and members of State Electricity Regulatory Commissions-SERCs), there is a proposal to set up a National Selection Committee. However, the Central Government is also considering to continue with the existing separate Selection Committees for each state – but make them Standing Selection Committees so that there is no need for constituting them afresh every time a vacancy occurs.

The only difference is that it will now be proposed to be presided by the Chief Justice of the High Court of the state.

Introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer: Direct Benefit Transfer will be beneficial for both the State Governments and as well as Distribution Companies. It will be beneficial for the State Government because it will ensure that the subsidy reaches the people who are actually entitled and the State Government gets clear accounts of the amount given as subsidy. It will benefit the distribution company by making sure that the subsidies due are received as per the number of beneficiaries.

National Renewable Energy Policy: India is a signatory to the Paris Climate Agreement. It is therefore proposed to have a separate policy for the development and promotion of generation of electricity from renewable sources of
energy. The policy prescribes a minimum percentage of purchase of electricity from renewable sources of production. It seeks to give special attention to hydro power.

**Sustainability: Cost Reflective Tariff**- There had been the issue of lazy attempts from the commissions in adopting the tariffs determined, causing issues of cost escalation. To address this problem, the Amendment has prescribed a period of 60 days to adopt the determined tariffs. Failing such a timeline of 60 days, the tariff would be deemed to be accepted.

**Payment Security** : It is proposed to empower Load Dispatch Centres to oversee the establishment of adequate payment security mechanisms before dispatch of electricity, as per contracts. Late payment of dues of generating and transmission companies have reached unsustainable levels. This impairs the finances of the Gencos and Transcos and also increases the **Non Performing Assets** of the Banks.

**Ease of Doing Business:**

**Establishment of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority (ECEA):** It is an Authority headed by a retired Judge of the High Court with powers to execute their orders as decree of a civil court. The Authority will enforce performance of contracts related to purchase or sale or transmission of power between a generating company, distribution licensee or transmission licensee.

Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) and State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) do not have powers to execute their orders as decree of a civil court.

**Cross Subsidy:** The Bill provides for the SERCs to reduce cross subsidies as per the provisions of the Tariff Policy.

**Strengthening of the Appellate Tribunal (APTEL):** It is proposed to increase the strength of APTEL to at least seven to facilitate quick disposal of cases. To be
able to effectively enforce its orders, it is also proposed to give it the powers of the High Court under the provisions of the Contempt of Courts Act.

**Penalties:** In order to ensure compliance of the provisions of the Electricity Act and orders of the Commission, section 142 and section 146 of the Electricity Act are proposed to be amended to provide for higher penalties.

**Cross Border Trade in Electricity:** Provisions have been added to facilitate and develop trade in electricity with other countries.

**Distribution sub-licensees:** To improve quality of supply, an option is proposed to be provided to Discoms to authorise another person as a sub-license to supply electricity in any particular part of its area, with the permission of the State Electricity Regulatory Commission.

**Shortfalls to be addressed in the new policy?**

- **Policy statements** - Our policy statements are too verbose and lengthy. The first NEP as also the draft circulated now run into several pages, and are not incisive enough or reader-friendly. Ideally, policy statements should be crisp and pithy, and should be able to hold on to readers’ interest.
- **Effectiveness** – Another issue is regarding the effectiveness of the policy.
- The draft policy has a lot to say on renewable generation, and rightly so, but what is the guarantee that it would be followed.
- While the central government may fix targets on renewable generation capacity, the implementation will mainly be done by private enterprises.
- Now, private enterprises will move according to the investment climate as it exists in states.
- All stakeholders should treat the NEP as mandatory and act accordingly.
- Problems have arisen in the case of the National Tariff Policy (NTP) in the past.
- Certain states have expressed unwillingness to comply with certain sections of this document.
- Incidentally, both the NEP and the NTP emanate from Section 3 of the Act.
- **NEP and NTP** – A fundamental issue is whether there is a need for two separate policy statements, the NEP and the NTP.
- The first NTP was formulated in 2006 with some minor amendments carried out in 2008, 2011 and 2016.
- Both these documents exist concurrently, but they practically run into each other’s domain.
It is not really possible to segregate tariff-related issues from electricity policy in general since they are all interlinked.

Thus, it would be appropriate to subsume the NTP into the NEP, and tariff would be one of the several issues which would be a matter of electricity policy.

It will have the benefit of a single holistic policy statement that would take into account all the interlinkages. This will not entail an amendment to the Act.

Source: PIB

National Programme for Organic Production-Organic agriculture

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has sourced finger millet and barnyard millet from farmers in Himalayas (Uttarakhand) for exports to Denmark. These millets were exported to Denmark after meeting the organic certification standards of the European Union (EU).

Organic Food

Organic farm produce means the produce obtained from organic agriculture, while organic food means food products that have been produced in accordance with specified standards for organic production. According to FSSAI, ‘organic agriculture’ is a system of farm design and management to create an ecosystem of agriculture production without the use of synthetic external imgs such as chemical fertilisers, pesticides and synthetic hormones or genetically modified organisms.
At present, organic products are exported provided they are produced, processed, packed and labelled as per the requirements of the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP).

- The **NPOP or the Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India)** is a top-down mechanism run by the APEDA under the Ministry of Commerce for certifying general exports.
- The **NPOP** came into inception in 2001 under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulations) Act, 1992.

### Organic Food Regulatory System

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is the food regulator in the country and is also responsible for regulating organic food in the domestic market and imports. FSSAI had notified the existing certification system through Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulations in 2017.

#### National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)

- NPOP grants **organic farming certification** through a process of **third party certification**.
- It involves the **accreditation programme** for Certification Bodies, standards for organic production, promotion of organic farming etc.
- It is implemented by **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**
- The **NPOP standards** for production and accreditation system have been **recognized** by the **European Commission, Switzerland** and **USA** as equivalent to their respective accreditation systems.

#### Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS)

- PGS is another process of **certifying organic products.**
- The certification is in the form of a **documented logo or a statement.**
- It is implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare.**
- The organic farmers have full control over the certification process. PGS certification is **only for farmers or communities** that can organise and perform as a group. Individual farmers or groups of farmers smaller than five members are **not covered** under PGS.
- PGS is applicable on **on-farm activities** comprising of crop production, processing and livestock rearing, etc.
- **Off-farm processing activities** such as storage, transport and value addition activities by persons/agencies other than PGS farmers away from
Organic foods are also required to comply with the requirements of labelling of FSSAI in addition to that of NPOP or PGS-India.

**Significance** - The NPOP certification recognized by the EU and Switzerland enables India to export unprocessed plant products to these countries without the requirement of additional certification.

- It also facilitates export of Indian organic products to the United Kingdom even in the post Brexit phase.
- It has also been recognized by the Food Safety Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) for trade of organic products in the domestic market.
- Organic products covered under the bilateral agreement with NPOP need not to be recertified for import in India.

**Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)**

- This authority, which was established under the APEDA Act, 1985, functions under the control of Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It has been mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the scheduled products viz. fruits, vegetables and their products, meat products and poultry products, dairy products, etc.,
- It has been entrusted with the responsibility to monitor import of sugar.


Source: PIB

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**Methane Emissions- Global Methane Assessment & Climate Change**

GS-III | 09 May,2021

**Methane Emissions- Global Methane Assessment & Climate Change**

**GS-Paper-3:** Environment and climate change – UPSC PRELIMS – Mains
Application

“Human-caused methane emissions must be cut by 45 per cent to avoid the worst effects of climate change, a new United Nations report has said”

Such a cut would prevent a rise in global warming by up to 0.3 degrees Celsius by 2045, the report added. It would also prevent 260,000 premature deaths, 775,000 asthma-related hospital visits annually, as well as 25 million tonnes of crop losses. Human-caused methane emissions are increasing faster currently than at any other time since record keeping began in the 1980s.

Methane

Methane is gas that is found in small quantities in Earth’s atmosphere. Methane is the simplest hydrocarbon, consisting of one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms (CH₄). Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas. It is flammable, and is used as a fuel worldwide. Methane is produced by the breakdown or decay of organic material and can be introduced into the atmosphere by either natural processes – such as the decay of plant material in wetlands, the seepage of gas from underground deposits or the digestion of food by cattle – or human activities – such as oil and gas production, rice farming or waste management.

Impact of Methane: Methane is 84 times more potent than carbon and doesn’t last as long in the atmosphere before it breaks down. This makes it a critical target for reducing global warming more quickly while simultaneously working to reduce other greenhouse gases. It is responsible for creating ground-level ozone, a dangerous air pollutant.

*** The report was released by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Key points

1. Carbon dioxide levels have dropped during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. However, methane in the atmosphere reached record levels last year, according to the data from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
2. The report said this was a cause of concern as methane was an extremely powerful greenhouse gas. It was responsible for about 30 per cent of
warming since pre-industrial times.
3. However, cutting methane emissions can rapidly reduce the rate of warming in the near-term as the gas broke down quickly, the report said.
4. Governments worldwide were aspiring to reduce methane. For instance, the European Commission had adopted the European Union Methane Strategy in October 2020. It outlined measures to cut methane emissions in Europe and internationally.
5. Human-caused methane emissions are increasing faster currently than at any other time since record keeping began in the 1980s.

Major Sources

Fossil Fuel: Oil and gas extraction, processing and distribution accounted for 23% of methane emissions in the fossil fuel sector. Coal mining accounted for 12% of emissions. Fossil fuel industry had the greatest potential for low-cost methane cuts, up to 80% of measures in the oil and gas industry could be implemented at negative or low cost. About 60% of methane cuts in this sector could make money as reducing leaks would make more gas available for sale.

Waste: Landfills and wastewater made up about 20% of emissions in the waste sector. The waste sector could cut its methane emissions by improving the disposal of sewage around the world.

Agriculture: In the agricultural sector, livestock emissions from manure and enteric fermentation constituted for roughly 32% and rice cultivation 8% of emissions. Three behavioural changes — reducing food waste and loss, improving livestock management and adopting healthy diets (vegetarian or with a lower meat and dairy content) — could reduce methane emissions by 65–80 million tonnes per year over the next few decades.

Reduction Potential

Europe: Greatest potential to curb methane emissions from farming, fossil fuel operations and waste management. The European Commission had adopted the European Union Methane Strategy.

India: Greatest potential to reduce methane emissions in the waste sector.

China: Mitigation potential was best in coal production and livestock.
Africa: Its potential to reduce methane emission was in livestock, followed by oil and gas.

Benefits

Human-caused methane emissions must be cut by 45% to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

Such a cut would prevent a rise in global warming by up to 0.3 degrees Celsius by 2045. It would also prevent 260,000 premature deaths, 775,000 asthma-related hospital visits annually, as well as 25 million tonnes of crop losses.

However, cutting methane emissions can rapidly reduce the rate of warming in the near-term as the gas broke down quickly.

Climate and Clean Air Coalition

Launched in 2019, it is a voluntary partnership of governments, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, scientific institutions and civil society organizations committed to protecting the climate and improving air quality through actions to reduce short-lived climate pollutants.

**India is a member of the coalition.**

United Nations Environment Programme: The UNEP is a leading global environmental authority established on 5th June 1972.


Headquarters: Nairobi, Kenya.

Functions: It sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for global environment protection.
India Initiative

**Seaweed-Based Animal Feed:** Central Salt & Marine Chemical Research Institute (CSMCRI) in collaboration with the country’s three leading institutes developed a seaweed-based animal feed additive formulation that aims to reduce methane emissions from cattle and also boost immunity of cattle and poultry.

**India Greenhouse Gas Program:** The India GHG Program led by WRI India (non-profit organization), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is an industry-led voluntary framework to measure and manage greenhouse gas emissions. The programme builds comprehensive measurement and management strategies to reduce emissions and drive more profitable, competitive and sustainable businesses and organisations in India.

**National Action Plan on Climate Change:** The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was launched in 2008 which aims at creating awareness among the representatives of the public, different agencies of the government, scientists, industry and the communities on the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.

**Bharat Stage-VI Norms:** India shifted from Bharat Stage-IV (BS-IV) to Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI) emission norms.

Source: DTE
The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) - of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has flagged serious concerns about NITI Aayog’s ambitious project for Great Nicobar Island. The committee has, however, removed the first hurdle faced by the project. The EAC was responding to the 126 page ‘pre-feasibility’ report, ‘Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman and Nicobar Islands’, prepared for the NITI Aayog by the Gurugram-based consulting agency Aecom India Private Limited.

Proposals for Great Nicobar plan

- The proposal includes an:
  - International container transshipment terminal,
  - A greenfield international airport,
  - A power plant and
  - A township complex spread over 166 sq. km. (mainly pristine coastal systems and tropical forests), and is estimated to cost ₹75,000 crore.

Concerns on site - missing information in EIA

- A discussion on the proposal in the March meeting was deferred because of delayed and incomplete submission of documents.
- The missing information included the minutes of the meeting note, details of the township to be developed over 149 sq. km., a note on seismic and tsunami hazards, freshwater requirement details (6.5 lakh people are envisaged to finally inhabit the island when the present population is only 8,500; the current total population of the entire island chain is less than 4.5 lakh), and details of the impact on the Giant Leatherback turtle.
- The committee also noted that there were no details of the trees to be felled — a number that could run into millions since 130 sq. km. of the project area has some of the finest tropical forests in India.
A point-wise response to concerns was submitted by the project proponent, the Andaman and Nicobar Island Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), on April 5, the very day the committee convened for its next meeting.

Environmental concerns in Galathea Bay

- Galathea Bay is an iconic nesting site in India of the enigmatic Giant Leatherback, the world’s largest marine turtle (IUCN status - Vulnerable).
- Other species at Galathea Bay - Nicobar Magapod and Dugong.
- The committee noted that the site selection for the port had been done mainly on technical and financial criteria, ignoring the environmental aspects.
- Ecological surveys in the last few years have reported a number of new species, many restricted to just the Galathea region.
- These include:
  - Critically endangered Nicobar shrew,
  - The Great Nicobar crake,
  - The Nicobar frog,
  - The Nicobar cat snake,
  - A new skink (Lipinia sp).
  - A new lizard (Dibamus sp.) and
  - A snake of the Lycodon sp that is yet to be described.
- “None of these are even mentioned in AECOM’s pre-feasibility report or the EAC’s observations,” he notes. “We don’t even fully know what exists here, leave alone understanding the many fragile inter-linkages of the Great Nicobar’s complex systems.”

Other recommendations of the Committee- Important points to note for EIA in Ecologically Sensitive areas

- The need for an independent assessment of terrestrial and marine biodiversity
- A study on the impact of dredging, reclamation and port operations, including oil spills
- The need for studies of alternative sites for the port with a focus on environmental and ecological impact, especially on turtles
- Analysis of risk-handling capabilities, a seismic and tsunami hazard map, a disaster management plan, details of labour, labour camps and their requirements, an assessment of the cumulative impact
- A hydro-geological study to assess impact on round and surface water regimes.
- The committee has also asked for details of the corporate environment
policy of the implementing agency — whether the company has an environment policy, a prescribed standard operating procedure to deal with environmental and forest violations, and a compliance management system.

Andaman and Nicobar Island Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)

- **ANIIDCO**, the Port Blair project proponent, is a government undertaking involved in activities such as tourism, trading (iron and steel, milk, petroleum products, and liquor) and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries.

Read more about Little Andaman Island Development


Source: TH

FCRA amendments- Foreign contribution and COVID-19

GS-II | 10 May, 2021

Details of the amendments

- The amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) enacted last year that among others made it compulsory for NGOs to open a bank account in Delhi has crippled the work of many organisations who are unable to receive foreign funds.
- Registered NGOs can receive foreign contribution for five purposes —
  - social,
  - educational,
  - religious,
  - economic and
An FCRA registration is mandatory for NGOs to receive foreign funds. There are 22,591 FCRA registered NGOs.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020


**Provisions of the Bill:**

- The Bill bars public servants from receiving foreign contributions. Public servant includes any person who is in service or pay of the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.
- The FCRA 2010 also bars certain persons to accept any foreign contribution. These include: election candidates, editor or publisher of a newspaper, judges, government servants, members of any legislature, and political parties, among others.
- The Bill prohibits the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person.
- The term ‘person’ under the Bill includes an individual, an association, or a registered company.
- The FCRA 2010 allows transfer of foreign contributions to persons registered to accept foreign contributions.
- The Bill makes Aadhaar number mandatory for all office bearers, directors or key functionaries of a person receiving foreign contribution, as an identification document.
- In case of a foreigner, a copy of the passport or the Overseas Citizen of India card for identification is required.
- The Bill states that foreign contribution must be received only in an account designated by the bank as FCRA account in such branches of the State Bank of India, New Delhi. No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account.
- The person may open another FCRA account in any scheduled bank of their choice for keeping or utilising the received contribution.
- The Bill allows the government to restrict usage of unutilised foreign contribution. This may be done if, based on an inquiry the government believes that such person has contravened provisions of the FCRA.
- The Bill proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. In FCRA
2010 the limit was 50%.
- The Bill allows the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate.
  - The government may do so if, post an inquiry, it is satisfied that such person has not violated any provisions of the FCRA 2010, and the management of its foreign contribution has been vested in an authority prescribed by the government.

**Importance of Amendment:**

- The annual inflow of foreign contribution has almost doubled between the years 2010 and 2019, but many recipients of foreign contribution have not utilised the same for the purpose for which they were registered or granted prior permission under the FCRA 2010.
- Many persons were not adhering to statutory compliances such as submission of annual returns and maintenance of proper accounts.
- Such a situation could have adversely affected the internal security of the country.
- The new Bill aims to enhance transparency and accountability in the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions and facilitating the genuine non-governmental organisations or associations who are working for the welfare of society.

**Issues**

- The Bill would impact the livelihoods of workers associated with the small Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and lead to the killing of the entire social sector as caps on administrative expenses would make it impossible for even the bigger NGOs to perform.
- It will severely impact collaborative research in critical fields in India as organisations receiving foreign funds will no longer be able to transfer them to small NGOs working at the grassroots level.
- The government aims to control the NGOs which engage in dubious activities. However, by failing to recognise the diversity of NGOs, which include world-class organisations that are recognised globally, will crush their competitiveness and creativity.
- It is also incompatible with international law.
  - The United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on protecting human rights defenders says that no law should criminalize or delegitimize activities in defence of human rights.
The Bill also fails to comply with India’s international legal obligations and constitutional provisions to respect and protect the rights to freedom of association, expression, and freedom of assembly. The amendments also assume that NGOs that are receiving foreign funds are guilty unless proven otherwise.

### Issue during COVID-19

- An NGO has now moved the Delhi High Court seeking exemption from the Union Home Ministry’s March 31 deadline to open an FCRA account with the SBI branch at Parliament Street here.
- The petitioner argued that it applied to open the account before the March 31 deadline but the administrative delays on the part of the bank and the Ministry severely restricted its activities including providing COVID-19 relief and paying of urgent salaries of staff and also affected its charitable and educational activities.
- There is also severe inconvenience involved in submitting copies of all the necessary papers and personal documents, such as Aadhaar card copies and the KYCs of trustees and other members of the NGO.
- The trustees and members live in different parts of the country, and getting documents together poses immense challenges due to COVID-19 restriction.
- The NGOs continue to face problems even as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on May 6 wrote to all States to involve NGOs, faith-based organisations, religious and social trusts at local level to handle the “unprecedented COVID-19 crisis”.

Source: TH
Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

- L.H. Bailey is considered the Father of American Horticulture and M.H. Marigowda is considered the Father of Indian Horticulture.
- It is a part of Green Revolution – Krishonnati Yojana which is Umbrella Scheme in agriculture sector since 2016-17 by clubbing 11 schemes.
- Centrally Sponsored Scheme. 85:15 in all States except Northeast and Himalayan States where it is 100% by States.
- For holistic growth of Horticulture sector; enhance Horticulture production, improve nutritional security and income support.
- MIDH adopts an end to end holistic approach i.e. Pre-production, Production, Post harvest management and Processing and marketing. Promote R&D in above fields (especially cold chain infrastructure).
- Promote FPOs and tie up with market aggregators and financial institutions; skill development and rural employment opportunities especially in cold chain sector; Improve productivity by way of quality germplasm and water use efficiency through Micro Irrigation.
- MIDH will work closely with NMSA towards development of Micro-Irrigation for all horticulture crops.

National Bamboo Mission is a subscheme of MIDH

- India has the highest area (14 million ha) under bamboo and is the 2nd richest country in diversity, after China, with 136 species (125 indigenous). Still India is a net importer of bamboo.
- Till recently, it has remained confined to the forests (12.8% of forest cover); 2/3rd located in North-Eastern States.

- The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) was launched in 2018-19 for holistic development of the bamboo sector through a cluster-based approach in a hub (industry) and spoke model to harness the opportunities by providing backward and forward linkages among the stakeholders – linking farmers to markets.
- Direct subsidy of 50% is given to farmers at Rs 1.00 lakh per ha, 100% to Government agencies and also to entrepreneurs for setting up various product development units, etc.
- The Mission is presently being executed by 21 States, including all the 9 States of NER through the respective State Bamboo Missions.
- NBM is also advising States to make available quality planting material to the farmers out to carry out plantations of commercially required species, set up common facility centres and other post-harvest units in complete sync with
the requirement of existing and sunrise industries for a win-win situation for farmers and Indian bamboo industry.

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
- **Funding:** Centrally Sponsored with 60:40 for all States; 90:10 for NE and Hilly States and 100% for UTs.
- **Components:**
  1. Adopting area-based, regionally differentiated strategy.
  2. To increase the area under bamboo cultivation. It proposes to bring about 1 lakh hectares under plantation.
  3. For marketing of bamboo and bamboo products especially of handicraft items.
  4. Setting up of new nurseries and strengthening of existing ones.
  5. Pest management and disease management will be a major part.
  6. The scheme would help in cutting down on the import of bamboo products.

- It will focus on limited States where it has social, commercial and economical advantage.

### National Horticulture Mission (NHM) is a subscheme

- Horticultural products include fruits, vegetables, flowers, coco, cashew nut, plantation crops, spices, medicinal aromatic plants. It is an employment intensive sector and an export oriented sector.
- **Ministry:** Department of Agriculture and Co-operation, MoAFW.
- **Funding:** Centrally Sponsored with 60:40 for all States in NHM and for HMNEH it is 90:10.
- **Objectives and Components:** Same as MIDH.

### Critical Analysis of MIDH Scheme

- To further promote and for holistic growth of the horticulture sector in the country, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has provided an enhanced allocation of Rs. 2250 Crore for the year 2021-22 for ‘Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture’ (MIDH), a centrally sponsored scheme.
- The Ministry is implementing MIDH with effect from 2014-15, for realizing the potential of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root and tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew and cocoa.
- Government intervention in the horticulture sector has led to the situation wherein horticulture production has surpassed the agriculture production in the country.
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. As per the 1st Advance Estimates for 2020-21 the total horticulture production in the country is 326.58 lakh MT from an area of 27.17 lakh ha. MIDH has played a significant role in increasing the area under horticulture crops. Area and production during the years 2014 – 15 to 2019 – 20 has increased by 9% and 14% respectively. Moreover, the mission has boosted best practices to be followed in farms which have significantly improved the quality of produce and productivity of farmland. The initiative of MIDH has not only resulted in India’s self-sufficiency in the horticulture sector but also contributed towards achieving sustainable development goals of zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, no poverty, gender equality etc. However, the sector is still facing a lot of challenges in terms of high post-harvest loss and gaps in post-harvest management and supply chain infrastructure. There is tremendous scope for enhancing the productivity of Indian horticulture which is imperative to cater to the country’s estimated demand of 650 Million MT of fruits and vegetables by the year 2050. Some of the new initiatives like focus on planting material production, cluster development programme, credit push through Agri Infra Fund, formation and promotion of FPOs are the right steps in this direction.

National Horticulture Board (NHB)

- National Horticulture Board (NHB) is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has cleared a record 1278 subsidy applications for integrated development of hi-tech commercial horticulture in the country including promotion of post-harvest and cold chain infrastructure during the last one year which were pending since long.
- NHB has also taken a lot of steps for ease of doing business by simplification of scheme guideline, documentation and processing process of new applications.
- NHB has also facilitated the convergence of its back-ended capital investment subsidy schemes with the Agri Infrastructure Fund Scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to encourage farmers and entrepreneurs to take advantage of subvention of 3% interest on the loan with credit guarantee coverage for a loan up to Rs 2.00 crores for setting up
post-harvest and cold chain infrastructure in the horticulture sector.

- With the financial support of NHB, an additional area of 2210 acres under hi-tech commercial horticulture, both in open and protected cultivation has been brought under horticulture. Also additional cold storage capacity of 1.15 lakh MT has been created under the Cold Storage Scheme of NHB.

Source: PIB
Disability identity and COVID-19

Persons with Disability (PWD) are those who have long-term impairment in terms of physical, mental, sensory and psychological conditions which can stop their equal participation in all aspects of society if met with various barriers. As per Census 2011, in India, out of the total population of 121 crore, about 2.68 Cr persons are ‘Disabled’ (2.21% of the total population).

- Out of 2.68 crore, 1.5 crore are males and 1.18 crore are females
- Majority (69%) of the disabled population resided in rural areas

Constitutional Frameworks for Disabled in India

- **Article 41** of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) states that State shall make effective provision for securing right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, within the limits of its economic capacity and development.
- The subject of ‘relief of the disabled and unemployable’ is specified in state list of the Seventh Schedule of the constitution.

Legislations for Disabled

Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016

- It increases the quantum of reservation for people suffering from disabilities from 3% to 4% in government jobs and from 3% to 5% in higher education institutes.
- Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education. Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to provide inclusive education.
- Stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings in a prescribed time frame along with Accessible India Campaign.
- The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State
Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies, monitoring implementation of the Act.

- A separate National and State Fund be created to provide financial support to persons with disabilities.
- The Bill provides for grant of guardianship by District Court under which there will be joint decision – making between the guardian and the persons with disabilities.
- The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies and also monitor implementation of the Act.
- The Bill provides for penalties for offences committed against persons with disabilities and also violation of the provisions of the new law.
- Special Courts will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.
- The New Act will bring our law in line with the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.

"Person with disability" means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.

"Person with benchmark disability" means a person with not less than 40% of a specified disability where specified disability has not been defined in measurable terms and includes a person with a disability where specified disability has been defined in measurable terms, as certified by the certifying authority.

Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.

- Principles stated to be implemented for empowerment of persons with disabilities (PWD) are respect for the inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons. The principle reflects a paradigm shift in thinking about disability from a social welfare concern to a human rights issue.
- The types of disabilities have been increased from 7 to 21. The act added mental illness, autism, spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological conditions, speech and language disability, thalassemia, hemophilia, sickle cell disease, multiple disabilities including deaf blindness, acid attack victims and Parkinson’s disease which were largely ignored in earlier act. In addition, the Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.

In News
The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has issued a notification making it mandatory for all States/UTs to grant certificate of disability through online mode only using UDID (Unique Disability ID) portal w.e.f. 01.06.2021.

Unique Disability Identification (UDID) Portal:

The project is being implemented with a view of creating a National Database for persons with disabilities (PwDs), and to issue a Unique Disability Identity Card to each PwDs. The project will not only encourage transparency, efficiency and ease of delivering the government benefits to the person with disabilities, but also ensure uniformity.

The project will also help in stream-lining the tracking of physical and financial progress of beneficiaries at all levels of hierarchy of implementation – from village level, block level, District level, State level and National level.

Programmes/Initiatives for Disabled:

- **DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme**: Under the scheme financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing various services to Persons with Disabilities, like special schools, vocational training centers, community-based rehabilitation, pre-school and early intervention, etc.
- **Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase / Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP)**: The Scheme aims at helping disabled persons by bringing suitable, durable, scientifically-manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances within their reach.
- **Accessible India Campaign: Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs**:
  - A nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access to equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.
  - The campaign targets at enhancing the accessibility of built environment, transport system and Information & communication ecosystem. Know in detail bout the Accessible India Campaign on the given link.
- **National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities (RGMF)**
  - The scheme aims to increase opportunities to students with disabilities for pursuing higher education.
  - Under the Scheme, 200 Fellowships per year are granted to students
Strengthening domestic Agarbatti industry

National Bamboo Mission has launched an MIS (Management Information Systems) based reporting platform for agarbatti stick production to collate the locations of stick making units, availability of raw material, functioning of the units, production capacity, marketing, etc.

With the help of this module, the linkages with the industry will be synergised better to enable seamlessly procurement from production units and information gaps can be plugged.

All NBM States are in the process of documenting all the units to assess better how further support can be given for ‘Vocal for Local’ and ‘Make for the World’ since Indian agarbatti are much sought after in global markets.

National Bamboo Mission (NBM), Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) schemes as well as States, together with industry partners have stepped up focused support to enable India to become Atma Nirbhar in the agarbatti sector, to bring back livelihoods for the local communities while at the same time modernising the sector too.

The agarbatti sector traditionally provided large scale employment to the local workforce, which however dwindled due to various factors including the ingress of cheap imports of round sticks and raw batti.

A comprehensive study was carried out by NBM in 2019 following which policy measures taken by the Government of moving raw batti imports from free to restricted category in Aug 2019 and increasing import duty on round stick uniformly to 25% in June 2020 came as a boost to the domestic units.

National Bamboo Mission is a subscheme of MIDH.
India has the highest area (14 million ha) under bamboo and is the 2nd richest country in diversity, after China, with 136 species (125 indigenous). Still India is a net importer of bamboo.

Till recently, it has remained confined to the forests (12.8% of forest cover); 2/3rd located in North-Eastern States.

The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) was launched in 2018-19 for holistic development of the bamboo sector through a cluster-based approach in a hub (industry) and spoke model to harness the opportunities by providing backward and forward linkages among the stakeholders – linking farmers to markets.

Direct subsidy of 50% is given to farmers at Rs 1.00 lakh per ha, 100% to Government agencies and also to entrepreneurs for setting up various product development units, etc.

The Mission is presently being executed by 21 States, including all the 9 States of NER through the respective State Bamboo Missions.

NBM is also advising States to make available quality planting material to the farmers out to carry out plantations of commercially required species, set up common facility centres and other post-harvest units in complete sync with the requirement of existing and sunrise industries for a win-win situation for farmers and Indian bamboo industry.

Ministry: Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

Funding: Centrally Sponsored with 60:40 for all States; 90:10 for NE and Hilly States and 100% for UTs.

Components:
1. Adopting area-based, regionally differentiated strategy.
2. To increase the area under bamboo cultivation. It proposes to bring about 1 lakh hectares under plantation.
3. For marketing of bamboo and bamboo products especially of handicraft items.
4. Setting up of new nurseries and strengthening of existing ones.
5. Pest management and disease management will be a major part.
6. The scheme would help in cutting down on the import of bamboo products.

It will focus on limited States where it has social, commercial and
IREDA bags “Green Urja Award”

• Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. IREDA has been conferred with “Green Urja Award” for being the Leading Public Institution in Financing Institution for Renewable Energy this year by Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC).
• The award was received by Shri Pradip Kumar Das, Chairman & Managing Director (CMD), IREDA from Dr. Ajay Mathur, Director General, International Solar Alliance in presence of Shri Anil Razdan, Chairman, ICC National Expert Committee on Energy in a virtual ceremony.
• IREDA gets the award for the pivotal and developmental role it plays in Green Energy Financing.
• IREDA under the administrative control of Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) is the only dedicated institution for financing Renewable Energy (RE) & Energy Efficiency (EE) projects in India.
• Since, its inception the company has played a catalytic role in developing market for financing RE & EE projects.
• IREDA has over the years sanctioned loans aggregating to Rs. 96,601 cores, disbursed Rs. 63,492 cores and supported more than 17,586 MW of RE capacity in the country till date.

Source: PIB
Afghanistan crisis news

Taliban and Afghan ceasefire for Id-ul-Fitr

- The Taliban and Afghan government on Monday declared a three-day ceasefire for this week’s Id-ul-Fitr holiday, following a sharp spike in violence as Washington goes about withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan.
- Violence has soared since May 1 — the deadline missed by the U.S. to withdraw the last of its troops — and while the Taliban have avoided engaging American forces, attacks against government and civilian targets have not stopped.
- Id-ul-Fitr marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramzan, and the holiday begins according to the sighting of the new moon.
- Pakistan is a key regional player in Afghanistan’s peace process, and Afghan officials have often accused Islamabad of arming and sheltering the Taliban.

Taliban and Afghan forces clashed at Kunduz

- The Taliban and Afghan forces clashed on the outskirts of the strategic northern city of Kunduz, with the insurgents claiming to have captured three districts in the region in a week.
- The Taliban have launched major offensives targeting government forces since early May when the U.S. military began its final troop withdrawal, and claim to have seized more than 50 of the country’s 421 districts.
- Taliban claimed they had captured the Imam Sahib district of the province, the third to be taken in a week.
- The Taliban have repeatedly attempted to capture the city, located not far from Tajikistan border. The insurgents briefly held Kunduz twice before — in September 2015, and again a year later.

Historical Background of Afghanistan crisis

The Saur Revolution had taken place in Afghanistan in 1978 which installed a communist party in power. Nur Muhammad Taraki became the head of the state replacing the previous president Daoud Khan. Taraki’s government introduced
many modernisation reforms that were considered too radical and left them unpopular, especially in the rural areas and with the traditional power structures. The communist government also had a policy of brutally suppressing all opposition. Even unarmed civilians opposing the government were not spared. This led to the rise of various anti-government armed groups in the country. The government itself was divided and Taraki was killed by a rival, Hafizullah Amin, who became the president. The Soviet Union, which at that time, wanted a communist ally in the country, decided to intervene.

**Soviet army was deployed on 24th December 1979 in Kabul.** They staged a coup and killed Amin, installing Babrak Karmal as the president. Karmal was a Soviet ally. This intervention was seen as an invasion by the USA and other western nations. While the Soviet army had control of the cities and towns, the insurgency groups called the Mujahideen had the rural parts of Afghanistan under their control. A bitter war was fought between both groups. The Soviet Union, which had planned to stay for 6 months to a year in Afghanistan found themselves stuck in a war that was proving to be too costly.

The Mujahideen did not relent in their pursuit to ‘drive out’ the Soviets. They had the support of many countries like the USA, Pakistan, China, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They were given assistance like arms and training needed to fight the soviets. The soviets followed a policy of wiping out the rural regions in order to defeat the Mujahideen. Millions of land mines were planted and important irrigation systems were destroyed. As a result, millions of Afghan refugees took refuge in Pakistan and Iran. Some came to India as well. It is estimated that in the Soviet-Afghan war, about 20 lakh Afghan civilians were killed.

In 1987, after the reformist *Mikhail Gorbachev* came to power in the Soviet Union, he announced that his government would start withdrawing troops. The **final soviet troops were withdrawn on 15 February 1989.** Now, the government of Afghanistan was left alone to fight the Mujahideen. Finally, they succeeded in taking control of Kabul in 1992. Again, the Mujahideen had different factions within and they could not agree on power sharing. The country collapsed into a bloody civil war.

**The Taliban**

In 1994, a group of fundamentalist students, wrought control of the city of Kandahar and started a campaign to seize power in the country. They were called
Many of them were trained in Pakistan when they were in refugee camps. By 1998, almost entire Afghanistan was under the control of the Taliban. Many of the Mujahideen warlords fled to the north of the country and joined the Northern Alliance who were fighting the Taliban. This time, Russia lent support to the Northern Alliance, though they were fighting against them earlier. The Taliban ruled the country under strict interpretation of the Sharia law and many of the progress with regard to women and education which the country had seen earlier, were reversed. Girls were forbidden from attending schools and women banned from working. The Taliban-ruled country also became a safe haven for international terrorists. Only Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia recognised the Taliban government.

In 2001, a US-led coalition defeated the Taliban and established another government in place. However, Afghanistan still sees resistance from the Taliban in certain pockets.

US fighting a war in Afghanistan and why has it lasted so long?

1. On 11 September 2001, attacks in America killed nearly 3,000 people. Osama Bin Laden, the head of Islamist terror group al-Qaeda, was quickly identified as the man responsible.
2. The Taliban, radical Islamists who ran Afghanistan and protected Bin Laden, refused to hand him over. So, a month after 9/11, the US launched air strikes against Afghanistan.
3. As other countries joined the war (ISAF), the Taliban were quickly removed from power. But they didn’t just disappear - their influence grew back and they dug in.
4. Since then, the US and its allies have struggled to stop Afghanistan's government collapsing and to end deadly attacks by the Taliban.
5. The mission, he said, was "to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime".
6. The first targets were military sites belonging to the hardline Taliban group who ruled the country. Training camps for al-Qaeda, the terror group run by 9/11 plotter Osama Bin Laden, were also hit.
7. But 18 years on, it's hard to argue the US mission has been fulfilled - the Taliban may play a part in ruling Afghanistan again if peace talks do eventually succeed.

The Taliban first took control of the capital Kabul in 1996, and ruled most of the country within two years. They followed a radical form of Islam and enforced
punishments like public executions. Within two months of the US and its international and Afghan allies launching their attacks, the Taliban regime collapsed and its fighters melted away into Pakistan.

A new US-backed government took over in 2004, but the Taliban still had a lot of support in areas around the Pakistani border, and made hundreds of millions of dollars a year from the drug trade, mining and taxes. As the Taliban carried out more and more suicide attacks, international forces working with Afghan troops struggled to counter the threat the re-energised group posed.

In 2014, at the end of what was the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since 2001, Nato’s international forces - wary of staying in Afghanistan indefinitely - ended their combat mission, leaving it to the Afghan army to fight the Taliban. But that gave the Taliban momentum, as they seized territory and detonated bombs against government and civilian targets. In 2018, Taliban was openly active across 70% of Afghanistan.

Where did the Taliban come from?

- Afghanistan had been in a state of almost constant war for 20 years even before the US invaded.
- In 1979, a year after a coup, the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan to support its communist government. It fought a resistance movement - known as the mujahideen - that was supported by the US, Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia among other countries.
- In 1989, Soviet troops withdrew but the civil war continued. In the chaos that followed, the Taliban (which means "students" in the Pashto language) sprang up.
- They first rose to prominence in the border area of northern Pakistan and south-west Afghanistan in 1994. They promised to fight corruption and improve security and, at that time, many Afghans were tired of the excesses and infighting of the mujahideen during the civil war.
- It's thought the Taliban first appeared in religious schools, mostly funded by Saudi Arabia which preached a hardline form of Islam.
- They enforced their own austere version of Sharia, or Islamic law, and introduced brutal punishments. Men were made to grow beards and women had to wear the all-covering burka.
- The Taliban banned television, music and cinema and disapproved of girls' education.
- And because the Taliban gave shelter to militants from the al-Qaeda group, it...
Why has the war lasted so long?

- There are many reasons for this. But they include a combination of fierce Taliban resistance, the limitations of Afghan forces and governance, and other countries' reluctance to keep their troops for longer in Afghanistan.
- At times over the past 18 years, the Taliban have been on the back foot. In late 2009, US President Barack Obama announced a troop "surge" that saw the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan top 100,000.
- The surge helped drive the Taliban out of parts of southern Afghanistan, but it was never destined to last for years.
- As a result, the Taliban were able to regroup. When international forces withdrew from fighting, Afghan forces left to lead the charge were easily overwhelmed. To make matters worse, Afghanistan's government, that is full of tribal division, is often hamstrung.

5 Main reasons why war is still going on:

- a lack of political clarity since the invasion began, and questions about the effectiveness of the US strategy over the past 18 years;
- the fact each side is trying to break what has become a stalemate - and that the Taliban have been trying maximise their leverage during peace negotiations
- an increase in violence by Islamic State militants in Afghanistan - they've been behind some of the bloodiest attacks recently
- There's also the role played by Afghanistan's neighbour, Pakistan.
- There's no question the Taliban have their roots in Pakistan, and that they were able to regroup there during the US invasion. But Pakistan has denied helping or protecting them - even as the US demanded it do more to fight militants.

How have the Taliban managed to stay so strong?

The group could be making as much as $1.5bn (£1.2bn) a year, a huge increase even within the past decade. Some of this is through drugs - Afghanistan is the world's largest opium producer, and most opium poppies - used for heroin - are grown in Taliban-held areas.

But the Taliban also make money by taxing people who travel through their territory, and through businesses like telecommunications, electricity and...
Foreign countries, including Pakistan and Iran, have denied funding them, but private citizens from the region are thought to have done so.

The figures for Afghan civilians are more difficult to quantify. A UN report in February 2019 said more than 32,000 civilians had died. The Watson Institute at Brown University says 42,000 opposition fighters have died. The same institute says conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan have cost the US $5.9 trillion since 2001. The US is still conducting air strikes against the Taliban, instigated by the third president to oversee the war, Donald Trump. But he is keen to reduce troop numbers before he faces another election in November 2020. The Taliban now control much more territory than they did when international troops left Afghanistan in 2014. Many in Washington and elsewhere fear that a full US troop pull-out would leave a vacuum that could be filled by militant groups seeking to plot attacks in the West. The Afghan people, meanwhile, continue to bear the brunt of the long and bloody conflict.

What do the Taliban and the United States want?

The negotiations appear to be focused on four elements:

- **Withdrawal of Foreign Forces**: Both sides agree on the full withdrawal of the fourteen thousand U.S. troops currently in Afghanistan, as well as of additional foreign forces, but they disagree on the timeline. The United States is reportedly offering a two-and-a-half-year deadline, while the Taliban insists on nine months.

- **Counterterrorism Assurances**: The Taliban has agreed to prevent Afghanistan from being used by terrorist groups, but negotiators disagree over how to define the terms “terrorism” and “terrorist.”

- **Intra-Afghan Dialogue**: Washington has urged Afghan government and Taliban leaders to begin official talks on how Afghanistan will be governed after the war, but the Taliban refuses to negotiate with the government until after it has reached a deal with the United States.

- **Comprehensive Cease-fire**: U.S. negotiators seek a permanent cease-fire among U.S., Taliban, and Afghan government forces prior to a peace deal, but the Taliban insists on putting off a cease-fire until U.S. troops have withdrawn.

Reasons for India to be part of reconciliation process with the Taliban:
Regional Stability: Security and Stability are foundations over which development can be built on. Peaceful neighbourhood and trouble free regional climate will provide space for the regimes to focus more on development as threats of violence by Taliban's in the region will be minimized.

Counter China and Pakistan’s vested interests: India should play a considerable role through Quadrilateral group plus 2 talks to thwart the efforts of China to place puppet regimes which can play according to their own vested interests. This can be counterproductive for India’s aspirations and concerns.

Connectivity with Central Asia: India’s trade with Central Asia and reaping benefits from the enhanced connectivity will be largely dependent on Afghanistan's domestic environment. A peaceful and cooperative Afghanistan will be a key pin in India’s Central Asia policy. The latest trilateral transit agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan is a significant step in this direction.

TAPI for Energy security: Violence free Afghanistan is desideratum for finishing the project of TAPI and sustaining the benefits from it through energy supplies from Turkmenistan.

Gateway to “Link west” policy: Afghanistan will act as a gateway to India’s increasing rigour on its west Asia policy.

Minerals of Afghanistan: The cost of access to minerals will be minimum and helpful in expanding the production of Indian Industries.

US- Taliban Deal

Recently, the U.S. signed a deal (at Qatar's capital-Doha) with the Taliban that could pave the way towards a full withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan over the next 14 months and represent a step towards ending the 18-year-war in Afghanistan. Along with this, a separate joint declaration was also signed between the Afghan government and the US at Kabul.

The peace deal is expected to kick-off two processes- a phased withdrawal of US troops and an ‘intra-Afghan’ dialogue. The deal is a fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and the future political roadmap for Afghanistan peace process and the Central region.

Background of the Deal
On 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks in America killed nearly 3,000 people. Osama Bin Laden, the head of Islamist terror group al-Qaeda, was quickly identified as the man responsible.

The Taliban, radical Islamists who ran Afghanistan at that time, protected Bin Laden, refused to hand him over. So, a month after 9/11, the US launched airstrikes against Afghanistan.

The US was joined by an international coalition and the Taliban were quickly removed from power. However, they turned into an insurgent force and continued deadly attacks, destabilising subsequent Afghan governments.

Since then, the US is fighting a war against the Taliban.

Donald Trump’s 2017 policy on Afghanistan, was based on breaking the military stalemate in Afghanistan by authorising an additional 5,000 soldiers, giving US forces a freer hand to go after the Taliban, putting Pakistan on notice, and strengthening Afghan capabilities.

However, the US realised that the Taliban insurgency could not be defeated as long as it enjoyed safe havens and secure sanctuaries in Pakistan, the US changed track and sought Pakistan’s help to get the Taliban to the negotiating table.

The negotiations began in September 2018 with the appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to initiate direct talks with the Taliban. After nine rounds of US-Taliban talks in Qatar, the two sides seemed close to an agreement.

Salient Features of the Deal

- **Troops Withdrawal:** The US will draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days and the NATO or coalition troop numbers will also be brought down, proportionately and simultaneously. And all troops will be out within 14 months.

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

- **Sanctions Removal:** UN sanctions on Taliban leaders to be removed by three months and US sanctions by August 27. The sanctions will be out before much progress is expected in the intra-Afghan dialogue.

- **Prisoner Release:** The US-Taliban pact says up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from “the other side” held by Taliban “will be released” by March 10.

Challenges in the Deal
One-Sided Deal: The fundamental issue with the U.S.’s Taliban engagement is that it deliberately excluded the Afghan government because the Taliban do not see the government as legitimate rulers. Also, there is no reference to the Constitution, rule of law, democracy and elections in the deal.

- Taliban is known for strict religious laws, banishing women from public life, shutting down schools and unleashing systemic discrimination on religious and ethnic minorities, has not made any promises on whether it would respect civil liberties or accept the Afghan Constitution.
- Therefore, Shariat-based system (political system based on fundamental Islamic values) with the existing constitution is not easy.

Issues with Intra-Afghan Dialogue:
- President Ashraf Ghani faces political crisis following claims of fraud in his recent re-election.
- The political tussle is between Ashraf Ghani (who belongs to the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan - the Pashtun) and Abdullah Abdullah (whose base is among his fellow Tajiks, the second largest group in Afghanistan).
- If there are any concessions made by Mr. Ghani’s government to the Taliban (predominantly Pashtun) will likely be interpreted by Mr. Abdullah’s supporters as an intra-Pashtun deal reached at the cost of other ethnic groups, especially the Taiiks and the Uzbeks.
- Consequently, these ethnic fissures may descend into open conflict and can start the next round of civil war.

Thus, the lifting of the US military footprint and the return of a unilateral Taliban could set the stage for the next round of civil war that has hobbled the nation since the late 1970s.

Problem with Prisoner’s Swap: The US-Taliban agreement and the joint declaration differ:

- The US-Taliban pact says up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from “the other side” held by Taliban “will be released” by March 10.
- However, the joint declaration lays down no numbers or deadlines for the prisoner’s swap. Afghanistan President held that there is no commitment to releasing 5,000 prisoners. He also held that such prisoners’ swap is not in the authority of the US, but in the authority of the Afghan government.

- Also, the Taliban is fragmented or divided internally. It is composed of various
regional and tribal groups acting semi-autonomously. Therefore, it is possible that some of them may continue to engage in assaults on government troops and even American forces during the withdrawal process. It is unclear if there is a date for the complete withdrawal of US troops or for concluding the intra-Afghan dialogue, or how long the truce will hold.

Impact of the Deal on Other Stakeholders

- **US:** The promise to end America’s “endless wars” in the greater Middle East region was one of the central themes of US President Donald Trump’s election campaign in 2016. This deal may demonstrate progress on that front in his bid for re-election later this year.

  - Though, the US doesn’t recognise Taliban as a state under the name of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (key demand of Taliban), though many experts are of the view that this deal is a little more than a dressed-up U.S. surrender that will ultimately see the Taliban return to power.

- **Pakistan:** The deal provides the strategic advantage to Pakistan, who is a long-time benefactor of the Taliban.

- **China:** After the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan is seen as more of a protectorate state of China. Thus, China may leverage Pakistan’s influence on the Taliban, to propel its strategic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative.

Impact of this Deal on India

This deal alters the balance of power in favour of the Taliban, which will have strategic, security and political implications for India. The deal may jeopardise the key stakes of India in Afghanistan:

- India has a major stake in the stability of Afghanistan. India has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan’s development.
- India has a major stake in the continuation of the current Afghanistan government in power, which it considers a strategic asset vis-à-vis Pakistan.

  - An increased political and military role for the Taliban and the expansion of its territorial control should be of great concern to India since the Taliban is widely believed to be a protégé of Islamabad.
- As Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia, the deal might dampen
India’s interest in Central Asia.
- Withdrawal of US troops could result in the breeding of the fertile ground for various anti-India terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Way Forward

An independent, sovereign, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive Afghanistan is crucial for peace and stability in the region. In order to ensure this:

- The Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.
- Also, there is a need for the global community to fight against the global concern of terrorism. In this context, it high time to adopt the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (proposed by India at UN in 1996).

Though the deal is a good step, the road ahead would not be easy. Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan will require patience and compromise among all parties.

India - Afghanistan: Heart of Asia Conference

- Calling for a “double peace” both inside Afghanistan and in the region, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said India supports the Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN), in a rare direct reference to the Taliban at the 9th Heart of Asia conference in Tajikistan.
- Mr. Jaishankar attended the meet along with Foreign Ministers of 15 countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Central Asian states.
- “India has been supportive of all the efforts being made to accelerate the dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, including intra-Afghan negotiations,” the Minister said and referred to his participation in the inaugural virtual session of the Doha talks in September 2020.

‘Engage in good faith’

- “If the peace process is to be successful, then it is necessary to ensure that the negotiating parties continue to engage in good faith, with a serious commitment towards reaching a political solution,” he added. India has not in the past referred directly to the Taliban, and the government has not opened any public engagement with the militant group.
- Mr. Jaishankar said India views the escalation in violence against civilians in
and the “continued involvement of foreign fighters” in Afghanistan with “grave concern” and pushed for Heart of Asia members to ensure a permanent ceasefire.

- Speaking at the same conference, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Pakistan “fears that any space gained by ISIS and Al-Qaeda could accentuate the threat of terrorism,” and cautioned against the role of “spoilers”, both “within and outside Afghanistan”.

- In a departure from the recent past, however, Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Qureshi were present for each other’s speeches during the conference, unlike previous boycotts by the two sides at a number of conferences since 2019.

- However, despite speculation over an ongoing India-Pakistan peace process and a back-channel dialogue, Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Qureshi did not make any public contact during the day-long conference, and were seen avoiding eye contact during the joint photo opportunity they both participated in.

- Speaking at the conference in Dushanbe, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, who spoke to both foreign ministers in separate meetings, thanked neighbouring countries for their support.

- He also lauded a number of regional connectivity initiatives including India’s air corridor programme and Chabahar port project, as well as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline.

Russia calls for an inclusive solution for Afghanistan peace talks

- A solution to the Afghan civil war should balance the ethnic and religious groups of Afghanistan and no group should be left out of the final settlement, said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov here on Tuesday after holding bilateral discussions with his Indian counterpart Dr. S. Jaishankar.

- Mr. Lavrov said India and Russia were working for stability and connectivity in the region, and urged that “military alliances” should not come up in Asia.

‘Part of Afghan society’

- “The Taliban movement is a part of Afghan society. Decision on the settlement in Afghanistan should foresee the participation of all political, ethnic and religious groups in the country. Otherwise, the solution will not be stable. This decision has to be based on balance of ethnic, political and religious interests, including in the legislative bodies,” Mr. Lavrov said.

- “Any exclusion of any group from this process will not lead to an implementable and sustainable agreement which can lead to resumption of hostilities, which is not the desire of the stakeholders,” he said in response to
a question after both the Ministers issued press statements.
- Dr. Jaishankar said there is a need to “harmonise” the interests of various stakeholders that are active in and around Afghanistan.
- “For India, what happens in Afghanistan impacts our security directly. I shared our approach that for a durable peace there would require harmonising the interest of all — both within and around that country,” Mr. Jaishankar said. “The peace process should be based on foundational principles to which we all subscribe and a political solution should mean independent, sovereign, united and democratic Afghanistan,” he added.

Missile defence system

- Apart from the Afghan situation, the major issue on the agenda for Tuesday’s talks was expected to be the delivery of the Russian S400 missile defence system and the threat of U.S. sanctions that the delivery could attract.
- However, the Ministers said the “specific” issue did not come up during the discussion.
- However, Mr. Lavrov acknowledged that the U.S. exerts pressure on any country that wants to sign military and industrial contracts with Russia.

Source: TH
The seeds of the conflict were laid in 1917 when the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed official support of Britain for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine under the Balfour Declaration. The lack of concern for the "rights of existing non-Jewish communities" i.e. the Arabs led to prolonged violence.

Unable to contain Arab and Jewish violence, Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine in 1948, leaving responsibility for resolving the competing claims to the newly created United Nations. The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine. Most Jews in Palestine accepted the partition but most Arabs did not.

In 1948, the Jewish declaration of Israel's independence prompted surrounding Arab states to attack. At the end of the war, Israel controlled about 50 percent more territory than originally envisioned UN partition plan. Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem's holy sites, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.

- 1964: Founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
- 1967: In Six-day Arab-Israeli war, Israeli forces seize the Golan Heights from
Syria, the West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan and Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt.

- The United Nations grants the PLO observer status in 1975 and recognizes Palestinians’ right to self-determination.
- Camp David Accords (1978): "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" brokered by U.S. set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the "Palestinian problem". This however remained unfulfilled.
- 1981: Israel effectively annexes the Golan but this is not recognized by the United States or the international community.
- 1987: Founding of Hamas, a violent offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood seeking "to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine" through violent jihad.
- 1987: Tensions in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza reached boiling point resulting in the First Intifada (Palestinian Uprising). It grew into a small war between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army.
- 1988: Jordan cedes to the PLO all the country’s territorial claims in the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem.
- 1993: Under the Oslo Accords Israel and the PLO agree to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence. The Oslo Accords also established the Palestinian Authority, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
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- 2007: Palestinian Movement Splits after few months of formation of a joint Fatah-Hamas government. Hamas militants drive Fatah from Gaza. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas appoints a new government in Ramallah (West Bank), which is quickly recognized by the United States and European Union. Gaza remains under Hamas control.
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- 2014: Fatah and Hamas form a unity government, though distrust remains
Areas of Conflict

- **West Bank**: The West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine. Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established
settlements there.

- **Gaza**: The Gaza Strip located between Israel and Egypt. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the Oslo peace process. In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.

- **Golan Heights**: The Golan Heights is a strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 war. Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981. Recently, the USA has officially recognized Jerusalem and Golan Heights a part of Israel.

- **Palestinian Authority**: Created by the 1993 Oslo Accords, it is the official governing body of the Palestinian people, led by President Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah faction. Hobbled by corruption and by political infighting, the PA has failed to become the stable negotiating partner its creators had hoped.

- **Fatah**: Founded by the late Yasir Arafat in the 1950s, Fatah is the largest Palestinian political faction. Unlike Hamas, Fatah is a secular movement, has nominally recognized Israel, and has actively participated in the peace process.

- **Hamas**: Hamas is regarded as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority's legislative elections. It ejected Fatah from Gaza in 2007, splitting the Palestinian movement geographically, as well.
Two-State Solution

- The “two state solution” is based on a UN resolution of 1947 which proposed two states - one would be a state where Zionist Jews constituted a majority, the other where the Palestinian Arabs would be a majority of the population. The idea was however rejected by the Arabs.
- For decades, it has been held by the international community as the only
Why is the solution so difficult to achieve?

- **Borders**: There is no consensus about precisely where to draw the line – with Israel building settlements and constructing barriers in areas like the West Bank that creates a de facto border. This makes it difficult to establish that land as part of an independent Palestine, breaking it up into non-contiguous pieces.
- **Jerusalem**: Both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital and consider it a center of religious worship and cultural heritage making its division difficult. In December 2017, Israel declared Jerusalem as its capital and the step found support from the USA, intensifying the situation in the region.
- **Refugees**: Large numbers of Palestinians who fled their homes in what is now Israel, during the preceding wars as well as their descendants believe they deserve the right to return but Israel is against it.
- **Divided Political Leadership on Both sides**: The Palestinian leadership is divided - two-state solution is supported by Palestinian nationalists in West Bank but the leadership in Gaza does not even recognize Israel. Further, while successive Israeli Prime Ministers - Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu - have all accepted the idea of a Palestinian state, they have differed in terms of what it should actually comprise.

Global Stand

- Nearly 83% of world countries have officially recognized Israel as a sovereign state and maintain diplomatic relations with it. However, at the same time, many countries are sympathetic to Palestine.

What do both parties want?

- Palestine wants Israeli to halt all expansionary activities and retreat to pre-1967 borders. It wants to establish a sovereign Palestine state in West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital.
- Palestine wants Palestine refugees who lost their homes in 1948 be able to come back.
- Israel wants it to be recognised as a Jewish state. It wants the Palestine refugees to return only to Palestine, not to Israel.

India’s Stand
India was one of the few countries to oppose the UN’s partition plan in November 1947, echoing its own experience during independence a few months earlier. In the decades that followed, the Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and withheld full diplomatic relations with Israel.

India recognised Israel in 1950 but it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian. India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.

In the 2014, India favored UNHRC’s resolution to probe Israel’s human rights violations in Gaza. Despite supporting probe, India abstained from voting against Israel in UNHRC IN 2015.

As a part of Link West Policy, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018 to treat both the countries mutually independent and exclusive.

In June 2019, India voted in favor of a decision introduced by Israel in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian non-governmental organization.

So far India has tried to maintain the image of its historical moral supporter for Palestinian self-determination, and at the same time to engage in the military, economic, and other strategic relations with Israel.

**Way Forward**

The world at large needs to come together for a peaceful solution but the reluctance of the Israeli government and other involved parties have aggravated the issue more. Thus a balanced approach towards the Israel-Palestine issue would help to maintain favourable relations with Arab countries as well as Israel.

Source: TH
India called for an immediate de-escalation of the situation between Israel and Palestine at the first public United Nations Security Council meeting held since the current surge in hostilities between the two parties entered its seventh day, killing at least 149 people in Gaza and 10 in Israel, including many children.

“Immediate de-escalation is the need of the hour, so as to arrest any further slide towards the brink. We urge both sides to show extreme restraint, desist from actions that exacerbate tensions, and refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status-quo, including in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhood,” India’s Permanent Representative and Ambassador to the UN, T.S. Tirumurti, told the Security Council.

The trust deficit between Israel and Palestinian authorities was increasing, as there were no direct negotiations between the two.

The UN, Qatar and Egypt are trying to broker a ceasefire.

Mr. Tirumurti said India had already voiced its concern over the violence in Jerusalem at closed-door meetings of the 15-member council held earlier this week (neither of which resulted in a joint statement).

“In both these meetings, we had expressed our deep concern over the violence in Jerusalem, especially on Haram Al Sharif/ Temple Mount during the holy month of Ramadan [Ramzan] , and about the possible eviction process in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, an area which is part of an arrangement facilitated by the UN,” he said.

He said India supported the efforts of the Quartet (UN, U.S., EU and Russia) and others, and expressed India’s support to the “just Palestinian cause” and its “unwavering” support for the two-state solution.

Chronology of Israel-Palestine conflict
The seeds of the conflict were laid in 1917 when the then British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed official support of Britain for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine under the Balfour Declaration. The lack of concern for the "rights of existing non-Jewish communities" i.e. the Arabs led to prolonged violence.

Unable to contain Arab and Jewish violence, Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine in 1948, leaving responsibility for resolving the competing claims to the newly created United Nations. The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states in Palestine. Most Jews in Palestine accepted the partition but most Arabs did not.

In 1948, the Jewish declaration of Israel's independence prompted surrounding Arab states to attack. At the end of the war, Israel controlled about 50 percent more territory than originally envisioned UN partition plan. Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem's holy sites, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.

- **1964**: Founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
- **1967**: In Six-day Arab-Israeli war, Israeli forces seize the Golan Heights from...
The United Nations grants the PLO observer status in 1975 and recognizes Palestinians’ right to self-determination. Camp David Accords (1978): "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" brokered by U.S. set the stage for peace talks between Israel and its neighbors and a resolution to the "Palestinian problem". This however remained unfulfilled.

- **1981**: Israel effectively annexes the Golan but this is not recognized by the United States or the international community.
- **1987**: Founding of Hamas, a violent offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood seeking "to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine" through violent jihad.
- **1987**: Tensions in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza reached boiling point resulting in the First Intifada (Palestinian Uprising). It grew into a small war between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army.
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Two-State Solution

- The “two state solution” is based on a UN resolution of 1947 which proposed two states - one would be a state where Zionist Jews constituted a majority, the other where the Palestinian Arabs would be a majority of the population. The idea was however rejected by the Arabs.
- For decades, it has been held by the international community as the only
realistic deal to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Why is the solution so difficult to achieve?

- **Borders**: There is no consensus about precisely where to draw the line – with Israel building settlements and constructing barriers in areas like the West Bank that creates a de facto border. This makes it difficult to establish that land as part of an independent Palestine, breaking it up into non-contiguous pieces.
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Source: TH
Pakistan government to set new rules to meet FATF requirements

- Pakistan, keen to exit from the grey list of the FATF, is set to introduce new rules relating to anti-money laundering cases and change the prosecution process to meet its remaining tough conditions.
- Pakistan was put on the grey list by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing in June 2018 and the country has been struggling to come out of it.
- The Dawn newspaper reported that the changes being made also include the transfer of investigations and prosecution of anti-money laundering (AML) cases from police, provincial anti-corruption establishments (ACEs) and other similar agencies to specialised agencies.
- This is part of two sets of rules, including the AML (Forfeited Properties Management) Rules 2021 and the AML (Referral) Rules 2021 under the “National Policy Statement on Follow the Money” approved by the federal Cabinet meeting a few days ago, the report said.
- These rules and related notifications for certain changes in the existing schedule of Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 (AMLA) would come into force immediately, to be followed by the appointment of administrators and special public prosecutors for implementation.
- Based on these measures, the FATF would conclude if Pakistan has complied with three outstanding benchmarks, out of 27, that blocked its exit from the grey list in February this year.

What is FATF?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- The inter-governmental body sets international standards that aim to prevent these illegal activities and the harm they cause to society.
- As a policy-making body, the FATF works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
With more than 200 countries and jurisdictions committed to implementing them. The FATF has developed the FATF Recommendations, or FATF Standards, which ensure a co-ordinated global response to prevent organised crime, corruption and terrorism. They help authorities go after the money of criminals dealing in illegal drugs, human trafficking and other crimes. The FATF also works to stop funding for weapons of mass destruction. The FATF reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and continuously strengthens its standards to address new risks, such as the regulation of virtual assets, which have spread as cryptocurrencies gain popularity. The FATF monitors countries to ensure they implement the FATF Standards fully and effectively, and holds countries to account that do not comply.

Functions of FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- In April 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- Since its inception, the FATF has operated under a fixed life-span, requiring a specific decision by its Ministers to continue. Three decades after its creation, in April 2019, FATF Ministers adopted a new, open-ended mandate for the FATF.

Objectives of FATF

- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- FATF monitors countries’ progress in implementing the FATF Recommendations; reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures; and, promotes the adoption and implementation of the FATF Recommendations globally.

UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1373
The UNSC resolution 1267 was adopted unanimously on October 15, 1999. It is a consolidated list of people and entities that UN has determined as being associated with Al Qaeda or the Taliban, and laws which must be passed within each member nation to implement the sanctions. The UNSC Resolution 1373 was adopted on 28th September, 2001. It declares international terrorism a threat to international peace and security and imposes binding obligations on all UN member states.

Money Laundering

What is Money Laundering?

- Money Laundering refers to converting illegal earned money into legitimate money.
- The government does not get any tax on the money because there is no accounting of the black money.
- So Money Laundering is a way to hide the illegally acquired money.
- The term "money laundering" originated from the Mafia group in the United States of America. Mafia groups have made huge amounts of extortion, gambling, etc. and this money is shown as legal money.
- In India, "money laundering" is popularly known as Hawala transactions.
- According to the IMF, global Money Laundering is estimated between 2 to 5% of World GDP.

Components of Money Laundering:

It involves three steps: placement, layering and integration.

- Placement puts the "dirty money" into the legitimate financial system.
- Layering conceals the source of the money through a series of transactions and bookkeeping tricks.
- In the case of integration, the now-laundered money is withdrawn from the legitimate account to be used for criminal activities.
Some examples of money laundering are Smurfing, Shell companies, Round tripping, Gambling, etc.

**Impacts of money Laundering:**

- **Economic Impact:**
  1. Undermines integrity of financial markets.
  2. Loss of control of economic policy
  3. Economic distortion and instability
  4. Loss of revenue

- **Social Impacts:**
  1. Increased criminality
  2. Decreases human development
  3. Misallocation of resources
  4. Affects trust of local citizens in their domestic financial institutions.

- **Political Impacts:**
  1. Initiates political distrust and instability
  2. Criminalisation of politics

The Legal Framework in India to deal with money laundering:

In India, the specific legislation dealing with money laundering is the **Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002**

- It forms the core of the legal framework put in place by India to combat money laundering.
- The provisions of this act are applicable to all financial institutions, banks (including RBI), mutual funds, insurance companies, and their financial intermediaries.
- The law was enacted to combat money laundering in India and has three main objectives:
  1. To prevent and control money laundering.
  2. To provide for confiscation and seizure of property obtained from laundered money.
  3. To deal with any other issue connected with money-laundering in India.

- Under the PMLA Act, the **Enforcement Directorate** is empowered to conduct a Money Laundering investigation.
- Apart from the provisions of PMLA, there are other specialised provisions such as RBI/SEBI/IRDA anti-money laundering regulations.
PMLA (Amendment) Act, 2012

- Adds the concept of ‘reporting entity’ which would include a banking company, financial institution, intermediary etc.
- PMLA, 2002 levied a fine up to Rs 5 lakh, but the amendment act has removed this upper limit of Rs. 5 lakh.
- It has provided for provisional attachment and confiscation of property of any person involved in such activities.

Other methods to control Money Laundering:

- Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985: It provides for the penalty of property derived from, or used in illegal traffic in narcotic drugs.
- Financial Intelligence Unit-IND: It is an independent body reporting directly to the Economic Intelligence Council (EIC) headed by the Finance Minister.
- Enforcement Directorate (ED):
  1. It is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
  2. One of the main functions of ED is to investigate offences of money laundering under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).
  3. It can take actions like confiscation of property if the same is determined to be proceeds of crime derived from a Scheduled Offence under PMLA, and to prosecute the persons involved in the offence of money laundering.
- India is a full-fledged member of the FATF and follows the guidelines of the same.

Source: Aspire IAS Notes

1.5 Lakh units of Oxycare Systems to be procured through PM CARES

GS-III | 12 May, 2021
1.5 Lakh units of Oxycare Systems to be procured through PM CARES

Background:

- In India, the spread of coronavirus has been increasing and is posing serious challenges for the health and economic security of millions of people.
- There have been calls for citizen donations to support the government in the wake of this emergency with people from all walks of life expressing their desire to donate to India’s war against COVID-19.

Details:

- Catering to the need for having a dedicated national fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, and to provide relief to the affected, a new fund has been set up.
- The fund will be a public charitable trust under the name of Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund).
- Prime Minister is the Chairman of this trust and its Members include Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister.
- The new fund will not only cater to the immediate crisis posed by COVID-19 but also similar distressing situations if they occur in the future.
- PM-Cares Fund accepts micro-donations too.

Contribution to PM - CARES Fund will Qualify as CSR Expenditure

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has clarified that contributions by companies towards the PM-CARES Fund will count towards mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure.
- Under the Companies Act, 2013, companies with a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore or turnover of Rs 1,000 crore, or net profit of Rs 5 crore are required to spend at least 2% of their average profit for the previous three years on CSR activities every year.
- The term "Corporate Social Responsibility" in general can be referred to as a corporate initiative to assess and take responsibility for the company’s effects on the environment and impact on social welfare.

Existing Similar Fund: Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund (PMNRF)
This fund was instituted in 1948 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to assist displaced persons from Pakistan. The fund is currently used primarily to tackle natural calamities like floods, cyclones and earthquakes. The fund is also used to help with medical treatment like kidney transplantation, cancer treatment and acid attack.

- The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support. It accepts voluntary contributions from Individuals, Organizations, Trusts, Companies and Institutions etc.
- The corpus of the fund is also invested in various forms with scheduled commercial banks and other agencies. Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister.
- The fund is recognized as a Trust under the Income Tax Act and the same is managed by the Prime Minister or multiple delegates for national causes.
- Contributions towards PMNRF are notified for 100% deduction from taxable income under section 80(G) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

What is the news?

- 1.5 Lakh units of Oxycare Systems to be procured through PM CARES
- PM-CARES Fund to procure 1,50,000 units of Oxycare System at a cost of Rs 322.5 Crore.
- Comprehensive system developed by DRDO to regulate oxygen being administrated to patients based on the sensed values of their SpO2 levels.
- DRDO has transferred the technology to multiple industries in India who will be producing the Oxycare Systems for use all across India.
- Oxycare system reduces the work load and exposure of healthcare providers by eliminating the need of routine measurement and manual adjustments of Oxygen flow.

Source: PIB

PLI scheme â€“ National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage

Production Linked Incentive scheme “National Programme
The Cabinet has approved the proposal of Department of Heavy Industry for implementation of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme ‘National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage’ for achieving manufacturing capacity of Fifty (50) Giga Watt Hour (GWh) of ACC and 5 GWh of "Niche" ACC with an outlay of Rs.18,100 crore.

- Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACCs) are the new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
- The consumer electronics, electric vehicles, advanced electricity grids, solar rooftop etc. which are major battery consuming sectors are expected to achieve robust growth in the coming years.
- While several companies have already started investing in battery packs, though the capacities of these facilities are too small when compared to global averages, but there still is negligible investment in manufacturing, along with value addition, of ACCs in India.
- ACC battery Storage manufacturers will be selected through a transparent competitive bidding process. The manufacturing facility would have to be commissioned within a period of two years. The incentive will be disbursed thereafter over a period of five years.
- Each selected ACC battery Storage manufacturer would have to commit to set-up an ACC manufacturing facility of minimum five (5) GWh capacity and ensure a minimum 60% domestic value addition at the Project level within five years.

**Benefits**

- All the demand of the ACCs is currently being met through imports in India. The National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage will reduce import dependence.
- It will also support the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

**The outcomes/benefits expected from the scheme are as follows:**

- Setup a cumulative 50 GWh of ACC manufacturing facilities in India under the Programme.
- Direct investment of around Rs.45,000 crore in ACC Battery storage manufacturing projects.
- Facilitate demand creation for battery storage in India.
Facilitate Make-In-India: Greater emphasis upon domestic value-capture and therefore reduction in import dependence.

Net savings of Indian Rs. 2,00,000 crore to Rs.2,50,000 crore on account of oil import bill reduction during the period of this Programme due to EV adoption as ACCs manufactured under the Programme is expected to accelerate EV adoption.

The manufacturing of ACCs will facilitate demand for EVs, which are proven to be significantly less polluting. As India pursues an ambitious renewable energy agenda, the ACC program will be a key contributing factor to reduce India's Green House Gas (GHG) emissions which will be in line with India's commitment to combat climate change.

Import substitution of around Rs.20,000 crore every year.

Impetus to Research & Development to achieve higher specific energy density and cycles in ACC.

Promote newer and niche cell technologies.

Source: PIB

China’s population growth slows to slowest rate in decades

China’s once-in-a-decade population census has recorded a slowing population growth rate that will likely see China’s population peak — and be overtaken by India’s — by as early as 2025, experts said, with the number of births falling for the fourth consecutive year.

The seventh census, released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Beijing, noted 12 million babies were born last year, the lowest number since 1961, a year when China was in the midst of a four-year famine unleashed by Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward policy in 1958 that devastated the farm sector and claimed millions of lives.

China’s population was 1.41 billion in 2020, according to the census,
increasing by 72 million since the last census in 2010, recording a 5.38% growth in this period. The average annual growth was 0.53%.

- The slowing growth rate, a consequence of China’s stringent family planning rules over decades — known as the “one-child policy” but involving a range of varying restrictions across urban and rural areas — has evoked concerns of a rapidly ageing society and the impact on China’s labour force, and fears that China will, as some experts have said, “get old before it gets rich”.
- The census recorded 264 million in the age group of 60 and over, up 5.44% since 2010 and accounting for 18.70% of the population. Those in the 15-59 age group were 894 million persons, down by 6.79% since 2010 and accounting for 63.35% of the population.
- Chinese experts acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, without linking it directly to the history of the Communist Party’s harsh family planning policies, at a time when it is planning to mark its 100th anniversary in July.
- In the lead up to the anniversary, China’s Internet regulator said it had deleted more than 2 million posts containing “harmful” discussions of history, the South China Morning Post reported, with the party clamping down on any adverse commentary about its present or past.
- China loosened family planning rules and allowed couples to have two children in 2016, but that has failed to mark a boom amid changing lifestyles and declining preferences, particularly in urban areas, for larger families.
- The impact on the labour force and healthcare is a particular concern. China’s workforce in the 15-59 age bracket peaked at 925 million in 2011, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said previously. That number was down to 894 million in this census and would drop to 700 million by 2050, according to the Ministry.
- The census did not offer a specific year for the population to peak, but experts said that could happen by 2025. “China’s population will peak in the future, but there remains uncertainty as to when specifically it will happen,” Ning Jizhe of the National Bureau of Statistics said. “For the next stage, we should continue to pay attention to changes in population growth and respond actively to risks and challenges in demographic development,” he said.
- The findings from the census were not entirely dire. The census also shed light on China’s increasingly educated workforce and its rapid pace of urbanisation.
- The number of people with a university education was 218 million, up to 15,467 per 100,000 of the population compared with 8,930 in 2010.
The average years of schooling for 15 and above increased from 9.08 years to 9.91 years and the illiteracy rate dropped from 4.08% to 2.67%, in part due to policies for nine years of compulsory and free education.

The urban population touched 901 million, accounting for 63.89%, up from 49.68% in 2010 with an increase of 236 million urban residents in the last decade.

Source: TH
Introduction

- Relentless rocket fire and rioting in mixed Jewish-Arab towns fuelled growing fears on Wednesday that deadly violence between Israel and Palestinians could spiral into a “full-scale war”.

View of Israel:

- Israel’s Defence Minister vowed more attacks on Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza to bring “total, long-term quiet” before considering a ceasefire.

Gaza militants

- Gaza militants have launched over 1,000 rockets since Monday, said Israel’s Army, which has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Islamist groups in the crowded coastal enclave of Gaza.

Impact

- The most intense hostilities in seven years have killed at least 53 people in Gaza, including 14 children, and six in Israel, including an Israeli soldier and one Indian national, since Monday.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared a state of emergency in the Jewish-Arab city of Lod, where “wide-scale riots erupted among some of the Arab residents”.

Role of UN

- The UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland warned that “we’re escalating towards a full-scale war”.

For Comprehensive analysis on Israel Palestine war from past to present – Read https://www.aspireias.com/daily-news-analysis-current-affairs/Israel-Palestine-Conflict
PM CARES fund to buy 1.5 lacs Oxycare system of DRDO
GS-III | 13 May, 2021

Oxycare system

- The PM CARES (Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations) Fund has sanctioned the procurement of **1.5 lakh units of the Oxycare system**, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), at a cost of ?322.5 crore.
- Separately, a **four lakh litre capacity oxygen production plant** supplied by Germany started functioning at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel COVID Hospital set up by the DRDO in the national capital while naval ships continued to bring in emergency supplies from friendly foreign countries.
- The **Oxycare system** was developed by Defence Bio-Engineering and Electro Medical Laboratory (DEBEL), Bengaluru, of the DRDO for soldiers posted at extreme high-altitude areas.
- The **Oxycare system delivers supplemental oxygen** based on the SpO2 levels and prevents the person from sinking into a state of hypoxia.
- The **automatic system** also provided audio warning for various failure scenarios.
- The robust ‘Oxycare’ system, which has been developed can be used for COVID care centers and at home also.
- The **DRDO had transferred the technology to multiple industries**, which would be producing the Oxycare system, it added.

Supplies from West Asia

- As part of operation ‘Samudra Setu II’, launched by the Navy, INS Tarkash arrived at Mumbai with **two Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) filled (20 MT [metric tonne] each) cryogenic containers and 230 oxygen cylinders**.
- The **oxygen containers** were facilitated by the **French Mission** as part of the “**Oxygen Solidarity Bridge**” and **oxygen cylinders were gifted by Indian diaspora in Qatar,”** the Navy said.
INS Kochi and INS Tabar reached the New Mangalore Port carrying 100 MT LMO in five containers and 1,200 oxygen cylinders from Kuwait.

Source: TH

SVAMITVA Scheme

SVAMITVA Scheme

- SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments and Survey of India.
- SVAMITVA, a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was nationally launched by the Prime Minister on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April 2021 after successful completion of the pilot phase of the Scheme in 9 States.
- SVAMITVA Scheme aims to provide property rights to the residents of rural inhabited areas in India by using Drone survey and CORS Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cms.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of the SVAMITVA scheme.
- In the States, the Revenue Department/Land Records Department will be the Nodal Department and shall carry out the scheme with the support of State Panchayati Raj Departments.
- **Aim:** To provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India.
  1. It is a scheme for mapping the land parcels in rural inhabited areas using drone technology and Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS).
  2. The mapping will be done across the country in a phase-wise manner over a period of four years - from 2020 to 2024.
- The program is currently being implemented in **six states** - Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
Sputnik V Covid vaccine to cost ₹995

Introduction

- The country is looking to produce 15.6 crore doses of the Russian Covid vaccine.
- The imported doses of Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine will cost ₹995.40 per shot, said the company’s partner in India, Dr Reddy's Laboratories.
Vaccines out, but data missing

The efficacy data of the phase-3 trials conducted in India for the two vaccines approved for restricted public use on Sunday, have not been made public yet.

**COVISHIELD**
- A vaccine developed by the Serum Institute-Pune based on the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine has been given 'conditional approval'.
- The vaccine's efficacy is reported to be 70.4% based on the phase-3 trials conducted in the U.K. and Brazil.
- The efficacy data of the phase-3 trials conducted on 1,600 volunteers in 17 Indian cities have not been made public yet.

**COVAXIN**
- A vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council for Medical Research has been approved for restricted emergency use in clinical trial mode.
- During the first two months after rollout, the firm has to inform drug regulators every fortnight about the adverse effects of the vaccine.
- Phase 1 and 2 trials were conducted on 800 volunteers to determine the safety and immunogenicity of Covaxin.
- The efficacy data of the ongoing phase 3 trials with 22,500 volunteers have not been made public yet.
However, the doses of the vaccine that will be made in India are expected to be cheaper.

The company said it is working closely with its six manufacturing partners to fulfil regulatory requirements to ensure a smooth and timely supply.

The first dose of the vaccine was also administered in Hyderabad on Friday as part of a limited pilot and soft launch of Sputnik V in India.

The country is looking to produce **15.6 crore doses of the Russian Covid**
"Its production will begin in July and it is estimated that 15.6 crore doses will be manufactured in that period," Paul said.

About Sputnik V

- It is the third vaccine India has given go-ahead to after 'Covishield', developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca and 'Covaxin', the indigenous vaccine manufactured by Bharat Biotech.
  - Covishield is manufactured by Serum Institute of India.
- With an efficacy of 91.6%, Sputnik V was the first vaccine against coronavirus in the world.
- Clinical trial data published in The Lancet indicated that the Covid-19 vaccine "appears safe and effective".
- More than 60 countries had registered Sputnik V for emergency use and most of these countries had already received the first batch of the vaccine.
- Russia has been actively marketing Sputnik V abroad despite the comparatively slow rollout at home and limited production capacities, according to reports.


Source: TH
India has asked Chinese authorities to ensure prices for key medical supplies remain stable as costs for oxygen concentrators and other critical goods have surged on the back of rising demand.

The supply chain should remain open and product prices should remain stable.

Since April, orders for at least 40,000 oxygen concentrators have been placed by Indian companies with Chinese firms, of which 21,000 have so far been delivered, along with more than 5,000 ventilators, 21 million face masks and 3,800 tons of medicines.

Inflated costs of oxygen concentrators

Chinese media are reporting that oxygen concentrators that were listed as selling for 1,000 yuan (around $11,000) on Chinese e-commerce websites such as Alibaba’s Taobao are now selling for four or five times that amount and the final cost borne by individual buyers once the goods are sold in India is even higher.

Source: TH

Civil Services Prelims-2021 postponed to on October 10

The Civil Services (Preliminary) examination, which was scheduled to be held on June 27, has been postponed to October 10.

Due to the prevailing conditions caused by the novel coronavirus, the Union Public Service Commission has deferred the Civil Services Examination, 2021, which was scheduled to be held on June 27, 2021. Now, this examination will be held on October 10, 2021.

The decision comes after the UPSC, last month, postponed the interviews to be held as a part of the 2020 examination.
OCI regulations by Ministry of Home Affairs

New regulations by Home Ministry

- The Home Ministry’s March 4 order that required professional Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), such as journalists, engineers and researchers, to notify the Ministry about their activities in India has left them in the lurch.
- A portal that was to come up for the purpose is not operational yet.
- The official said the OCIs could intimate the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) through e-mail till the portal is activated.
- OCI cardholders could claim “only NRI (Non-Resident Indian) quota seats” in educational institutions.
  - It specified that OCIs could only pursue the following professions — doctors, dentists, nurses and pharmacists, advocates, architects and chartered accountants, and the rest would require “special permission”.
- The notification said that OCIs shall be required to obtain a “special permission or a special permit” from the competent authority or the FRRO or the Indian mission “to undertake research, missionary or Tabligh or mountaineering or journalistic activities or internship in any foreign diplomatic missions”.

Challenge by AROCIF

- Rajanna Sreedhara, president of the Association of Resident OCI and Families (AROCIF), said they believed the notification was discriminatory adding that they planned to challenge it in the High Court but the plan is currently on the back burner due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Even if an OCI student has secured a high rank in an exam like NEET.
Several institutions of repute do not have NRI seats. The exorbitantly high fees under the NRI quota cannot be afforded by many OCIs as they live and work in India. India-domiciled OCI students are deprived of domicile status both in India [country of residence] as well as the country of their citizenship.

**About OCI:**

- OCIs are of Indian origin but hold foreign passports.
- India does not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits under Section 7B(I) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs.
- So far, 37.72 lakh OCI Cards are said to have been issued.

Source: TH
Tropical Cyclones

Definition of a Cyclone

- **Cyclone refers to any spinning storm that rotates around a low-pressure center.** The low-pressure centre is also referred to as the 'eye' of the storm, which is well known for being eerily calm compared with the areas under the spinning 'arms' of the storm.
- You could say that the eye is watching what's going on down below, so it needs a clear path, but the arms are where all the action happens because this is where the storm is throwing out all of its rain and wind.

How are cyclones formed?

- To form a cyclone, warm, moist air over the ocean rises upward from near the surface. As this air moves up and away from the ocean surface, it leaves less air near the surface. So basically as the warm air rises, it causes an area of lower air pressure below.
- Air from surrounding areas with higher air pressure pushes in to the low pressure area. Then this new “cool” air becomes warm and moist and rises, too. And the cycle continues.
- As the warmed, moist air rises and cools the water in the air forms clouds. The whole system of clouds and wind spins and grows, fed by the ocean’s heat and water evaporating from the ocean surface.
- As the storm system rotates faster and faster, an eye forms in the centre. It is very calm and clear in the eye, with very low air pressure. Higher pressure air from above flows down into the eye.
- Tropical cyclones usually weaken when they hit land, because they are no longer being “fed” by the energy from the warm ocean waters. However, they often move far inland, dumping many centimetres of rain and causing lots of wind damage before they die out completely.
Tropical cyclone

- Tropical cyclone is an intense circular storm that originates over warm tropical oceans and is characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds, and heavy rain.
- Drawing energy from the sea surface and maintaining its strength as long as it remains over warm water, a tropical cyclone generates winds that exceed 119 km (74 miles) per hour. In extreme cases winds may exceed 240 km (150 miles) per hour, and gusts may surpass 320 km (200 miles) per hour.
- Accompanying these strong winds are torrential rains and a devastating phenomenon known as the storm surge, an elevation of the sea surface that can reach 6 metres (20 feet) above normal levels.
- Such a combination of high winds and water makes cyclones a serious hazard for coastal areas in tropical and subtropical areas of the world. Every year during the late summer months (July–September in the Northern Hemisphere and January–March in the Southern Hemisphere), cyclones strike regions as far apart as the Gulf Coast of North America, northwestern Australia, and eastern India and Bangladesh.

Different names of tropical cyclones
Tropical cyclones are known by various names in different parts of the world. In the North Atlantic Ocean and the eastern North Pacific they are called hurricanes, and in the western North Pacific around the Philippines, Japan, and China the storms are referred to as typhoons. In the western South Pacific and Indian Ocean they are variously referred to as severe tropical cyclones, tropical cyclones, or simply cyclones. All these different names refer to the same type of storm.

Conditions for formation of tropical cyclones

- The temperature of the surface layer of ocean water must be 26.5 °C (80 °F) or warmer, and this warm layer must be at least 50 metres (150 feet) deep.
- A preexisting atmospheric circulation must be located near the surface warm layer.
- The atmosphere must cool quickly enough with height to support the formation of deep convective clouds.
- The middle atmosphere must be relatively humid at a height of about 5,000 metres (16,000 feet) above the surface.
- The developing system must be at least 500 km (300 miles) away from the Equator.
- The wind speed must change slowly with height through the troposphere—no more than 10 metres (33 feet) per second between the surface and an altitude of about 10,000 metres (33,000 feet).

Types of Cyclones:

Tropical cyclones are what most people are familiar with because these are cyclones that occur over tropical ocean regions.

- **Hurricanes and typhoons** are actually types of tropical cyclones, but they have different names so that it's clear where that storm is occurring. Hurricanes are found in the Atlantic and Northeast Pacific, typhoons are found in the Northwest Pacific. If you hear 'tropical cyclone,' you should assume that it's occurring in the South Pacific or Indian Ocean, but for this lesson, we'll use it to refer to all types of tropical ocean cyclones.
- We can also further describe tropical cyclones **based on their wind speeds.** They are called category 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, increasing with intensity and wind speed as the number increases. A category 1 cyclone is the weakest, with wind speeds of 74-95 mph. A category 5 cyclone, on the other hand, is
extremely dangerous and has the potential for major damage. Category 5 cyclones have wind speeds of 155 mph and above!

- **Polar cyclones** are cyclones that occur in polar regions like Greenland, Siberia and Antarctica. Unlike tropical cyclones, polar cyclones are usually stronger in winter months. As you can see, these storms really do prefer the colder weather! They also occur in areas that aren't very populated, so any damage they do is usually pretty minimal.

- **A mesocyclone** is when part of a thunderstorm cloud starts to spin, which may eventually lead to a tornado. 'Meso' means 'middle', so you can think of this as the mid-point between one type of storm and the other. Tornadoes all come from thunderstorm clouds, but not all thunderstorm clouds make tornadoes. In order for a tornado to occur, part of that cloud has to spin, and though you can't really see this happening, this is the intermediate, or 'meso' step from regular cloud to dangerous spinning cloud running along the ground.

Depending upon its location and strength, a tropical cyclone is referred by different names:

- Typhoons in Western North Pacific
- Willy-willies in Australia
- Baguio in Philippine Islands
- Hurricanes around North America
- Taifu in Japan
- Cyclone in the Indian Ocean

**How are the cyclones named?**

- If the speed of a cyclone is more than 34 nautical miles per hour then it becomes necessary to give it a special name. If the speed of the storm reaches or crosses 74 mph, it is then classified into a hurricane/cyclone/typhoon.
- The cyclones that are formed in any ocean basin around the world are named by the Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs). There are a total of six RSMCs in the world, including the India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia Pacific (ESCAP)** have been naming cyclonic storms since 2000.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) names the cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean, including the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian
Sea. It also issues advisories to 12 other nations in the region on the development of cyclones and storms.

- In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP-- Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand-- decided to name cyclones in the region.
- In 2018, five more countries were added-- Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
- After the aforementioned countries sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalise the list.
- In April 2020, IMD released a list of 169 cyclone names. 13 suggestions were sent in by the aforementioned WMO/ESCAP member nations.

Why are cyclones named?

- The cyclones are named to help people identify them easily as it would be difficult to remember numbers and technical terms.
- Additionally, appending names makes it easier for the media, scientific community and the disaster management community to identify and report individual cyclones, disseminate warnings, increase community preparedness, and ward off confusion in areas that witness multiple cyclones.

Guidelines to name cyclones

The guidelines to name the cyclones are as follows:

1. The proposed name must be neutral to politics and political figures, religious beliefs, cultures and genders.
2. It must not hurt the sentiments of any group of people across the world.
3. It must not be rude and cruel in nature.
4. The name must be short, easy to pronounce and inoffensive to any member.
5. It must be of a maximum of eight letters and be given with its pronunciation and voice over.
6. The names of cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean will not be repeated. Once used, it will cease to be used again.

Source: PIB
186 elephants killed on rail tracks in over 10 years

Asiatic Elephant

- Asiatic Elephant is Endangered in IUCN; Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act and Appendix I of CITES.
- Elephants are National Heritage animals.
- Elephant Reserves (ER are declared by Center)
  1. Singhbhum ER in JH is the 1st ER of India.
  2. Karnataka has the highest Elephants followed by Assam & Kerala.
  3. Singphlan ER = Nagaland. (Other Protected Areas in NG = Itangki NP,
Elephant Corridors
1. Elephant Corridors are narrow strips of land that connect 2 large habitats of Elephants.
2. Elephant corridors are crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons.
3. Odisha, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh are mineral rich states, but also have the highest number of Elephant corridors.

Asian Elephant Alliance
1. It is an umbrella initiative by 5 NGOs, has come together to secure 96 out of the 101 existing corridors in next 10 years used by elephants across 12 States in India.
2. NGOs Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), IUCN Netherlands and World Land Trust have teamed up with Wildlife Trust of India's (WTI) in the alliance.

Project Elephant, 1992
1. It was launched by India in the year 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with following objectives:
   1. To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors
   2. To address issues of man-animal conflict
   3. Welfare of captive elephants
2. It is implemented in 16 States and MoEF provides the financial and technical support.

MoEF + WTI launched Gaj Yatra from Tura in Garo Hills, Meghalaya
1. Gaj Yatra is a mega campaign launched on World Elephants Day (12 Aug) by NGOs WTI + IFAW (both are NGOs) (International Fund for Animal Welfare). The campaign is planned to cover 12 Elephant range states. 100 Elephant corridors. Awareness.
2. Recognize people’s Initiative of Community forests for Human - Elephant Harmony & conservation of animals like Hoolock Gibbon.

MoEF + WTI launched Haathi mere Saathi campaign
1. Launched at E-8 meetin un 2011. For awareness.
2. E-8 members include India, Srilanka, Thailand, Indonesia; Botswana, DRC, Kenya, Tanzania.

MIKE: Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme
1. MIKE is established by the UN CITES. At the core of the MIKE Programme is the site-based monitoring of elephant mortality.
2. MIKE aims to help Elephant range States improve their ability to monitor elephant populations, detect illegal killings, and use this information to provide more effective law enforcement and strengthen.
any regulatory measures required to support such enforcement.

- **Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS):**
  1. ETIS is a comprehensive information system to track illegal trade in ivory and other elephant products.
  2. It shares the same objectives as those set out for MIKE, with the difference that its aim is to record and analyse levels and trends in illegal trade, rather than the illegal killing of elephants.

- **Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpes virus (EEHV)**
  1. EEHV is a type of herpes virus that can cause a highly fatal hemorrhagic disease in young Asian elephants.
  2. It is a rare disease that has affected 5 elephants in Odisha.

- **Elephant Conflict**
  1. Bengal, Odisha and Assam account for half fatalities in man-elephant conflict.
  2. Reasons: **Electrocution > Train Accidents > Poaching > Poisoning.**

- **Wayanad WS:** is a part of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It has the **World's largest recorded population of Asiatic Elephant.** It is drained by **Kabini river** which is a tributary of Cauvery river.

- **MP gets its 1st Elephant colony in Bandhavgarh forests** (Elephants came from Chattisgarh).

- **India’s first elephant rehabilitation centre** is to be set up in **Kottoor, Kerala.** It is being planned on the lines of the **Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage in Sri Lanka.** India has also opened its **first water clinic for elephants** suffering from arthritis, joint pain and foot ailments at a wildlife SOS Elephant Hospital, **Mathura, UP.**

**Difference between Asiatic Elephants and African Elephants**
Asian Elephants

- **Elephus Maximus.**
- 3000 - 6000 kg.
- **Smother skin**.
- They have 20 pair of ribs.
- **Highest point is on back.**
- They have small ear.
- **Dent on forehead.**
- Molars strongly compressed.
- **Male has Tusk** and female

African Elephants

- **Loxodanta Africana.**
- 4000 - 7000 kg. **Heavier.**
- Skin is wrinkled.
- They have 21 pair of ribs.
- **Highest point is on shoulder.**
- **Big ear.** They reach till neck.
- No dent on forehead.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dont have tusks.</th>
<th>Molars are diamond in shape.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Grass eaters.</td>
<td>• Both Male and Female have tusks but male have bigger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leaves and Branch eaters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Read more about Elephant: [Click here](#)
# ELEPHANT SPECIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Subspecies</th>
<th>Conservation Status</th>
<th>Home Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Elephant</td>
<td><em>Elephas maximus</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>Southeastern Asia, including India, Thailand, Nepal, Sumatra, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei, Borneo, Vietnam, Bangladesh and China. They inhabit grasslands, different types of forests and scrublands. They can live at altitudes ranging from sea level to more than 3,000 feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Savannah Elephant</td>
<td><em>Loxodonta africana</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola and Botswana. The elephants move among a variety of habitats, including grasslands, forests, woodlands, wetlands and agricultural lands from sea level to mountainous slopes. In Mali and Namibia, there are small populations of elephants who also live in desert areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Forest Elephant</td>
<td><em>Loxodonta cyclotis</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>West Africa and the Congo River Basin, including Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cameroon, Gabon and Democratic Republic of the Congo. They live in evergreen moist deciduous forests and rainforests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Physical Characteristics

- **Largest living land mammal in Asia.** Their forehead has two hemispherical bulges, their back is convex and they have five toes on each forefoot and four on each hind foot. Their trunk has one finger-like tip.
- **Largest living land mammal in Africa.** Their backs are concave and their trunks have two finger-like tips. Their skin appears loose with parallel folds, which create maximum surface area for heat dissipation. The savannah elephant has large ears that are pointed and triangular shaped whose shape resembles the African continent.
- **Smallest of the three living elephant species.** Their ears are rounder and tusks straighter than the savannah elephants.

## Average Weight

- **8,000 pounds**
- **8,000 pounds**
- **4,000-8,000 pounds**

What is the news?

- As human-elephant conflicts increase with time and expanding human range, understanding social behaviour becomes crucial to the conservation and management of the highly social and endangered Asian elephant.
- The Asian elephant is a charismatic species with a long history of co-existence with humans. Yet works on male societies of wild elephants based on long-term observations are rare.
- To fill this gap, researchers from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), an autonomous Institute of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, studied associations of male Asian elephants by collecting and analysing data on behaviour of identified nonmusth wild Asian elephants of Nagarahole and Bandipur National Parks.
- They found that the time spent by male Asian elephants in all-male and mixed-sex groups depended on the age of the male.
- Adult Asian male elephants preferred to spend their time alone than in mixed-sex or in all-male groups. Besides, old males were found mostly in the company of their age peers and less frequently with young males (15 to 30 years of age). Also, young males did not disproportionately initiate associations with old males.
- Adult male Asian elephants are less social than females. They enter musth -- a mate-searching strategy for old (above 30 years of age) males, annually. The researchers hypothesised that when the adult males enter musth, dominance relationships may affect the number of mating opportunities they procure. Hence, it might be more crucial for old males than for young males to test strength with each other and settle dominance relationships during their nonmusth time.
- On the other hand, since young males associated less with females during musth than non-musth time, they might also be using their non-musth time to search for mating opportunities.
- The team observed male elephants and identified them using features of their ears, tails, and tusks and recorded whether males associated with each other in the presence or absence of females.
- They used six years of field data on 83 identified males for this study, which was published in the open-access journal ‘Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution’. They considered two possible reasons for male associations --non-musth males may use their time to fight with males of the same age.
class, who would be of similar sizes, to decide their dominance relationships, and young males might also use their associations to learn from older males about food resources and/or reproductive behaviour.

- Their results showed that all-male groups (in the absence of females) were rare and small. According to the team, social learning from older males did not seem to play a big role in male associations. In contrast, African savannah elephants have been found to spend more time in all-male groups and to form larger groups, and young males preferred to associate with older males.
- The researchers said that this could be due to the difference in the dispersion of food resources in the habitats occupied by the two species.
- This study is one of the few that examines male associations in species in which males rove between social groups. It provides an example of how ecological differences could possibly drive differences in male societies in related species with similar male reproductive strategies.

What is the news?

- A total of 186 elephants were killed after being hit by trains across India between 2009-10 and 2020-21, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- According to the data furnished by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry, Assam accounted for the highest number of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by West Bengal (57), and Odisha (27). Uttar Pradesh saw just one death.
- Trains claimed the highest number of pachyderms in 2012-13, when 27 elephants were killed in 10 States as per the data accessed by activist R. Pandiyaraja from Tenkasi district in Tamil Nadu through the Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- According to the Ministry, a Permanent Coordination Committee was constituted between the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and the MoEFCC for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.

Key measures

- The formation of coordination committees of officers of Indian Railways and State Forest Departments, clearing of vegetation along railway tracks to enable clear view for loco pilots, using signage boards at suitable points to alert loco pilots about elephant presence, moderating slopes of elevated sections of railway tracks, setting up underpass/overpass for safe passage of
elephants, regulation of train speed from sunset to sunrise in vulnerable stretches, and regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches of railway tracks by frontline staff of the Forest Department and wildlife watchers are among other initiatives the Ministry has undertaken.

- The MoEFCC also stated that it released ₹212.49 crore to elephant range States under Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) of Project Elephant to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors, to address man-elephant conflicts, and for the welfare of captive elephants, between 2011-12 and 2020-21.
- Kerala stood at the top in getting CSS funds of ₹35.39 crore during the period. Punjab received the lowest of the funds — ₹ 1.82 lakh, according to the RTI document.

Source: TH
Myanmar military coup

About Myanmar
Myanmar, aka Burma, is a country in South East Asia. It neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India. Myanmar is a diverse country, with the state recognizing more than one hundred ethnic groups. Forming roughly two-thirds of the population, ethnic Burmans, known as the Bamar, have enjoyed a privileged position in society and hold a majority of government and military positions. Many ethnic minority groups, on the other hand, have faced systemic discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities and development in their regions, minimal representation in government, and abuses at the hands of the military. Since independence, discrimination has been ingrained in Myanmar’s laws and political system. Anti-Muslim sentiment has also been on the rise in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. (Rohingya crisis) Buddhist extremists, who promote the supremacy of Buddhism, have attacked Muslims and spread hate speech.

Historical Background for Myanmar

- The country gained independence from Britain in 1948. Since then, Myanmar has been ruled by a military junta.
- The Union of Burma began as a parliamentary democracy, like most of its newly independent neighbors on the Indian subcontinent. But representative democracy only lasted until 1962, when General U Ne Win led a military coup and held power for the next 26 years. By 1988, widespread corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar’s currency, and food shortages led to massive student-led protests. But it was crushed by the army. In the aftermath of the 1988 crackdown, Ne Win resigned as chairman of his party, although he remained active behind the scenes as another military junta took power. The new ruling military changed the country’s name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital to Nay Pyi Taw, a city it built-in central Myanmar.
- In 2007, the Saffron Revolution, widespread anti-government protests that were sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-colored robes worn by participating Buddhist monks—and international pressure prompted shifts in Myanmar.
- The junta pushed forward a new constitution in 2008, which is still in
place today, that gave the military widespread powers even under civilian rule. The military junta unexpectedly officially dissolved in 2011 and established a civilian parliament for a transitional period, during which former army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed president.

- In 2015, Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty elections—considered to be the freest and fairest elections in decades—since the country’s transition away from military rule.
- Suu Kyi became Myanmar’s de facto leader in 2015.

What is the news?

- General Min Aung Hlaing led a Military coup in February 2021.
- By arresting President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the rest of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership, and declaring military rule under a state of emergency for at least a year, General Min Aung Hlaing has made it clear that it is the military that is in charge, and he is not particularly concerned about the opposition to or condemnation of the move.

What led to 2021 Military coup?

- In 2020, Myanmar held its second national elections under civilian rule, which Ms Suu Kyi’s NLD party overwhelmingly won. The military suffered a major blow in the elections: the USDP won just 33 of 476 available seats, while the NLD won 396.
- The immediate reason for the coup was that the newly elected National Assembly was due to meet in Naypyidaw, despite the Tatmadaw’s (Army’s) claims that the November general elections had several irregularities, and its contestation of the NLD’s landslide victory.
- Ms. Suu Kyi had refused to bow to Gen. Hlaing’s demand that the results, which also saw the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party with a reduced strength in Parliament, be set aside.
- Clearly, the Army, which still nominates a fourth of the parliamentary seats and retains the important Defence, Borders and Interior portfolios, felt it was better to dismiss the NLD government before it increased its clout.
- Gen. Hlaing is due to retire this year, and it is possible that the move was meant to extend his longevity in power.
- Backed by a silent Beijing, the junta leadership may also have gambled that it was better to take drastic action against the democratic leaders before the new U.S. administration finds its feet.
Role of Aung San Suu Kyi

1. The return to Army rule was also helped to some extent by Ms. Suu Kyi, who came to office in 2015, but has lost opportunities to put her country more firmly on the road to democracy. She has accepted a dual power system in the state.
2. Daw Suu, as she is known, has also failed to bring democracy to her party, and been criticised for her autocratic style.
3. Her refusal to rein in the Generals when the Tatmadaw unleashed a pogrom on the Rohingya between 2016-17, had lost the Nobel Peace laureate much international support.

Impact on India

- The crisis had its spillover impacts on the borders as well.
- At least 300 Myanmarese, including police officers, are estimated to have since crossed into India.
- Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga took up the issue with the Foreign Minister and India has shut the border for now, but it would be difficult for New Delhi to turn a blind eye to the border if the situation in Myanmar turns worse.

PT Pointers for India- Myanmar

- Biggest Ethnic Population- Bamar people
- Has been ravaged by Extremely Severe Cyclone Nargis in the past
- Kyaukphyu port in Myanmar is being developed by China as part of Belt & Road Initiative
- India & Myanmar are doing multimodal Kaladan project that connects India’s North East border with Myanmar’s Sittwe Port.

India’s Stand

- India had cultivated a careful balance, between nudging along the democratic process by supporting Ms. Suu Kyi, and working with the military to ensure its strategic interests to the North East and deny China a monopoly on Myanmar’s infrastructure and resources, the developments are unwelcome.
- India expressed “deep concern” over the reports of an unfolding military
India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar.

The country believes that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld.

India had shown a commitment to building robust relationships with Myanmar over the past two decades which intensified after the democratic process began in 2011.

India has sealed its border to Myanmar: click here for further news.

Click here for the Jakarta Summit – Myanmar and ASEAN after coup

Source: TH

GST council to convene on May 28

Goods and Service Tax – GST (Indirect Tax)

- Through 101st Amendment Act guided by Art 301 Govt introduced GST includes both Goods and Services
- Art 279 A is introduced to make GST workable. Enforced from 1 July 2017.
- Exceptions
  1. Except Alcohol and Electricity all items included.
  2. 5 Petroleum products are temporarily out of GST (to control losses to the State): Crude Oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and Natural Gas.
- GST Council
  1. Constitutional Body. Responsible for Tax rates, listing of items and any dispute resolution among States and provide participation of all States and UTs.
  2. Headed by FM. Represented by FM of States. Vice Chairperson from respective State FM.
  3. Voting: 2/3rd State and 1/3rd Center. Decision is based on majority voting.
  4. Quorum = 50% and Majority = 75% members present.
- It preserves Principle of Cooperative Federalism. But if Tax rates are decided
States have no autonomy to modify it which goes against Cooperative Federalism.
- GST tried to provide Single Tax for supply of all goods and services (solved problem of multiple taxation).
- It is a destination based tax (opposite of VAT) guided by 1 Tax 1 Nation 1 Market to decrease cascading effect and decrease cost of production and increase export and control inflation.
- GST is based on IT technology hence minimum interface between tax official and citizens.
- It is a part of Ease of Doing Business by doing away with multiple taxation, multiple filling and multiple compliance. Now all firms can file same tax, get GST number to get the benefit of Input Tax Credit.

For PAN India Company a person should take different GST number in different States because State has State GSTs.

**Taxes subsumed under GST**
1. Central Taxes = Excise Duty (Medicinal and Toiletry Goods), Additional Duties of Excise (Goods of special importance), Additional Custom Duties, Special Additional Custom duties, Service Tax, Central Surcharges and Cess.

**Provisions of GST**
1. As it is a Destination Based Tax, Chances is that UP Govt (Destination State) can earn more GST than Maharashtra which is manufacture state. Hence Govt came up with Cess @ 15% on more luxurious goods to compensate lossmaking states at 15% over peak rate of 28% but at times the effective rate is < 40%. Hence, effective rate of cess is 12%.
2. Exemption limit in plain area increased from 20 to 40 lakh rs. and in Northeast and Hilly regions, increased from 10 to 20 lakhs.
3. Govt introduced GST Composition Scheme:
   1. If a Trader, manufacturer and restaurant; if annual turnover <= 1.5 crore then the Trader and Manufacture must pay 1% of GST and Restaurant can pay 5% of GST. But they are not eligible for imp tax credit mechanism.
   2. In service sector 18% is GST but if any enterprise has turnover of 50 lakhs
then you can pay 6% They are not eligible for img tax credit off. Under it Center and State share is 50:50.
3. 4 Types of GST: CGST, SGST, UTGST and IGST imposed on imported goods or custom duties and interstate trade distributed to state as per FC recommendations.
4. Rates
   1. 0% = Essential goods. Unbranded. Unpacked. Export and supplies to SEZ are 0 rated.
   2. 5% = Packed essential goods. Branded. Important for consumption of masses.
   3. 12% = Daily health and hygiene. Basic Raw material for industries, few construction items (except Cement).
   4. 18% = Majority services.
   5. 28% = Luxury goods and Cement.
   6. Separate rate for precious metals = 3% and semi precious stones = 0.25%.
   7. For administrative convenience, if a Business have turnover < 1.5 crore 90% belongs to State and 10% = Central. But if Business > 1.5 crore turnover then Centre: State share has 50:50.
8. Now J&K is also a part of GST.
5. Exceptions
   - Except Alcohol and Electricity all items included.
   - 5 Petroleum products are temporarily out of GST (to control losses to the State): Crude Oil, petrol, diesel, ATF and Natural Gas.
6. Input Tax Credit Off of State GST will be adjusted from State GST.
7. e-filing of returns from e-payment, netbanking, RTGS.
8. Refund of taxes to be sought by taxpayers or any other person is within 2 years time period from date.
9. Self assessment of tax payable by registered person provided by audit and he should comply provisions.
10. Formation of advanced ruling authority in every State to enable tax payers to seek a binding clarity on taxation matter, Center should adopt such authority.
11. GST Appellate Tribunal = Head Commissioner Level to solve disputes relating to GST amount.
12. Anti Profiteering Clause: To ensure that benefit of GST and Input Tax credit off can pass to consumers like Monetary Transmission of RBI.
13. 3 Tier Structure
   1. Standing Committee on Anti Profiteering
   2. Screening Committee at State Level
   3. NAPA: (National Anti Profiteering Authority) to ensure that benefits that occur
to entities due to decreased cost are passed on to customers. Entities that hike prices to get profits will be checked.

14. They will 1st identify business and ask him to comply. They can ensure payment of compensation to consumers at 18% from date of imposing high prices. If they do not accept, they can cancel its licence.

Source: TH
Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India.
- Since the Act is internal security legislation, despite being a law related to financial legislation, it falls into the purview of Home Ministry and not the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

Objectives of FCRA

- The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest.
- It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India.

Provisions of FCRA

- The Act prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others.
- Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.
- It defines the term ‘foreign contribution’ to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.
- The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

Registration and prior approval under FCRA:
In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised. Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities. The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.

NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding. This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

Conditions on the use of foreign funds:

- All funds received by an NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received.
- Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act.
- Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act.
- Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members.
- Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a ‘NIL’ report must be furnished with the Authority.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020

- The Bill bars public servants from receiving foreign contributions. Public servant includes any person who is in service or pay of the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.
- The Bill prohibits the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person. The term ‘person’ under the Bill includes an individual, an association, or a registered company. The FCRA 2010 allows transfer of foreign contributions to persons registered to accept foreign contributions.
- The Bill makes Aadhaar number mandatory for all office bearers, directors
or key functionaries of a person receiving foreign contribution, as an identification document. In case of a foreigner, a copy of the passport or the Overseas Citizen of India card for identification is required.

- The Bill states that foreign contribution must be received only in an account designated by the bank as FCRA account in such branches of the State Bank of India, New Delhi. No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account. The person may open another FCRA account in any scheduled bank of their choice for keeping or utilising the received contribution.
- The Bill allows the government to restrict usage of unutilised foreign contribution. This may be done if, based on an inquiry the government believes that such person has contravened provisions of the FCRA.
- The Bill proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. In FCRA 2010 the limit was 50%.
- The Bill allows the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate.

Source: TH

Adoption issues in COVID

Adoption issues in COVID

- The Supreme Court has directed the States and the Union Territories to take stringent action against private individuals and NGOs who invite people to illegally adopt children orphaned by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ministry asked the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to add a column in hospital admission forms asking patients to specify in whose custody their children could be left in case of any eventuality. Only the district-level child welfare committee can decide the future of children who have lost both parents to the infection.
- A Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose, in an 18-page order published, directed the government to step in and prevent private entities from revealing the identities of affected children, usually on social
media, and inviting people to adopt them.

The State Governments/Union Territories are directed to prevent any NGO from collecting funds in the names of the affected children by disclosing their identity and inviting interested persons to adopt them. No adoption of affected children should be permitted contrary to the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

It was illegal to invite strangers to adopt children, already traumatised by their personal losses, without the involvement of the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), a statutory body under the Women and Child Development Ministry.

Invitation to persons for adoption of orphans is contrary to law as no adoption of a child can be permitted without the involvement of CARA.

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

- CARA is a statutory body of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by the Government of India in 2003.
- CARA primarily deals with the adoption of orphan, abandoned, and surrendered children through its associated/recognized adoption agencies.
- CARA interacts with State Governments and UT Administrations through regular training and orientation programmes as well as meetings, consultations and visits to the States/UTs.
- The implementation of the adoption programme in the States/UTs is reviewed in various consultations organized by the Ministry as well as meetings of the Project Approval Board to consider proposals received from States/UTs for release of grants under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme.
- In 2018, CARA allowed individuals in a live-in relationship to adopt children from and within India.
Hague Convention on Adoption

- The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption is an international convention dealing with international adoption, child laundering, and child trafficking.
- The Convention was developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the preeminent organization in the area of private international law.
- It was concluded on 29 May 1993 and entered into force on 1 May 1995.
- It is an effort to protect those involved from the corruption, abuses, and exploitation which sometimes accompanies international adoption.
- The Convention has been considered crucial because it provides a formal international and intergovernmental recognition of intercountry adoption to ensure that adoptions under the Convention will generally be recognized and given effect in other party countries.
- 96 countries including India has signed and ratified this convention. Whereas Nepal, South Korea, and Russia are yet to ratify it.

- The order came after the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), on Monday, raised the alarm on a spate of complaints about illegal adoption of COVID-19 orphans through private individual and organisations.
- NCPCR statistics show that 3,621 children were orphaned, 26,176 children lost either parent and 274 abandoned between April 1, 2021 to June 5, 2021. The court is hearing a suo motu case on the plight of children impacted by the pandemic.

National Commission for protection of Child Rights, 2005

1. It is a Statutory Body. NCPCR has given the definition of child to be less than 18 years.
2. NCPCR can take up suo-motu cases.
3. Mandate: To ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and
Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights given in Constitution and UN Convention on Rights of Child.

4. NCPCR had asked to form special cells in schools to solve problems of children. The cell will examine the mental & physical torture against children. Complainsts regarding sexual harassment, mental harassment, favouritism etc. should be informed to the Taluk/District Legal Services Authority within 48 hours.

5. It is the nodal body for Right to Education and Child abuse.

Main Recommendations of NCPCR:

1. **Seminars** should be conducted for teachers to improve their teaching styles.
2. The **dignity** of a student should be accepted by everyone.
3. **Drug addiction, copying, violence** etc. should be curtailed.
4. **State Commissions** of Protection of Child Rights should be established.

Child trafficking

- Advocate Gaurav Agrawal, amicus curiae, said cases of child trafficking have been going up.
- The government should intervene to care and protect children orphaned, abandoned or whose families have lost their earning members.
- The court said lack of knowledge about the rights of children under the Juvenile Justice Act had led to many falling victim to efforts at illegal adoption.
- It directed the Centre, States and the Union Territories to give wide publicity to the provisions of the 2015 Act at regular intervals so as to make the general public, children and their parents or guardians aware of such provisions.
- It ordered the States and the Union Territories to continue with their efforts to identify children in need of care and protection after March 2020 and upload their details on the NCPCR database in order to provide them welfare schemes.
Tele Counselling through SAMVEDNA for Children impacted by COVID-19

GS-I | 17 May, 2021

Tele Counselling through SAMVEDNA for Children impacted by COVID-19

- With an objective of providing psychological first-aid and emotional support to children affected during COVID-19 Pandemic, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is providing Tele-Counselling to children through SAMVEDNA (Sensitizing Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance) - a Toll-Free Helpline launched to provide psycho-social mental support for Children affected during COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Tele-counselling is being provided through a network of qualified Experts/Counselors/Psychologists trained under the guidance of Dr. Shekhar Seshadri, Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and his team from NIMHANS, on various psychosocial issues in reference to COVID-19, using different Tele counselling strategies.
- SAMVEDNA tele counselling service is for psychological support to children to address their stress, anxiety, fear and other issues during the Pandemic.
- This service is available on a toll-free No: 1800-121-2830 from Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- This service is exclusively for children who are willing to talk and are in need of counseling.
- When a child/ caretaker/Parent dials SAMVEDNA1800-121-2830, they get to speak to a professional counselor in a safe environment. Tele counselling is provided to the children under three categories:

1. Children who are in Quarantine/isolation/COVID Care centers.
2. Children who have COVID positive parents or family members and near ones.
3. Children who have lost their parents due to Covid-19 Pandemic.

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Source: PIB
India’s Policy on Israel-Palestine conflict

- At the United Nations Security Council on Sunday, India, a non-permanent member, reaffirmed its support for Palestine, but stopped short of making any direct reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future Israel-Palestine borders.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday tweeted the national flags of 25 countries, from the United States to Albania, that he said were “resolutely standing with Israel and supporting our right to self defence”. Indian flag was not among them.
- Ambassador Tirumurti’s statement made two things clear.
  1. One, he said the “violence began in East Jerusalem a week back”, referring to the clashes in the Al-Aqsa compound and East Jerusalem’s neighbourhood. This means, India doesn’t see Hamas’s rocket firing on May 10, which followed Israeli forces storming Al-Aqsa Mosque in the morning, as the trigger of the conflict.
  2. Second, India has expressed “our deep concern over the violence in Jerusalem, especially on Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount during the holy month of Ramzan and about the possible eviction process in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.” Dozens of Arab families in the occupied East Jerusalem face eviction by the Israelis, which was one of the triggers of Arab protests in the last week of Ramzan.
- India has also urged both sides to “refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status quo, including in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhood.”
- Here, it is Israel which is trying to unilaterally change the status quo by moving to evict the Palestinian families, and deploying troops to the Al-Aqsa compound.
- India called for “the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, including Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount must be respected”.
- So, without mentioning any country, India has, in effect, called for the eviction process to be stopped and status quo ante to be restored at the Al Aqsa compound.
- While refusing to toe the Israeli line on the conflict, India’s comments also point to its evolving position on the larger Israel-Palestine issue.
- “It’s a very carefully drafted statement. For example, it’s called for the status
quo relating to East Jerusalem. But the crucial point that’s missing is that East Jerusalem should be the capital [of a future Palestinian state]. Earlier, this used to be the mantra from India regarding the two-state solution. This portion is now taken out.

- Therefore, we are simply giving lip service to the two-state solution without mentioning that East Jerusalem is the core part of that two-state solution,” said Talmiz Ahmad, a former diplomat who was India’s Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.
- Until 2017, India’s position was that it supported “the Palestinian cause and called for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel”.
- Then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated this position in November 2013. So did then President Pranab Mukherjee, in October 2015.
- India dropped the references to East Jerusalem and the borders in 2017 when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas visited Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said back then, “[W]e hope to see the realisation of a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestine, coexisting peacefully with Israel. I have reaffirmed our position on this to President Abbas during our conversation today.”
- In 2018, when Mr. Modi visited Ramallah, he reaffirmed the same position, with no direct reference to the borders or Jerusalem. Ambassador Tirumurti stated this line while calling for a “just” solution, without giving specifics on what that solution should be.

For Israel-Palestine conflict: complete history and analysis: [click here](#)
Fertilizer Industry in India

- It is 1 of the 8 core industries. Fertilizer has the minimum share in Index of Core Industries.
- India is the 2nd largest consumer of Urea fertilizers after China. India also ranks 2nd in the production of nitrogenous fertilizers and 3rd in phosphatic fertilizers. Potash requirement is met through imports since we have limited reserves of potash. There are 2 types of Fertilizers
  1. Primary Fertilizers: classified on the basis of nutrients they supply to soil like N:P:K:
     1. Nitrogenous (Urea),
     2. Phosphatic (di-ammonium phosphate - DAP) and
     3. Potassic (muriate of potash (MOP) fertilizers.
  2. Secondary Fertilizers includes Calcium, Magnesium and Sulphur.
  3. Micronutrients include Iron, Zinc, Boron, Chloride etc.
- Fertilizer subsidy (Food > Fertilizer > Petroleum > Interest payments)
  1. Earlier no Fertilizer subsidy was paid till 1977. Oil crisis of 1973 led to increase in Fertilizer prices leading to a decline in consumption and an increase in food prices. In 1977, Govt subsidized manufacturers.
  2. After 1991 crisis, Govt decontrolled the import of Phosphate and Potash but Urea imports is restricted.

Urea Production and Pricing mechanism

- Urea is the source of Nitrogenous fertilizer and it is heavily subsidized by Center. Today Urea is the only fertilizer which remains controlled.
- CCEA approved continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme upto 2020
  1. It is a part of Central Sector Scheme. Urea price will be same till 2020.
  2. Now DBT Scheme is approved for fertilizer subsidy to urea manufacturers and importers. It also includes imported Urea subsidy which is directed towards import to bridge the gap between demand and indigenous production of urea. It also includes freight subsidy for movement of urea.
  3. Benefits
     1. DBT will ensure timely payment of subsidy to urea manufacturers. Fertilizer Co. leading to timely availability of urea to farmers.
2. This will reduce the leakage of fertilizer subsidy and black marketing.
3. Ceiling might be put to reduce the overuse of Nitrogenous fertilizers.
4. Subsidy to Fertilizer manufacturer/ importer = Farm Gate price - MRP paid by Farmers.
   - New Urea Policy of 2015 (till 2019-20)
     1. With the objective of maximizing indigenous urea production, promoting energy efficiency in urea production and rationalize subsidy.
     2. It is applicable to existing 25 gas based units.
     3. It ensures timely payment to urea manufacturers resulting in timely availability of urea to farmers.
   - Urea is given at statutorily controlled price = Rs. 5360/ MT. Other charges for Neem coating.
   - Center plans to ease control on the retail prices of Urea and wants to make it more targeted.
   - Earlier Mandatory Neem coated urea production was done to slow down the dissolution of nitrogen into soil, resulting into less nutrient requirement.
   - Govt is also planning over fixing a Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) rate for Urea to promote balanced use of fertilizers and bring efficiency in industry.

CCEA approved continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme till 2020

- Under this scheme a fixed amount of subsidy decided on annual basis, is provided to fertilizer companies (other than Urea) depending on its nutrient content. It is applicable to 22 fertilizers (other than Urea).
- Govt announces a fixed rate of subsidy on each nutrient of subsidized Nitrogen, Phosphate, Potash and Sulphur fertilizers. MRP is decided by considering international and domestic prices of P&K fertilizers, exchange rate and inventory level in the country.

Infrastructure

- Fertilizer Corporation of India Limited: has 4 units at Sindri (Jharkhand); Gorakhpur (UP); Ramagundam (AP) and Talcher (Odisha) and Korbe (Chattisgarh).
- Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation Limited: at Barauni (Bihar); Durgapur (WB) and Namrup (Assam).
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- This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

Conditions on the use of foreign funds:

- All funds received by an NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received.
- Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act.
- Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act.
- Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members.
- Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a ‘NIL’ report must be furnished with the Authority.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020
The Bill bars public servants from receiving foreign contributions. Public servant includes any person who is in service or pay of the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.

The Bill prohibits the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person. The term ‘person’ under the Bill includes an individual, an association, or a registered company. The FCRA 2010 allows transfer of foreign contributions to persons registered to accept foreign contributions.

The Bill makes Aadhaar number mandatory for all office bearers, directors or key functionaries of a person receiving foreign contribution, as an identification document. In case of a foreigner, a copy of the passport or the Overseas Citizen of India card for identification is required.

The Bill states that foreign contribution must be received only in an account designated by the bank as FCRA account in such branches of the State Bank of India, New Delhi. No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account. The person may open another FCRA account in any scheduled bank of their choice for keeping or utilising the received contribution.

The Bill allows the government to restrict usage of unutilised foreign contribution. This may be done if, based on an inquiry the government believes that such person has contravened provisions of the FCRA.

The Bill proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. In FCRA 2010 the limit was 50%.

The Bill allows the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate.

Source: PIB

Electoral Bonds in recent Assembly Elections
GS-III | 19 May, 2021

Electoral Bonds in recent Assembly Elections

As per the scheme, Electoral bonds means a bond issued in the nature of promissory note which is a bearer banking instrument not carrying the name of buyer or payee. They are used for making donations to political
parties. Govt launched it on 2 Jan, 2018.

- They are issued by Scheduled Commercial Banks upon authorisation from Central Govt (not RBI) to donor, but only against cheque and digital payments (not cash). They are redeemable in a registered political party.
- Amendments to RBI Act, 1934 and RPA, 1951 was made through Finance Bill, 2017.
- It is an interest free banking instrument issued on a non refundable basis and are not available for trading. Further, no loan would be provided against these bonds. Purchases needs to have fulfilled KYC norms.
- Electoral Bonds would have a life of only 15 days during which it can be used for making donation only to the political parties registered under Section 29A of RPA, 1951. It will be encashed by them only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.
- No payment shall be made to any payee political party if the bond is deposited after the expiry of the validity period and the bond deposited by any political party to its account shall be credited on the same day.
- The information furnished by the buyer shall be treated confidential. No commission, brokerage or any charges for the issue of bond shall be payable.
- Maximum amount of cash donation that a political party can receive is stipulated at Rs. 2000/- from 1 person. Political parties are exempted from Income tax.
- As per Section 29C (1) of RPA, 1951, the political party needs to disclose the details of Non governmental corporations and persons who donate > 20000 to it.

**Issues:**
1. Donors are left anonymous. So Electoral bonds cannot be identified or associated with any particular buyer or political party.
2. Election Commission argues that it does not allow to check violations of RPA.
3. Declaration of sources of funding for political parties is given in Section 29 of RPA, 1951. Before 2017, they had to declare all donations made > 20000 but now they are out of this purview.
5. Issue of corporate funding misuse to Political parties and lobbying.
6. Issue of favoring the ruling party. As in 2017-18, 94.6% of bonds given to BJP.
7. Foreign companies with a majority stake in Indian companies can invest in Electoral bonds. This allows unchecked foreign funding.

**Benefits**
1. It limits the use of cash in political funding.
2. It curbs Black money as the payments are made only by Cash, DD, NEFT, RTGS.

3. It protects donor from political victimization as they remain anonymous.

- **3 National Parties received 1931 crore** in FY 19 through Electoral Bond scheme which allows anonymous donations to political parties. **BJP got the highest.** Both EC and RBI are against it.

Electoral bonds worth ?695 cr. sold during the recent elections

- The Electoral bond scheme allows any Indian citizen or company to purchase the bonds sold by the SBI in denominations of ?1,000, ?10,000, ?1 lakh, ?10 lakh and ?1 crore and give them to political parties anonymously.
- The State Bank of India (SBI) sold electoral bonds worth ?695.34 crore from April 1 to 10, when the Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, West Bengal, Assam and Kerala polls were in full swing, says an RTI reply by the bank.
- The amount sold was the **highest-ever for any Assembly elections since the scheme started in 2018**, according to the numbers provided in the reply.
- All but ?2,000 of the bonds sold in the 16th phase of the scheme were encashed. Predictably, the sale shot up during the elections in comparison to the previous tranche in January when bonds worth ?42.1 crore were sold, it said.
- The **highest amounts were sold at the Kolkata branch (?176.1 crore), followed by New Delhi (?167.5 crore) and Chennai (?141.5 crore).**
- The Hyderabad and Mumbai branches sold ?91.5 crore worth bonds each, while ?15 crore worth bonds were sold at the Gandhinagar branch, 75 crore in Jaipur, 74.15 crore in Guwahati and ?3 crore in Panaji.
- In the 16th phase of the scheme, 972 out of the 974 electoral bonds were encashed, with over half the amount — ?351 crore — being encashed at the New Delhi branch. The rest were encashed at Bhubaneswar (?116 crore), Chennai (?106 crore), Hyderabad (?63.5 crore), Kolkata (?55 crore) and Mumbai (?3.8 crore).
- In its May 14 reply to a query filed by Bihar-based RTI activist Kanhaiya Kumar on April 16, the SBI declined to name the political parties that encashed the bonds, saying it was “third party personal information” that was exempted under the RTI Act.
- The bank also declined to share the details of how much commission it had earned from the sale of bonds since the scheme started in 2018, saying the information was of “commercial confidence in nature” and its disclosure would “harm the competitive position of the bank”. Mr. Kumar, however, pointed out that the SBI was the only bank authorised to sell electoral bonds.
Everything about: Arctic
GS-I | 19 May, 2021

Arctic mapping
1. Read all this from Orient Longman Blackswan Atlas as Ankit Sir teaches in his Mapping classes.
2. Barent (Kola penin), Kara (Yamal penin), Laptev (Taymyr penin), Eastern Siberian (Kolyma lowland), Chukchi, Beaufort sea (USA, Canada), Gulf of Boothia, Baffin Bay.
3. Lincoln sea is between Denmark and Arctic.
4. Gunnbjørn Mt is in Denmark.
5. Denmark Strait is between Greenland (Denmark) and Iceland.
6. Greenland is between Denmark Strait and Davis Strait.
7. Arctic Circle only cuts Kola and Chukchi Penin. Also Davis & Denmark Strait.
8. Aleut, Athabaskan, Gwich'in, Inuit, Saami are the tribes of Arctic.
9. Flora and Fauna of the Arctic = Polar bear, Arctic fox, Bowhead whale, Beluga whale, Arctic Hare and ringed seal, walrus, harp seal, Arctic tarn and goose. Also Lichens and Mosses. GrizzlyBear is found in Canada, US, Europe. Sea lion or Walrus is found in Arctic.
10. Nordic countries is a cultural grouping of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Denmark.

About Arctic Region

- Arctic region is a polar region located at the northernmost part of Earth.
- The Arctic consists of the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska.
Land within the Arctic region has seasonally varying snow and ice cover, with predominantly treeless permafrost (permanently frozen underground ice) containing tundra. Arctic seas contain seasonal sea ice in many places.

- The Arctic region is a unique area among Earth's ecosystems. The cultures in the region and the Arctic indigenous peoples have adapted to its cold and extreme conditions.
- Life in the Arctic includes zooplankton and phytoplankton, fish and marine mammals, birds, land animals, plants and human societies.
- Arctic land is bordered by the subarctic.

**Arctic Council**
1. It is an **intergovernmental forum** that addresses issues faced by Arctic Govts and indigenous people of the Arctic (Inuit, Aleut, Athabaskan, Gwich'in, Saami).

2. **Ottawa declaration** is related to the formation of Arctic Council in **1996**.

3. There are 8 members: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and USA. Decisions are based on Consensus.

4. **Observer States**: India, China, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, UK, France, Switzerland, Spain.

5. 1st country to chair Arctic was **Canada, 2017 to 2019** Finland; 2019 to 2021: Iceland.

6. It has **6 working groups**
   1. Arctic Contaminants Action Programme
   2. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme
   3. Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group
   4. Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group
   5. Sustainable Development Working Group
   6. Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation

7. **Significance of Arctic**
   1. Rules based International order and that it should not be a dispute zone.
   2. ONG and military bases of Russia.
   3. Diplomatic interest to neutralize China.
   4. R&D wrt Climate Change.

8. **Issues**
   1. Militarization of the Arctic: Russia (Murmansk) vs USA (Nuuk - Greenland).
   2. Russia also launched a floating Nuclear Power Plant in Arctic to provide Electricity to small Islands.
   3. Oil spill in the Arctic.

**India and Arctic Programmes**

- India initiated its **Arctic Research program in 2007** with thrust on CC at Poles.
  1. Study connections between Arctic climate and Indian monsoon.
  2. Study sea ice to estimate the effect of **global warming at Poles**.
  3. Study on effects of glaciers on **Sea level change**.

- India launched its 1st sci expedition in 2007 and opened "**Himadri**" at Ny-Alesund, Spitsbergen Island, Svalbard (Norway).
- National Center for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), Goa also works on the Arctic.
  1. It **renamed as NCPOR** (National Center for Polar and Ocean Research).
2. NCAOR was established in 1998 for expeditions to Antarctic 1st now both.

3. NCPOR is India’s premier R&D institution in the Polar and Southern Ocean realms.

4. The mandate of NCPOR is multi-dimensional:
   1. Research and Help in Expeditions to the Polar and Ocean sciences (Indian part of Southern Ocean).
   2. Geo scientific surveys of India’s EEZ and beyond 200M, Deep sea drilling in Arabian Sea basin, exploration for ocean non-living resources such as the gas hydrates and multi-metal sulphides in mid-ocean ridges.
   3. Upkeep of Research bases of Maitri and Bharati of Antarctic and Himadri at Arctic.
   4. Upkeep research vessel ORV Sagar Kanya and others.
   5. The research-vessel fleet consists of 6 research vessels viz Sagar Kanya, Sagar Sampata, Sagar Nidhi, Sagar Manjusha, Sagar Purvi & Saga Paschmi currently, and a 7th being the Polar Research Vessel (PRV) is being constructed.

HIMANSH Station at Spiti, HP
It is India’s remote, high-altitude research station in the Himalayas called HIMANSH at Spiti, HP.

As part of the Indian government’s initiatives to better study and quantify the Himalayan glacier responses towards the climate change, National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), Goa, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences has established a high altitude research station in Himalaya called HIMANSH (literally meaning, a slice of ice), situated above 13,500 ft (> 4000 m) at Sutri Dhaka, Chandra basin, Lahaul-Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh.

**Objectives:** To facilitate Himalayan Cryosphere Studies in Chandra basin to study the dynamics and the rate of change of Himalayan glaciers to understand its impact on hydrology and climate.

Since Upper Himalaya has been dominated by very harsh climate and terrain conditions, the station will enable scientists and field staff to stay in relatively weather resistant environment and carry out field experiments and monitoring on a continuous basis.

HIMANSH has been established under the NCAOR program “Cryosphere and Climate” for proper monitoring of glaciers to understand dynamics,
mass budget, energy and hydrological balance of Chandra basin.

- **Observations**: A total of six glaciers (280 km² glacier area) of Chandra basin name Sutri Dhaka, Batal, Bara Shigri, Samudra Tapu, Gepang Gath and Kunjum have been monitoring for mass, energy and hydrological balance including surface flow, ice flux, terminal fluctuation using this station “HIMANSH”.

**IndARC Project**
- It is India's 1st underwater observatory in the frigid waters of Arctic Ocean in the Kongsfjorden fjord (natural lab). It is with Norway.
- It will help scientists understand the Arctic climate process and its influence on the Indian Monsoon system. It will also study the salinity and temperature profile.
- It is designed and developed by the scientists from (Earth System Science Organisation) ESSO; NCAOR, Goa; NIOT, Chennai; INCOIS, Hyderabad.

MOSAiC mission (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the study of Arctic Climate.)
It aims to understand Global Warming. The mission has received funding from US institutions like NASA, National Science Foundation, Department of Energy and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
It is the largest ever Arctic expedition. Scientists from 17 countries will take part in this year long mission as they anchor the ship (German icebreaker RV Polarstern) to a large piece of Arctic sea ice to study climate change.

This mission comes 125 years after Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen 1st managed to seal his wooden expedition ship, Fram into the ice during a 3 year expedition to the North Pole.

India’s Vishnu Nandan is among the 300 researchers who will deploy radar sensor on the sea ice surface from Polarstern. It is the 1st study of this scale at the North Pole for an entire year.
Other programmes

- **India - Sweden**: MoU for Polar Science Cooperation (both for Arctic & Antarctic).
- ARLS (Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support) with Russia will give **access to Russian bases in Arctic** for logistics & operational turnaround.

**India’s Arctic Policy**

India’s Arctic Policy roadmap for sustainable engagement draft is based on **five pillars**:

1. Science and research activities,
2. Economic and human development cooperation,
3. Transportation and connectivity,
4. Governance and international cooperation, and
5. National capacity building.

**Highlights of the Policy:**

- The policy commits to expanding scientific research, “sustainable tourism” and mineral oil and gas exploration in the Arctic region.
- The draft spells out goals in India’s Arctic Mission such as to better understand the scientific and climate-related linkages between the Arctic and the Indian monsoons.
- 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.
- 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.

**Nodal Agency**

India has designated the **Goa-based National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research** to lead scientific research and act as a nodal body to coordinate among various scientific bodies to promote domestic scientific research capacities in the arctic. Read in detail about the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research on the given link.

**Objectives of India’s Draft Arctic Policy**
Promotion of Scientific Study of Arctic Region – Orient the curriculum on earth sciences, geosciences, climate change, biological sciences, and space-related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian Universities.

Promotion of Arctic Tourism – to encourage tourism and hospitality sectors by building specialised capacities and awareness by engaging with Arctic enterprises.

Planning the explorations in the Arctic region – to formulate effective plans for Arctic-related programmes for mineral, oil and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes.

Arctic’s ice called “Last Ice Area” to be melted before expected
A part of the Arctic’s ice called “Last Ice Area”, located north of Greenland, has melted before expected. Scientists had believed this area was strong enough to withstand global warming.

But now, in a paper published in the journal “Communications Earth & Environment”, researchers note that in August 2020 the area where the Last Ice Area (LIA) is located, experienced a record low concentration of sea ice. Significantly, they point out that sea-ice has been thinning for years, a trend they think has been prevalent because of climate change.

What is the Last Ice Area?

In an article published in 2015, the National Geographic noted that while climate projections forecast the total disappearance of summer ice in the Arctic by the year 2040, the only place that would be able to withstand a warming climate would be this area of ice called the “Last Ice Area”.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) notes that climate change is shrinking the extent of Arctic summer sea ice, which is not only important for animals but also the local Inuit communities.

But while this piece of ice above northern Canada and Greenland was
expected to last the longest time, it is now showing signs of melting. WWF claims that WWF-Canada was the first to call this area ‘Last Ice Area’.

**Why is the area important?**

- The area is important because it was thought to be able to help ice-dependent species as ice in the surrounding areas melted away.
- The area is used by polar bears to hunt for seals who use ice to build dens for their offspring.
- Walruses too, use the surface of the ice for foraging.

**When did the area start changing?**

- In the paper for which research was led by the University of Washington, researchers note that the first sign of change in LIA was observed in 2018.
- Further, in August last year, sea ice showed its “vulnerability” to the long-term effects of climate change. The ice in LIA has been thinning gradually over the years much like other parts of the Arctic Ocean.

**What are the reasons that explain the change?**

- Through satellite images, researchers noted that the sea ice concentration was at a record low of 50 percent, as of August 14, 2020. The team also explored the reasons for the record low concentration of sea ice.
- They say that about 80 percent of thinning can be attributed to weather-related factors such as winds that break up and move the ice around.
- The remaining 20 percent can be attributed to longer-term thinning of the ice due to global warming.
- Even so, the results of their study cannot be applied to the entire region considering there are some unknowns, such as how more open water in the region would affect ice-dependent species over the short and long term.

To read everything about Antarctic: [click here](#)

Source: TH
Self-sufficiency in Edible Oils

- To achieve self-sufficiency in the production of oilseeds, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has adopted a multi-pronged strategy.
- Under the strategy, the Government of India has approved an ambitious plan for the **free distribution of high yielding varieties of seeds** to the farmers for the Kharif season 2021 in the form of mini-kits.
- The special Kharif programme will bring an **additional 6.37 lakh hectare area under oilseeds** and is likely to produce 120.26 lakh quintals of oilseeds and edible oil amounting to 24.36 lakh quintals.
- Both area and productivity enhancement has been formulated for soybean and groundnut with a focus on high yielding varieties of seeds to be provided free of cost under the National Food Security Mission (Oil Seeds and Oil Palm) Mission.

About National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm

The Government of India through the National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm has the objective to augment the availability of edible oils and reduce the import of edible oils by increasing the production and productivity of oilseeds and oil palm. To this end a multi-pronged strategy is being adopted which includes the following:

- Increasing the seed replacement ratio with focus on varietal replacement
- Increasing irrigation coverage
- Nutrient management
- Intercropping with cereals/pulses/sugarcane
- Productivity improvement and adoption of proven and climate-resilient technologies
- Area expansion through diversification of low yielding food grains.
- Targeting rice fallow areas and high potential districts
- Promotion in non-traditional states
- Encouraging mechanization
- Research projects
- Training of farmers and extension officials
- Supporting cluster demonstrations for the adoption of good agricultural practices
- Creation of 36 oilseed hubs with a focus on regional approach for larger availability of quality seeds
- Post-harvest management at farm and village level
Formation of Farmer Producer Organisations

As a result of the above efforts, the production of oilseeds has increased from 27.51 million tonnes in 2014-15 to 37.31 million tonnes in 2020-21 (2nd advance estimates), while the area has increased from 25.99 million hectares to 28.82 million hectares and yield from 1075 kg/hectares to 1295 kg/hectares during the same corresponding period.

Source: PIB

6 new World Heritage Sites in Tentative list

Six of the nine sites submitted by the Archaeological Survey of India had been accepted by UNESCO for inclusion in the tentative list, which is a requirement before the final nomination of any site.

The recently-included proposals are

1. Ganga ghats in Varanasi
2. Temples of Kancheepuram
3. Satpura Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh
4. The Maratha military architecture in Maharashtra
5. The Hire Bengal megalithic site in Karnataka and
6. Bhedaghat-Lametaghat of Narmada Valley in Madhya Pradesh

India has 48 sites in the Tentative list as of now. As per Operational Guidelines, 2019 of UNESCO, it is mandatory to put any monument/site on the Tentative List (TL) for one year before it is considered for the final nomination dossier. Once the nomination is done, it is sent to the World Heritage Centre (WHC).

World Heritage Site:

- The sites are designated as having “outstanding universal value”
under the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972.
- The World Heritage Centre is the Secretariat to the 1972 Convention.
- It provides a framework for international cooperation in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world.

There are three types of sites: Cultural, Natural, and Mixed.

- **Cultural heritage** sites include hundreds of historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting.
- **Natural heritage** sites are restricted to those natural areas that have excellent ecological and evolutionary processes, unique natural phenomena, habitats of rare or endangered species etc.
- **Mixed heritage** sites contain elements of both natural and cultural significance.
- **India has 38 world heritage sites**, including 30 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site. The latest one included is Jaipur city, Rajasthan.

Source: TH

**Rajasthan govt. declares mucormycosis an epidemic**

Amid the increasing instances of mucormycosis or black fungus, which is primarily affecting people recovering from COVID-19, the Rajasthan government declared it
an epidemic and a notifiable disease.

**What is Mucormycosis?**

- It is a serious but rare **fungal infection** caused by a group of molds called **mucormycetes**, which is abundant in the environment.
- It mainly affects people who have health problems or take medicines that lower the body’s ability to fight germs and sickness.
- The types of Mucormycosis are: Rhinocerebral (Sinus and Brain), Pulmonary (Lung), Gastrointestinal, Cutaneous (Skin), and disseminated Mucormycosis.
- The transmission occurs through inhalation, inoculation, or ingestion of spores from the environment.
- Mucormycosis needs to be treated with prescription antifungal medicine. In some cases, it can require surgery.

- It will be mandatory for the health facilities to report every case of the disease in the State.
- The State has at present more than 100 black fungus patients, for whom a special ward has been established at the Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital here. More of these cases are being reported from Jaipur, Jodhpur, Sirohi and Kota districts.
- The notification was issued under the Rajasthan Epidemic Act, 2020.
- **Mucormycosis appears as a side effect among COVID-19 patients** who are put on oxygen support through liquid medical oxygen cylinders or oxygen concentrators.
- The State government has also given instructions for procurement of oxygen concentrators of good quality and ensure strict compliance with safety measures while using them.

Source: TH
Rajasthan, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have declared it an epidemic. Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said black fungus had claimed 90 lives in the State so far. Eight people had died of the infection in Haryana, which has reported 316 cases. Rajasthan has 100 patients, while Tamil Nadu has reported nine cases.

**Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897**

- The colonial government introduced the Act to tackle the epidemic of **bubonic plague** that had spread in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency in the 1890s.
- Using powers conferred by the Act, colonies authorities would search suspected plague cases in homes and among passengers, with forcible segregations, evacuations, and demolitions of infected places.
- In 1897, the year the law was enforced, freedom fighter **Bal Gangadhar Tilak** was punished with 18 months’ **rigorous imprisonment** after his newspapers Kesari and Mahratta admonished imperial authorities for their handling of the plague epidemic.
Provisions of the Act

The Act, which consists of four sections, aims to provide “for the better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.”

Section 2 empowers state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations for containing the outbreak. It reads: “Power to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease.—

- **When at any time the State Government is satisfied** that the State or any part thereof is visited by, or threatened with, an outbreak of any dangerous epidemic disease, the State Government, if it thinks that the ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient for the purpose, may take, or require or empower any person to take, such measures and, by public notice, prescribe such temporary regulations to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it shall deem necessary to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof, and may determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any) shall be defrayed.
- **In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions**, the State Government may take measures and prescribe regulations for – the inspection of persons travelling by railway or otherwise, and the segregation, in hospital, temporary accommodation or otherwise, of persons suspected by the inspecting officer of being infected with any such disease.”

Section 3 provides penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act. These are according to section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).

Section 4 gives legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

What is Mucormycosis?
It is a serious but rare fungal infection caused by a group of molds called mucormycetes, which is abundant in the environment. It mainly affects people who have health problems or take medicines that lower the body’s ability to fight germs and sickness. The types of Mucormycosis are: Rhinocerebral (Sinus and Brain), Pulmonary (Lung), Gastrointestinal, Cutaneous (Skin), and disseminated Mucormycosis. The transmission occurs through inhalation, inoculation, or ingestion of spores from the environment. Mucormycosis needs to be treated with prescription antifungal medicine. In some cases, it can require surgery. Mucormycosis appears as a side effect among COVID-19 patients who are put on oxygen support through liquid medical oxygen cylinders or oxygen...
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)

concentrators.

Source: TH
China’s Border infrastructure

Tibet highway

- China has completed the construction of a strategically significant highway through the world’s deepest canyon in Tibet along the Brahmaputra river, enabling greater access to remote areas along the disputed border with Arunachal Pradesh in India.
- The highway, official media in China reported this week, took seven years to complete and passes through the Grand Canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is called in Tibet.
- This is the “second significant passageway” to Medog county that borders Arunachal, directly connecting the Pad township in Nyingchi to Baibung in Medog county.
- The highway will reduce the distance between Nyingchi city and Medog from 346 km to 180 km and will cut the travel time by eight hours.
- The project, undertaken by the China Huaneng Group, required an estimated investment of over 2 billion yuan (around $310 million).
- The construction, which began in 2014, is part of a wider infrastructure push in border areas in Tibet.

Rail link

- In November, China began work on a strategically important railway line — its second major rail link to Tibet after the Qinghai-Tibet railway that opened in 2006 — that will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi.
- The first segment of the line within the Sichuan province, from Chengdu to Yaan, was completed in December 2018. Work on the 1,011-km section from Yaan to Nyingchi will be finished in 2030.

Civilian settlements

- Another part of the border infrastructure push is the construction of new civilian settlements, along with the expansion of existing smaller hamlets, along border areas, some of which lie in disputed territories claimed by India and Bhutan, to strengthen China’s control over the land.
- In 2017, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government launched a plan to build “moderately well-off villages” in border areas, under which 628 “first
line and second line villages”, referring to those right on the border and others in remote areas slightly further within, would be developed in the prefectures of Ngari, Shigatse, Shannan and Nyingchi, along China’s borders with India, Bhutan and Nepal.

- An investment of 30.1 billion yuan (about ₹30,000 crore) was announced for the project, covering 62,160 households and 2.4 lakh people, and includes plans to resettle residents to live in the new settlements.
- Last year, satellite images emerged showing a new village called Pangda built 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land.
- On January 18 this year, another village built 4-5 km into what India sees as its territory in Arunachal was seen via satellite images.
- Indian officials said this land has been under China’s effective control since 1959 and there were military barracks there earlier.

The civilian settlements, along with the new infrastructure connectivity, are seen as aimed at bolstering China’s control over the areas.

For India – China relations: click here

Source: TH

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**FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act), 2010**

**GS-II | 21 May, 2021**

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India.

- Since the Act is internal security legislation, despite being a law related to financial legislation, it falls into the purview of Home Ministry and not the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

**Objectives of FCRA**
The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest. It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India.

Provisions of FCRA

- The Act prohibits acceptance and use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by a certain specified category of persons such as a candidate for election, judge, journalist, columnist, newspaper publication, cartoonist and others.
- Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.
- It defines the term ‘foreign contribution’ to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.
- The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

Registration and prior approval under FCRA:

- In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised.
- Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities.
- The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.
- NGOs not eligible for registration can seek prior approval from FCRA for receiving foreign funding.
- This permission is granted only for a specific amount of foreign funding from a specified foreign source for a specific purpose. It remains valid till receipt and full utilisation of such amount.

Conditions on the use of foreign funds:
All funds received by an NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received. Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act. Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act. Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members. Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a ‘NIL’ report must be furnished with the Authority.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020

- The Bill bars public servants from receiving foreign contributions. Public servant includes any person who is in service or pay of the government, or remunerated by the government for the performance of any public duty.
- The Bill prohibits the transfer of foreign contribution to any other person. The term ‘person’ under the Bill includes an individual, an association, or a registered company. The FCRA 2010 allows transfer of foreign contributions to persons registered to accept foreign contributions.
- The Bill makes Aadhaar number mandatory for all office bearers, directors or key functionaries of a person receiving foreign contribution, as an identification document. In case of a foreigner, a copy of the passport or the Overseas Citizen of India card for identification is required.
- The Bill states that foreign contribution must be received only in an account designated by the bank as FCRA account in such branches of the State Bank of India, New Delhi. No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account. The person may open another FCRA account in any scheduled bank of their choice for keeping or utilising the received contribution.
- The Bill allows the government to restrict usage of unutilised foreign contribution. This may be done if, based on an inquiry the government believes that such person has contravened provisions of the FCRA.
- The Bill proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. In FCRA 2010
the limit was 50%.

- The Bill allows the central government to permit a person to surrender their registration certificate.

What is the news?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Delhi High Court on Thursday that it would release authorisation certificates to operationalise the FCRA (Foreign Contribution [Regulation] Act) bank accounts of non-government organisations (NGOs) within seven days of receiving a request.
- The court was hearing a petition moved by 10 NGOs that their foreign contribution account in the State Bank of India’s main branch in Delhi be operationalised.
- Even if an NGO had applied before the earlier deadline of March 31, the accounts were not operational for want of an FC6C certificate. After NGOs moved court, the deadline was extended to June 30.
- The SBI said on May 17 that “out of the total 22,598 active FCRA associations, 17,611 entities (NGOs and Associations) approached SBI for opening of FCRA accounts”. It claimed that it had opened accounts of 78% of the applicants.
- “There is a difference between opening an account and operationalising it. The SBI opened the account but it cannot function till the bank receives an authorisation certificate from the ministry,” said NGOs’ lawyer Abishek Jebaraj.
- The Ministry also gave a relief to NGOs whose registration was expiring between September 29, 2020 and May 31, 2021. They had to apply for renewal of certificates or registration by May 31, which has now been extended to September 30.

Source: TH

World’s largest iceberg breaks off from Antarctica

GS-I | 21 May, 2021
A huge ice block has broken off from western Antarctica into the Weddell Sea, becoming the largest iceberg in the world and earning the name A-76. It is the latest in a series of large ice blocks to dislodge in a region acutely vulnerable to climate change, although scientists said in this case it appeared to be part of a natural polar cycle.

Slightly larger than the Spanish island of Majorca, A-76 had been monitored by scientists since May 13 when it began to separate from the Ronne Ice Shelf, according to the U.S. National Ice Center. The iceberg, measuring around 170 km long and 25 km wide, with an area of 4,320 sq km is now floating in the Weddell Sea.

It joins previous world’s largest title holder A-23A — approximately 3,880 sq. km. in size — which has remained in the same area since 1986.

A-76 was originally spotted by the British Antarctic Survey and the calving — the term used when an iceberg breaks off — was confirmed using images from the Copernicus satellite, the European Space Agency said.

Icebergs form when hunks of ice break off from ice shelves or glaciers and begin to float in open water.

Everything about: Antarctic

Antarctic mapping
1. Read all this from Orient Longman Blackswan Atlas as Ankit Sir teaches in his Mapping classes.
2. Antarctic = Ross Sea, Amundsen Sea, Bellingshausen Sea, Drake Passage.
Weddel Sea.
3. Drake Passage/ Antarctic Peninsula is between Bellingshausen Sea and Weddel Sea.
4. Winson Massif (Ellsworth Mountains) is the highest peak of Antarctica.
5. Bharati, Maitri, Dakshin Gangotri are in Antarctic. Lambert glacier is here. Himadri is in Arctic.

About Antarctic region

- Antarctic is a polar region around Earth's South Pole, opposite the Arctic region around the North Pole.
- Antarctica is defined as all of the land and ice shelves south of 60°S latitude.
- The Antarctic comprises the continent of Antarctica, the Kerguelen Plateau and other island territories located on the Antarctic Plate or south of the Antarctic Convergence.
- The Antarctic region includes the ice shelves, waters, and all the island territories in the Southern Ocean situated south of the Antarctic Convergence, a zone approximately 32 to 48 km (20 to 30 mi) wide varying in latitude seasonally.
- The region covers some 20 percent of the Southern Hemisphere, of which 5.5 percent (14 million km2) is the surface area of the Antarctica continent itself. All of the land and ice shelves south of 60°S latitude are administered under the Antarctic Treaty System.
- Biogeographically, the Antarctic realm is one of eight biogeographic realms of Earth's and surface.

India and Antarctic

Antarctic Treaty, 1959

- The Antarctic Treaty was signed between 12 countries in Washington on 1st December 1959 for making the Antarctic Continent a demilitarized zone to be preserved for scientific research only. It entered into force in 1961 and has since been acceded by many other nations.
- The twelve original signatories are Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the UK and the US.
- India officially acceded to the Antarctic Treaty System on 1st August 1983. India became the 15th Consultative member. Currently it has 54 parties.
- **Headquarters**: Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- **Provisions of the treaty**
  1. Promoting the freedom of scientific research.
2. **Countries can use the continent only for peaceful purposes.**
3. **Prohibition** of military activities, nuclear tests and the disposal of radioactive waste.
4. **Neutralising territorial sovereignty**, this means a limit was placed on making any new claim or enlargement of an existing claim.
5. It put a **freeze on any disputes** between claimants over their territories on the continent.

- These agreements are **legally binding and purpose-built** for the unique geographical, environmental and political characteristics of the Antarctic and form a robust international governance framework for the region.
- The Antarctic treaty remains the only example of a **single treaty that governs a whole continent**.
- It is also the foundation of a **rules-based international order** for a continent without a permanent population.

**Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)**
Antarctic Treaty and related agreements are collectively known as the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS)
It regulates international relations with respect to Antarctica
Antarctica is defined as all of the land and ice shelves south of 60°S latitude
Antarctic Treaty Secretariat Headquarters — Buenos Aires, Argentina

Major International Agreements of the Treaty System:

- The 1959 Antarctic Treaty.
- The 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), 1982

- Objective:
  1. To conserve Antarctic marine life.
  2. Response to increasing commercial interest in Antarctic krill resources, a keystone component of the Antarctic ecosystem.
  3. It practises an ecosystem-based management approach.
- Headquartered at Hobart, Tasmania.

East Antarctic Marine Park/Sanctuary:

- Australia and France met in Hobart at the meeting of Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to create a massive ocean sanctuary in East Antarctica. East Antarctica Marine Park would be 1 million sq km of Ocean.
- It has previously established other major ocean Antarctic sanctuaries – including World’s largest spanning 1.55 million sq. km. in Ross Sea.
- But China and Russia are opposing the move. CCAMLR has 26 members.

Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty

- It designates Antarctica as a “natural reserve, devoted to peace
India’s Antarctic Expeditions and Programmes

- The Indian Antarctic expeditions began in 1981.
- The first trip comprised of a team of 21 scientists and support staff led by Dr SZ Qasim. After a humble beginning, the Indian Antarctic programme has now credited to have built three permanent research base stations in Antarctica—named Dakshin Gangotri, Maitri, and Bharati. As of today, India has two operational research stations in Antarctica named Maitri and Bharati.
The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa, manages the entire Indian Antarctic program.

National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), Goa also works on the Arctic.

- It renamed as NCPOR (National Center for Polar and Ocean Research).
- NCAOR was established in 1998 for expeditions to Antarctic 1st now both.
- NCPOR is India’s premier R&D institution in the Polar and Southern Ocean realms.
- The mandate of NCPOR is multi-dimensional:
  1. Research and Help in Expeditions to the Polar and Ocean sciences (Indian part of Southern Ocean).
2. Geo scientific surveys of India’s EEZ and beyond 200M, Deep sea drilling in Arabian Sea basin, exploration for ocean non-living resources such as the gas hydrates and multi-metal sulphides in mid-ocean ridges.  
3. Upkeep of Research bases of Maitri and Bharati of Antarctic and Himadri at Arctic.  
4. Upkeep research vessel ORV Sagar Kanya and others.  
   • The research-vessel fleet consists of 6 research vessels viz Sagar Kanya, Sagar Sampata, Sagar Nidhi, Sagar Manjusha, Sagar Purvi & Saga Paschmi currently, and a 7th being the Polar Research Vessel (PRV) is being constructed.

- Dakshin Gangotri was the first Indian scientific research base station established in Antarctica, as a part of the Indian Antarctic Program. Dakshin Gangotri is closed.
- Maitri is India’s second permanent research station in Antarctica. It was built on Schirmacher Oasis and finished in 1989. India also built a freshwater lake around Maitri known as Lake Priyadarshini. India is rebuilding Maitri and expanding its infra development in Antarctica through Bharati.
- Bharati: Bharti, India’s latest research station operation since 2012. It has been constructed to help researchers work in safety despite the harsh weather.
- In 2008, India commissioned the Sagar Nidhi, for research. An ice-class vessel, it can cut through the thin ice of 40 cm depth and is the first Indian vessel to navigate Antarctic waters.

Indian Scientific Expedition to the Southern Ocean 2020

- This is the 11th expedition of an Indian mission to the Southern Ocean, or Antarctic Ocean. The first mission took place between January and March 2004.
- The 18-institution team, led by Dr Anoop Mahajan from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, are collecting air and water samples from around 60 stations along the cruise track.
- These will give valuable information on the state of the ocean and atmosphere in this remote environment and will help to understand its impacts on the climate.
- A key objective of the mission is to quantify changes that are occurring and
The impact of these changes on large-scale weather phenomenon, like the Indian monsoon, through tele-connection

The Expedition consists of 6 core projects:

1. **Hydrodynamics and biogeochemistry** of the Indian Ocean sector of the Southern Ocean at different depths. It will help to understand the formation of Antarctic bottom water.
2. Observations of movement of **trace gases** (halogens and dimethyl sulphur) from the ocean to the atmosphere which will help to improve parameterisations that are used in global models.
3. **Study of organisms namely, coccolithophores** (existed in the oceans for several million years). We’ll get to know past climate.
4. Investigate **atmospheric aerosols** and their optical and radiative properties. Its continuous measurements will quantify the impact on Earth’s climate.
5. Study the Southern Ocean’s impact on Indian monsoons.
6. Dynamics of the **food web** in the Southern Ocean which will help to implement sustainable fishing.

**40th Indian scientific expedition to Antarctica**

- India today launched the 40th scientific expedition to Antarctica.
- This Indian expedition marks four decades of country’s scientific endeavour to the southern white continent.
- The 40th expedition journey will be flagged off from Goa on January 5, 2021, with 43 members onboard.
- The chartered ice-class vessel MV Vasiliy Golovnin will make this journey and will reach Antarctica in 30 days. After leaving behind a team of 40 members, it would return to India in April 2021. On return, it will also bring back the winter team of the preceding trip.
- The focus is to support the ongoing scientific projects on climate change, geology, ocean observations, electric and magnetic flux measurements, environmental monitoring; resupplying of food, fuel, provisions and spare; and accomplishing the return of the winter crew. India is committed to maintaining the continent of Antarctica free of COVID-19.
- The expedition will duly follow all protocols for the deployment of men and material as per Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs(COMNAP).

**Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP):**
**SONIC Project**

- SONIC Stands for Schirmacher Oasis Nippon (Japan) India Coring. It was initiated during 2019 to reconstruct the past climate.
- It is an Indo-Japanese project that was initiated during 2019 to reconstruct the past-climate.
- In 2019 India-Japan under the aegis of National Center for Polar and Ocean Research and National Institute of Polar Research signed an MoU to share and carry out R & D in Antarctica.

**Objective of SONIC**
1. To understand the ice sheet variability at the Schirmacher Oasis to examine East Antarctic Ice Sheet sensitivity and its response to glacial-interglacial cycles
2. To assess the variability biological community through study of pigments and DNA

**MADICE Project**

- India also collaborated with Norway in Antarctic Research.
- A major Indo-Norwegian collaborative field campaign, near Indian Maitri station, was undertaken during 2016–2019 to understand the ice shelf dynamics, mass balance and reconstruct past changes in atmospheric and sea ice dynamics under the joint project “Mass balance, dynamics, and climate of the central Dronning Maud Land coast, East Antarctica (MADICE”).
- Ice core drilling, ice-sheet modelling and satellite remote sensing-based studies were conducted to understand the future Antarctic contribution to the global sea-level rise.

To reach Everything about Arctic: [click here](#)

Extra news: NASA’s Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna
Recently, NASA’s Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA) has detected the unusual upward movement of neutrinos in Antarctica.

What is ANITA?

- Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA) is a radio telescope instrument to detect ultra-high energy cosmic-ray neutrinos from a scientific balloon flying over the continent of Antarctica.
- It involves an array of radio antennas attached to a helium balloon which flies over the Antarctic ice sheet at 37,000 meters.
- At such a height, the antennas can listen to the cosmos and detect high-energy particles, known as neutrinos, which constantly bombard the planet.
- It is the first NASA observatory for neutrinos of any kind.
- ANITA detects neutrinos pinging in from space and colliding with matter in the Antarctic ice sheet through the Askaryan effect.
- The **Askaryan effect** is the phenomenon whereby a particle traveling faster than the phase velocity of light in a dense dielectric (such as salt, ice or the lunar regolith) produces a shower of secondary charged particles.
- When neutrinos smash into an atom, they produce a shower of detectable secondary particles. These detectable secondary particles allow us to probe where they came from in the universe.
- However, neutrinos pose no threat to human beings and pass through most solid objects. Additionally, they rarely do interact with matter. It is named after Gurgen Askaryan, a Soviet-Armenian physicist who postulated it in 1962.

What is the news?

- Instead of the high-energy neutrinos streaming in from space, they seem to have come from the Earth's interior, before hitting the detectors of ANITA. Usually, the high-energy particles move top to bottom (i.e. from space to the earth). However, ANITA has detected an anomaly i.e. particles have been detected travelling bottom to top.
- Earlier, researchers had also located a deep-space source for high-energy neutrinos through the Ice Cube Neutrino Observatory at a U.S. scientific research station at the South Pole in Antarctica (PT). The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is located at the Bodi West Hills region in Theni District of Tamil Nadu.

Click here for the complete news on Neutrinos
The Biden administration is leading a campaign against Russian attempts to assert authority over Arctic shipping and reintroduce a military dimension to discussions over international activity in the area.

As Russia assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council on Thursday, the U.S. rallied members to oppose Moscow’s plans to set maritime rules in the Northern Sea Route, which runs from Norway to Alaska, and its desire to resume military talks within the eight-nation bloc. Those talks were suspended in 2014 over Russia’s actions in Ukraine.

The effort reflects growing concerns in Washington and among some NATO allies about a surge in Russian military and commercial activity in the region that is rapidly opening up due to the effects of climate change.

At a meeting of Arctic Council Foreign Ministers in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the group should maintain its focus on peaceful cooperation on environmental issues, maritime safety and the well-being of indigenous people in the region.

Mr. Blinken stressed the importance of upholding “effective governance and the rule of law” to ensure that the “Arctic remains a region free of conflict where countries act responsibly.”

Several other Foreign Ministers, including those from Canada, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, echoed Mr. Blinken’s call to keep the Arctic peaceful and free of conflict.

Click here to read: Everything about Arctic
• Rajasthan, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have declared it an epidemic. Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said black fungus had claimed 90 lives in the State so far. Eight people had died of the infection in Haryana, which has reported 316 cases. Rajasthan has 100 patients, while Tamil Nadu has reported nine cases.

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

• The colonial government introduced the Act to tackle the epidemic of bubonic plague that had spread in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency in the 1890s.
• Using powers conferred by the Act, colonies authorities would search suspected plague cases in homes and among passengers, with forcible segregations, evacuations, and demolitions of infected places.
• In 1897, the year the law was enforced, freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak was punished with 18 months’ rigorous imprisonment after his newspapers Kesari and Mahratta admonished imperial authorities for their handling of the plague epidemic.
Provisions of the Act

The Act, which consists of four sections, aims to provide “for the better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.”

Section 2 empowers state governments/UTs to take special measures and formulate regulations for containing the outbreak. It reads: “Power to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease.—

• When at any time the State Government is satisfied that the State or any part thereof is visited by, or threatened with, an outbreak of any dangerous epidemic disease, the State Government, if it thinks that the ordinary provisions of the law for the time being in force are insufficient for the purpose, may take, or require or empower any person to take, such measures and, by public notice, prescribe such temporary regulations to be observed by the public or by any person or class of persons as it shall deem necessary to prevent the outbreak of such disease or the spread thereof, and may determine in what manner and by whom any expenses incurred (including compensation if any) shall be defrayed.

• In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions, the State Government may take measures and prescribe regulations for — the inspection of persons travelling by railway or otherwise, and the segregation, in hospital, temporary accommodation or otherwise, of persons suspected by the inspecting officer of being infected with any such disease.”

Section 3 provides penalties for disobeying any regulation or order made under the Act. These are according to section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).

Section 4 gives legal protection to the implementing officers acting under the Act.

What is Mucormycosis?
It is a serious but rare fungal infection caused by a group of molds called mucormycetes, which is abundant in the environment. It mainly affects people who have health problems or take medicines that lower the body’s ability to fight germs and sickness. The types of Mucormycosis are: Rhinocerebral (Sinus and Brain), Pulmonary (Lung), Gastrointestinal, Cutaneous (Skin), and disseminated Mucormycosis. The transmission occurs through inhalation, inoculation, or ingestion of spores from the environment. Mucormycosis needs to be treated with prescription antifungal medicine. In some cases, it can require surgery. Mucormycosis appears as a side effect among COVID-19 patients who are put on oxygen support through liquid medical oxygen cylinders or oxygen
concentrators.

Source: TH
What did Israel achieve in Gaza?
After the fighting | The 11-day fighting between Israel and Hamas was the most intense conflict between the two since 2014

**CASUALTIES**

- 243 deaths in Gaza, including 66 children
- 12 deaths in Israel, including one child
- 1,900 were injured

90% of the rockets aimed at populated areas in Israel were intercepted by the Iron Dome air defence system, says IDF

Over 1,800 airstrikes were carried out by Israel

16,800 homes were destroyed in Gaza in Israeli airstrikes

4,000 rockets were fired by Hamas

Over 350 were injured in Israel

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Soft target: Smoke rising after an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City targeted the Ansar compound, linked to the Hamas movement, on May 14.

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the operation hit the ability of Hamas, the Islamist group which runs Gaza, to launch missiles at Israel
- Hamas foreign relations chief Osama Hamdan says the organisation received assurances regarding Israeli policy toward Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa in East Jerusalem

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Follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com)
After 11 days of airstrikes on and rocket attacks from Gaza, Israel and Hamas agreed to an Egypt-mediated ceasefire.

What were the goals?

- During the course of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there were two ways to deal with Hamas — one, to conquer Hamas and the other to establish deterrence.
- The Prime Minister said his aim was “forceful deterrence”, but conquering was “an open possibility”.
- Israeli military leaders have claimed that they have killed 225 members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad — a contested claim as the Gaza Health Ministry says 243 Gazans were killed, including 66 children.
- Israel has also claimed that it has destroyed Hamas’s elaborate tunnel network and military and intelligence infrastructure. “We have set Hamas back by years,” said Mr. Netanyahu.
- It’s true that Hamas has suffered far greater damage than what its rockets inflicted on Israel, where 12 people were killed, including one child and three foreign nationals.
- But it will be clearer only in the coming weeks, months or years whether the Israeli campaign has established deterrence.
- The facts on the ground tell us that despite the heavy losses Hamas suffered, it continued to fire rockets into Israel till the last moment. On the 11th day, Hamas fired some 300 rockets into Israel.

Pressure from all sides

- Unlike in 2014, when the last major fighting between Israel and Hamas occurred, the Israeli troops were wary of launching a ground invasion this time. In a ground attack, Israel could inflict more damage on Hamas, but the risk of losing Israeli soldiers would also be high.
- This time, the focus of Israel’s military campaign, which started on May 10, was on causing maximum damage to Hamas’s militant infrastructure through airstrikes.
- In the first 10 days of the fighting, Israel carried out more than 1,800 airstrikes on Gaza, according to the UN.
- But one issue with offensives that are heavily dependent on air power is that they need a quicker exit strategy. Airstrikes will leave disproportionate civilian casualties.
- And disproportionate airstrikes, which was Israel’s strategy, will have even greater damage. While Israel tried to sell the narrative that it’s a victim of
terror (which has buyers), the fact remains that Israel is the only sovereign power in this conflict, which continues the occupation of Palestinian territories in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, international laws and norms.

- So, when civilian casualties mounted in Gaza, even those countries that initially supported Israel’s “right to defend itself” started calling for a ceasefire. In the UNSC, most countries, including India, backed an immediate ceasefire.
- The Biden administration, which was facing intense pressure from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, issued a strong statement on Wednesday asking for “a significant de-escalation”
- Israel was also facing internal pressure as its streets were gripped by riots between Jewish vigilantes and Arab mobs. Protests were spreading in the West Bank and rockets were coming from the Lebanon border. Amid intensifying pressure from all sides, the Israeli Security Cabinet unanimously accepted a “unilateral and mutual” ceasefire with Hamas on Thursday night. The militants immediately confirmed the truce.

Hamas’s strategy

- As soon as the ceasefire was announced, Palestinians took to the streets “celebrating the resistance”. Senior Hamas officials called it “the euphoria of victory”.
- By launching the rocket attacks on May 10, hours after Israeli forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, Hamas was seen to be making a political point — it is the real defender of Jerusalem. In effect, Hamas was trying to tap the growing Palestinian resentment towards Israel’s high-handedness.
- The political messaging appeared to have gone down well with the Palestinians as Israel faced unprecedented protests and riots both in the occupied West Bank and Israeli cities when the Gaza attack was under way.
- Militarily, Hamas, despite the heavy losses it suffered, demonstrated its growing rocket fire capabilities. Hamas launched at least 4,000 rockets in 11 days, more than the 3,383 rockets it fired during the 50 days of conflict in 2014.
- By launching barrages of rockets within minutes, it also managed to overwhelm Israel's Iron Dome defence system. For example, in one day last week, Hamas launched more than 1,000 rockets. In 2014, its daily total never crossed 200.
- And Hamas rockets killed more civilians in Israel in 11 days this time than the total number of civilian deaths during the seven weeks of 2014, which is a matter of grave concern for Israel.
Way Forward?

- Ceasefires can be fragile. In 2014, after the ceasefire was announced, Israel attempted to assassinate Hamas’s shadowy military commander Mohammed Deif, but failed.
- This time, too, the truce is tenuous. Hamas says it accepted truce after Israel promised “to lift their hands off Sheikh Jarrah (where Palestinians face eviction from their houses) and Al-Aqsa Mosque.
- The Israeli side has denied any such promise and emphasised that the ceasefire was unconditional. Egypt says concerns in Jerusalem will be “addressed”. Israel has already removed some restrictions it had imposed on Al-Aqsa, which it says was a temporary security measure. Hamas could take credit for the same.
- But Sheikh Jarrah is a more complicated matter. The Supreme Court of Israel is supposed to give a final ruling on the eviction of Palestinians in the neighbourhood.
- If Israel goes ahead with the eviction process, there could be more protests and violence. Israeli leaders say there won’t be lasting peace as long as Hamas has rockets. Hamas says there will be rockets as long as the occupation continues.

For complete Israel-Palestine issue: [click here](#)

Source: TH

RBI gives Rs. 99,122 crore surplus to Government

- The Reserve Bank of India’s board approved a significantly higher-than-expected surplus transfer to the government on Friday but it may not be enough to cushion the damage from a crippling second wave of the novel coronavirus.
- The surplus distribution policy of the RBI is determined in accordance with Section 47 of the RBI Act, 1934.
The RBI announced a surplus transfer of ₹99,122 crore for the 9-month period from July 2020 to March 2021, the central bank said in a statement. The bank will move to an April to March accounting year from 2021/22, from a July to June year.

The higher-than-expected dividend or surplus transfer to the government comes as the government is expecting a sharp sequential fall in tax collections due to the severe second wave of COVID-19 which has forced lockdowns in several States.

“This surplus likely reflects the central bank’s higher income from their open market operations as well as receipts from FX sales, with its transfer to the government’s coffers providing some cushion to the pandemic-driven shortfall in revenues,” said Radhika Rao, an economist with DBS.

The government had budgeted to receive a surplus of about ₹50,000 crore from the RBI to be accounted for in the budget estimates for 2021/22, while in the previous full accounting year, the RBI had transferred ₹57,128 crore as surplus.

Barring 2018/19, this is the highest ever transfer by the RBI in an accounting period. In FY19, ₹1.76 lakh crore was transferred to the government which included a one-time transfer of extra reserves.

The government is likely to find it challenging to meet its privatisation and disinvestment target of $24 billion while goods and services tax (GST) revenues are also likely to fall, a government official said.

The RBI also decided to maintain a Contingency Risk Buffer at 5.50% in line with recommendations of the Bimal Jalan Committee report.

Bimal Jalan Committee to review the RBI’s Economic capital framework.

1. It allows higher capital expenditure on infrastructure and social programs. These are surplus funds and part of excess provisions identified as per revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF) adopted by RBI’s board.
2. It recommended to align the RBI’s accounting year with the financial year. The accounting years of RBI is April to March and RBI’s accounting year is July to June.
3. RBI’s provisioning for monetary, financial and external stability risks is India’s savings for a ‘rainy day’, (a monetary or financial stability crisis) which is maintained with RBI for its role as a Lender of the Last Resort and Monetary Authority. This risk provisioning is known as Contingent Risk.
Buffer (CRB).

4. Panel recommended a clear distinction between 2 components of Economic Capital

1. **Realized Equity**: Built up from retained earnings. To be used to meet all risks/losses.

2. **Revaluation Balances**: They represented unrealized valuation gains and hence not distributable. They can be reckoned only as risk buffers against market risks.

5. **RBI holds its money under 4 heads**
   1. Contingency Fund
   2. Currency and Gold re-evaluation account
   3. Asset Development Fund and
   4. Investment re-evaluation account

6. **RBI earns its money via several channels**
   1. Income which it generates on the interest of Govt bonds which are held for conducting OMOs.
   2. Fees from Govt's market borrowing endeavours.
   3. It retains some earnings after transfer of dividends to Indian Govt.
   4. It earns from interest which it generates after the investment in foreign currency assets.

Source: TH
BRIC was formed in 2006. South Africa joined in 2012. It is an informal organization with no charter.

All coming as a part of changing world order, South South cooperation, multilateralism, increased accommodation in global, attracting investment & stab eco system.

It was formed in the context China and India, by 2050, become the world's dominant suppliers of manufactured goods and services.

The term BRIC was coined by Goldman Sachs Economists like Jim O’Neill. O’Neill’s paper was named “Building Better Economic BRICS”.

It comprises 42% of the world's population, has 23% of the global GDP but just 17% of the world trade.

BRICS represents the World’s top emerging economies and claims to serve as a bridge between the developed and developing World.

Objectives: More sustainable, equitable and mutually beneficial
There are four main areas of cooperation:

- **Economic cooperation**: in Innovation, Customs and Strategic cooperation between BRICS Business Council, Contingent Reserve Agreement and NDB.
- **People to People Exchange**: in culture, sports, education, film and youth. Eg. Young Diplomats Forum, Parliamentarian Forum, Civil BRICS etc.
- **Political and Security Cooperation**: aimed at achieving peace, security, development and cooperation. BRICS is used as a driver for African Agenda and South-South cooperation.
- **Cooperation Mechanism**
  1. Track I (Government to Government);
  2. Track II (Government affiliated institutions) and
  3. Track III (People to people).

**Chairperson**: The Chair country goes by the name B, R, I, C, S in that order.

- 2019 – Brazil was the Chair. 2020 – Russia. **In 2021 India will host 13th BRICS Summit and India is a Chair in 2021.**

**BRICS Summits**

- **2017 Summit in Xiamen, China**
  1. China introduced BRICS+ by inviting a few countries from different regions like Argentina, Jamaica, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt.

- **2018 Summit in Johannesberg, South Africa**
  1. Theme was BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the IR 4.0.
  2. BRICS Outreach programme was with African leaders and Outreach with Global South summit.
  3. It also calls for Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) by UNGA.
  4. Discussed on democratisation of UN, expansion of UNSC.
  5. Leaders stressed on the centrality of the rules based transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive multilateral trading based on WTO.
  6. Help nations prepare for IR 4.0 BRICS PartNIR (Partnership on New Industrial Revolution). It should engage Private sector and Young innovators.

- **2019 11th Summit Brasilia**: Brasilia is the **1st city to hold its 2nd BRICS summit**
  1. Brazil is the current Chair of BRICS. President is Jair Bolso
  2. **BRICS Bond Fund** in local currency is on the financial agenda of Brasilia meet.
  3. Russia (like BRICS) rejects diktat and pressure, blackmail and threats,
4. BRICS is committed to democratization of International life and it's development under the principles given in UN charter, the principles of respect for cultural and civilizational diversity of world and the right of people to forge their destiny themselves.
5. BRICS is also becoming a magnet for major Emerging economies. Coz BRICS protects multilateralism, supports transparent, non-discriminatory, open, free and inclusive International Trade and rejects unilateral economic restrictions in developing International economic ties.
6. BRICS CRA = $ 100 bn to be a guarantor of the BRICS financial stability in case of crisis.

- **G20 Osaka Summit, Japan (2019)**
  1. BRICS in G20 Osaka summit indicated to protect multilateral trade system, role of WTO & IMF reforms.
  2. It talks about Regional Groupings like: RIC (Russia-India-China); JIU (Japan-India-USA) and BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa).
  This shows India’s rising power in the World.

**Achievements of BRICS**

- Because of financial crisis of 2008, BRICs started to cooperate. BRICS called for the reform of multilateral institutions. BRICS managed to push for international reform which led to IMF Quota reform in 2010.
- **BRICS New Development Bank**: 2014 Fortaleza Summit: See below
  - They are developing a joint payments mechanism to reduce foreign trade settlements in US $.
  - **BASIC** (BRICS without Russia) is an offshoot dealing with Climate Change.
  - India is taking the lead role in digital health, digital forensics, film technology, traditional medicine, sustainable water management, internships and fellowships.
  - Potential of Brazil’s investments in space, defence, agri equipment, animal husbandry, post harvest technologies and biofuels.

**BRICS New Development Bank**

- Because of overdomination of USA and EU in IMF, BRICS in Fortaleza summit came up with New Development Bank as a alternative to IMF and WB. Made by Fortaleza declaration in 2014. 1st time talked in Delhi (4th Summit) but established in Fortaleza. President – K V Kamath. Headquarter in Shanghai.
The purpose of the Bank is to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging market economies and developing countries to complement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions.

NDB's Key area of Operation are clean Energy, Transport infra, irrigation, sustainable urban development and economic cooperation.

The NDB functions on a consultative mechanism among the BRICS members with all the member countries possessing equal rights.

Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) signed in 2014 Fortaleza Declaration at 6th BRICS summit.

1. The BRICS CRA aims to provide short-term liquidity support to the members through currency swaps to help mitigating BoP crisis situation and further strengthen financial stability.
2. It has a corpus of US $ 100 billion. It will also contribute to strengthening global financial safety net and complement existing international arrangements (IMF).

Significance of BRICS

- India can collaborate on global issues like Terrorism, climate change, Energy security.
- India would need the support for its UNSC and NSG membership.
- NDB approved 1st set of loans which included US $ 250 million for India for Renewable Energy.
- BRICS gave 1 billion each to India, Brazil and South Africa.
- 1st time India talked about Traditional medicine systems in BRICS NDB meeting.

Challenges pertaining in BRICS

- BRICS combined population is 40% World but trade is just 15%.
- Dilution under G20.
- India - China issues.
- No formalization due to draft or Constitution.
- Global political turmoil. Various regions still have conflict potential. Arms control architecture is deliberately undermined with US withdrawal from Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Treaty.
- Structural imbalances in the World Economy. Threats from unfair competition practices, sanctions, trade wars, abuse of US $ status as World reserve currency.
Terrorism and Climate Change. Terrorism has caused loss of $1 trillion to World Economy.

Way Forward

- To become a true representative of Emerging economies, BRICS must increase membership and expand its agenda to climate change, development finance etc. **BRICS + and NextEleven (N – 11) = 11 countries poised to become the biggest economies in the World in 21st C after BRICS.** They are South Korea, Mexico, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Phillipines, Turkey and Vietnam.
- It will be useful for BRICS to develop an institutional research wing on the lines of OECD, offering solutions relevant to the developing World.
- BRICS can consider on Climate Change and UN SDGs through setting up BRICS Energy alliance and Energy Policy.
- Idea of setting up a **BRICS Credit Rating Agency (BCRA)** as proposed by India (opposed to West Standard and Poor, Moody) can be on BRICS Future Agenda.

What is the news?

- The BRICS Astronomy Working Group has recommended networking of telescopes in member countries and creating a regional data network.
- Under the science, technology and innovation track of the BRICS 2021 calendar, India hosted the seventh meeting of BRICS Astronomy Working Group (BAWG) on online mode from May 19 and 20. Also present were astronomers from these countries.
- In the BAWG meeting, the delegates agreed to develop a flagship project in this area. It witnessed participation from all five BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – with more than 50 participants, including researchers, academicians and government officials.
- The members of the working group also indicated future directions of research in this area such as building a network of intelligent telescopes and data, study of transient astronomical phenomena in the universe, big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning applications to process the voluminous data generated by the enhanced multi-wavelength telescope observatory.
- The delegates deliberated on strategic and operational matters and recommended the networking of existing telescopes in BRICS countries and creating regional data network.
- They agreed to develop a flagship project in this area, according to a
statement by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India. From the Indian side, the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, and the DST coordinated the meeting.

- The BAWG, which provides a platform for BRICS member countries to collaborate in the field of astronomy, recommended that each country should present the scientific results of the work being carried out in their country. This will help seek funding support to realise the flagship project whenever funding opportunities were announced by BRICS funding agencies. The BAWG noted the importance of enhancing collaboration among astronomers from the BRICS countries.
  - S K Varshney, head of international cooperation division of the DST, presented India’s perspectives, and lead scientific researchers from each BRICS country presented their country report which highlighted the research activities and infrastructure they have created.
  - India assumed the BRICS Presidency from January 2021. About 100 events, including ministerial level meetings, senior official meetings, and sectorial meetings or conferences, stand to be organised in 2021.

Source: TH
Gold Hallmarking in India

The government said that it is fully prepared to implement the mandatory hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts from June 15, 2021.

What is Gold hallmarking?

- Gold hallmarking is a purity certification of precious metal. At present, it is voluntary in nature.

Gold Hallmarking in India:

- In 2019, the Government announced that hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts will be made mandatory across the country.
- The government had given jewellers more than a year to shift to hallmarking and register themselves with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

Key Features of Gold Hallmarking:

- Hallmarked gold jewellery will only available in three grades – 14-carat, 18-carat and 22-carat. Currently, it is available in ten grades.
- The Hallmarked Gold jewellery will contain four marks. Such as BIS mark, purity in carat, assay centre’s name and jewellers’ identification mark.
- The rule is applicable only to sales by retailers and not to consumers. However, it is available for consumers if they want to get their old jewellery hallmarked.
- Anybody found violating the provision, will have to pay a minimum fine of Rs 1 lakh or 5 times the price of the article.

Benefits of Gold Hallmarking:

- Gold Hallmarking will protect the public against lower caratage. It also ensures consumers do not get cheated while buying gold ornaments.
- It will also help to get the purity, bring in transparency and assure the consumers of quality.
- The new system will also weed out anomalies and corruption in the system of manufacturing of jewellery.

Note: India is the largest importer of gold. In volume terms, the country imports 700-800 tonne of gold annually, draining the exchequer in terms of outflow of
TRIFED and NITI to partner for Van Dhan initiative in all Aspirational districts of India

TRIFED and NITI AAYOOG to partner for implementing the Van Dhan initiative in Tribal Clusters of all Aspirational districts of India

- Keeping in line with the Hon’ble Prime Minister’s call for “Atmanirbhar Bharat” aligned to the slogan of “Be Vocal for Local Buy Tribal”, towards realizing the goal of “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas”, TRIFED will now be partnering with NITI Aayog to implement the Van Dhan Yojana in the districts that have been identified as aspirational districts by NITI Aayog.
- These include districts in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Telangana and Tripura.
- As a part of this association, a special focus will be on these aspirational districts where tribal population constitutes more than 50%.
- Under the expansion plan of tribal development program, an additional 9900 VDVKs subsumed into 659 VDKV Clusters spread out in these tribal aspirational districts are envisaged. At the moment, 5325 VDVKs subsumed into 355 VDKV Clusters have been established in these districts. This is expected to give a boost to the employment generation to nearly 2 lakhs tribal families.
- Through this association, NITI Aayog will also support TRIFED in the concept of convergence for the Mission with Article 275(1), DMF, and STC component of different Ministries, and will help in professionally monitoring and promotion for effective implementation and feedback.
- The Van Dhan tribal start-ups and the Mechanism for Marketing of Minor
Forest Produce (MFP) Through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP Scheme that provides MSP to gatherers of forest produces and introduce value addition and marketing through tribal groups and clusters are among the many initiatives of TRIFED, Ministry of Tribal Affairs that have proved helpful by generating employment and income for the tribal population.

- The Van Dhan tribal start-ups is a programme for value addition, branding & marketing of Minor Forest Produces by establishing Van Dhan Kendras to facilitate creation of sustainable livelihoods for the forest-based tribes.
- 37,259 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs), subsumed into 2224 Van Dhan Vikas Kendra Clusters (VDVKCs) of 300 forest dwellers each, have been sanctioned by TRIFED as of date.
- A typical Van Dhan Vikas Kendra includes 20 tribal members. 15 such Van Dhan Vikas Kendras form 1 Van Dhan Vikas Kendra cluster.
- The Van Dhan Vikas Kendra Clusters will provide the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras economies of scale, livelihood and market-linkages, as well as entrepreneurship opportunities to nearly 6.67 lakh Tribal forest gatherers in 23 states and 2 UTs. 50 lakh tribals have been impacted by the Van Dhan start-ups programme up until now.

Aspirational Districts programme of NITI Aayog

- Aspirational Districts are those districts in India, that are affected by poor socio-economic indicators.
- It has a vision of Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas. It was launched in 2018.
- The 117 districts were identified from 28 states, at least one from each state.
- At the Government of India level, the programme is anchored by NITI Aayog. In addition, individual Ministries have assumed responsibility to drive the progress of districts.
- The objective of the program is to monitor the real-time progress of aspirational districts.
- ADP is based on 49 indicators from the 5 identified thematic areas, which focuses closely on improving people’s Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure.
- With States as the main drivers, ADP seeks to focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
- The broad contours of the programme are:
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)

1. Convergence (of Central & State Schemes) which brings together the horizontal and vertical tiers of the government.
2. Collaboration (of Central, State level ‘Prabhari’ Officers & District Collectors) which enables impactful partnerships between government, market and civil society.
3. Competition among districts driven by a spirit of the mass movement, it fosters accountability on district governments.

- The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is one of the largest experiments on outcomes-focused governance in the world.
- It focuses on becoming the best district in the State and then the best in the country.
- It includes District Action Plans and convergence of Central State efforts.
- Champions of Change is the Aspirational Dist Dashboard for real time data and ranking.

Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED), 1987

under administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Objectives

1. Socio economic development of tribal people by marketing development of tribal products like metal crafts, tribal textiles, paintings and pottery etc.
2. TRIFED is a facilitator and service provider. Capacity building of tribal people through sensitization, formation of SHGs and training them.

Functions

1. Minor Forest Produce (MFP) development (NTFP like bamboo, canes, fodder, leaves, resins, honey etc).
2. Hence Govt came out with MSP for MFP.
3. Retail Marketing and Development: Sustainable market, create brand and business opportunities. Marketing through TRIBES INDIA outlets.
4. Explore national as well as international markets, creating a brand and marketing tribal products.

Van Dhan Scheme, 2018 (MoTA and TRIFED)

1. It seeks to improve tribal incomes through value addition of tribal products.
2. The establishment of "Van Dhan Vikas Kendra" is for providing training,
skill upgradation and capacity building and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility. Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG).
3. Coverage is proposed to be expanded from the current 18,000 SHGs to 50,000 Van Dhan SHGS.
4. Coverage of tribal gathers to be increased three fold to 10 lakh through Art 275 (1).
5. ‘Go Vocal for Local Go Tribal – Mera Van Mera Dhan Mera Udyam’.

Structure

1. MoTA is nodal dept at Central level
2. TRIFED as nodal agency at National level.
3. At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs
4. District collectors at grassroots level.

For further analysis on Van Dhan Scheme: click here

Source: PIB

Initiatives for the welfare of Transgender community

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment being the nodal ministry for Transgender Welfare has decided to provide a subsistence allowance of Rs.1500 to each Transgender person as immediate support to meet their basic requirements.
This financial assistance will help the Transgender community to meet their day-to-day needs. NGOs and Community-based Organisations(CBOs) working for Transgender Persons have been asked to spread awareness about this step.

How to apply?

- Any Transgender Person or CBOs on behalf of the Transgender Person can apply for financial assistance after providing basic details, Aadhar, and Bank
Account number in a form https://forms.gle/H3BcREPCy3nG6TpH7.

- This form is available on the website of the National Institute of Social Defence, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- To ensure that the information about this reaches a maximum number of Transgender Persons, this form is also being circulated on social media with the help of NGOs and CBOs.
- The Ministry provided similar financial assistance and ration kits to Transgender persons during lockdown last year too. A total amount of 98.50 lakh rupees was incurred which benefitted nearly 7000 Transgender Persons across the country.

Counselling Services Helpline

As people facing mental health problems do not feel comfortable about seeking help due to the stigma around it, a free helpline for distressed Transgender Persons owing to the current pandemic for psychological support and mental health care has also been announced by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Any Transgender Person can connect with experts on the Helpline Number 8882133897. This helpline will be functional from Monday to Saturday between 11 AM to 1 PM and 3 PM to 5 PM. On this helpline, counselling services will be provided by professional Psychologists for their mental health.

Vaccination of transgenders

- A letter has also been written by the Ministry to the Principal Secretaries of all states to ensure that there is no discrimination against Transgender persons in existing Covid vaccination centers.
- They have also been requested to conduct awareness drives especially reaching out to the Transgender community in different vernaculars to ensure they are informed and aware of the vaccination process.
- A request has also been made to the states to organize separate mobile vaccination centers or booths for vaccination of Transgender persons such as those taken up in the states of Haryana & Assam.

Other Initiatives for Transgender persons

- This is the first-of-its-kind gender inclusive community policing initiative in the country, the Cyberabad police inaugurated a ‘Transgender Community Desk’ at Gachibowli Police Station.
- The desk will be managed by a police liaison officer and a transgender
person who is designated as community coordinator.

- It will be the focal point for all grievance redressal among the transgender community in the Cyberabad Commissionerate.
- The desk will provide support to file cases in offences related to violence or discrimination against any transgender person.
- Among other services, the desk will also provide counselling, legal aid, life skills, soft skills training, job placements, and referral linkages to welfare schemes in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and District Legal Services Authority.
- The Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) will also organise monthly training, employability, life-skill training, and facilitate access to job opportunities, while Prajwala, a non-governmental organisation, would assist the desk to facilitate a safe space for any transgender person who needs emergency transit stay.
- Over 200 transgender persons participated in the event, during which Mr. Sajjanar spoke about the need to build an inclusive society ensuring equal opportunities for all.

National Council for Transgender Persons

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has constituted the National Council for Transgender Persons, under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Background

- Indian Census never recognized third gender i.e. Transgender while collecting census data. But in 2011, data of Transgender was collected with details related to their employment, literacy and caste.
- As per 2011 Census, the total population of Transgender is 4.88 lakhs, highest being in Uttar Pradesh followed by Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar.
- In National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India case (2014), Supreme Court of India declared transgender people to be a 'third gender'. It also affirmed that the fundamental rights granted under the Constitution of India will be equally applicable to transgender people, and gave them the right to self identification of their gender as male, female or third-gender.
The Bill defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes transmen and transwomen, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities such as kinnar and hijra.

A transgender person may make an application to the District Magistrate for a certificate of identity, indicating the gender as ‘transgender’.

The Bill prohibits discrimination against a transgender person, including denial of service or unfair treatment in relation to Education, Employment, Healthcare, Movement, Reside, Rent, public or private office, access a Govt or private establishment.

The Act has a provision that provides transgender the right of residence with parents and immediate family members.

It states the offences against Transgender persons will attract jail of 6 months to 2 years + fine.

The Bill also seeks to provide rights of health facilities to transgender persons including separate HIV surveillance centres, and sex reassignment surgeries. Govt shall review medical curriculum and provide medical insurance.

Functions of National Council for Transgender Persons:

- Advising the Central government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons.
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons.
- Reviewing and coordinating the activities of all the departments.
- Redressing grievances of transgender persons.
- Performing such other functions as prescribed by the Centre.

Composition of the Council:

- Its chairperson will be the Union Minister of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- It will also consists of:
- Representatives from 5 states or UTs (one each from the north,
south, east, west and northeast regions), on a rotational basis.

- **Five members of the transgender community** (one each from the north, south, east, west and northeast regions).
- The tenure of the community members shall be **three years**.
- **Representatives from 10 central departments**.
- The council will have joint secretary-level members from the Ministries of Health, Home, Minority Affairs, Education, Rural Development, Labour and Law.
- In addition, there will be a member from the Department of Pensions (Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions), NITI Aayog, National Human Rights Commission and National Commission for Women.

**Way Forward**

- The establishment of National Council for Transgender Persons which seeks to increase awareness and inculcate sense of respect and acceptance for transgender community, is a welcome step. However, its up to the effective functioning of the council whether it will able to identify the issues faced by the transgender community and accordingly advice the government.
- Apart from policies and regulations, there is also a need for an inclusive approach, sensitising legal and law enforcement systems in particular towards the issues of transgender community.

Source: PIB
National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants

Ministry of Power has decided to set up a National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants. This would further support the energy transition in the country and our targets to move towards cleaner energy sources.

Objectives:

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 biomass pellets and agro-residue and its transport up to the power plants.

d. To consider regulatory issues in biomass co-firing.

Structure of the mission

- It is being envisaged that 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.
- 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.
- The Mission would have full time officers from CEA, NTPC, DVC and NLC or other participating organizations.
- The duration of proposed National Mission would be a minimum 5 years. The following Sub-Groups are also proposed to be formed under the Mission:
  1. Sub-Group 1 : to be responsible to carry out research on properties/characteristics of biomass.
  2. Sub-Group 2 : to carry out technical specification and safety aspects including research in boiler design etc. to handle the pilot project for higher amount of co-firing of biomass with coal in pulverized coal (PC).
1. IFSC seeks to bring in India, those type of financial services and transactions that are currently carried on outside India by overseas FIIs and overseas branches of Indian FI subsidiaries. It is also designated as a ‘deemed foreign territory’ which would have the same ecosystem as other offshore locations, but is physically on Indian soil.

2. SEZ Act provides for the establishment of an IFSC in India within an SEZ in India and enables the Central Govt to regulate IFSC activities. SEBI, RBI, IRDAI and Dept of Financial Services issued the regulations for IFSC-GIFT under the provisions of SEZ Act, 2005.

3. Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Co. Ltd (GIFT) is being developed as the country’s first IFSC.

4. Any financial institution (or its branch) set up in the IFSC is Treated as a NRI located outside India.

Source: PIB
2. Conducting a business in foreign currency.
3. Only 1 IFSC is approved in an SEZ.
4. Nothing contained in any other regulations shall apply to a unit located in IFSC, subject to certain provisions.
5. Some of its major services include:
   1. Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and govs.
   2. Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual fund
   3. Wealth management
   4. Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization
   5. Risk management operations
   6. Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations etc.
6. Budget 2016-17 announced a tax regime for IFSC
   1. Tax exemptions for a period of 10 years.
   2. MAT reduced from 18.5% to 9%.
   3. Exemptions from DDT, STT, Commodities TT and Long terms CGT.
   4. Short term capital gains tax taxable at 15%.

International Financial Services Center (IFSC) Authority Bill, 2019

- **Establishment of IFSC Authority**: to develop and regulate the financial services market in the International Financial Services Centres set up under the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005.
- **Composition of Authority**: It will consist of 9 members appointed by the Central Govt- Chairperson;
  - 4 members to be nominated from RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and PFRDA;
  - 2 members from amongst officials of the Ministry of Finance;
  - 2 members to be appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.
- **Functions**: include Regulating financial products, financial services, and financial institutions in an IFSC.
- **Transaction in foreign currency**: As per the Bill, all transactions of financial services in IFSCs will be in such foreign currency as specified by the Authority, in consultation with the central government.
- **Setting up an IFSC Authority Fund**: All grants, fees and charges received by the Authority and all sums received by the Authority from various sources, as decided by the central government will be credited to this Fund.
- **All the laws of land**, including the Prevention of Money laundering Act would apply and would be audited by CVC and CAG.
- Tax Holiday is given only for 10 years in IFSC.
- IFSC provides jurisdiction for carrying out International financial services domestically.
- **No limit on the number of IFSCs that can be set up.**
What is the news?

- The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has been established as a unified regulator to develop and regulate financial products, financial services and financial institutions in the International Financial Service Centres (IFSCs) in India.
- The Fund Industry has been playing an increasingly important role in intermediating between seekers of capital and investors.
- IFSC has been actively engaging with stakeholders to enhance the Global reach of GIFT-IFSC.
- The regulatory approach has been to benchmark with Global Standards and adopt a facilitative framework to provide ease of operations for seeker as well as provider of capital.
- IFSCA, in its endeavour to develop a comprehensive and consistent regulatory framework based on global best practices with a special focus on ease of doing business, has constituted an Expert Committee on Investment Funds to recommend to IFSCA on the road map for the funds industry in the IFSCs.
- The Committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Mr. Nilesh Shah, MD, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Co. Ltd. The Committee comprises of leaders from the entire Fund Management ecosystem including from areas such as technology, distribution, legal, compliance, and operations.

Terms of reference of the Expert Committee:

- To recommend IFSCA on long term vision for operations of Investment Funds in IFSC.
- To make recommendations with respect to structure of Investment Funds in IFSC. The recommendations may be two-fold:
  1. Short term in nature that can be implemented by IFSCA immediately (i.e. less than 3 months). Such suggestions may fall under the exclusive regulatory purview of IFSCA.
  2. Recommendations that may be implemented in mid-term (6 months to 1 year). Such suggestions may also pertain to regulatory purview of other regulators.
- To identify issues that may be critical for development of the Investment Funds industry at IFSCs including inter-regulatory issues.
- Any other relevant item on building the ecosystem inter-alia on asset managers, hedge funds, PE, VC, sovereign funds, family offices, and the
accompanying professional services.

Source: PIB
National Digital Health Mission

- National Digital Health Mission was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2020 while addressing the nation from the Red Fort to mark the occasion of India's 74th Independence Day.
- National Digital Health Mission will be a "completely technology-based" initiative. According to the Prime Minister, the initiative will revolutionise the health sector.
- Under the National Digital Health Mission, every Indian will get a Health ID card that will contain all relevant information about his/her past medical conditions, treatment and diagnosis.
- Since launch, the digital modules and registries have been developed and the mission has been rolled out in six Union Territories.
- So far, nearly 11.9 lakh Health IDs have been generated and 3106 doctors and 1490 facilities have registered on the platform.

What is National Digital Health Mission?

- National Digital Health Mission aims to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of health services in the country. It comes under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY).

Features

- Under National Digital Health Mission, every Indian will get a Health ID card that will store all medical details of the person including prescriptions, treatment, diagnostic reports and discharge summaries.
- The citizens will be able to give their doctors and health providers one-time access to this data during visits to the hospital for consultation.
- However, access to the confidential medical data will have to be given separately for each visit due to fears over data confidentiality.
- The National Digital Health Mission will allow patients to access health services remotely through tele-consultation and e-pharmacies, as well as offer other health-related benefits.

How will Health ID cards work?
Every time an Indian citizen visits the doctor or a pharmacy, all details including prescriptions will be logged in the health ID card. This will enable all information regarding the person's health, right from the doctor's appointment to the advised medication, to be logged in his/her health profile. The Health ID will contain information about every single test, every disease, diagnosis, treatment and the medicines prescribed by the doctor prescribed and final reports.

**What is Universal Health Interface?**

- It has been envisaged that Unified Health Interface (UHI) - an open and interoperable IT network for digital health should soon be rolled out.
- This interface shall enable public and private solutions and apps to plug in and be a part of National Digital Health Ecosystem. It will allow users to search, book and avail necessary healthcare services such as tele-consultations or laboratory tests.
- The system will ensure that only verified healthcare providers join the ecosystem.
- This is likely to unleash a digital health tech revolution with innovations and various services for citizens.
- In such a manner, healthcare infrastructure and human resources can also be utilised in a more efficient manner across the nation.
- The concept of UPI e-Voucher developed by National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) was also in discussions. This digital payment option will enable financial transactions linked to specific purpose which can be used only by the intended user. It can be useful for targeted and efficient delivery of various government schemes and an immediate use cases of UPI e-Voucher could be healthcare services.

Analysis of National Digital Health Mission: [click here](#)

Source: PIB
Tropical Cyclones Yaas

Definition of a Cyclone

- **Cyclone refers to any spinning storm that rotates around a low-pressure center.** The low-pressure centre is also referred to as the 'eye' of the storm, which is well known for being eerily calm compared with the areas under the spinning 'arms' of the storm.
- You could say that the eye is watching what's going on down below, so it needs a clear path, but the arms are where all the action happens because this is where the storm is throwing out all of its rain and wind.

How are cyclones formed?

- To form a cyclone, warm, moist air over the ocean rises upward from near the surface. As this air moves up and away from the ocean surface, it leaves less air near the surface. So basically as the warm air rises, it causes an area of lower air pressure below.
- Air from surrounding areas with higher air pressure pushes in to the low pressure area. Then this new “cool” air becomes warm and moist and rises, too. And the cycle continues.
- As the warmed, moist air rises and cools the water in the air forms clouds. The whole system of clouds and wind spins and grows, fed by the ocean’s heat and water evaporating from the ocean surface.
- As the storm system rotates faster and faster, an eye forms in the centre. It is very calm and clear in the eye, with very low air pressure. Higher pressure air from above flows down into the eye.
- Tropical cyclones usually weaken when they hit land, because they are no longer being “fed” by the energy from the warm ocean waters. However, they often move far inland, dumping many centimetres of rain and causing lots of wind damage before they die out completely.
Tropical cyclone is an intense circular storm that originates over warm tropical oceans and is characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds, and heavy rain. Drawing energy from the sea surface and maintaining its strength as long as it remains over warm water, a tropical cyclone generates winds that exceed 119 km (74 miles) per hour. In extreme cases winds may exceed 240 km (150 miles) per hour, and gusts may surpass 320 km (200 miles) per hour. Accompanying these strong winds are torrential rains and a devastating phenomenon known as the storm surge, an elevation of the sea surface that can reach 6 metres (20 feet) above normal levels. Such a combination of high winds and water makes cyclones a serious hazard for coastal areas in tropical and subtropical areas of the world. Every year during the late summer months (July–September in the Northern Hemisphere and January–March in the Southern Hemisphere), cyclones strike regions as far apart as the Gulf Coast of North America, northwestern Australia, and eastern India and Bangladesh.

Different names of tropical cyclones
Tropical cyclones are known by various names in different parts of the world. In the North Atlantic Ocean and the eastern North Pacific they are called hurricanes, and in the western North Pacific around the Philippines, Japan, and China the storms are referred to as typhoons. In the western South Pacific and Indian Ocean they are variously referred to as severe tropical cyclones, tropical cyclones, or simply cyclones. All these different names refer to the same type of storm.

**Conditions for formation of tropical cyclones**

- The temperature of the surface layer of ocean water must be 26.5 °C (80 °F) or warmer, and this warm layer must be at least 50 metres (150 feet) deep.
- A preexisting atmospheric circulation must be located near the surface warm layer.
- The atmosphere must cool quickly enough with height to support the formation of deep convective clouds.
- The middle atmosphere must be relatively humid at a height of about 5,000 metres (16,000 feet) above the surface.
- The developing system must be at least 500 km (300 miles) away from the Equator.
- The wind speed must change slowly with height through the troposphere—no more than 10 metres (33 feet) per second between the surface and an altitude of about 10,000 metres (33,000 feet).

**Types of Cyclones:**

Tropical cyclones are what most people are familiar with because these are cyclones that occur over tropical ocean regions.

- **Hurricanes and typhoons** are actually types of tropical cyclones, but they have different names so that it's clear where that storm is occurring. Hurricanes are found in the Atlantic and Northeast Pacific, typhoons are found in the Northwest Pacific. If you hear 'tropical cyclone,' you should assume that it's occurring in the South Pacific or Indian Ocean, but for this lesson, we'll use it to refer to all types of tropical ocean cyclones.
- We can also further describe tropical cyclones **based on their wind speeds.** They are called category 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, increasing with intensity and wind speed as the number increases. A category 1 cyclone is the weakest, with wind speeds of 74-95 mph. A category 5 cyclone, on the other hand, is...
extremely dangerous and has the potential for major damage. Category 5 cyclones have wind speeds of 155 mph and above!

- **Polar cyclones** are cyclones that occur in polar regions like Greenland, Siberia and Antarctica. Unlike tropical cyclones, polar cyclones are usually stronger in winter months. As you can see, these storms really do prefer the colder weather! They also occur in areas that aren't very populated, so any damage they do is usually pretty minimal.

- **A mesocyclone** is when part of a thunderstorm cloud starts to spin, which may eventually lead to a tornado. 'Meso' means 'middle', so you can think of this as the mid-point between one type of storm and the other. Tornadoes all come from thunderstorm clouds, but not all thunderstorm clouds make tornadoes. In order for a tornado to occur, part of that cloud has to spin, and though you can't really see this happening, this is the intermediate, or 'meso' step from regular cloud to dangerous spinning cloud running along the ground.

 Depending upon its location and strength, a tropical cyclone is referred by different names:

- Typhoons in Western North Pacific
- Willy-willies in Australia
- Baguio in Philippine Islands
- Hurricanes around North America
- Taifu in Japan
- Cyclone in the Indian Ocean

**How are the cyclones named?**

- If the speed of a cyclone is more than 34 nautical miles per hour then it becomes necessary to give it a special name. If the speed of the storm reaches or crosses 74 mph, it is then classified into a hurricane/cyclone/typhoon.
- The cyclones that are formed in any ocean basin around the world are named by the Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs). There are a total of six RSMCs in the world, including the India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia Pacific (ESCAP) have been naming cyclonic storms since 2000.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) names the cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean, including the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian
Sea. It also issues advisories to 12 other nations in the region on the development of cyclones and storms.

- In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP-- **Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand**-- decided to name cyclones in the region.
- In 2018, **five more countries were added**-- Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, **United Arab Emirates and Yemen**.
- After the aforementioned countries sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalise the list.
- In April 2020, **IMD released a list of 169 cyclone names**. 13 suggestions were sent in by the aforementioned WMO/ESCAP member nations.

**Why are cyclones named?**

- The cyclones are named to help people identify them easily as it would be difficult to remember numbers and technical terms.
- Additionally, appending names makes it easier for the media, scientific community and the disaster management community to identify and report individual cyclones, disseminate warnings, increase community preparedness, and ward off confusion in areas that witness multiple cyclones.

**Guidelines to name cyclones**

The guidelines to name the cyclones are as follows:

1. The proposed name must be neutral to politics and political figures, religious beliefs, cultures and genders.
2. It must not hurt the sentiments of any group of people across the world.
3. It must not be rude and cruel in nature.
4. The name must be short, easy to pronounce and inoffensive to any member.
5. It must be of a maximum of eight letters and be given with its pronunciation and voice over.
6. The names of cyclones developing over the north Indian Ocean will not be repeated. Once used, it will cease to be used again.

Source: TH
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.
Bordering states & territories (clockwise from north): the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei. Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.
It is connected by Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea and by Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.
It contains numerous shoals, reefs, atolls and islands. The Paracel Islands,
Importance of South China Sea

- 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) one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.
- According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines, this sea has one-third of the entire world’s marine biodiversity and contains lucrative fisheries providing food security to the Southeast Asian nations.
- The South China Sea is believed to have huge oil and gas reserves beneath its seabed.

In News: The Chinese fishing fleets have been seen raiding the rich waters of the South China Sea that are internationally recognised as exclusively Indonesia’s to fish. The fishermen in Natuna Islands (Indonesia) are worried.

The Chinese steel trawlers scrape the bottom of the sea and destroy other marine life. Chinese trawling also breaches the maritime borders. Since China is its largest trading partner, it has been argued that the Indonesian government has not taken any steps to deal with the incursions by Chinese fishing boats.

China’s illegal fishing near the Natuna islands carries global consequence, reminding regional governments of Beijing’s expanding claims to the South China Sea through which one-third of the world’s maritime trade flows. China wants to claim the resources such as oil, natural gas, and fish in the South China Sea. The presence of Chinese fishers also helps to embody China’s maritime claims. The nine dash line (rejected by an international tribunal) asserted by China violates the principle of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).
History of Dispute

- In the first half of the 20th century, the Sea remained almost quiet. In fact, at the end of World War II, no claimant occupied a single island in the entire...
South China Sea.
- China laid claim to the South China Sea in 1947. It demarcated its claims with a U-shaped line made up of eleven dashes on a map, covering most of the area.
- But two “dashes” were removed in the early 1950s to bypass the Gulf of Tonkin as a gesture to communist comrades in North Vietnam.
- The remaining ‘nine-dash line’ stretches hundreds of kilometers south and east of its southerly Hainan Island, covering almost 90% of South China Sea.
- After 1960’s when the huge reserve of oil and natural gas were discovered in the region, the territorial claims started growing in an unprecedented manner.
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, established a legal framework intended to balance the economic and security interests of coastal states with those of seafaring nations.
- While UNCLOS has been signed and ratified by nearly all the coastal countries in the South China Sea, based on their own interpretation of the UNCLOS, claimant countries started to legitimize their claims.
- In 2002, ASEAN and China came together to sign the Declaration on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to keep disputes away. However, it didn’t achieve the desired outcomes.
- In 2009, Malaysia and Vietnam sent a joint submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for setting out some of their claims. In response to this China submitted a map containing the infamous “nine-dash” line and due to which, there was no headway in the dispute resolution.

Why in the news?
- The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), based in The Hague, Netherlands, recently ruled that China’s claims of historical rights over the South China Sea (SCS) has no legal basis. The case against China was initiated by the Philippines.

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) has ruled that China’s claims to the waters within the “nine-dash line”, was in breach of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The court also observed that China has caused “severe harm to the coral reef environment” by building artificial islands.

- The Philippines had lodged the suit against China in 2013 and has welcomed the ruling, but China has reacted furiously, saying that it “does not accept
and does not recognise” the decision.

- China had even refused to participate in the case, saying that the tribunal had “no jurisdiction” over the issue.

- It is important to note that this ruling, comes at a critical juncture, as China bolsters its global economic status. China has a long-standing ambition to be accorded recognition as a market economy under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- With reference to the current ruling by the tribunal, the U.S. can’t exert much moral pressure as it has not even ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Conversely, since both China and the Philippines have ratified the UNCLOS, there is more pressure on China to comply.

Geopolitics and Activities undertaken in the region:

- Between China and the Philippines, the conflict centers around the Scarborough Shoal. The Scarborough Shoal, is essentially a triangle-shaped chain of reefs and rocks with a total area of 150 square kilometers.

- In 1995, China took control of the disputed Mischief, constructing octagonal huts on stilts- Chinese officials said at the time that these would serve as shelters for fishermen. The Philippines registered a protest through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

- In fact, the current round of tension between the two countries began in 2008-2009 after a tense but bloodless stand-off over the Scarborough Shoal, led to China gaining de facto control of it in 2012.

- Also recently, China has constructed and installed military-capable infrastructure in the Spratly Islands.

- China’s state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has accelerated oil exploration, especially in the western region of the South China Sea. China’s rising energy demands appears to be a factor fuelling its assertion in South China Sea, and sharpening its disputes with littoral states, especially Vietnam and the Philippines, along with Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

- Recently, Chinese and Russian naval forces carried out joint air defense and anti-submarine drills in the South China Sea (SCS)- this was part of an eight-
Reasons for the stalemate on a possible solution

- ASEAN member nations, namely, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, often show signs of anxiety whenever claimants over the South China Sea, most often China, escalate the conflict.

- In fact, one of the fundamental principles of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been to resolve disputes by peaceful means and to reach agreement by a consensus.

- But on the issue of the South China Sea, ASEAN has been unable to formulate a consensus policy. Reasons for this can be attributed partly to the fact that not all 10 ASEAN members are claimants to the South China Sea. While another reason is that members of ASEAN have overlapping claims among themselves. Moreover, bilateral relations between China and some smaller ASEAN members, such as Laos and Cambodia, are also a factor. Because of its economic and military power, China has been able to win over some ASEAN members.

- In fact, when China insisted on talks among the parties concerned, the claimants in ASEAN wanted to pursue it through multilateralism or the Court of Arbitration. Thus, the existence of two opposing approaches was, and continues to be a major challenge for bringing a mutually acceptable solution to the South China Sea disputes.

Strategic Importance of South China Sea:

- It is important to note that the South China Sea (SCS) contains one of the world’s busiest international sea lanes and is also home to many of the world’s busiest shipping ports. The South China Sea also connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans and thus is of a unique strategic importance to the littorals of these two oceans which are important naval powers in the region—such as India, Japan, etc.

- The SCS, is one of the main arteries of the global economy and trade. More than $5 trillion of world trade ships pass through the SCS each year. The SCS is rich in resources, with numerous offshore oil and gas blocks. The day naval war game, Joint Sea-2016, which is the largest naval military exercise ever between the two countries.
natural resources in the region are yet to be explored.

- The United States Energy Information Agency estimates that there are 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in deposits under the South China Sea (SCS).
- The waters of the South China Sea (SCS), contain lucrative fisheries that, according to some estimates, account for 10% of the global total.

**The Indian Context**

- It is important to note that in July 2014, an Arbitration Tribunal, set up under the Permanent Court of Arbitration, delivered its ruling, in the matter of the Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Delimitation between India and Bangladesh. The maritime boundary so delimited covered the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf.

- The United Nations tribunal awarded Bangladesh 19,467 sq. km of the 25,602 sq. km sea area of the Bay of Bengal.

- India has been widely credited, with her acceptance of the decision and the manner in which she has abided by it. This is an example which China should be encouraged to emulate. In fact, it is interesting to note that the US has asked China to learn from India’s handling of its maritime disputes with its neighbours- referring to the maturity with which India has agreed to the settlement on the maritime boundary with Bangladesh.

- Under the ‘Act East’ policy, India has been taking a higher position at the global high table- this was reflected in the joint statement issued in September 2014, by the Governments of U.S. and India when Indian PM Narendra Modi, travelled to U.S. The joint statement “urged the concerned parties to pursue resolution of their territorial and maritime disputes through all peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.” The joint statement also, “affirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea.”

- In the wake of the recent judgement by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, it is a good time for India to assert that it believes in global commons, and in freedom of navigation. India has rightfully not come out in ‘open’ support of
the verdict from the tribunal, as any overt support to this verdict might run against India’s ambitions of securing membership into the NSG- where China’s support is needed.

- India has legitimate commercial interest in the South China Sea (SCS) region. But India follows the policy of not involving itself in the disputes between sovereign nations.

- India has been concerned about the security of its trade-flows and energy interests in the South China Sea. Vietnam has offered India seven oil blocks in its territory of the SCS- this move didn’t get down well with China. India has signed energy deals with Brunei too.

- India has been a strong advocate of the idea of freedom of navigation. This belief is strongly echoed by most other major powers, including the U.S.

**Possible Way Forward**

China operates from a position of strength in the South China Sea, wherein it has physical control over critical islands in the region, coupled with this, her policy of gradual militarization of the disputed islands in the South China Sea, would impact freedom of navigation- making China the main arbiter of the accepted range of ‘legitimate’ operations in the South China Sea.

Also, although the ruling is historic, the tribunal lacks powers to enforce its rulings, it is important that the claimant nations do not escalate the issue, but work on arriving at a consensus through effective diplomacy.

Judicial verdicts on issues of contested sovereignty have had historical precedents of triggering a nationalist backlash. It is thus important to consider possible solutions to this dispute. Some measures are as under:

- To resolve the disputes peacefully, the claimants in the region should be willing to abandon their confrontational attitude, and instead agree to find a middle path- even if this requires sacrificing certain portions of their claims.

- All claimants can perhaps limit their claim to the areas of 200 nautical miles of the Exclusive Economic Zone in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Thus, by agreeing to such a proposal, the claimants can also reach an agreement to leave international waters for free navigation.
Another possible solution would be for the parties concerned to establish a common ownership of the disputed areas whereby all the revenues from the South China Sea are equitably shared among the littoral countries.

Perhaps another possibility would be for the disputing countries to specifically lay out their claims and allow a neutral party to adjudicate on the basis of the UNCLOS or any other relevant international laws.

Source: TH
China’s Space Missions

- China took another step towards completing the construction of its first space station by the end of next year following the launch and docking of a cargo spacecraft early on Sunday.
- The *Tianzhou-2 cargo spacecraft*, described by China’s state media as “the delivery guy for China’s space station”, was launched late on Saturday on a Long March-7 rocket from the island of Hainan, and docked eight hours later with the space station’s first core module called *Tianhe, or “heavenly harmony”*.
- The launch was a third landmark for China’s space programme in recent weeks. China landed a spacecraft in Mars on May 15 carrying its first Mars rover, Zhurong. The *Tianhe module*, which the cargo spacecraft docked with on Sunday, was launched on April 29.
- The *Tianzhou-2 spacecraft* carried a range of supplies, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) said, and will be followed by the launch of another cargo spacecraft, Tianzhou-3, and two manned missions, *Shenzhou-12* and *Shenzhou-13*, this year, each carrying three astronauts who will spend several months in orbit. The Shenzhou-12 launch is slated for mid-June.
- The six missions to follow this year, including for the space station’s second and third modules, *Wentian and Mengtian*, will close to complete the construction of China’s first space station, expected to be finished in 2022.
- The CMSA said Tianzhou-2, with a maximum takeoff weight of 13.5 tons and 6.9 ton-payload capacity, is the largest cargo spacecraft in service.
- The spacecraft is carrying cargo and propellant that will replenish the supplies of the Tianhe module, the agency said.
- Official broadcaster China Global Television Network said its supplies include food for the crew that will follow in the Shenzhou-12 and Shenzhou-13 missions, including “famous stir-fried Chinese dishes like shredded pork with garlic sauce and Kung Pao chicken.”

Recent news

- Recently, China launched an unmanned module of its permanent space station that it plans to complete by the end of 2022.
- The module, named "Tianhe", or "Harmony of the Heavens", was launched on the Long March 5B, China's largest carrier rocket.
India has also set its eye on building its own space station in low earth orbit to conduct microgravity experiments in space in 5 to 7 years.

- The only space station currently in orbit is the **International Space Station (ISS)**, from which China is excluded.
- A space station is a spacecraft capable of supporting crew members, designed to remain in space for an extended period of time and for other spacecraft to dock.
- The ISS is backed by the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada.
- China has been a late starter when it comes to space exploration. It was only in 2003 that it sent its first astronaut into orbit, making it the third country to do so, after the Soviet Union and the US.
- So far, China has sent two previous space stations into orbit. The Tiangong-1 and Tiangong-2 were trial stations though, simple modules that allowed only relatively short stays by astronauts.

**China’s Space Station:**

- The new, 66-tonne, multi-module Tiangong station is set to be operational for at least 10 years.
- Tianhe is one of three main components of what would be China’s first self-developed space station, rivalling the only other station in service – the ISS.
- It forms the main living quarters for three crew members in the Chinese space station.
- The Tianhe launch is the first of 11 missions needed to complete the space station, which will orbit Earth at an altitude of 340 to 450 km.
- In the later missions, China will launch the two other core modules, four manned spacecraft and four cargo spacecraft.

**Significance for China:**

- China aims to become a major space power by 2030. It has ramped up its space programme with visits to the moon, the launch of an uncrewed probe to Mars and the construction of its own space station.
- In contrast, the fate of the ageing ISS – in orbit for more than two decades – remains uncertain. The project is set to expire in 2024, barring funding from its partners. Russia has said recently that it would quit the project from 2025.
- Russia is deepening ties with China in space as tensions with the US rise. It has slammed the US-led Artemis moon exploration programme and instead chosen to join China in setting up a lunar research outpost in the coming years.