

GS - I

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2020

What is the news?

- The Delhi High Court has directed the Medical Superintendent of All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) to constitute a medical board to examine the condition of a 25-week pregnant woman, whose foetus is suffering from serious abnormalities.
- The court's direction came while hearing a petition by a woman seeking permission to undergo medical termination of her 25-week pregnancy on the ground that the foetus was suffering from Bilateral Agenesis and Anlyaramni.
- In India, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act stipulates a ceiling of 20 weeks, for termination of pregnancy, beyond which abortion of a foetus is statutorily impermissible.
- The plea said during an ultra sonography, conducted on the woman at the gestational age of 25 weeks, it was discovered that the foetus suffered from Bilateral Renal Agenesis (both kidneys absent) thereby making it incompatible with life.
- Since pregnancy had crossed the 20 weeks mark and medical termination of pregnancy now prohibited, the woman approached the court.
- The woman's counsel said that the foetus would not survive till childbirth as both the kidneys have not developed as yet. The counsel said in the circumstances it would be futile to compel the woman to undergo the full terms of pregnancy.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2020 or Abortion Law

- It is related to abortion, procedures and conditions of abortion.
- India does not allow free abortions, only when there is a risk of life or substantial abnormalities of child. Hence certification of Medical practitioner.



Amendments to MTP Act, 1971

1. It seeks to enhance the upper gestation period from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women that will be defined. Extension is important as in 1st 5 months of pregnancy, some women realise the need to abort very late.
2. Usually foetal anatomy scan is done during 20-21st week of pregnancy.
3. It will include vulnerable women including survivor of rape, victims of incest.

Difference between 1971 Act and 2020 Bill

1. 1971 Act allowed termination of pregnancy for 20 weeks. But 2020 Bill says 24 weeks.
2. If substantial physical and mental injury to child, or if pregnancy risks or is a grave injury to life of mother, then she can abort.
3. If the termination is for < 12 weeks then 1 Medical practitioner's permission is required. If it is in between 12 to 24 weeks, 2 Medical practitioners. If > 24 weeks then Medical Board's permission is needed.
4. According to Section 3(2); Abortion extended to only failure of married women or husband. This is replaced by "A woman and her partner".
5. Her identity should not be disclosed except to a person who is authorised by the law. If it is breached then penalty of 1 year or fine or both.

6. MTP Act divides the regulatory framework for allowing abortions into categories, according to Gestational age of foetus.

Issues in 1971 Act:

1. Reports show that > 10 women die everyday due to unsafe abortions in India and backward abortion laws only contribute to women seeking illegal and unsafe options.
2. In 2008, a petition was filed by Haresh and Niketa = Mehta to abort in 22 week.
3. High Court does not provide women in final say unlike 67 countries where women can get an abortion on request with or without a specific gestation limit (usually 12 weeks).
4. Prejudice against unmarried women - According to Section 3 (2) pregnancy because of failure of any birth control device
5. Issue is that some child's abnormalities is found > 20 weeks.

Still there are issues in 2020 Bill

1. It does not allow abortion on request at any point after pregnancy.
2. It doesn't take a step towards removing the prejudice against unmarried women.
3. It enhances the gestation limit from 20 to only 24 weeks in certain cases of women like rape survivors, victims of incest and minors.

The question of abortion needs to be decided on the basis of human rights. In the landmark, US SC judgement Roe vs Wade, the judges held that US constitution protects a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy. Ultimately nations will have to decide the outer limit also based on the capacity of their health systems to deliver based on the capacity of their health systems to deliver care without danger to life of mother, there is no uniform gestation viability for abortion.

Buddhism and Philately

- It's no surprise that many stamps of M. Lokeswara Rao are related to nature.
- But about one-third of Mr. Rao's stamp collection is on Buddhism. In his book, Buddhism on Stamps, which was released on Thursday, he discusses the life and teachings of Buddha through 1,134 philatelic (collection of stamps) material, including stamps and postcards.
- “I took to painting Buddha in 2014 as a stress-relieving hobby. Two years later, when I retired, I started the stamp collection. I am not a Buddhist but I like the teachings of Buddha because they are about peace and nature,” he said.
- Apart from Buddhism, Mr. Rao also collects orchids and Penny Red stamps.

Buddhist Philosophy/Teachings of the Buddha

It teaches the Middle Path renouncing extreme steps like indulgence and strict abstinence.

The four noble truths (Arya Satya) in Buddhism are:

Four Noble Truths

1. The world is full of sorrow
2. Desire is the root cause of all sorrow
3. Sorrow can be conquered by conquering desire
4. Desire can be conquered by following the eight-fold paths (Ashtangirka Marga)

The eight-fold path in Buddhism is:

1. Right understanding
2. Right resolve
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right living
6. Right efforts
7. Right thought
8. Right self-concentration.

The Tri Ratnas of Buddhism are: Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

1. Buddha: the highest spiritual potential in everyone.
2. Dhamma: the teachings of Buddha (Pali for Sanskrit Dharma or righteousness)
3. Sangha: order of monks who follow Buddhism.

Other principles:

1. Buddha did not believe in God or the soul.

2. Stressed on karma and ahimsa.
3. He was against the varna system. Buddha taught in Pali.
4. Buddhism spread to several countries outside India. China adopted Buddhism in the 1st century AD.

Indonesia Jet missing

- A jet carrying 62 people lost contact with air traffic controllers minutes after taking off from Indonesia's capital Jakarta on a domestic flight on Saturday.
- Officials were examining debris found by fishermen to see if it was from the missing plane.
- The plane was carrying 50 passengers and 12 crew members, all Indonesian nationals.

Reason for the missing Indonesia jet: Thunderstorms

What are Thunderstorms?

- Lightning or electrical storm is known as a thunderstorm. It is characterized by lightning and thunder.
- Thunderstorms produce strong winds, heavy rainfalls, and even produce snowfall and hail. Some of the thunderstorms don't produce any precipitation and in some cases, thunderstorms produce very little precipitation.

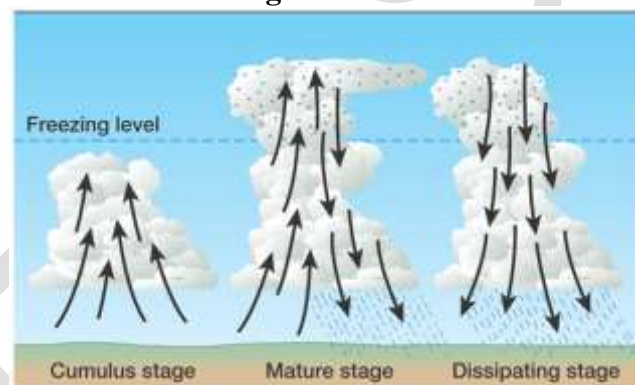
How are Thunderstorms Formed?

- Cumulonimbus Clouds produce Thunderstorms and it forms when there is a rapid rise or movement of warm and moist air.
- Cumulonimbus clouds sometimes form at even heights of over 20 kilometres and it is formed when there is the upward movement of warm, moist air. This warm air and moist air cools and condenses when it moves upwards resulting in the formation of cumulonimbus clouds.
- Condensation of Water vapour into water droplets or ice happens when the rising air reaches its dew point temperature.
- This results in a reduction of pressure locally within the thunderstorm cell.
- Any precipitation falls a long distance

through the clouds on the way to the surface of the Earth. Larger droplets are formed when the smaller droplets that are falling down collide with other droplets.

- Downdraft is created by the falling droplets as it pulls cold air with it, and this cold air spreads out at the surface of the Earth. This results in strong winds that are commonly produced during thunderstorms.

What are the 3 Stages of Thunderstorms?



Most Thunderstorms have three stages:

1) Cumulus Stage

- During day time the Earth's surface gets heated up by the Sun.
- This results in Updraft, a phenomenon where warm air rises upwards. This happens due to the surface of the Earth getting heated up due to the Sun and the warm air is lighter than cool air, which results in its upward movement.
- The warm air condenses into a cumulus cloud in the presence of moist air.
- As long as warm air below the clouds continues to rise, it will help in the continuous growth of clouds.

2) Mature Stage

- The water in Cumulus Clouds becomes large and heavy as the cumulus cloud grows in size.
- Raindrops start to fall through the cloud when the rising air can no longer hold them up.
- Cool dry air starts to enter the cloud as the raindrops start falling through the clouds.
- The phenomenon of downdraft takes place. It is a phenomenon that happens when warm air is lighter than the cool air,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

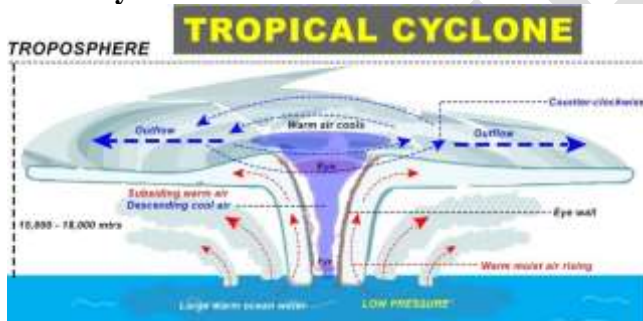
which makes the cool air to descend in the cloud.

- Heavy water is pulled downward by the downdraft resulting in rains.
- Due to updraft, downdraft, and rain; this cloud has become a cumulonimbus cloud.
- The cumulonimbus is now a thunderstorm cell.

3) Dissipating Stage

- Dissipation of thunderstorms happens after a time duration of 30 minutes.
- This dissipation occurs when the updraft gets dominated by downdrafts in the cloud. Due to this domination of downdraft cloud droplets will cease to form since the warm moist air can no longer rise. As the cloud disappears from top to bottom, the storm will dissipate.
- For ordinary thunderstorms, the above-mentioned complete process will take approximately 1 hour, whereas for much larger and powerful Supercell thunderstorms the above-mentioned dissipation process may take several hours.

About cyclones:



- 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.

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

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

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

Interlinking of the Rivers and Ken-Betwa Project

The Ken-Betwa Link Project

- The **Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP)** is the River interlinking project that aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and

Chhatarpur districts of MP.

- Ken-Betwa is one of the 30 river inter linking projects conceived across the country.
- The project has been delayed due to political and environmental issues
- Ken and Betwa rivers originate in MP and are the tributaries of Yamuna.
- Ken meets with Yamuna in Banda district of UP and with Betwa in Hamirpur district of UP.
- Rajghat, Paricha and Matatila dams are over Betwa river.
- Ken River passes through Panna tiger reserve.

Inter-Linking of Rivers (ILR) Project

- The ambitious project comprises 16 rivers of Himalayan origin and 14 in peninsular region.
- The Detailed Project Report (DPR) in respect of Ken-Betwa Inter-State Link Project involving Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh has been completed and work on the project will begin soon.
- Besides, the DPRs for four projects is in progress.

The meeting reviewed the status of the various ILR projects, namely

- Ken-Betwa Link Project,
- Cauvery (Kattalai)-Vaigai-Gundar link (IBWT),
- Bedti-Varda link (IBWT),
- Damanganga (Ekdare)-Godavari link (Intra-State),
- Damanganga-Vaitarna-Godavari link (Intra-State),
- Damanganga-Pinjal and Par-Tapi-Narmada Link Projects,
- Alternative proposal of Diversion of Godavari waters upto Cauvery basin, Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga (MSTG) link and Integration of Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project with Parbati- Kalisindh-Chambal link.
- Status of the 47 Intra-State link proposals from nine States, besides restructuring of the National Water Development Agency, Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers and the National Interlinking of Rivers

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Authority (NIRA) were also discussed.

Need for Interlinking of Rivers

- 80% of the water India receives through its annual rains and surface water flow happens over a 4 month period June through September.
- This spatial and time variance in availability of natural water versus year round demand for irrigation, drinking and industrial water creates demand supply gap, which can be balanced by interlinking of rivers.
- Interlinking of rivers involves joining rivers by the network of canals and reservoirs that solves twin problems of drought and flood by maintaining a water balance between the water deficit and surplus areas.
- Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme, has already interlinked the Godavari river and the Krishna river in Andhra's West Godavari district.

Advantages

- River linking will be a solution to recurring droughts in Bundelkhand region.
- It will curb the rate of farmers suicide and will ensure them stable livelihood by providing sustainable means of irrigation (6 lakh hec of land) and reducing excessive dependence on groundwater.
- It will not only accelerate the water conservation by construction of multipurpose dam but will also produce 75MW of electricity and will supply drinking water to 13 lakh people.
- Few are of the view that the introduction of dam inside the water scarce regions of panna tiger reserve, will rejuvenate the forests of Panna Tiger reserve that in turn will pave the way for Rich Biodiversity in the region.
- It will provide employment during the execution of the project.
- The afforestation programme could be implemented on canal banks resulting in environmental improvement.
- The communication system will improve because of canal roads and CD works

raising marketing opportunities.

- The formation of the reservoirs will help tourism development, fish and aquaculture, bird sanctuaries etc.

Concerns

- Construction of Daudhan dam will result into submergence of 10% of critical tiger habitat of MP's Panna Tiger Reserve that will adversely affect the tiger conservation efforts.
- Height of the dam (77 meters) will affect the nesting sites of vulture.
- Construction of one of the barrages inside the Ken Gharial Sanctuary will adversely affect the sustainability of the sanctuary.
- Submergence by Daudhan and Makodia reservoirs will result into displacement of 20,000 people of the bundelkhand region and will give rise to rehabilitation issues.
- Politicization of Ken Betwa project is making project more complex and resulting into its further delay.
- Because of certain environmental and wildlife conservation concerns like passing of project through critical tiger habitat of panna tiger reserve ,project is stuck in for the approval from NGT, and other higher authorities.
- There is a huge economic cost attached with the projects implementation and maintenance, which has been rising due to delays in project implementation.
- Reconstruction and rehabilitation caused due to displacement resulting from submergence of two dams will involve social cost as well.

Conclusion

- Ken Betwa interlinking project can act as a boon to the water scarce districts of the bundelkhand region where farmers are struggling with their dependency over monsoon.
- This can even boost the agricultural production of the area by including water intensive, plantation and cash crops in their crop cycle that will increase the income of farmers.

All the Martial Arts of India

1. Kalaripayattu



- It is the oldest martial art in India originated in the state of Kerala in 4th century A.D.
- Techniques of Kalaripayattu: Uzhichil or the massage with Gingli oil, Otta, Maipayattu or body exercises, Puliyanam or sword fight, Verumkai or bare-handed fight etc.
- Kalari is a Malayalam word which means School/gymnasium/training hall where Martial arts are practiced or taught.
- Kalaripayattu was introduced as martial art by a legend, sage Parasurama, who built temples.
- This art is used as a means of unarmed self-defence and a way to achieve physical fitness today. Also used in traditional rituals and ceremonies.
- It includes mock duels (armed and unarmed combat) and physical exercises, important aspect is the style of fighting and is not accompanied by any drumming or song.
- Its important key is footwork which includes kicks, strikes and weapon based practice.
- Its popularity also increases with the movie Ashoka and the Myth.
- Women also practiced this art, Unniyarcha; a legendary heroine won many battles using this martial art.

2. Silambam

- It is a kind of Staff Fencing originated in Tamil Nadu, a modern and scientific martial art.
- **Techniques of Silambam:** Swift

movements of the foot, use of thrust, cut, chop, sweep to achieve mastery & development of force, momentum & precision at different levels of the body, snake hits, monkey hits, hawk hits etc.

- Silambam is promoted in Tamil Nadu by the rulers Pandya, Chola and Chera and the reference to the sale of Silambam staves, pearls, swords and armours can be seen in a Tamil literature ‘Silapaddigaram’.
- This art also travelled to Malaysia, where it is a famous sport apart from a self defence technique.
- For mock fighting and self-defence the long-staff technique is used. Infact, Lord Muruga (in Tamil Mythology) and sage Agasthya are credited with the creation of Silambam. Even during Vedic age, training was imparted to young men as a ritual and for an emergency.



3. Thang-ta and Sarit Sarak



- This art was created by the Meitei people of Manipur.
- Thang refers to a ‘sword’ while Ta refers to a ‘spear’ and is an armed martial art whereas Sarit Sarak is an unarmed art form

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

that uses hand to hand combat.

- In 17th century this art was used by Manipuri kings against Britishers later on when Britishers captured the area this technique was banned.
- Thang-Ta is also known as HuyenLallong, which is a popular ancient martial art which uses other weapons including an axe and a shield.
- It is practiced in 3 different ways: Firstly, ritualistic in nature linked with tantric practices, secondly, mesmerising performance of sword and sword dances and thirdly, is the actual technique of fighting.

performed by Sikhs of Punjab.

- Gatka means whose freedom belongs to grace. Others say that ‘Gatka’ comes from a Sanskrit word ‘Gadha’ means mace.
- This art uses weapons like Kirpan, Talwar and Kataar.
- It is displayed in various occasions, celebrations in the state including fairs.



4. Thoda



- It was started in Himachal Pradesh and Wooden bows, arrows are used.
- Thoda name is derived from the round wooden piece attached to the head of an arrow to minimise its lethal potential.
- It is a mixture of martial art, sport and culture.
- It takes place during Baisakhi every year.
- This martial art relies on a player's skill of archery and can be dated back at the time of Mahabharata where bows and arrows were used in the valleys of Kullu and Manali.
- In the game, there are 2 groups of 500 people each. All of them are not archers but dancers also who came with them to boost the morale of their respective teams.
- The two teams are called Pashis and Saathis, who believed to be the descendants of Pandavas and Kauravas of Mahabharata.

6. Lathi



- Lathi is one of the oldest weapon used in martial arts. It was originated in Punjab and Bengal.
- Lathi refers to a ‘stick’ mainly cane sticks which is generally 6 to 8 feet in length and sometimes metal tipped.
- It is also a common sport in various villages of the country..

7. Inbuan Wrestling



- It was started in Mizoram, believed to have its genesis in 1750 A.D. in Duntland village.

5. Gatka

- Gatka is a weapon based martial art form

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- This art consists of very strict rules that prohibit stepping out the circle, kicking and knee bending.
- It also involves catching of the belt worn around their waist by the wrestlers.
- When people migrated from Burma to Lushai hills then this art form was regarded as a sport.

8. Kuttu Varisai



- It was originated and mainly practiced in South India and also popular in north-eastern part of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.
- Techniques: Grappling, striking and locking techniques are used in this art.
- This art was first mentioned in Sangam literature in the first or second century B.C.
- Kuttu Varisai means ‘empty hand combat’.
- It is an unarmed Dravidian martial art used to advance athleticism and footwork through yoga, gymnastics, breathing exercises etc.
- It also uses animal based sets including snake, eagle, tiger, elephant and monkey.

9. Musti Yuddha



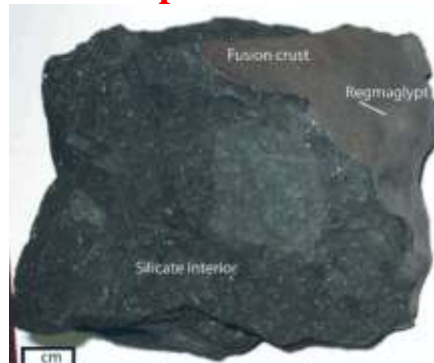
- It is an unarmed martial art form. Since 1960 it is a popular art. Started in Varanasi. Kicks, punches, knee and elbow strikes are the techniques used by this martial art.
- It incorporates the development of all three aspects physical, mental and spiritual.
- The fights in this art are named on the Hindu God and divided into four categories.
- The first is known as Jambuvanti that refers to the forcing the opponent into submission through locking and holding.
- Second is Hanumanti, which is for technical superiority.
- Third refers to Bhimaseni, which focusses on sheer strength and fourth is called Jarasandhi that concentrates on limb and joint breaking.

10. Pari-Khanda



- ‘Pari’ means shield while ‘khanda’ refers to sword. Therefore, both shield and sword are used in this art.
- It involves fighting using Sword and Shield.
- Its steps and techniques are used in Chhau dance of Bihar.

Mukundpura meteorite



- On June 6, 2017, at around 5 a.m., residents of Mukundpura village near Jaipur saw a bright trail in the sky followed by a thunderous sound. They spotted a burning object with a sulphur smell on the soft agricultural land.
- The meteorite broke into several fragments, but a pit of about 15 cm in diameter and 10 cm in depth was formed at the impact site.
- The local police immediately collected it and handed it over to the **Geological Survey of India, Kolkata**.
- Now, a new study has shed light on the mineralogy of the meteorite.

Carbonaceous chondrite

- The meteorite named Mukundpura CM2 was classified to be a **carbonaceous chondrite**. “This is a type of stony meteorite, considered the most primitive meteorite and a remnant of the first solid bodies to accrete in the solar system. The composition of carbonaceous chondrites are also similar to the Sun.
- He adds that meteorites are broadly classified into three groups – stony (silicate-rich), iron (Fe–Ni alloy), and stony-iron (mixed silicate–iron alloy). Chondrites are silicate-droplet-bearing meteorites, and this Mukundpura chondrite is the fifth carbonaceous meteorite known to fall in India.

Degrees of alteration

- The study revealed that Mukundpura CM2 had experienced varying degrees of alteration during the impact.
- Some minerals like forsterite and FeO olivine, calcium aluminium rich inclusion (CAI) minerals escaped alteration.
- Few magnetites, sulphides and calcites were also found. Detailed spectroscopic studies revealed that the meteorite had very high (about 90%) phyllosilicate minerals comprising both magnesium and iron. Further X-ray studies showed it also had aluminium complexes.

Relevance to asteroids

- Dr. Ray adds that the results of the Mukundpura CM2 study are relevant to the surface composition of near-Earth asteroids Ryugu and Bennu.
- In October 2020, NASA’s OSIRIS-REx mission collected samples from Bennu and is expected to return in September 2023.
- Last month, Japan’s Hayabusa-2 mission landed on Earth with samples from Ryugu.
- Spectroscopy results suggest that spectral properties of the surface of these asteroids are consistent with CM carbonaceous meteorites.
- Therefore, a better understanding of the nature and evolution of such meteorites that have been aqueously altered will help considerably in the interpretation of results of these missions,” he writes.

Why it is important to study meteorites?

- On being asked, Dr. Ray explains: “Meteorites are representative of asteroids. Asteroids are the remnant debris of the inner solar system formation process and thus offer the formation history or the building blocks of the planets.
- Therefore, by studying meteorites in the laboratory and asteroids by exploration and sample return mission we try to reconstruct the activity of early solar system events.
- Also, asteroids are often rich in volatiles and other minerals and can be exploited for future planetary exploration.”

Vanadium reserves in Arunachal Pradesh

- Arunachal Pradesh, considered a sleeping hydropower giant, is likely to become India’s prime producer of vanadium, a high-value metal used in strengthening steel and titanium.
- Exploration being carried out by the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has placed the eastern Himalayan State on the vanadium map of the country, and geologists are confident of identifying a deposit soon. India is a significant consumer of vanadium, but is not a

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

primary producer of the strategic metal.

- It is recovered as a by-product from the slag collected from the processing of vanadiferous magnetite ores (iron ore), GSI officials said.
- According to data provided by the GSI, India consumed 4% of about 84,000 tonnes of vanadium produced across the globe in 2017. China, which produces 57% of the world's vanadium, consumed 44% of the metal.
- “We found promising concentrations of vanadium in the palaeo-proterozoic carbonaceous phyllite rocks in the Depo and Tamang areas of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh. This was the first report of a primary deposit of vanadium in India, with an average grade of 0.76% V₂O₅ [vanadium pentoxide],” a GSI specialist said.
- Vanadium mineralisation in Arunachal Pradesh is geologically similar to the “stone coal” vanadium deposits of China hosted in carbonaceous shale. This high vanadium content is associated with graphite, with a fixed carbon content of up to 16%.
- Geologists discovered two bands of about 7-metre thick carbonaceous phyllite for a length of more than 6 km in the Depo area. This prompted the GSI to extend its search to other areas of the State.
- “Good prospects” of vanadium for a cumulative length of 15.5 km and an average thickness of 7 m were found in the Deed, Saiya and Phop areas of Lower Subansiri district. Vanadium content was also found in the Pakro area of Pakke-Kesang district, Palin-Sangram in Kra Daadi, Kalamati in West Siang, Kalaktang in West Kameng and Kaying in Siang district.
- “The expected grade of vanadium mineralisation in Arunachal Pradesh is comparable to the important vanadium deposits of the world. The largest deposits are in China, followed by Russia and South Africa,” the specialist said.

Status of Gender Inequality in India

- Is the electoral promise of paying women for carrying out domestic work and care work a progressive public policy?
- The proposal, put forth by Kamal Haasan's political party, Makkal Needhi Maiam, has generated curiosity and reopened the old but unsettled academic debate. On the face of it, the proposal might appear progressive. However, closer scrutiny suggests otherwise.

Disproportionate burden of work

- Women bear a disproportionately high burden of unpaid domestic work and care work in India.
- It would be instructive here to examine how Tamil Nadu, where the electoral promise is being made, fares vis-à-vis India. The all-India Time Use Survey (2019) says that 82% of females (six years and above) as against 24% of males from Tamil Nadu participate in unpaid domestic work.
- The huge disparity persists even if we look at the age group of 15-59 years: 90% of females and 24% of males participate in domestic work. A similar disparity prevails at the all-India level as well: 81% of females (six years and above) and 26% of males participate in unpaid domestic work. There is an equally huge disparity in the average time spent by participating males and females.
- While females (six years and above) in Tamil Nadu spend, on average, 261 minutes a day in unpaid domestic work, males spend only 91 minutes.
- The corresponding figures for females and males in India are 299 minutes and 97 minutes, respectively.
- The data suggest that females bear more than 83% of the burden of domestic and care work both in Tamil Nadu and India.
- Can the proposed policy address the huge burden that women are forced to endure daily?
- Posed differently, what should a progressive policy proposal aim at: paying

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

women a wage for domestic and care work or addressing the huge gender disparity?

- The insights offered by the feminist economist Diane Elson (2017) are pertinent. The gist of her argument is this: public policy should aim at closing the huge gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work through ‘recognition, reduction and redistribution’ (Triple-R).
- The party’s proposal only satisfies the first component of Triple-R, that is ‘recognition’. Paying a wage is a formal recognition of the fact that unpaid domestic and care work are no less important than paid market work, as the latter is parasitic on the former.
- Since it is women who predominantly carry out unpaid domestic and care activities, often at the expense of their employment prospects and health, the monetary reward is a recognition of their contribution to the well-being of the household and the opportunities forgone by women. The proposal appears progressive, for this reason and to that measure.

Failing two aspects

- If the broader aim of a progressive public policy is to close the gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work, how does the proposal measure up?
- Specifically, will paying women a wage for domestic and care work reduce their disproportionately huge daily burden?
- The proposal not only fails miserably in this aspect, but also has the potential to increase women’s burden.
- This is because paying monetary benefits carries with it the possible danger of formally endorsing the social norm that domestic and care work are ‘women’s work’, for which they are being paid.
- The purportedly progressive proposal thus has the risk of furthering the gender disparity in unpaid work within homes.
- What’s more, it also fails in the other crucial aspect of ‘redistribution’ of the burden of unpaid work.
- In fact, it might give space for men to

claim that women are bound to do these unpaid activities as they are being compensated for the time spent or income foregone, and that women can at best expect men only to help but not participate daily in carrying out these activities.

- The fact that only 24% of men from Tamil Nadu participate in and spend less time than women on unpaid domestic work calls for a policy proposal that increases men’s participation and the time they spend in unpaid work at home.
- Instead of incentivising men to participate more in household work and reducing women’s burden by redistributing the responsibility, the current proposal might do the opposite.
- Incentivising men, monetarily or otherwise, to participate more and spend longer hours in carrying out unpaid domestic work is one thing, but paying women a wage for shouldering the primary responsibility is another. At best, the latter might help meet what the academic Caroline Moser referred to as ‘practical’ gender needs.
- But it cannot possibly address the ‘strategic’ gender needs of reducing and redistributing women’s burden.
- The electoral promise, therefore, lacks the transformative potential of achieving gender equality in sharing unpaid work.

Harvest Festivals of India

Lohri

- Lohri is primarily celebrated by Sikhs and Hindus. It marks the end of the winter season and is traditionally believed to welcome the sun to the northern hemisphere.
- It is observed a night before Makar Sankranti, this occasion involves a Puja Parikrama around the bonfire with prasad.
- It is essentially termed as the festival of the farmers and harvest, whereby, the farmers thank the Supreme Being.

Makar Sankranti

- Makar Sankranti denotes the entry of the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

sun into the zodiac sign of Makara (Capricorn) as it travels on its celestial path.

- The day marks the onset of summer and the six months auspicious period for Hindus known as Uttarayan – the northward movement of the sun.
- As a part of the official celebration of 'Uttarayan', the Gujarat government has been hosting the International Kite Festival since 1989.
- The festivities associated with the day is known by different names in different parts of the country — Lohri by north Indian Hindus and Sikhs, Sukarat in central India, Bhogali Bihu by Assamese Hindus, and Pongal by Tamil and other South Indian Hindus.

Pongal

- The word Pongal means ‘overflow’ or ‘boiling over’. Also known as Thai Pongal, the four-day occasion is observed in the month of Thai, when crops such as rice are harvested and people show their gratitude to the almighty and the generosity of the land.
- Tamilians celebrate the occasion by making traditional designs known as kolams in their homes with rice powder.

Other festivals of India

- **Magha Bihu:** In Assam and many parts of the North East, the festival of Magha Bihu is celebrated. It sees the first harvest of the season being offered to the gods along with prayers for peace and prosperity.
- **Uttarayan:** Gujarat celebrates it in the form of the convivial kite festival of Uttarayan.
- **Maghi:** In Punjab, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Maghi. Bathing in a river in the early hours on Maghi is important.
- **Saaji:** In Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh, Makara Sankranti is known as Magha Saaji. Saaji is the Pahari word for Sankranti, start of the new month. Hence this day marks the start of the month of Magha.
- **Kicheri:** The festival is known as Kicheri

in Uttar Pradesh and involves ritual bathing.

Makaravilakku festival in Sabarimala

- It is celebrated at the sacred grove of Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimala.
- It is an annual seven-day festival, beginning on the day of Makara Sankranti when the sun is in the summer solstice.
- The highlight of the festival is the appearance of Makarajyothi- a celestial star which appears on the day of Makara Sankranti on top of Kantamala Hills.
- Makara Vilakku ends with the ritual called 'Guruthi', an offering made to appease the god and goddesses of the wilderness.

New Monsoon Forecast Model and Madden Julian Oscillation

New Monsoon Forecast Model

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) may introduce new monsoon models this year to better forecast changes in rainfall.
- The monsoon that concluded in 2020 was unique, in that with monsoon 2019, it was only the third time in a century that India saw back-to-back years of above normal rainfall. In both years — and monsoon 2019 was a 25-year high — the IMD failed to forecast the magnitude of the excess and only indicated that the monsoon would be “above normal”.
- D.S. Pai, who heads the IMD’s Climate Research Services, Pune, said in his talk there were three different models that could be tested this year. Two of them were dynamical models and one a statistical model.

Computer simulation

- In the former, the climate on any particular day is simulated on supercomputers and meteorologists observe the changing daily output. The other is the traditional statistical model that equates relationships of physical parameters, such as for instance sea surface temperatures, snowfall, the temperature of landmass etc, with the actual observed rainfall in the

past.

- The **three models** under consideration are:
 1. 12 global circulation models (dynamical) whose outputs would be combined into a single one;
 2. a model that gauges rainfall based on the sea surface temperature in the tropics (developed by Professor Sumant Nigam, University of Maryland, U.S.) and
 3. the statistical model based on climate variables observed during the pre-monsoon. All of them are ‘ensembles’ meaning smaller models are combined to arrive at an average value.
- M. Mohapatra, Director General, IMD, told The Hindu that the traditional statistical model would continue to be used this year. “However, we will continue to have discussions and will decide later on what new approach can be added.”

and the other half in the suppressed convective phase.

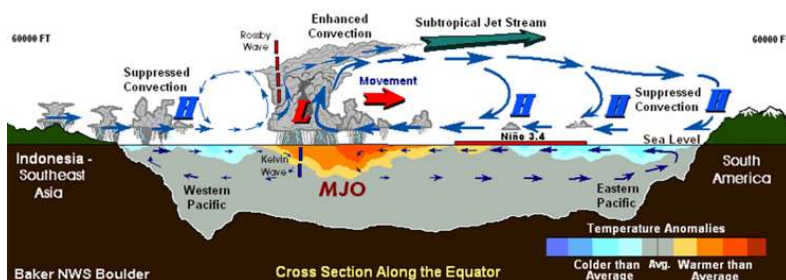
1. Enhanced rainfall (or convective) phase: Winds at the surface converge, and the air is pushed up throughout the atmosphere. At the top of the atmosphere, the winds reverse (i.e., diverge). Such rising air motion in the atmosphere tends to increase condensation and rainfall.

2. Suppressed rainfall phase:

- Winds converge at the top of the atmosphere, forcing air to sink and, later, to diverge at the surface. As air sinks from high altitudes, it warms and dries, which suppresses rainfall.
- It is this entire dipole structure, that moves west to east with time in the Tropics, causing more cloudiness, rainfall, and even storminess in the enhanced convective phase, and more sunshine and dryness in the suppressed convective phase.

What is Madden Julian Oscillation?

Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) in the Tropical Pacific Ocean



- It is an oceanic-atmospheric phenomenon which affects weather activities across the globe. It brings major fluctuation in tropical weather on weekly to monthly timescales.
- 2. The MJO can be defined as an eastward moving 'pulse' of clouds, rainfall, winds and pressure near the equator that typically recurs every 30 to 60 days.
- 3. It's a traversing phenomenon and is most prominent over the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

How Does MJO Affect Indian Monsoon?

- The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), El Nino and MJO are all oceanic and atmospheric phenomena, which affect weather on a large scale. IOD only pertains to the Indian Ocean, but the other two affect weather on a global scale-up to the mid-latitudes.
- IOD and El Nino remain over their respective positions, while MJO is a traversing phenomenon.
- The journey of MJO goes through eight phases.
- When it is over the Indian Ocean during the Monsoon season, it brings good rainfall over the Indian subcontinent.
- On the other hand, when it witnesses a longer cycle and stays over the Pacific Ocean, MJO brings bad news for the Indian Monsoon.
- It is linked with enhanced and suppressed rainfall activity in the tropics and is very important for the Indian monsoonal rainfall.

Phases of MJO

The MJO consists of two parts or phases. Strong MJO activity often dissects the planet into halves. One half within the enhanced convective phase

Periodicity of MJO:

- If it is nearly 30 days then it brings good rainfall during the Monsoon season.
- If it is above 40 days then MJO doesn't

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

give good showers and could even lead to a dry Monsoon.

- Shorter the cycle of MJO, better the Indian Monsoon. Simply because it then visits the Indian Ocean more often during the four-month-long period.
- Presence of MJO over the Pacific Ocean along with an El Nino is detrimental for Monsoon rains.

Tribal issues

- For almost two decades now, Chellappan and his family have been forced to lead a nomadic life after being ‘banished’ from their tribal colony.
- The punishment came after Chellappan, who belongs to the **Muthuvan tribe**, married his maternal cousin, which is prohibited in the community. He and his wife Yasodha were ostracised from the Adichilthotty tribal colony in Athirappilly panchayat in the Edamalayar forest range, straddling Ernakulam and Thrissur districts.
- Since then the couple lived on the banks of the Edamalayar reservoir scrounging a living by fishing. Their two sons, who study at a tribal hostel at Vazhachal, spend their holidays with them in a hut perched atop a rock facing the reservoir.
- “Being ostracised without permanent address means they also do not possess any document, including Aadhaar or ration card; this has stripped them of all government benefits. The Forest Department tries to help Chellappan by using his services as a watcher.
- As per 1951 census, 5.6% of the total population of the country was tribal. According to Census-2011, the number of scheduled tribes in India is 10, 42, 81,034. It is **8.6% of the total population** of India. There are about **550 tribes** in India.
- During 2001-2011 the decadal growth rate of the population of India was 17.64%. During this period the decadal growth rate of the scheduled tribes was **23.7%**.
- States and union territories

having **maximum ratio** of scheduled tribes, as per Census-2011 (in descending order)- **Lakshadweep (94.8%)** > **Mizoram (94.4%)** > Nagaland (86.5%) > Meghalaya (86.1%) > Arunachal Pradesh (68.8%).

- States and Union territories having **minimum ratio** of Scheduled tribes, as per Census-2011 (in ascending order)- **Uttar Pradesh (0.6%)** < **Tamil Nadu (1.1%)** < Bihar (1.3%) < Kerala (1.5%) < Uttarakhand (2.9%).
- **Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry have no population of Scheduled tribes.**

Sex ratio in STs

- As per Census 2011, the sex ratio in India is 943 whereas it is 990 in scheduled tribes.
- The sex ratio of children (0-6 age group) in India is 919 whereas that of it are 957 in scheduled tribes.
- The sex ratio in scheduled tribes is in favour of females in Goa (1046), Kerala (1025), Arunachal Pradesh (1032), Odisha (1029) and Chhattisgarh (1020).
- In Jammu and Kashmir (924) the sex ratio in scheduled tribes is the lowest in the country.

Literacy of Scheduled Tribes

- As per Census 2011, the rate of literacy in India is 72.99% whereas that of it in scheduled tribes is 59%.
- State-wise, the rate of literacy in scheduled tribes is highest in Mizoram (91.7%) and lowest in Andhra Pradesh (49.2%).
- Among union territories, the highest rate of literacy in scheduled tribes is in Lakshadweep (91.7%).

List of Tribes in India

- Arunachal Pradesh = Aptani, Mishmi, Daffla, Miri, Aka, Sinpho, Khamti etc.
- Assam = Chakma, Mikir, Kachari, Bora etc
- Meghalaya = Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Hamar etc
- Nagaland = Angami, Konyak, Lotha etc
- Manipur = Kuki, Lepcha, Mugh etc

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Tripura = Bhutia, Chakma, Garo, Kuki etc
- Mizoram = Mizo, Lakher etc
- West Bengal = Asur, Bhumij, Birhor, Lodha, Lepcha, Magh, Mahali, Malpaharia, Polia etc
- Jharkhand = Santhal, Paharia, Munda, Ho, Birhor, Oraon, Kharia, Tamarua etc
- Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand = Tharu, Bhatia, Jaunsari, Bhoksha, Raji, Khasa, Bhuia, Kharwar, Manjhi, Kol etc
- Odisha = Zuang, Sawara, Karia, Khond, Kandh etc
- Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh = Hill Maria, Muria, Dandami, Gond, Baiga, Parja, Bhattra, Agaria, Bhil, Saharia, Korwa, Halba etc
- Himachal Pradesh = Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnar etc
- Jammu & Kashmir = Gaddi, Bakarwal etc
- Rajasthan = Bhil, Meena, Kathoria, Garasia etc
- Andhra Pradesh and Telangana = Chenchu, Yandai, Kurumba, Khond, Bagdaz, Koya, Bagata, Gadaba etc
- Kerala = Irula, Kurumba, Kadar, Puliyan etc
- Tamil Nadu = Toda, Kota, Kurumba, Badaga etc
- Andaman & Nicobar = Great Andamanese, Nicobarese, Onge, Jarawa, Shompen, Sentanalese etc.

maternal mortality among others.

- This is a generation that was — until the pandemic struck — breaking a millennium of stereotypes and deprivation.

Pre-COVID Situation of Adolescent girls

- Born just as the new century began, adolescent girls in India were seeing never-before school-going rates (10.3% **out-of school girls** in 2006 to **4.1% in 2019**, according to the 2019 ASER report).
- They were pushing the boundaries of academic achievement with **92.15% pass percentage in class XII** versus 86.19 % for boys in the 2020 CBSE board exams).
- They were **marrying later**; the rate of child marriage was 50% in 2000 as against 27% today (UNICEF report on Ending Child Marriage).
- Fewer women were dying in childbirth, thanks to work done by the Government, health and education systems, NGOs, communities, and families.
- Large-scale change makers including the Government were recognizing that working with this age group could potentially nip a host of life-long deprivations like income poverty, food insecurity and preventable morbidities in the bud.
- And, then, the pandemic struck. Girls in schools, working towards their first professional degrees or gaining new exposure and perspectives from the world suddenly found themselves confined to the home.

Impact of COVID-19 on adolescent girls and Education

Prelims Pointers: Education is in the Concurrent List. It was put into Concurrent list (List III under Article 246) after 42nd Constitution Amendment Act, 1976.

- Like the rest of the population, as many as **120 million adolescent girls (data for Mains)** — roughly one-tenth of the nation — are experiencing a never-before situation. However, the disruption they are facing is likely to push back the gains made in the previous decades.
- Adolescent girls' welfare and entitlements are **linked to** a host of development indicators, including **women's workforce participation, morbidity rates and**

COVID-19 Impact on Adolescent girls

The impact of such a phenomenon **on day-to-day lives** needs to be taken into account, says a recent survey among 7,200 teens from **Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha**.

- Instead of going to school, girls reported spending more time **cleaning the household (61%), cooking (59%), washing clothes (44%), washing utensils (41%), and taking care of siblings (23%)**.
- Boys, on the other hand, said they spent

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

most of their time watching TV and farming, among others.

- Nor did girls have optimal access to the **Internet**. Among girls, just 22% knew how to use online learning platforms. Just 12% had access to mobile phones against 35% for boys.
- More than half the girls surveyed said they did not have essential textbooks.
- Not surprisingly, more girls than boys felt they were likely to **drop out of school**.
- Further, a high number of adolescent girls reported that they felt vulnerable to **domestic violence and sexual harassment** during the lockdown.
- **Curbs on their mobility** also increased; only 39% of girls said they were allowed to go out alone compared to 62% of boys of the same age.
- The closure of schools has also led to a lack of a safe space for girls.
- All this underscores what practitioners have highlighted: **without formal school and Internet access, practices such as domestic work, child labour, and early marriage become the only available coping strategies** for families, often enforced through patriarchal norms.

Government Efforts

- The Government of India's ambitious **Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) and School Health and Wellness programmes**, for instance, take a community and school-based approach towards health, nutrition, gender equity, injuries and violence, non-communicable diseases, mental health, and substance misuse.
- Another specific and scalable example is the **Kerala State Education Department's 'First Bell' initiative**, launched on June 1, 2020. Over 600 classes are now running via the **'KITE Victors' television channel**, making lessons accessible to students without smartphone and internet access.
- While the Government of India has programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Pado, Skill India Mission and Digital

India Mission, a **localised approach needs to be worked out**, considering the diversity of the country.

- Coordinated action to end the pandemic-induced crisis for adolescent girls calls for reinforcing programming strategies.
- Addressing health, empowerment, and education needs this early in life will not only help overturn the disruptions of 2020 but also help go a long way towards achieving the Sustainable Goals for Development.

Tropical cyclones

- Tropical cyclones across the globe, **except Atlantic hurricanes**, are moving closer to land in recent decades, a new study found.
- Tropical cyclones generally have been moving westward by about 30 kilometres per decade since 1982, putting them closer to land and making them more dangerous, a study published in Science said.
- Each decade since the 1980s, an additional two cyclones have come within 200 kilometres of land, the study said.

Ominous trends

- Researchers do not quite know why this is happening, but it adds to other ominous trends in cyclone activity.
- Past studies have found that the most intense storms are getting stronger and storms in general are getting wetter, shifting poleward, moving slower and are keeping their power longer after hitting land.
- But while the new study found storms are getting closer to land, researchers still haven't seen a significant increase in landfalls, which “is still a puzzle,” said study lead author Shuai Wang, a cyclone scientist at Imperial College in London.

Atlantic zone

- It's mysterious that, unlike other areas, the Atlantic hurricane basin didn't show any significant westward shift, but that could be because the Atlantic hurricane zone is more closely surrounded by continents, Wang said.
- The busiest tropical cyclone basin is in the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

western Pacific, where there are the most landfalls and the shift westward is twice as big as the global average.

- Wang and his colleagues are still trying to figure out why this westward shift is happening. Storms generally move east to west because of trade winds in the tropics, so a greater westward shift usually puts them closer to where the land is, Wang said.
- Storms that form just west of land, such as in the Pacific off the California and Mexican coasts, are usually moving away from land already, so this shift doesn't spare more land.
- Changes in atmospheric currents that steer storms tend to be pushing cyclones farther west, but why is still an open question, Wang said.
- He said it could be only partly explained by some natural long-term climate cycles.

Other factors

- Other shifts in atmospheric patterns have been connected to human-caused climate change and that's a possible factor in the shift but not something researchers can prove yet, he said.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology hurricane expert Kerry Emanuel said the study is plausible, especially since scientists have already seen a shift of storms more toward the north and south poles, but it raises questions that require follow up, especially why no corresponding increase in landfalls has been found.

GS - II

Britain leaves Europe's single market

- Brexit becomes a reality as Britain leaves Europe's customs union and single market, ending nearly half a century of often turbulent ties with its closest neighbours.
- Brexit has dominated British politics since the country's narrow vote to leave the bloc in June 2016, opening deep political and social wounds which remain raw. But both sides are now keen to move on to a new future.
- Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Brexit “a new beginning in our country's history and a new relationship with the EU as their biggest ally”.
- Legally, Britain left the EU on January 31, but it has been in a transition period during fractious talks to secure a free-trade agreement with Brussels, which was finally clinched on Christmas Eve.
- Once the transition ends, EU rules will no longer apply, with the immediate consequence being an end to the free movement of more than 500 million people between Britain and the 27 EU states.
- Customs border checks will be back for the first time in decades, and despite the free-trade deal, queues and disruption from additional paperwork are expected.
- Britain — a financial and diplomatic big-hitter plus a major NATO power — is the first member state to leave the EU, which was set up to forge unity after the horrors of World War II.
- The EU has lost 66 million people and an economy worth \$2.85 trillion, but Brexit, with its appeal to nationalist populism, also triggered fears that other disgruntled members could follow suit.
- The key financial services sector also faces an anxious wait to learn on what basis it can keep dealing with Europe, after being largely omitted from the Brexit trade deal.
- Northern Ireland's border with EU member state Ireland will be closely watched to ensure that movement is unrestricted — a key plank of a 1998 peace

deal that ended 30 years of violence over British rule.

Iran Nuclear Deal and JCPOA

- Iran has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it intends to produce uranium enriched to up to 20% purity, well beyond the threshold set by the **2015 Vienna accord**, the UN nuclear watchdog said.
- Iran informed the agency of its intention to enrich uranium at a rate of up to 20% in its **Fordow** underground plant, to comply with a law recently passed by the Iranian Parliament.
- According to the latest report available from the UN agency, published in November, Tehran was enriching uranium to levels greater than the limit provided for in the Vienna agreement (3.67%) but not exceeding the 4.5% threshold, and still complied with the Agency's very strict inspection regime.
- But there has been turmoil since the assassination in late November of Iranian nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.
- In the aftermath of the attack, blamed on Israel, hardliners in Tehran pledged a response and Parliament passed a controversial law calling for the production and storage of “at least 120 kg per year of 20% enriched uranium” and to “put an end” to the IAEA inspections intended to check that the country is not developing an atomic bomb.
- The Iranian government had opposed the initiative at the time.

What is the Iran nuclear deal?

- It is officially called the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**.
- Commonly as the **Iran nuclear deal** or **Iran deal**, is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—

- It was signed between **Iran and the P5**, plus Germany and the EU in 2015. P5 is the 5 permanent members of the UNSC (US, China, France, Russia, and UK).
- Under JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years.
- For the next 15 years Iran will only enrich uranium up to 3.67%. Iran also agreed not to build any new heavy-water facilities for the same period of time.
- Uranium-enrichment activities will be limited to a single facility using first-generation centrifuges for 10 years. Other facilities will be converted to avoid proliferation risks.
- To monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities.
- The agreement provides that in return for verifiably abiding by its commitments, Iran will receive relief from U.S., European Union, and UNSC nuclear-related sanctions.
- On 5 January 2020, in the aftermath of the Baghdad Airport Airstrike that targeted and killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, Iran declared that it would no longer abide by the limitations of the deal but would continue to coordinate with the IAEA, leaving open the possibility of resuming compliance.

- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an international organization that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.
- The IAEA was established as an autonomous organization in 1957.
- Though established independently of the United Nations through its own international treaty, the IAEA Statute, the IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- The IAEA has its headquarters in **Vienna, Austria**.
- The IAEA has two "Regional Safeguards Offices" which are located in Toronto, Canada, and in Tokyo, Japan.
- The IAEA serves as an intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical co-operation in the peaceful use of nuclear technology and nuclear power worldwide.
- The IAEA and its former Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2005.
- Recently Iran has refused to allow IAEA to two sites where nuclear activity may have occurred in the past (Parachin and Frodo).

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



Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

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.
- **2005**: Israel begins a unilateral withdrawal of Jews from settlements in Gaza. However, Israel kept tight control over all border crossings (blockade).
- **2006**: Hamas scores a victory in Palestinian Authority elections. The vote leaves the Palestinian house divided between Fatah movement, represented by President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, which will control the cabinet and parliament. Efforts at cohabitation fail almost immediately.
- **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.
- **2012**- UN upgrades Palestinian representation to that of "non-member observer state".
- **2014**- Israel responds to the kidnapping and murder of three Jewish teenagers in the West Bank by arresting numerous Hamas members. Militants respond by firing rockets from Gaza. Clashes end in uneasy Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.
- **2014**- Fatah and Hamas form a unity government, though distrust remains between the two factions.



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.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- 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.
- **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.

China amends National Defence Law

- China's President Xi Jinping has signed an order that has amended China's National Defence Law, giving the Central Military Commission (CMC), which he heads, greater power in mobilising resources to protect a new and broader definition of what constitutes the national interest.
- The revised regulations on military equipment, which are effective as of January 1, focus on “war preparedness and combat capabilities”, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Sunday, adding that they “define the basic tasks, contents and management mechanisms for military equipment work under the new situation and system.”
- The document, which State media said comprised 100 stipulations in 14 chapters, follows “the general principle of the CMC exercising overall leadership, theater commands responsible for military operations and the services focusing on developing capabilities.”
- Draft amendments released last year noted that “when China's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, and security and development interests are under threat, the country can conduct nationwide or local defense mobilisation”.
- The phrase “development interests” was a new addition to the law, with experts noting this also included the protection of China's economic activities and assets overseas, such as those under the Belt and Road Initiative, as a reason for defence mobilisation.
- The amendment **broadened the scope of key security fields** beyond land borders, maritime and air defence, to include outer space and electromagnetic networks. The amendment also said China “will participate in global security governance, join multilateral security talks and push for and set up a set of international rules that is widely accepted, fair and reasonable”,

State media reported.

Greater control

- The amendments, experts said, were also aimed at increasing the control exercised by the CMC and transferring some decision-making previously exercised by the State Council, or Cabinet, that runs the government, to the CMC. The broader goal is to speed up the modernisation plans for the People's Liberation Army (PLA).
- After Mr. Xi assumed the role of General Secretary of the Communist Party in 2012 and as President the following year, a number of measures have restructured the Party-State apparatus, handing back greater political control to Party bodies that previously had left decision-making to the government machinery.
- In 2016, Mr. Xi pushed sweeping reforms of the PLA and brought its various departments under more direct control of the CMC, which he heads. Seven military regions were reorganised into five integrated theater commands. The Western Theater Command, the largest, is responsible for the border with India.
- The revised regulations would push Chinese military development “in two major aspects”, according to Song Zhongping, a military expert in Beijing, who told the Party-run Global Times the amendments would push faster research and development as well as improve management of existing military equipment.
- Mr. Song said the theater commands would be given a greater role “to provide the direction for the future development of weaponry based on the demand of winning a future war.”
- The change comes amid a push for closer civil-military fusion, with a target to make the PLA a “world class” military, or on par with the United States military, by 2049, when the People's Republic of China turns 100.
- The South China Morning Post reported the amendment underlines the need “to build a nationwide coordination mechanism for the mobilisation of state-

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

owned and private enterprises to take part in research into new defence technologies covering conventional weapons, as well as the non-traditional domains of cybersecurity, space and electromagnetics.”

- The new moves, the Post said, have “expanded the power” of the CMC “to mobilise military and civilian resources in defence of the national interest, both at home and abroad” and would also “weaken the role of the State Council” in “formulating military policy” by “handing decision-making powers to the CMC.”
- “The CMC is now formally in charge of making national defence policy and principles, while the State Council becomes a mere implementing agency to provide support to the military,” Zeng Zhiping, a former PLA colonel who is a military law expert at Soochow University, told the paper.

Governor

Article 153 states that there shall be a Governor for each state. Same person can be appointed as Governor for 2 or more states was added by **7th amendment act 1956**. **Article 154** states that the executive power of the state is vested in him and is exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him.

Appointment & Tenure (Article 155 & 156)

- Governor is the executive **Head/Nominal Head** of the State.
- Governor of a State is appointed by the **President**.
- **Hold office during the pleasure of the President.**
- May resign by submitting his resignation to the President.
- Otherwise the normal term of his office is **5 years**.
- Grounds for removal of the Governor are **not mentioned** in the Constitution; however he must be involved in the gross delinquency like bribery, treason or violation of the Constitution for such an action.
- A President may transfer a Governor

appointed to one State to another State for rest of the term.

- A Governor whose term has expired may be reappointed in the same State or any other State.

Qualifications & Conditions for office (article 157 & 158) of Governor

He must be -

- A citizen of India.
- Has attained 35 years of age.
- Not a Member of Parliament or state legislature.
- Not hold any office of profit under the government.
- His emoluments, allowances and privileges are determined by parliament by law.
- The emoluments are charged on the Consolidated Fund of India and cannot be diminished during his term of office.
- If the same person acts as Governor of 2 or more states, the Constitution provides that President may decide about the allocation of emoluments of Governor among states proportion wise (Article 158(3A)).

Oath

Article 159 says that the Governor and every person discharging the functions of the Governor is to take an oath or affirmation before the Chief Justice of the High Court of that state, or in his absence, the senior-most judge of that court available.

Article 160 gives the president the power to make such provision as he thinks fit for the discharge of the functions of the Governor in any contingency not provided for in the Constitution.

Executive Powers of Governor

- **Article 166:** All executive actions of the state are to be taken in the name of the Governor. He acts as a representative of President in the state. He has power to recommend President that the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. This leads to the imposition of President rule in the State under Article 356.
- All major appointments in the state are made by the Governor - those of CM,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Ministers, and Advocate-General (and decide his remuneration). Chairman & members of State Public Service Commission (PSC), State Election Commissioner and Finance Commission. Members and Chairman of State PSC are however removed by President.

- He is the **Chancellor** of various universities in the state and appoints their Vice-Chancellors.

Legislative Powers of Governor

- He is an integral part of the state legislature, though not a member of it, he discharges some important legislative functions.
- He summons the house(s) of the legislature of state to meet at such a time and place as he thinks fit. However 6 months must not lapse between the last sitting in one session and the first in the next session.
- He may prorogue the house(s) and dissolve the legislative assembly.
- He has right to reserve certain bills for the assent of the President [**Article 200**].
- He nominates 1/6th of the members of Legislative council having special knowledge in literature, science, arts, cooperative movement and social service.
- Decides on the question of disqualification of a member State Legislature in consultation with Election Commission.
- His most important power is the ordinance making power [**Article 213**].
- But the Governor cannot issue an ordinance without the previous instructions from the President in cases in which-
 - (a) Bill would have required his previous sanction;
 - (b) Required to be reserved under the Constitution for the assent of the President.

- The ordinances have to be approved by the state legislature, in the same way as the Parliament does in case of Presidential ordinances.
- The scope of the ordinance making power of the Governor
- is co-extensive with the legislative powers of the State Legislature and is confined to

the subjects mentioned in state List and Concurrent List.

- Submission of reports from Auditor General, State Public Service Commission, State Finance Commission, etc. before the Legislature.

Discretionary Powers of Governor

- Discretion of the Governor is wider than that of the President. Article 163 (2) provides that as to the question of matter of discretion, it is the Governor himself who decides which matter falls in his discretion. And his action based on such discretion shall not be called in question.
- Though in most of the matters he has to act on the advice of Council of Ministers, but there are some matters in which he can act according to his discretion.
- He selects the CM if no party has clear-cut majority.
- Dismissal of Ministry if he is convinced that it has lost majority support. But SC in **S.R. Bommai Vs UOI (1994)** case directed that his opinion must not be subjective and compulsory floor-testing must be done.
- Dissolving the Legislative Assembly.
- Submission of report to the President regarding failure of constitutional machinery in the State.
- Reservation of certain bills for the consideration of the President (Article 200). He must reserve the bill that endangers the position of high court. In addition, he can also reserve the bills that are against the provisions of Constitution, are against larger national interest or DPSP and those which deal with compulsory acquisition of property under Article 31 A.

Financial Powers of Governor

- A money bill cannot be introduced in the Legislative Assembly of the State without the recommendation of the Governor.
- No demand of grants can be made except on the recommendation of the Governor.
- The Governor is required to cause to be laid before the house or houses of the legislature “annual financial statements”,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

that is “Budget” [Article 202].

- He constitutes a finance commission after every five years to review the financial position of the panchyats and the municipalities.

Judicial powers of governor

- Governor appoints judges of the courts below HC
- He is consulted by the President before appointing judges of the HC.
- Under Article 161 he can grant pardons, reprieves, remission of punishment to the persons convicted under state laws. However he has no power to pardon a sentence of death or remit sentence by the court martial (military court).

Other Powers

The Governor receives the report of the Auditor General and places it before the State Legislature. He places the report of the state Public Service Commission along with the observations of the Council of Ministers before the State Legislature. As chancellor of various universities within the jurisdiction of the state, he appoints the vice-chancellors of the universities.

Comparison between Powers and Position of the president and the Governor

President	Governor
The President is not only the Head of the State internal and the Government, he is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed the Forces.	Each state has its own laws and the Governor, who looks after governance of every state. He is the person, who finalises the budget of the state and also has power to appoint judges in the courts.
The President cannot function without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.	Governor can exist without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
The President can grant pardon, reprieve, respite, suspension, remission of Commutation in respect to punishment or sentence by a Court Martial.	Governor can suspend, remit or commute a death sentence. The Governor does not enjoy power of pardoning a death sentence.

Every Ordinary Bill, after it is passed by both the houses of the Parliament either single or at a joint sitting is presented to the President for his assent.	Every Ordinary bill after it is passed by the Legislative Assembly in case of a Unicameral Legislature or both the Houses in case a Bicameral Legislature either in the first instance or in the second instance is presented to the Governor for his assent.
I Every Money Bill after it is passed by both House of the Parliament is presented to the President for his assent.	Every Money Bill after it is the passed by the State Legislature is presented to the Governor for his assent.
A President needs no instructions for making an ordinance	Governor can make an ordinance without the instructions from the President only in three cases i.e. if a bill containing the same provisions would have required the previous sanction of the President for its introduction into the State Legislature or if he would have deemed it necessary to reserve a Bill containing the same provisions for the consideration of the President or it an act of the State Legislature containing the same provisions would have been invalid without receiving the President's assent.

Central Vista Project approved



- The Supreme Court, in a majority judgment, gave its go-ahead to the multi-crore Central Vista redevelopment project, which proposes to build a new Parliament three times bigger than the existing 93-year-old heritage building and modify the use of 86.1 acres of land, home to India's power corridor in the national capital.
- In their majority opinion, Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari said

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

the court cannot order the government to desist from spending money on one project and use it for something else.

- They said the government did not act against public trust.
- They brushed aside allegations that the government committed foul play and illegally carved out the Parliament project from the Central Vista project.
- The majority opinion said the project did not involve any “radical” change in land use. The proposed change in landscape would not limit “recreational spaces” for the public.
- It dismissed notions that the project was “sui generis” (unique) and deserved a “heightened judicial review”.
- “The right to development is a basic human right and no organ of the state is expected to become an impediment in the process of development as long as the government proceeds in accordance with law,” Justice Khanwilkar wrote.
- Justice Sanjeev Khanna, in a separate dissent, upheld the project bid notice, award of consultancy and the order of the Delhi Urban Arts Commission, but concluded that the Centre did not take the public into confidence about the changes proposed for Central Vista, an area, which in post-Independent India, “inspires and connects common people to the citadels of our democracy”.

About Central Vista Project

Path cleared

A chronology of the Central Vista project

Sept. 2019: Govt. announces Central Vista revamp plan; it envisages a new triangular Parliament House with a seating capacity for 900 to 1,200 MPs and several govt. buildings

Feb. 11, 2020: Delhi HC asks Delhi Development Authority to approach the court before notifying any change in the Master Plan before going ahead with the project

Feb. 28: Division bench stays order on an appeal by DDA, Centre

July 17: Supreme Court starts hearing a batch of pleas raising various issues, including environmental clearance and land use, related to the project



Nov. 5: SC reserves verdict

Dec. 7: SC allows Centre to proceed with foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Central Vista project but restrains it from starting construction

Dec. 10: Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone for the project

Jan. 5, 2021: SC clears the decks for construction of the ambitious project

redevelopment project in 2019.

The project has the following features

- Constructing a triangular Parliament building next to the existing one.
- Constructing Common Central Secretariat.
- Revamping of the 3-km-long Rajpath — from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.
- North and South Block to be repurposed as museums.

Why is the need of revamping Central Vista?

- The Parliament building's facilities and infrastructure are inadequate to meet the current demand.
- The offices of the Central Government are spread over different locations which affects inter-departmental coordination, and unnecessary travel leading to congestion and pollution.
- Most of the existing buildings have outlived their structural lives.

History of Central Vista: PT Pointers

- Currently, the Central Vista of New Delhi houses Rashtrapati Bhawan, Parliament House, North and South Block, India Gate, National Archives among others.
- In December, 1911, King George V made an announcement in Delhi Durbar (a grand assembly) to shift the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi.
- Delhi Durbar was hosted to mark the coronation of King George V.
- The task of constructing a new city was given to Edwin Lutyens, known for his

strong adherence to European Classicism and Herbert Baker, a prominent architect in South Africa.

• Herbert Baker is also the architect of the Union buildings at Pretoria, South Africa.

• Parliament House building was designed by both Lutyens and Baker.

• Rashtrapati Bhavan was designed by Edwin Lutyens.

• The Secretariat which includes both north and south block was designed

by Herbert Baker.

- The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs proposed a Central Vista

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

- Gulf leaders signed a “solidarity and stability” deal after leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar publicly embraced, bringing Doha back into the regional fold after a three-year-long rift.
- Saudi Arabia had led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond to cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017, charging that it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups — allegations that Doha denied.
- Those countries, along with Oman and Kuwait, which have mediated between the two sides, signed a deal in Al-Ula, after Riyadh overnight re-opened its land, sea and air borders to Doha.
- “There is a desperate need today to unite our efforts to promote our region and to confront challenges that surround us, especially the threats posed by the Iranian regime’s nuclear and ballistic missile programme and its plans for sabotage and destruction,” said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.
- The details of the agreement were not immediately released, and analysts warned that any deal could be preliminary in nature and may not immediately end all the measures taken against Qatar.

About Gulf Cooperation Council, 1981



- GCC is a regional intergovernmental

political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf except Iraq and Iran, namely: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

- It was established at Abu Dhabi.
- Objectives
 1. Customs Union; Common market; Common currency.
 2. similar regulations in various fields such as religion, finance, trade, tourism, legislation, and administration.
 3. Unified military
 4. Set up joint ventures, private sector.

Disintegration of GCC: Qatar crisis

- Blockade of Qatar in 2017 by Saudi, UAE and Bahrain because it is accused of terrorist funding.
- Qatar said it will not discuss the compromise until the blockade is removed.
- Plus there was an issue of killing of Khashoggi who was a Saudi Journalist.
- Qatar is the largest exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).
- Blockade has made Qatar only more independent in Foreign Policy decisions.
 - It increased assistance for Hamas, Gaza.
 - It increased plan to allow Turkey to set up military camp.
 - It resists call to cut ties with Iran.

India and Gulf Countries

- Gulf countries need Indians to work for them. NRI gives remittances and India's CAD is reduced by Forex.
- India tried before 1st lockdown to bring people from these countries. But still they are in West Asia and these countries are discriminatory in nature (no test facilities, captured passport, no wages).
- India should provide holistic policy for them and bilaterally we can improve ties.
- Around 8 million people are in West Asia and 50% of them are unskilled and 30% are semi skilled.
- Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha are important

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

transit for international travel. Thousands of Indian tourists were also stranded there during COVID.

SC Judicial Activism and Anti Conversion Law

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to examine the constitutional validity of laws enacted by States, such as Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, that criminalise religious conversion via marriage and mandate prior official clearance before marrying into another faith.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, however, did not stay the implementation of the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, despite fervent pleas.
- Mr. Singh argued that the burden of proof was on those who married to show they were not doing so to get converted. “Those who are found guilty under these laws stare at a 10-year prison sentence. The offences are non-bailable. We are getting reports that people are being picked up in the middle of weddings on suspicion of religious conversion,” he said.
- However, the Bench, which asked the petitioners to go to the respective State High Courts with their challenge, did not stay the implementation of the laws.
- “This is the problem. We have already issued notice. You have come here under Article 32 of the Constitution...” Chief Justice Bobde said and resisted the plea for stay.
- Mr. Singh said the laws concerned violation of the fundamental rights of dignity and liberty enshrined under Article 21.
- They had been enacted despite a series of judgments by the Supreme Court, including in **the Hadiya case**, that right to marry a person of one’s choice was part of an adult’s privacy.

Advertising in the name of God is illegal

- The Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court has declared that advertisement of any article using the name of any God and claiming that it has supernatural qualities, is “**illegal**” and falls under the **Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act**.
- A division bench of justices T.V. Nalawade and M.G. Sewlikar was hearing a petition filed by Rajendra Ambhore, a teacher, seeking a direction and injunction to prevent advertisements on television channels that promote the sale of articles like Hanuman Chalisa Yantra.
- Mr. Ambhore said that in March 2015, he came across advertisements on TV claiming special, miraculous and supernatural properties/qualities in Hanuman Chalisa Yantra prepared by one Baba Mangalnath, who had achieved ‘siddhi’ (supernatural powers) and was blessed by Lord Hanuman. The Yantra costs Rs. 4,900 and was said to be made of 24-carat gold. Singers and such other celebrities were shown in the ads talking about their experience, the plea said.
- The court said telemarketers change the names of companies, Gods and Babas to show that each was a different Yantra. The court went on to say, “The objectives quoted in the Black Magic Act can be achieved mainly through education. Reformists like **Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar**, who worked to remove evil practices and spread awareness against superstition, were born on this soil.”
- It could safely be said that at least basic education was available to everybody in the State.

Analysis of Central Vista Project



Beyond judicial clearance, Central Vista should be able to achieve national consensus

- With the Supreme Court's 2-1 judgment clearing the Central Vista project for New Delhi, the Narendra Modi government can now indelibly **reshape the national capital's visual landscape**.
- Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari found no infirmity in the approvals granted by the **Central Vista Committee**, Delhi Urban Art Commission, the Heritage Conservation Committee and other bodies, paving the way for **a new Parliament building** and other edifices of government to come up.
- Justice Sanjiv Khanna, while agreeing with the majority opinion on the call for bid, award and the decision of the Urban Commission, dissented on the key issue of **public participation in the entire exercise**, which vitiated the endorsement of land use change.
- Governments should naturally be free to plan policies and programmes on behalf of the people, with no prior restraint, but **subject to judicial review to ensure accountability**.
- Judged against this principle, the Centre is simply exercising its privilege to plan a new set of buildings to house its establishment and the federal legislature.
- While the final cost estimate is unclear, planned expenditures are in excess of **Rs. 13,450 crore** for, among other things, a new Central Secretariat, Vice-President's enclave and Prime Minister's residence, besides **Rs. 971 crore** for the new Parliament.
- With a national consensus, such a colossal plan might be a crowning achievement for the 75th year of Independence in 2022.
- What is germane to the question, however, is **its appropriateness** in a year of unprecedented disruption due to COVID-19.
- This is when an elected government must give its undivided attention to schemes for the common weal and not be tempted into extravagant indulgence.
- As Justice Khanna has pointed out, public consultation in a democracy requires citizens to be able to assess the project's rationale, armed with information on the official reasoning, and with sufficient time at their disposal.
- The essence of their view should inform the final decision.
- Opportunities for public consultation, already incorporated into modern laws and also in the Delhi Development Act, in no way fetter the executive.
- It would be appropriate, therefore, for the Centre to attempt consensus-building on Central Vista, without showing undue anxiety and haste in taking up all planned structures together.
- The pandemic's course points to uncertainty on restoration of economic health, and ameliorating the damage to large sectors of the economy, especially in services.
- In the run-up to 2022, the government will be tested on its ability to ensure good health for all citizens, revive normative education and provide stronger welfare.
- Prioritising Central Vista can prove to be a distraction from the task.

Pro-Trump Mob Attack on USA Parliament



- The U.S. Congress confirmed Democrat Joe Biden as the presidential election winner after a violent mob loyal to President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol in a stunning attempt to overturn the presidential election.
- Lawmakers were resolved to complete the Electoral College tally in a display to the country, and the world, of the nation's enduring commitment to uphold the will of the voters and the peaceful transfer of power. They pushed through the night, with tensions high and the nation's capital on alert.
- The lawmakers confirmed that Mr. Biden had won the election. Mr. Trump, who repeatedly refused to concede the election, said in a statement immediately after the vote that there would be a smooth transition of power on Inauguration Day (20 January).
- The Capitol was under siege, as the nation's elected representatives scrambled to crouch under desks and don gas masks while the police futilely tried to barricade the building, one of the most jarring scenes ever to unfold in a seat of American political power.
- A woman was shot and killed inside the Capitol, and Washington's Mayor instituted an evening curfew to contain the violence.
- The rioters were egged on by Mr. Trump, who has spent weeks falsely attacking the

integrity of the election and had urged his supporters to descend on Washington to protest against Congress' formal approval of Mr. Biden's victory.

- Some Republican lawmakers were in the midst of raising objections to the results on his behalf when the proceedings were abruptly halted by the mob.
- Congress reconvened in the evening, with lawmakers decrying the protests and vowing to finish confirming the Electoral College vote for Mr. Biden's election, even if it took all night.
- The President gave his supporters a boost into action on Wednesday morning at a rally outside the White House, where he urged them to march to the Capitol. He spent much of the afternoon in his private dining room off the Oval Office watching scenes of the violence on television.
- A sombre President-elect Biden, two weeks away from being inaugurated, said American democracy was “under unprecedented assault”, a sentiment echoed by many in Congress, including some Republicans. Former President George W. Bush said he watched the events in “disbelief and dismay”.

History of Capitol Attacks

- The domed Capitol building has for centuries been the scene of protests and occasional violence.
- In more than 220 years, the US Capitol had seen nothing like it: a roiling mob, forcing its way past its majestic marble columns, disrupting the passage of power, desecrating the seat of the world's greatest democracy.
- But this was far from the first time the Capitol has been scarred by violence.
- In 1814, just 14 years after the building opened, British forces in the War of 1812 tried to burn it down. The invaders looted the building first, and then set the southern and northern wings ablaze incinerating the Library of Congress. A sudden rainstorm prevented its total destruction, but the building was left “a most magnificent ruin,” according to architect Benjamin

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Henry Latrobe.

- The building has been bombed many a times. There has been shootings. One legislator almost killed another.
- The most famous episode occurred in 1954, when four Puerto Rican nationalists unfurled the island’s flag and, shouting “Freedom for Puerto Rico,” unleashed a barrage of about 30 shots from the visitor’s gallery of the House. Five congressmen were injured, one of them seriously.
- Before and since, the building has been a target. In 1915, a German man planted three sticks of dynamite in the Senate reception room; it went off shortly before midnight, when no one was around.
- More recently, the Weather Underground set off an explosive in 1971 to protest the U.S. bombing of Laos, and the May 19th Communist Movement bombed the Senate in 1983 in response to the invasion of Grenada. Neither caused any deaths or injuries, but both resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage and led to tougher security measures.
- The most deadly attack on the Capitol occurred in 1998, when a mentally ill man fired at a checkpoint and killed two Capitol Police officers.

- And I mean on direct threats to India, we have always been very clear.
- Whether on Kashmir we have been very supportive of India in the Security Council, we have not let the Chinese play any kind of procedural games,” Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron, said at a webinar.
- Referring to the stand-off in eastern Ladakh, he said that when it came to the Himalayas, the statement had been “perfectly clear”. “What we say publicly, we say to the Chinese also privately. We need to be robust...” Mr. Bonne said.
- Mr. Bonne was in India for the third India-France strategic dialogue led by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval from the Indian side.
- Mr. Bonne thanked India for its support recently in “countering disinformation” from Turkey and Pakistan, and said that their relations with Pakistan were “at a historic low”.
- “We very much appreciate the support we got not only from your authorities but also from Indian civil society when our country was under attack by some leaders in Turkey and Pakistan and in other countries,” he said.
- Saying that they wanted China to respect “certain rules, be less aggressive,” Mr. Bonne said China should work in the same framework as others and it was important for France to be more defensive, aggressive but also be more dynamic and nimble, and join forces.

India – France relations and Stand on China

- A day after the Chinese Ambassador in India objected to the outgoing U.S. Ambassador’s comments on the India-China stand-off, a senior French diplomat said that “when China breaks rules, we have to be very robust and very clear”.
- When it came to direct threats to India, he said, France had always been supportive on Kashmir at the UN Security Council and did “not let the Chinese play any procedural games”.
- “Let us not go for confrontation — it’s much easier to say this from Paris, [than] from Delhi when you almost have a problem in the Himalayas and when you have Pakistan at your border.

Judicial Reforms

- Justice Lokur discusses about the Judiciary and the Judicial Reforms needed for the country.
- Judges should not be “hypersensitive” about criticism.
- It was high time judges sat down for an introspection on what had gone wrong and what was to be done, he said.
- There should be a “robust, strong, uninhibited and informed criticism of the functioning of the judiciary”.

- The Supreme Court has been at the centre of a furious public debate on various aspects, including a Chief Justice of India becoming a Rajya Sabha member after retirement and the trial and punishment of civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan for allegedly scandalising the top court.
- Mr. Ram pointed out that the “scandalising the court” provision in the contempt law should be struck down by the court itself. Parliament would not do it. The provision was vague, arbitrary and had a chilling effect on free speech.
- He said the case against Mr. Bhushan was “shocking” and one must push the line with well-informed criticism of the judiciary.
- “It is important for people to have the opportunity and entitlement to criticise the judiciary, to call it out when judiciary is corrupt or arbitrary or allows itself to be submissive to external influences.
- Was the January 12 press conference of the judges a contempt?
- A lot of people applauded [the four judges, including Justice Lokur, who held the press conference],” Mr. Ram said.
- Ms. Guruswamy said the contempt of court law should be scrapped.

Justice Lokur, however, said it was for each individual judge to decide whether or not to accept post-retirement assignments.

USTR slams India’s digital tax

- Digital services taxes adopted by India, Italy and Turkey discriminate against U.S. companies and are inconsistent with international tax principles, the U.S. Trade Representative’s office said, paving the way for potential retaliatory tariffs.
- USTR, releasing the findings of its “Section 301” investigations into the digital taxes, said it was not taking specific actions at this time, but “will continue to evaluate all available options.”
- The probes are among several still open USTR Section 301 investigations that

could lead to tariffs before President Donald Trump leaves office or early in the administration of President-elect Joe Biden.

‘Tax impacts U.S. firms’

- USTR has concluded the digital taxes imposed by France, India, Italy and Turkey discriminate against big U.S. tech firms, such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon.com.
- In the latest report, the USTR also said the Indian, Italian and Turkish taxes were “unreasonable” because they are “inconsistent with principles of international taxation, including due to its application to revenue rather than income, extraterritorial application, and failure to provide tax certainty.

‘Does not discriminate’

- India on Thursday said the 2% equalisation levy does not discriminate against U.S. companies as it applies equally to all non-resident e-commerce operators irrespective of their country of residence, Press Trust of India reported.
- In a statement, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said the purpose of the levy is to ensure fair competition, reasonableness and exercise the ability of governments to tax businesses that have a close nexus with the Indian market through their digital operations.
- It also does not have extraterritorial application as it applies only on the revenue generated from India, the ministry said.

Geopolitics of South Asia

- China has held its third multilateral dialogue with countries from South Asia to take forward closer cooperation on fighting COVID-19 and coordinating their economic agendas, reflecting a new approach in Beijing’s outreach to the region.
- The third dialogue, held virtually on January 6, brought together every country

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

in the region barring India, Bhutan and the Maldives, and was aimed at “anti-epidemic cooperation and poverty reduction cooperation”, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

- All three dialogues have been attended by Pakistan and Nepal, which are emerging as two lynchpins in China’s regional strategy.
- The first such meeting was convened by China in July, and was attended by Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan.
- This was followed by a grouping in November attended by China, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- The January 6 meeting was attended by all five countries that have taken part in these dialogues — Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh — and was a follow-up to the two earlier meetings, Ms. Hua said.
- “In this meeting, the representatives shared their experience on anti-epidemic and poverty relief,” she said. “They talked about dealing with the impact of the pandemic, resuming economic and trade cooperation, dealing with non-traditional security challenges and advancing sustainable development, and reached an initial consensus.
- It shows our strong will and confidence in dealing with challenges together and achieving cooperation.
- China would like to work with all sides in implementing our consensus and to make greater contribution to building a regional community with shared future for health.”
- In the previous two rounds, the countries also discussed how to work more closely together under China’s Belt and Road Initiative to boost their post-COVID-19 economic recovery and agreed that countries linked by land ports should establish joint response mechanisms in border areas, apart from committing to greater information sharing and international cooperation.

CPEC extension

- At the July quadrilateral dialogue with

Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, as well as taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, called the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network.

- Mr. Wang told the conference the four countries were “connected by mountains and rivers”, and also offered to share China’s expertise and capacities on COVID-19 vaccines. The Foreign Minister also hit out at countries that had “politicised” the pandemic and “undermined cooperation for their own political needs”, saying they would be “nailed to history’s pillar of shame forever”.

India – Maldives relations

Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, rose to power in 2018, promising democratic governance and justice to citizens. While the two years he has completed in office have seen major policy changes, his incumbent government faces many challenges, only heightened by the pandemic. In an email interview, President Solih speaks on economic revival plans, regional cooperation, and responds to criticism over his government’s “over-reliance” on India.

Mr. President, you have completed over two years in office. How would you evaluate your performance?

- This administration has accomplished much in the past two years across every major policy sphere. We have made education free up to the first undergraduate degree; initiated a health sector reform programme which has seen the upgrading of medical centres; we’ve strengthened our decentralisation legislation to empower local communities and reverse decades of over-centralisation.
- We have also demonstrated our commitment to gender equality by legally mandating that 1/3rd of our local councils be comprised of women and by appointing the first ever women justices to the Maldives’ Supreme Court. We have

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

repealed regressive legislation such as a defamation act that criminalised speech critical of the government.

- On the international front we have reinvigorated our relationships with our global partners, re-entered the Maldives into important organisations such as the Commonwealth of Nations, and reiterated our ambitions towards mitigation and adaption against the climate emergency.

Like the rest of the world, the Maldives too is reeling under the impact of the pandemic. How do you plan to revive your economy?

- Our economy has long been reliant on tourism. The pandemic and the consequent restrictions on global air travel have adversely affected this industry and the overall economy. With the reopening of our borders, and stringent health measures in place at our resorts in accordance with guidelines developed by our health authorities and Tourism Ministry, the tourism industry is now slowly recovering, as is our economy. However, the pandemic has also made clear the danger of our economy being overly reliant on a single sector.
- We will also need international assistance and support for our recovery efforts, to shore up our depleted foreign currency reserves, and reduce our debt burden.

The Maldivian Auditor-General recently voiced concern over your government’s “heavy reliance” on a single country for grants, alluding to India. Given that Male-New Delhi bilateral relations improved drastically after your election, how do you respond to that?

- We appreciate the proactive role that India has taken in economic relief efforts and providing financial assistance to the Maldives, as well as for its continued development assistance. We are also very happy that bilateral relations have improved with India, as it has between the Maldives and many of our partners across the globe. The Maldives is keen to engage with all our partners.
- It is significant, because the political

opposition and critics of your government have accused your administration of “selling off Maldives” to India, taking out rallies on Male’s streets and leading ‘India out’ campaigns on social media.

- Moving away from an isolationist foreign policy and engaging with our neighbours strengthen our national security and increase respect for us as a sovereign country. The Maldives makes no apologies for our positive engagement with our largest neighbour, and one of our closest international partners, India.
- We welcome constructive criticism of our foreign policy, as well as other aspects of our governance. Undermining relationships that are in the interest of the Maldives for the sake of demagoguery and cheap political points is irresponsible.

One of your key election promises was that your government will revisit the deals signed by the Yameen administration with China - loans and infrastructure projects - if elected. Have you been able to restructure the debt — over \$ 1.4 billion — Male owes Beijing?

- China is a close and valued partner to the Maldives. We welcome their participating in the G20’s DSSI [Debt Service Suspension Initiative], and appreciate that we have been able to positively engage with them to renegotiate the terms of ongoing development assistance and economic projects, in a manner mutually beneficial to both countries, and consistent with our friendly relations.

Your government recently signed a defence deal with the U.S., and another agreement with Japan to strengthen your Coast Guard. Last month, the Indian Foreign Secretary visited your capital. Is Male leaning towards the ‘Quad’ bloc?

- The Maldives’ priorities lie in a peaceful Indian Ocean region.
- Our international engagements are to enhance our commercial cooperation, strengthen regional peace and security, facilitate economic prosperity for our country, and voice out on issues important

to us on the international fora, such as climate change and environmental preservation. We will pursue our goals alongside our partners who share our mutual priorities.

The geopolitical contest in the region has escalated this year, especially after the border tensions between India and China. How does this impact the Maldives and your foreign policy choices?

- Not at all. The Maldives believes that differences between international partners can be settled peacefully through dialogue and mediation. While this is ongoing, it does not hinder our ability to constructively engage with our partners on issues of mutual interest.

What, in your view, are the prospects for regional cooperation, including through SAARC, in the Indian Ocean Region in this difficult climate of the pandemic and persisting bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan?

- I reiterate that regional differences should be settled amicably through means and solutions agreeable to all concerned.
- While it is not in the Maldives's policy to comment on disagreements between two sovereign countries, we also believe that such disputes are best resolved through strengthening multilateral and regional cooperation mechanisms, and using such channels for frequent dialogue and mediation.
- While the pandemic may be a challenge towards realising such ends in the immediate future I believe it has made especially evident that major global issues and crises cannot be contained to borders, and will thus help galvanise efforts to strengthen regional cooperation frameworks in the long-term.
- The Maldives is happy to be part of such efforts.

India – China Border disputes

- Konchok Stanzin, a councillor from Chushul in Eastern Ladakh, says Chinese infrastructure that could not be seen from border villages earlier is now clearly visible as China continues to hold positions in areas within India's perception of the Line of Actual Control.
- In an interview to The Hindu, Mr. Stanzin said residents had witnessed a large number of Chinese tents, bunkers and vehicles very close to the border villages in Chushul, Merak and Khakted, in a clear departure from the past.

Pastures cut-off

- Mr. Stanzin said nomads who lived in villages close to Pangong Tso (lake), one of the multiple locations where Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a stand-off since April-May 2020, have not been able to access the winter grazing grounds this year due to heavy troop deployment.
- Ladakh was declared a Union Territory without legislature after the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir was downgraded and bifurcated into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019 by Parliament.
- “At Black Top in South Pangong, where in 2018, only a camera existed on the Chinese side, today we regularly see Chinese vehicles and tents. While in other areas where they could reach the top in their vehicles, we cannot even take our horses and porters due to unfavourable terrain,” Mr. Stanzin said. He said there were many spots in the Finger area that had been occupied by the Chinese and if an aerial survey was conducted, it extended up to the upper reaches of Finger 2.
- As reported earlier by The Hindu, China has ingressed about 8 km in the Finger area and Indian troops have not been able to patrol beyond Finger 4 since the last week of April 2020, when China started amassing troops. Earlier, Indian troops could patrol up to Finger 8.
- The other areas where Chinese build-up continues are the Depsang plains, Galwan, Gogra-Hot Springs and the south bank of

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Pangong lake. Mr. Stanzin said China had been nibbling away Indian territory since May 2018.

- “As a strategy, the Chinese encourage their nomads and provide facilities so that they can come with their livestock and mark the territory as their own. On our side, we have to take several clearances, have to show our I-cards, our livestock are counted, even then sometimes we are not permitted,” he said. He had requested the Defence Minister to permit the nomads to go in the Finger area for winter grazing.
- Referring to poor communication facilities, Mr. Stanzin said the border villages got only 2G mobile connectivity and power supply from solar panels for not more than two or three hours a day.

COVID Pandemic and India's New Foreign Policy

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

- The year 2021 should see a cementing of the many trends that had their genesis in 2020.
- Leadership change in the United States is perhaps the most awaited change, but is unlikely to bring about a major power shift in the international arena.
- Even before the changeover, and despite the promise of a Biden presidency to invigorate the U.S.-Europe axis, Europe has turned its back on the U.S. and revived its China links, by ‘concluding in principle the negotiations for an EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment’.
- In one swift move, Europe has thus shattered all hope that China would remain ostracised in 2021.
- Many countries will now find themselves scrambling for cover. India which has greatly curtailed its relations with China since April 2020, (in the wake of Chinese aggression in Eastern Ladakh) will find itself ‘out on a limb’, with many countries likely to seek closer economic relations with China now.

A stronger China

- The year 2021, hence, begins on a triumphal note for China and China's Supreme Leader, Xi Jinping.
- China is about the only major country which had a positive rate of growth at the end of 2020, and its economy is poised to grow even faster in 2021.
- Militarily, China has further strengthened itself, and now seeks to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its announcement of the launch of its third aircraft carrier in 2021.
- Simultaneously, it is seeking to strengthen its military coordination with Russia.
- Consequent on all this, and notwithstanding Chinese intransigence in several matters including its heavy-handed actions in Hong Kong and Uighur, China's position across Asia is, if anything, stronger than in 2020.
- News emanating from China is that President Xi will further cement his position, both as Party leader and as President during 2021, despite internecine tensions within the Communist Party of China.
- China is, hence, unlikely to concede any ground to its opponents across the world in 2021, a fact that India will need to reckon with. It cannot expect any Chinese concessions in Eastern Ladakh, until India ‘makes amends’.

Economy first for Europe

- The new year will be dominated by strong authoritarian leaders like Xi Jinping in China, Vladimir Putin in Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey.
- International politics may not be very different from that in 2020, but any hope that the Compact of Democracy would emerge stronger will need to be eschewed.
- Europe, minus Britain following Brexit, and the retirement of Germany's Angela Merkel, could become even less relevant in world affairs.
- The China-EU Investment Treaty which saw Europe capitulating to China's blandishments is an indication that Europe

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

values its economy more than its politics.

- Major changes are afoot in Eurasia and West Asia which could lead to significant shifts. Russia is beginning to display greater interest in the affairs of countries on its periphery and, together with strengthening ties with China and reaching an entente with Turkey, this seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.
- In West Asia, the Abraham Accords, leading to a realignment of forces in the Arab world, have sharpened the division between the Saudi Bloc and Iran-Turkey.
- Despite the hype surrounding the Abraham Accords, the situation, however, remains fluid and has not reduced the risk of a confrontation between Iran and Israel.
- This does pose problems for India, since both have relations with it. Meanwhile, China demonstrates a willingness to play a much larger role in the region, including contemplating a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement with Iran.
- Saudi Arabia could find the going difficult in 2021, with a Biden Administration taking charge in Washington. The healing of wounds among the Sunni Arab states in the region should be viewed as a pyrrhic victory at best for Saudi Arabia.
- One by-product of this could be a sharpening of hostilities between the Sunni and Shia camps.
- Given the strategic flux in the region, Iran could well be tempted to use its nuclear capability to enhance its position, confident that the West may be unwilling to challenge it at this juncture.

India isolated

- At the start of 2021, India seems the odd man missing as far as these developments are concerned.
- No breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations has, or is likely to occur, and the confrontation between Indian and Chinese armed forces is expected to continue.
- India currently plays no significant role in West Asia.
- India-Iran relations today lack warmth. In

Afghanistan, India has been marginalised as far as the peace process is concerned.

- While India's charges against Pakistan of sponsoring terror have had some impact globally, it has further aggravated tensions between the two neighbours, and in the process, also helped Pakistan to cement its relations with China.
- While hostility between India and Nepal appears to have reduced lately, relations continue to be strained.
- Through a series of diplomatic visits, India has made valiant efforts to improve relations with some of its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, but as of now worthwhile results are not evident.
- One key takeaway is that as India-China relations deteriorate, India's neighbours are not averse to taking sides, increasing India's isolation.
- Whether India's perceived marginalisation from global mainstream events as we enter 2021 signifies a sharp drop-off in its foreign policy capabilities is, no doubt, debatable. India's foreign policy objectives are to widen its sphere of influence, enhance its role across nations, and make its presence felt as an emerging power in an increasingly disruptive global system.
- It is a moot point though whether any of these objectives has been achieved. Today, India's voice and counsel are seldom sought, or listened to.
- This is a far cry from what used to happen previously.
- India will serve as the president of the powerful UN Security Council for the month of August, 2021, but if it is to make a real impact, it must be seen to possess substantial weight to shape policies, more so in its traditional areas of influence.

Diplomacy and perceptions

- Many explanations could be available for this state of affairs. Admittedly, our diplomats conduct their activities with a high degree of competence, but they are possibly hampered by other factors.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- One, could be the kind of policy choices the country has adopted in the recent period, which have possibly altered the perception of India in certain quarters.
- There is again a perception that India's closeness to the U.S. has resulted in the weakening of its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran, impacting the country's image.
- Perhaps the most relevant explanation could be the shifting balance of power in the region in which India is situated, notably the rise of China, and the enlarging conflict between the two biggest powers in Asia, compelling many nations to pick sides in the conflict.
- A less obvious, but perhaps more relevant aspect, could also be that India's foreign policy suffers from an ideational vacuum.
- It is not the sharp decline in the economy, problems caused on account of the pandemic, or the growing polarisation in values across nations and societies, but more possibly India's inability or failure in the ideational realm that lies at the root of our foreign policy inadequacies.

More misses than hits

- Currently, India remains isolated from two important supranational bodies of which it used to be a founding member, viz., the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- Efforts to whip up enthusiasm for newer institutions such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), have hardly been successful.
- India has opted out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (a majority of Asian countries are members), and failed to take advantage of the RIC, or the Russia, India and China grouping, even as relations with Russia and China have deteriorated.
- On the other hand, India's foreign policy imperatives, across Asia and South Asia in particular, today seem to be a mixture of misplaced confidence, sometimes verging

on hubris (as in the case of Nepal), a lack of understanding of the sensitivities of neighbours such as Bangladesh and long-time friends (such as Vietnam and Iran), and according excessive importance to the policy needs and pressures of nations such as the U.S.

- There is possibly a misplaced perception in much of Asia that the India of today is not unwilling to sacrifice its strategic autonomy under U.S. pressure.
- As part of the ideational restructuring of India's foreign policy, what is urgently required, apart from competent statecraft, is the adoption of prudent policies, pursuit of realistically achievable objectives, and, above all, a demonstration of continuity of policy, irrespective of changes in the nature of the Administration.
- These may be time consuming, but are a surer recipe for success in attaining foreign policy objectives.

Analysis of Qatar and GCC

- The Gulf reconciliation summit, in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom and its allies decided to end their blockade of Qatar, has brought to an end, for now, their long feud.
- In 2017, Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed the blockade and severed diplomatic ties, accusing the tiny Gulf country of supporting terrorism.
- They also issued 13 demands for it to be lifted, which included shutting down the Qatar-funded TV network, Al Jazeera, closing a Turkish military base and reducing diplomatic relations with Iran. Qatar did not budge despite the heavy economic cost.
- When the Saudi and Emirati airspaces were closed, Iran offered Qatar global connectivity. Al Jazeera is still live.
- And, Qatar has invited more Turkish troops, bolstering its ties with Ankara, which is eager to play a bigger role in West Asia.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Moreover, it played an important role in the U.S.-Taliban deal and continued to host talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government.
- If the original Saudi plan was to isolate Qatar and make it kneel, it has backfired. And in the last weeks of the Trump administration, MBS and his allies seem to have realised their strategic folly.
- Qatar has made few concessions to reach the reconciliation.
- The 13 specific demands were replaced by a broad agreement on non-intervention in other countries' internal affairs and cooperating to ensure regional stability and security, which can be open to different interpretations for different sides.
- After the summit, Qatar's Foreign Ministry has said that the country had no intention of altering ties with Iran and Turkey.
- In practice, the Saudi side stepped down from its demands and made amends with an unshaken Qatar as a new President is going to assume power in the U.S. The Saudi U-turn could be the result of a genuine tactical rethink.
- The rift in the Gulf helped Iran and Turkey, Riyadh's main rivals, while it failed to scuttle Qatar's standing. Iran, reeling under U.S. sanctions, also got some financial relief from Qatari payouts for using its airspace.
- By lifting the air and sea blockades, the Saudis and the Emiratis could deny Iran of those funds and also try to put up a united Arab regional front as Joe Biden is preparing to renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal.
- The Saudis may also be hoping that bridging the Gulf between two American allies would help them warm up to the Biden administration.
- While ending the feud is welcome, it cannot be overlooked that this unnecessary crisis was born out of an ill-thought-out Saudi-Emirati strategy of coercion. It reflects poorly on them.
- They should learn from the mistakes and build ties based on mutual interests and

cooperation, not on threats and coercion.

Dual Currency in Cuba

- As per the latest devaluation plan announced in December by President Miguel Diaz-Canel, the CUP's artificial one-to-one parity with the U.S. dollar has been removed.
- The currency will instead trade at 24 pesos to the greenback and the CUC will be phased out in six months.
- The CUP is in circulation in the domestic economy and serves as the principal medium by which goods are priced and wages paid.

A dual domestic currency

- During the turmoil in Cuba's sugar industry and a plunge in nickel prices in the 1990s, a volatile CUP had fallen to 140 to the dollar. Against this backdrop, the CUC was introduced in 1994 as a unit of account and store of value, to prevent the country's excessive reliance on the U.S. dollar following the end of the former Soviet Union.
- In recent years, this second currency has more or less steadied at one CUC to 24 CUPs in official exchange outlets and is the predominant mode of transaction for tourists and residents at high-end shopping outlets and other imported goods.
- Apart from the disparities attributed to the prevalence of a dual domestic currency, Havana has at times had to deftly deploy the surge in dollar remittances and tourism to bolster the peso, by legalising the greenback in the 1990s.
- It has also had to respond in kind to American sanctions at other instances, as when the government in 2004 imposed a 10% tax on the exchange of the dollar for CUCs.
- Last July, Havana scrapped the 10% surcharge in a sequel to the 2019 opening of stores trading principally in dollars.
- The recent shift is part of the government's bid to boost dollar transactions alongside other hard currencies, especially after

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

tourism was closed in the wake of the pandemic.

- There is concern that the circulation of hard money could reinforce the segmentation and distortions of the past that resulted from access to the CUC for public sector companies at preferential exchange rates.

An important objective

- The country's switch back to a single currency was an important objective in the economic transformation plan envisioned in the 2011 Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba under former President Raul Castro.
- Among the expected gains from a unified peso are transparency of firms in terms of costs and profits, higher economic productivity and incentives for exports.
- Experts have opined that a corresponding devaluation of the peso was a necessary first step to discontinue the dual currency.
- The government of President Diaz-Canel has sought to cushion the likely impact of high inflation resulting from the devaluation with a generous wage and pension hike for state employees, besides a roll-back of subsidies to state-owned firms.
- There are concerns, however, that it could still leave a sizeable private and informal sector labour force exposed.
- In addition, there is the real risk that the adverse effects from high prices could further incense protesters who have been demanding protection for civil liberties and artistic freedom following the detention of a well-known rap singer.
- Predictably, the government has been quick to dismiss the voicing of dissent as U.S. interference in Cuba's internal affairs. Havana must take citizens along in order to implement the new reforms.

Puducherry Governor issue

Governor issues

- The recent three-day-long protest, led by Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, under the banner of the Secular Democratic Progressive Alliance, against Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi came as no surprise, given the strained ties between the two constitutional functionaries.
- They have been at loggerheads over many matters, most recently on the appointment of the State Election Commissioner, an office critical to holding elections to local bodies in the Union Territory.
- But the principal issue of contention is the implementation of direct benefit transfer in the public distribution system using cash, instead of free rice, being given to beneficiaries.
- The agitation was meant to highlight the demand of the Congress and its allies for the recall of the Lt Governor.
- As a prelude to the stir, the Chief Minister presented memoranda to President Ram Nath Kovind and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G. Kishan Reddy, accusing Ms. Bedi of “functioning in an autocratic manner” and adopting an “obstructionist attitude” in ensuring the progress and welfare of people.
- On her part, Ms. Bedi has advised him to refrain from misleading the public about the Centre and her office. She has even attributed his “anguish and disappointment” possibly to the “diligent and sustained care” exercised by the Lt Governor's secretariat “in ensuring just, fair and accessible administration following the laws and rules of business scrupulously”.
- With the Assembly election likely in April or May, the Chief Minister leading the protest against the Lt Governor was clearly an act of political mobilisation, even though the Congress's major ally, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, chose to stay away from it.
- The agitation should be seen as a reflection of the political reality in the Union

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Territory as Mr. Narayanasamy does not have any effective Opposition. This allows him to turn all his energy and time against the Lt Governor instead of on his political adversaries at a time when the election is near.

- And this seems to be his strategy to ward off any criticism against his government’s “non-functioning” by laying the blame at the doorstep of the Lt Governor.
- On her part, Ms. Bedi should take into account the legitimate requirements of an elected government and try to accommodate Mr. Narayanasamy’s views on important matters such as the free rice scheme.
- After all, the Centre itself did not see any great virtue in the DBT mode when it decided to give additional food grains (rice or wheat) free of cost at five kg per person a month to ration cardholders during April-November last year — a relief measure during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- With the near breakdown of communication between the Lt Governor and the Chief Minister, the Centre should step in, in the interest of smooth administration.

BIMSTEC and Analysis

1. Bay of Bengal (BoB) is the largest Bay in the World.
2. It includes 7 countries = BBIN, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand.
3. BoB is the largest bay in the World. It has 1.5 billion, 21% of World's population and a GDP of 2.5 trillion.
4. BIMSTEC was established in 1997 in Bangkok. 1st Meet held at Bangkok in 2004. 2nd in Delhi, India in 2008. 3rd in 2014 in Naypyidaw, Myanmar. 4th Summit held in 2018 Kathmandu, Nepal. 2020 Summit was to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Kathmandu Declaration, 2018

- It focusses on
 - Issue of Terrorism and Transnational organized crimes =

great threat to international peace and security.

- Connectivity among member nations - Trade, Economic, Digital, Export, People to People connectivity.
- Called for identifying and holding accountable states and non-states entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provides sanctuaries to terrorists and falsely extol their virtues.
- Establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection - optimization of using energy resources in the region and promotion of efficient and secure operationn of power system.
- This Kathmandu meet will be another milestone for India after the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit that India hosted in 2016.
- India will host the International Buddhist Conclave in 2020.
- For research in Art and Culture in BoB, India would set up a Center for BoB Studies at Nalanda University.

India's Interests in BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC is an alternative to SAARC deadlock and is a vehicle to take forward India’s regional, strategic and economic interests. SAARC deadlock limited the scope of India's growing aspirations and its role in improving regional governance.
- Some people want to see India's interests in BIMSTEC as a strategy to isolate Pakistan and position BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC. But its 2 failed attempts of SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement and SAARC Satellite suggest otherwise.
- India wants to push BIMSTEC not to bypass Pakistan but to ensure that IO region does not lag behind due to the unstable neighbourhood. India's desire to link South Asia to Southeast Asia is a part of this strategy.
- BIMSTEC mechanism would reassure South Asia achieve common goals with India playing its due role.

Challenges for India

- India is currently the largest contributor to BIMSTEC budget. Its annual contri was 2 crore (32% of the budget for 2017-18). BIMSTEC is increasing Human resources and hence would need more resources.
- BIMSTEC FTA negotiated in 2004 but yet to finalise. It can boost our trade from 7% to 21%.
- To counter the impression that BIMSTEC is an India dominated bloc. Today, most of the smaller neighbours are more willing to engage so as to benefit from India's economic rise.
- China's presence in BoB region through OBOR.

Way Forward

- India will need to show sensitivity to the concerns of smaller neighbour.
- India will have to carefully navigate the emerging regional geopolitics, as many of the elements that made SAARC hostage to political rivalry and turned it into a defunct mechanism can re-emerge in BIMSTEC.

Analysis of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Analysis of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

- On January 5, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) met at the ancient town of Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia to end the bitter discord that three of its members — Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, along with Egypt — have had with their partner, Qatar.
- On June 5, 2017, the Arab Quartet, as they styled themselves, subjected Qatar to an onerous diplomatic boycott and a total land, sea and air embargo. They accused Qatar of destabilising the region with its support for Islamist groups.
- They then presented Qatar with 13 demands including severing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, diluting relations with Turkey and Iran, and shutting down the Al Jazeera network, in order to normalise ties.
- Viewing these demands as an

encroachment on its sovereignty, Qatar rejected them. This led to the boycott which was accompanied by shrill invective against Qatar on national media, which included threats of violence and even regime change.

- Now, three and a half years later, the boycott has ended.

Background to the boycott

- Ten years ago, the Arab Spring uprisings across West Asia had thrown up popular demands for reform — an end to authoritarian rule and the restoration of Arab “dignity” through freedom and democracy.
- Four leaders fell under these pressures, which also gave rise to two new developments: one, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties came to power in Egypt and Tunisia; and, two, Saudi Arabia decided to divert demands for domestic reform by highlighting a threat from Iran.
- Asserting that Iran had hegemonic designs across the region, the Kingdom shaped opposition to Iran on sectarian basis and confronted it in theatres of its influence — Syria and later Yemen.
- The Brotherhood, with its grassroots mobilisation and a political platform that marries Islamic principles with Western-style democracy, poses a serious challenge to the existing monarchical order that provides no scope for popular participation. Hence, Saudi Arabia and the UAE watched with horror the Brotherhood's electoral successes, culminating in Mohammed Morsi being elected President in Egypt in 2012.
- Fearing that a successful Brotherhood administration would become a model for their countries as well, the two GCC allies supported the Egyptian army's coup against Morsi in July 2013.

Qatar and the Brotherhood

- Qatar, a GCC member, has over several years been a maverick in GCC counsels.
- Besides supporting its independent television channel, Al Jazeera, that often

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

criticises regional leaders, it is a major supporter of the Brotherhood.

- Though explained as an expression of its independent foreign policy, the reason goes deeper: the former Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and his son, Sheikh Tamim, the present ruler, aspire to play a major role in regional affairs, overcoming with their wealth the disadvantage of Qatar’s small size.
- In pursuing their regional role, they have been sensitive to U.S. interests. Thus, after the events of 9/11, when the U.S. was convinced of the need for wide-ranging reform in the region, it believed that the Brotherhood, with its blend of Islam and democracy, could achieve change.
- Hence, Qatar’s backing for the Brotherhood from the early 2000s and later, specifically of Morsi, was in line with U.S. interests.
- U.S. President Donald Trump’s visceral hostility towards Iran and total support for Saudi Arabia gave the quartet the opportunity to change Qatar’s ways: through the boycott of June 2017, they sought to pressurise their partner into submission.
- This approach failed: with its huge resources, Qatar could weather the financial assault, while the backing of Turkey, Iran and two GCC partners, Kuwait and Oman, ensured that the movement of goods and people was maintained.
- Turkey, led by an Islamist party, became Qatar’s strategic partner, and even challenged Saudi regional leadership on doctrinal and political bases.
- Recently, when the UAE and Bahrain “normalised” ties with Israel, both Qatar and Turkey affirmed their support for Hamas, the Islamist party in power in Gaza.
- The two countries are also partners in Libya, ranged against the group backed by Egypt and the UAE in the ongoing civil conflict.

- The most likely reason for the reconciliation at Al-Ula is the incoming Biden presidency in the U.S.: it is expected that, besides reviving the nuclear agreement with Iran and easing sanctions, Joe Biden could focus on Saudi Arabia’s dismal human rights record and the war in Yemen.
- Hence, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was anxious to project his conciliatory approach to the incoming administration by patching up with Qatar.
- The reconciliation has evoked no enthusiasm from the other sponsors of the boycott.
- The UAE and Egypt feel particularly threatened by the Brotherhood; they sent low-level delegations to Al-Ula and their media comment has been tepid. Both have made clear, as has Bahrain, that future ties with Qatar will depend on its conduct.
- No one, however, believes that Qatar will dilute its backing for the Brotherhood, delink itself from Turkey, or even tone down commentary on Al Jazeera.
- The UAE has its own reasons for hostility towards Qatar. It has far greater concerns relating to the threat from the Brotherhood than other GCC members due to the influence of its domestic Brotherhood-affiliated Al Islah party.
- Again, its leaders are also keen to emerge as major players in regional affairs on the back of close links with the U.S. They therefore see Qatar as a rival hindering their aspirations.
- The Al-Ula conclave could herald some major shifts in regional alignments.
- There could be a nascent Saudi-UAE competition, with the UAE ingratiating itself with the U.S. and supporting its interests in diverse theatres – Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the western Indian Ocean.
- Turkey and Qatar, possibly with Iran, could then seize the opportunity to re-engage with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, thus shaping an alternative regional coalition that would perhaps be closer to Russia and

Possible re-alignments

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

China than to the U.S. As Mr. Biden takes charge in the U.S., the Al-Ula conclave could trigger the emergence of a new regional order in West Asia.

India – Nepal ties during COVID-19

- In Nepal, however, officials said the resolution of the dispute remains important for improving overall bilateral ties that plunged to new lows last year.
- “We have been urging India repeatedly through diplomatic notes to bring the border dispute to the table and the Joint Commission is an opportunity for us to that,” said Rajan Bhattarai, Foreign Affairs Adviser to Mr. Oli, explaining Nepal’s direction for the Joint Commission talks.
- The 6th Joint Commission meeting has been delayed by more than a year because of the row over the Kalapani issue and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Commission met for the 5th round on August 22, 2019, when the entire gamut of bilateral relation was discussed. Mr. Oli had said that Mr. Gyawali would discuss “the issue related to the border and several other matters”.
- Mr. Gyawali is expected to deliver a public lecture at the Vivekananda International Foundation on January 15.

Vaccine supply

- It is understood that Nepal may raise its requirement of COVID-19 vaccines and both sides may discuss an agreement for their supply, once the government clarifies its plans to allow the export of Covishield and Covaxin.
- “India will have greater clarity on export of COVID-19 vaccines within the next few weeks,” External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was quoted as saying by Reuter, indicating that the government may still consider prioritising its domestic vaccine requirement before sending consignments abroad.
- Nepal is also expected to raise the need to discuss and adopt the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report which has been completed but has not found official

recognition from the Indian side.

- The EPG, constituted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Oli in February 2016, has recommended several measures such as firming up Nepal’s land boundary with India and the revision of historic treaties.
- “The established procedure agreed among the members of the EPG was that the completed report should be submitted to the Indian PM first. The report is now ready but it is yet to be accepted by the Indian PM,” Mr. Bhattarai said.
- Mr. Gyawali’s visit comes weeks after Mr. Oli recommended the dissolution of the Lower House of Parliament — Pratinidhi Sabha. The “broader message” of the visit is likely to be India’s silent acknowledgement of the action of Mr. Oli. India had to engage Mr. Oli now as the other option would be to wait for the election which may not be held in the foreseeable future.
- Prime Minister Oli has called for election in April-May, however the legal process over the dissolution of the Lower House is under way and sources indicated that they are expecting that the polling could be postponed.
- “As far as we are concerned, the Joint Commission between the Indian and Nepalese Foreign Ministers is one of the topmost politically important bilateral mechanisms. It should have met earlier but could not be held. We welcome India’s decision to host the meeting,” Mr. Bhattarai said.

Judicial Activism and Marriage Laws

- The Allahabad High Court has ruled that the provision of publication of notice of intended marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, is not mandatory.
- The court, in a significant judgment delivered on January 12, said making such publication mandatory “would invade the fundamental rights of liberty and privacy, including within its sphere the freedom to choose for marriage without interference

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

from state and non-state actors, of the persons concerned”.

- A Bench of Justice Vivek Chaudhary mandated that while giving notice under Section 5 of the Act, it shall be optional for the parties to the intended marriage to make a request in writing to the marriage officer to publish or not to publish a notice under Section 6 and follow the procedure of objections as prescribed under the Act.
- In case the parties do not make such a request, the officer “shall not publish any such notice or entertain objections to the intended marriage and proceed with the solemnisation of the marriage”.
- The Bench directed the Senior Registrar of the court to send a copy of the order to the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh to forthwith communicate the same to all the marriage officers in the State and other authorities concerned as soon as possible.
- The requirement of publication of notice under Section 6 and inviting or entertaining objections under Section 7 can only be read as directory in nature, to be given effect only on request of parties to the intended marriage and not otherwise, the court observed in the 47 page judgment.
- The interpretation of Sections 6 and 7 read with Section 46 containing the procedure of publication of notice and inviting objections to the intended marriage in the Act of 1954 has to be such that would uphold the fundamental rights and not violate them, the court said.
- The court was disposing off a habeas corpus writ filed by a Muslim woman who married a Hindu man after converting as per Hindu rituals.

Indo-Pacific region.

- Maintaining “U.S. strategic primacy” in the region and promoting a “liberal economic order” while stopping China from establishing “illiberal spheres of influence” is the U.S.’s first national security challenge, as per the document.
- The other two challenges are ensuring that North Korea does not threaten the U.S. and advancing U.S. economic leadership globally.
- With regard to India, one of the ‘desired end states’ of the U.S.’s strategy is for the U.S. to be India’s preferred partner on security issues and for the two countries to “cooperate to preserve maritime security and counter Chinese influence” in South Asia, Southeast Asia and other regions of “mutual concern”.
- Several sentences in the document — including in sections on India — have been redacted.

Border dispute

- The U.S. aims to help India become a net security provider in the region, solidify a lasting strategic partnership with India “underpinned by a strong Indian military able to effectively collaborate with” the U.S and its regional partners.
- These objectives it plans to achieve via enhanced defence cooperation and interoperability; working with India “toward domestic economic reform” and greater leadership roles for India in the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus.
- Consequently, the U.S.’s to-do list has on it offers of support to India via military, diplomatic and intelligence channels “to help address continental challenges such as the border dispute with China and access to water, including the Brahmaputra and other rivers facing diversion by China.”
- Last year, India and China were engaged in their deadliest border dispute in decades along the Line of Actual Control, in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were killed.

Geopolitics: India, China and USA

- With days to go before its end, the Trump administration has declassified a sensitive document on the U.S. strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific’ from 2018. The 10-page document outlines objectives and strategies with regard to China, North Korea, India and other countries in the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Just last week U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster had said that the U.S. cooperated with India to counter China’s “aggressive” actions along the LAC, but did not get this cooperation.

Act-East policy

- The U.S. also seeks to bolster common principles, including the peaceful resolution of disputes and the transparent infrastructure-debt practices (a reference to alternatives to financing by China’s Belt Road Initiative, which has led to untenable debt positions in borrowing countries), as per the strategy.
- The U.S. aims to support India’s “Act East” policy and “its aspiration to be a leading global power, highlighting its compatibility with the U.S., Japanese and Australian vision” of the Indo-Pacific.
- “A strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China,” is one of the underlying assumptions of the strategy, which expects Chinese military, economic and diplomatic influence will continue to increase in the short term.
- “China aims to dissolve U.S. alliances and partnerships across the region. China will exploit vacuums and opportunities created by these diminished bonds,” the document says.
- On Russia, it says the country will “remain a marginal player” in the region relative to the U.S., China and India.
- On North Korea, it stated U.S. objective is to, “Convince the Kim regime that the only path to its survival is to relinquish its nuclear weapons.”
- The official reason for the early declassification of the document, 20 years ahead of time, was “to communicate to the American people and to our allies and partners, the enduring commitment of the U.S. to keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open long into the future,” said national Security Advisor Robert C O’ Brien in a covering note.

India – Afghanistan relations

- In a trip that was kept under wraps before it got underway, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Wednesday visited Afghanistan for talks on strategic issues with the leadership in Kabul. The Afghan government said the conversations were about “synchronising efforts to combat terrorism and build peace”.
- This is the first visit by a senior Indian official after the Afghan political stakeholders and the Taliban started their reconciliation process last year.
- India attended the US-brokered peace pact signing in Doha in February last year. An Indian delegation also attended the inaugural ceremony of the intra-Afghan negotiations in September last year, while External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addressed the gathering via video-conference.
- The Afghan National Security Council said Doval and his counterpart, Hamdullah Mohib, held “extensive conversations on issues of strategic mutual interest, including on synchronising efforts to combat terrorism and build peace”.
- Doval, who is on a two-day visit, also met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and “discussed cooperation in countering terrorism and strengthening a regional consensus on the Afghan peace process”, Afghan chargé d’affaires in Delhi, Tahir Qadiry said on Twitter.
- “Both sides discussed counter-terrorism cooperation and efforts for building regional consensus on supporting peace in Afghanistan,” said a brief statement issued by the Arg, the Presidential Palace.
- During the meeting, Ghani said the Afghan security forces are the righteous pillars of Afghanistan’s stability and are fighting in the front lines against regional and global terrorism. “Afghanistan and India, in joint efforts with NATO and the United States, will be able to succeed in the fight against terrorism,” Ghani was quoted as telling Doval.
- Doval said that India is willing to continue its cooperation with Afghanistan and is

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

ready to continue talks on common interests, the statement said.

- There was no official word from the Indian government, but sources said this was part of Delhi's quiet engagement with stakeholders in Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy on the Afghan peace process, visited India twice during the pandemic.
- Doval also met Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council of National Reconciliation. Abdullah visited India in October last year and held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Doval.
- Influential Afghan leader Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum had also visited India in September last year.

Nepal Foreign Minister to meet Jaishankar today

- Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali will meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday for their first face-to-face meeting since the border row led to a slide in ties.
- Gyawali, who arrived in New Delhi Thursday afternoon, will co-chair the India-Nepal Joint Commission meeting along with Jaishankar on Friday. This comes against the backdrop of a political crisis in Nepal, where Nepal PM K P Sharma Oli has dissolved the Parliament and is now heading a caretaker government.
- “The Joint Commission is an important mechanism that provides the opportunity of reviewing at a high level the entire gamut of our bilateral partnership and providing political guidance to further enhance the special and unique ties that we enjoy. We look forward to constructive discussions on the numerous sectors that encompass our bilateral agenda,” Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.
- On whether there will be talks on the boundary issue, the MEA spokesperson said, “Our position on the boundary issue

is well known. Let me say that the JCM and boundary talks are separate mechanisms.”

- The Nepal Foreign Minister's visit comes about a month and a half after the first high-level diplomatic visit to Nepal in November when Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla went to Kathmandu and met the country's leaders, including Prime Minister Oli and Gyawali, among others.
- Sources said that the conversations will pick up the threads from the conversations between Foreign Secretary Shringla's discussions with PM Oli — the two had a one-on-one meeting, apart from the delegation level talks — which had included a “candid review of the state of the bilateral relationship”, and the potential for bringing India and Nepal closer.

UP Anti - Conversion Ordinance, 2020

- At least 91 persons have been booked and 54 arrested so far, an overwhelming number of them Muslims, under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020.
- The most number of arrests have been made in Etah (14) followed by Sitapur (13), Mau (8), Gautam Buddha Nagar (4), Azamgarh (3) and Firozabad (3).
- The FIRs were spread across 14 districts of six administrative zones of the State. The other districts are Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Bareilly, Kannauj, Hardoi, Bijnor and Shahjahanpur.
- In addition to these cases, an FIR was registered in Shahjahanpur on January 3 against five persons, including two Christians from Tamil Nadu and two local Dalits, on charges of allegedly trying to allure a Bajrang Dal convener into conversion for jobs and free education for children. However, no arrests were made in the case.
- A petitioner, Saurabh Kumar of Prayagraj, had prayed for the ordinance to be declared ultra vires saying it was “both morally and

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

constitutionally repugnant”.

- Following this, the Allahabad High Court had issued a notice to the government and sought its response.
- The Allahabad High Court ruling that people marrying under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, can choose not to publicise their union with a notice 30 days in advance may not exactly be a judicial pushback against problematic anti-conversion laws enacted by several BJP-ruled States.
- But it serves to get a major irritant out of the way of couples wanting to marry against the wishes of their parents or their immediate community.
- Many intercaste and inter-faith marriages have faced violent opposition from those acting in the name of community pride or those raising the bogey of ‘love jihad’.
- Hindutva activists have been targeting Muslim men marrying Hindu women, especially if the women have converted to Islam prior to the marriage.
- The court said that mandatorily publishing a notice of the intended marriage and calling for objections violates the right to privacy.
- According to the new order, if a couple gives it in writing that they do not want the notice publicised, the Marriage Officer can solemnise the marriage.
- Under Section 5 of the Act, which enables inter-faith marriages, the couple has to give notice to the Marriage Officer; and under Sections 6 and 7, the officer has to publicise the notice and call for objections.
- But, in his order, Justice Vivek Chaudhary said the Act’s interpretation has to be such that it upholds fundamental rights, not violate them.
- Laws should not invade liberty and privacy, he said, “including within its sphere freedom to choose for marriage without interference from state and non-state actors, of the persons concerned”.
- The HC ruling came on the plea of a Muslim woman who converted to Hinduism for marriage as the couple saw the notice period under the Special

Marriage Act as an invasion of their privacy.

- Justice Chaudhary’s remarks on ‘state and non-state actors’ will undoubtedly be read in the context of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, that particularly targets inter-faith marriages.
- This new law declares conversion of religion by marriage to be unlawful, mandates a 60-day notice to the District Magistrate and also requires the Magistrate to conduct a police inquiry to find out the explicit reason for the conversion. Enacted last November, there have been 54 arrests till date by the U.P. police.
- The HC ruling can now be cited across India to prevent public notices under the Special Marriage Act.
- Inter-faith couples will hope that when the Supreme Court hears pleas on the U.P. conversion law, it will be guided by progressive verdicts, such as the 2017 Aadhaar ruling, on the right to privacy as a basic right, and the 2018 judgment on Hadiya, upholding the student’s right to choose a partner, a Muslim man in Kerala, as an essential freedom.

Impeachment of USA President Donald Trump twice

- Outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump has entered the record books for being the only American President to be impeached twice.
- The moment of ignominy came after the House of Representatives passed a motion of impeachment against him, this time for “incitement of insurrection,” following the assault on the U.S. Capitol building on January 6 by a violent pro-Trump mob.
- His first impeachment, in September 2019, was for “abuse of power” and “obstruction of justice” over his dealings with Ukraine and attempts by Congress to investigate the same, yet he survived in office owing to a Senate acquittal.
- On this occasion, not only did the House

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

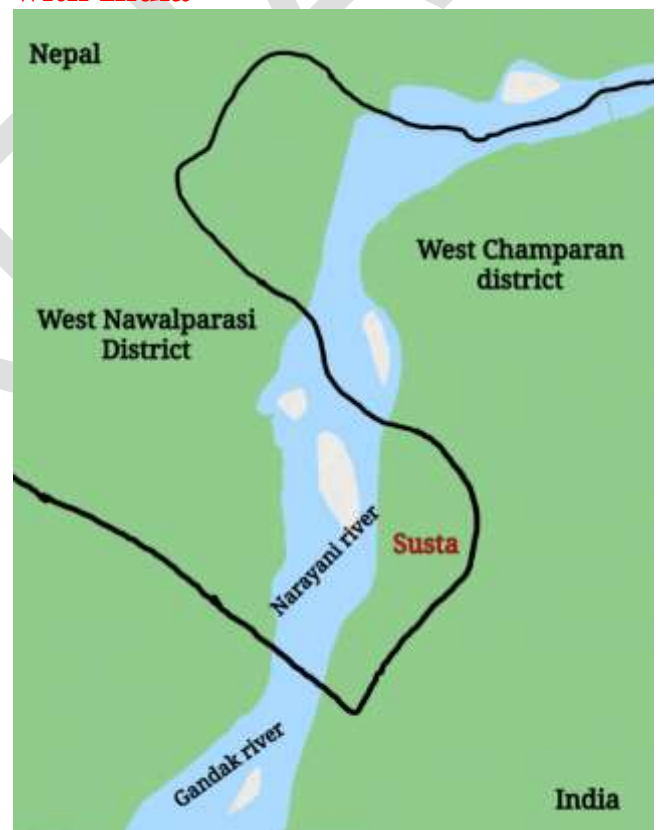
vote resoundingly, by a margin of 232-197, to impeach him but it passed with an unprecedented margin of bipartisan support after 10 Republicans crossed the aisle.

- This might signal a broader mood across Congress, particularly in the Senate, to vote differently to the outcome last time, specifically that there will be sufficient support among Republican ranks for a Senate conviction.
- Given the tight timeline leading up to the inauguration of Democratic President-elect Joe Biden on January 20, it might be that the Senate does not have the opportunity to conduct a full trial based on the article of impeachment sent to it by the House, before Mr. Trump demits office.
- Nevertheless, Senate Democrats have vowed to carry out the trial even after the fact, including not only a vote on convicting him for high crimes and misdemeanours but also potentially on barring him from running again.
- The question looming before Congressional Republicans is this: are they, as a group united in safeguarding mainstream conservative values, convinced that the harm that Mr. Trump has done to the presidency and the fabric of American society warrants banning him from the highest office in the land, or will there be too many holdouts within their ranks to successfully bring closure to this turbulent saga in American politics?
- The answer also depends on what Senate and House Republicans make of the broader “movement” that he has come to represent — a rowdy, vicious campaign built on white privilege and regularly indulging in racist attacks, yet one that has pulled in elements of economically disenfranchised middle America.
- Will they believe that they can cut off Mr. Trump from leading this cohort, yet appear responsive to the needs of the 74 million Americans who voted for him?
- Or will they fear that they have no other leaders of national standing who could bring the kind of support that he did into

the Republican tent?

- The course of action that Senate Republicans choose now will determine which vector the country’s battered politics will travel along — one that strikes a balance between national interest and the traditional formula of economic growth with social pluralism, or one that gives ever greater voice to nativist populism and disregard for the cherished institutions of democracy.

Nepal raises Kalapani boundary issue with India



Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Nepal has raised the Kalapani boundary dispute with India during the Joint Commission meeting, visiting Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali said.
- The Minister said that the Indo-Nepal boundary dispute existed in “two segments” and Kathmandu wished to find a solution to the matter urgently. Mr. Gyawali also took up Nepal’s requirement for vaccines to fight the COVID-19 pandemic as Kathmandu has approved Serum Institute of India’s (SII) Covishield vaccine.
- “We started the demarcation and mapping of the boundary since 1981. At that time, a Joint Technical Committee was founded which had tenure till 2007. It produced 182 strip maps which depicts the border... but for various reasons [work on] two segments — **Susta and Kalapani** — were not completed. If we talk of the overall boundary between Nepal and India, it is a smaller segment. However, it is an unfinished work and that’s why we are talking of the need and urgency of finalising and finishing those segments as well,” said Mr. Gyawali.
- This is the first time that the Foreign Minister of Nepal has presented the dispute on the boundary front from the Indian capital since the issue erupted in November 2019 prompting Nepal to unveil a new political map that showed the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura region of Pithoragarh district as part of the country’s sovereign territory.
- The Hindu had reported earlier citing sources that the Indian side was aware the Nepalese delegation would raise the boundary issue in Friday’s interaction but said that India would not discuss the matter at the Joint Commission level as the boundary dispute has a dedicated Foreign Secretary-level mechanism that is yet to meet.
- Addressing the bitterness that was witnessed in India-Nepal relations in 2020, Mr. Gyawali said there were “ups and downs” and there were differences on some issues.
- “But overall partnership and relations moved smoothly and we should take this momentum ahead by drawing lessons from that,” said Mr. Gyawali, highlighting that Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared “very personal” ties.
- A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal said “boundary and border management” was part of the discussion. In contrast, a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said “border management” was part of the discussion.
- The statement from Nepal said that both the teams “discussed the review of the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950”.
- It is understood that the review has been recommended by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) constituted by Mr. Modi and Mr. Oli in 2016.
- The EPG report, which has been completed, is yet to be submitted to the Indian Prime Minister.
- The Nepalese statement said the issue of “submission” of the report was also raised during the meeting.

Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion Coronavirus plan

- President-elect Joe Biden has unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan to end “a crisis of deep human suffering” by speeding up vaccines and pumping out financial help to those struggling with the pandemic’s prolonged economic fallout.
- Called the “**American Rescue Plan**,” the proposal would meet Mr. Biden’s goal of administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration, and advance his objective of reopening most schools by the spring.
- On a parallel track, it delivers another round of aid to stabilise the economy while the public health effort seeks the upper hand on the pandemic.
- “We not only have an economic imperative to act now — I believe we have a moral obligation,” Mr. Biden said in a

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

nationwide address on Thursday. At the same time, he acknowledged that his plan “does not come cheaply.”

Economic recovery

- Mr. Biden proposed \$1,400 cheques for most Americans, which on top of \$600 provided in the most recent COVID-19 Bill would bring the total to the \$2,000 that Mr. Biden has called for.
- It would also extend a temporary boost in unemployment benefits and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September.
- And it shoehorns in long-term Democratic policy aims such as increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, expanding paid leave for workers, and increasing tax credits for families with children.
- The last item would make it easier for women to go back to work, which in turn would help the economy recover.

India – China Trade relations



- India's trade with China declined last year to the lowest level since 2017, with the trade deficit narrowing to a five-year low as the country imported far fewer goods from its northern neighbour.
- Bilateral trade slid 5.6% to \$87.6 billion, according to new figures from China's General Administration of Customs

(GAC).

- India's imports from China shrank by 10.8% to \$66.7 billion, marking the lowest level of inbound shipments since 2016.
- India's exports to China, however, jumped 16%, crossing the \$20 billion-mark for the first time to a record high of \$20.86 billion.
- The trade deficit, a source of friction in bilateral ties, shrank to \$45.8 billion, the lowest level since 2015.
- While there was no immediate break-up of the data for 2020, India's biggest import in 2019 was electrical machinery and equipment, worth \$20.17 billion.
- Other major imports in 2019 were organic chemicals (\$8.39 billion) and fertilisers (\$1.67 billion), while India's top exports that year were iron ore, organic chemicals, cotton and unfinished diamonds.

Appetite for iron ore

- The last 12 months saw a surge in demand for iron ore in China, as a slew of new infrastructure projects aimed at reviving growth after the COVID-19 slump lifted consumption of steel.
- Total iron ore imports in Asia's largest economy rose 9.5% in 2020.
- The drop in India's imports from China largely mirrored a decline in overall inbound shipments last year as domestic demand slumped in the wake of the pandemic.
- That makes it difficult to determine whether 2020 is an exception or marks a turn away from the recent pattern of India's trade with China, especially since there is, as yet, no evidence to suggest India has replaced its import dependence on China by either sourcing those goods elsewhere or manufacturing them at home.
- The dip in exports to India bucked a strong year for Chinese exports, which surged 10.9% in December and grew 4% in 2020, aided by the economic recovery in China while many countries worldwide remained in various stages of lockdown.
- The full year's export performance marked a sharp turnaround for the world's second-largest economy, which saw its GDP

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

contract 6.8% during the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in the first quarter, while foreign trade fell 4.9% year-on-year over the first five months through May.

- With a stringent lockdown containing the outbreak in China by the summer, the economy rebounded to grow 3.2% in the second quarter and 4.9% in the third, with China's industries humming back to life even as much of the rest of the world remained in varied states of lockdown.

‘Positive growth’

- China was “the world's only major economy to have registered positive growth in foreign trade in goods,” said Li Kuiwen, spokesperson of the GAC, with China's foreign trade and exports in the first 10 months of the year accounting for a record 12.8% and 14.2% share of the global totals, respectively.
- That was reflected in the annual export figures, as China posted sharp increases with most of its major trading partners.
- Exports to the ASEAN bloc, China's largest trading partner last year with bilateral trade amounting to \$684 billion, rose 6.7%, while exports to the EU, China's second-largest trading partner, also rose 6.7% as total trade reached \$649 billion.
- Despite the trade war with the U.S. and the pandemic, two-way trade was up 8.3% to \$586 billion, with China's exports rising 7.9% to reach a record \$451 billion.
- The trade surplus with the U.S. expanded to \$317 billion in 2020, compared with the \$288 billion figure at the end of President Donald Trump's first year in office in 2017, underlining the limited impact of his tariff measures as he ends his presidency.

Police Reforms

- Home Minister Amit Shah, who arrived on a two-day visit to Karnataka on Saturday, laid the foundation stone for establishing a unit of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) at Bhadravati in Shivamogga district.
- The RAF, the specialised wing of the Central Reserve Police Force, will be the

first battalion of its kind in the State. The State government has provided the CRPF with 50.29 acres of land for the purpose. The unit at Bhadravati will cater to the needs of 39 districts spread over Karnataka, Kerala, and Goa. The RAF is specialised in handling riots and other major law and order situations.

- Mr. Shah said Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa had written to him seeking an RAF unit in the State, promising suitable land.
- Among government officials, the job of the police is the toughest. We need to change the way we look at the police. The police do not get a holiday even to celebrate festivals. They will be on the field to maintain law and order. Many have sacrificed their lives while on duty,” he said.
- The Centre, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, had taken many steps to modernise the police force. The government had allotted Rs. 800 crore for the purpose. “We have started Indian National Defence University and National Forensic Sciences University, the first of its kind in the world. I suggest the Chief Minister to set up colleges in Karnataka with affiliation to these universities,” he said.
- Stating that recognising the sacrifice of police personnel, the Centre had set up a national police memorial in Delhi, he appealed to the public to visit the memorial.
- “Your gesture to appreciate the police force and their sacrifice would boost the morale of the force,” he said.
- The establishment would involve officers' quarters, a central school, a hospital, parade ground, playground, and other essential amenities.
- Mr. Shah lauded Mr. Yediyurappa's leadership in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and said the government would complete its full term in office.
- Mr. Shah said the BJP government would complete the full term and the party would come to power again after the 2023

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Assembly elections in the State. The Opposition Congress need not have doubts about the completion of the term by the BJP government, he said.

- After the virtual inauguration of the police quarters under Police Gruha-2020 scheme and Police Gruha-2025 in various parts of the city, the Home Minister said Karnataka’s fight against the pandemic was “very good” and appreciated the Bengaluru police’s role in maintaining the law and order during the lockdown.
- He also inaugurated Indian Reserve Battalion unit’s administrative office building at Tikota, Vijayapura district.

USA and Anti Globalist Policies of Trump

- Few Presidents have tried to alter the fundamentals of American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War like Donald Trump has done in the past four years.
- Mr. Trump broke with the Washington consensus on what western policymakers and strategists call the liberal internationalist order. He put his ‘America First’ doctrine in the driving seat of his foreign policy wagon. He decried the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the bedrock of the trans-Atlantic military cooperation, pulled the United States out of international organisations and multilateral treaties, and launched tariff wars with both friends and foes alike.
- Barring a series of normalisation agreements between Israel and some Arab countries, Mr. Trump does not have any major foreign policy achievement to his credit.
- But he is more of a disruptor than an achiever. And he has caused disruptions in America’s foreign policy which could outlive his presidency.
- When Joe Biden assumes the White House very soon, the biggest foreign policy challenge he faces is whether he could unmake the Trump legacy and take Washington back to its liberal

international consensus.

America and isolationism

- America’s isolationism did not start with Mr. Trump. He was rather harping on an old foreign policy doctrine that shaped and drove American policy before the Second World War when he pulled the U.S. back from the stage of global leadership.
- Before the war, the U.S., an emerging economic and military power, was largely an isolated country that was focused on its own rise and expansion.
- The economic catastrophe caused by the Great Depression and the losses it suffered in the First World War prompted the American isolationists, including progressives and conservatives, to push for a policy of non-involvement in European and Asian conflicts — a policy Washington had largely followed throughout the 19th century.

The Wilsonian imprint

- The roots of the liberal internationalist order can be traced to the ideals of the 28th American President, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, who led the U.S. to the First World War, called for a rules-based global order governed by international institutions in which countries could cooperate and achieve peace (what he called “an organised common peace”) rather than going to war to meet their goals.
- The Wilsonian principles on self-determination, rule of law within and between countries, liberal capitalist economic model and freer trade and emphasis on human rights would lay the foundations of the liberal global order which the West would wholeheartedly embrace after the Second World War, but they did not have many takers in the U.S. during the inter-war period. The U.S. was not even a member of the League of Nations.
- Washington unearthed the values of Wilsonian globalism only after it suited America’s strategic interests during the Cold War. When the world was divided

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

between the capitalist and communist blocs and when the communist and socialist parties (under the patronage of the Soviet Union) started making advances into Asian and European countries, the U.S. turned to liberal globalism and took up the leadership of the western world. It called itself and its allies the “free world”, claiming moral superiority over the communist and socialist dictatorships.

- While this remained the larger narrative, it did not stop them from embracing the dictators who were opposed to the red bloc.
- Basically, liberal internationalism embodied the transborder cooperation of western democracies and their allies in their fight against the socialist internationalism of the rival bloc.
- When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many pundits and policymakers saw it as a triumphant moment for liberal internationalism. Some even predicted “the end of history”.
- The U.S. stepped up its leadership role: It started wars to protect human rights, export democracy and defeat jihadists. But history did not proceed as the end-of-history theorists had prophesied.

Structural shifts

- From a normative point of view, the geostrategic charm of the liberal moral argument about freedom has diminished in the post-Cold War world. On the other side, with the rise of religious terrorism, even liberal democratic governments started arming themselves with more powers that often clashed with civil liberties.
- The liberal promise of ‘minimum government’ stayed confined to the economic realm, while the security state kept expanding its powers. On the global stage, the U.S.’s repeated military adventures have tested its own hard power superiority.
- The U.S. effected a regime change in Yugoslavia in 1999, but the campaign eventually led to the disintegration of the

country. In Iraq, the U.S. never won a conclusive victory.

- In Afghanistan, after 19 years of war, the U.S. has struck a deal with the Taliban and is badly looking for an exit.
- In Libya, the country “liberated by NATO”, there are two governments and two armies and many militias backed by rival regional powers.
- When it comes to Iran and North Korea, the U.S. is not as confident as it was with Iraq and Afghanistan on using force.
- This inability to win wars and prolonged military campaigns turned foreign interventions unpopular again.
- The biggest blow to the western liberal order, however, came from within. The crisis in capitalism that broke out in 2008, has weakened the U.S. and western Europe (the guarantors of the post-war order) economically, and unleashed political changes.
- The focus shifted away from human rights and civil liberties to fighting terrorism and stopping immigration in many of these countries. Illiberal, far-right and anti-immigrant Islamophobic parties started rising.
- They challenged post-war internationalism, mobilised the public based on cultural nationalism and vilified immigration and the flow of refugees (which was in part triggered by the wars the globalists fought in poorer countries).

From Trump to Biden

- The rise of Mr. Trump to power in the U.S., the leader of the western liberal order (and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom) was the sharpest manifestation of this tectonic shift that has been under way.
- Unsurprisingly, Mr. Trump, a product of the crisis in globalised capitalism, took the U.S. back to pre-war isolationism. It may not be a coincidence that Mr. Trump is the first American President since Jimmy Carter who has not launched a new war.
- Mr. Biden’s foreign policy would be different from Mr. Trump’s. He would

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

seek to strengthen alliances and build a more consistent foreign policy approach to the myriad problems America is facing.

- He could undo some of the policy decisions of Mr. Trump's such as the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord or its exit from the World Health Organization.
- But could Mr. Biden, a liberal internationalist himself, revive the western liberal international order?
- Could he revert to liberal trade, embrace globalisation like, say, Bill Clinton did, or launch wars in the name of protecting human rights or exporting democracy?
- Could he establish the U.S. hegemony over a fast-diversifying international system?
- The forces of history are against him.
- After the Second World War, there was a trans-Atlantic consensus among the ruling elites of North America and western Europe on how to tackle the challenges from the Soviet Union. Now, there is no such consensus on how to tackle the challenges they face.
- There could be broad agreements on issues such as climate change or the fight against COVID-19, but on critical strategic issues such as the rise of China and the challenges from Russia, there is a huge gap between the old globalists and the new populists.

Mr. Trump has been defeated, but not Trumpism and the anti-globalist politics it has unleashed. Even if Mr. Biden overcomes the currents of isolationism at home, he could face similar challenges across the Atlantic where a bunch of illiberal populist leaders and cultural nationalists such as Marine Le Pen of France, Matteo Salvini of Italy, Norbert Hofer of Austria and Geert Wilders of the Netherlands are on the ascent. Like Mr. Trump, none of them represents the old order.

UK invites PM Narendra Modi to G7 Summit

- G7 are the IMF declared 7 largest economies of the World – they are USA, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, UK and Japan.



- It represents 40% of global GDP and 10% of World population.
- G7 Summit 2019 happened in Biarritz, France. India was a participant.
- 2020 Summit is in USA and 2021 summit is in UK.



What is the news?

- The United Kingdom has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the G7 summit that is scheduled to be held in June.
- Apart from India, Australia and South Korea are also invited to participate in the proceedings of the summit as “guest countries”.
- “U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson will use the first in-person G7 summit in almost two years to ask leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to seize the opportunity to build back better from coronavirus, uniting to make the future fairer, greener and more prosperous,” a statement issued by the British High Commission announced on Sunday.
- The summit will be held in Cornwall from June 11 to 13.
- The invitation came days after Mr.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Johnson cancelled his visit to India in the last week of January because of a new wave of COVID-19 in Britain. He said he will visit India “ahead” of the G7 summit.

- Cooperation between the U.K. and India is significant this year as India is a non-permanent member at the UN Security Council, where the United Kingdom will take over the presidency in February.

India – China Border dispute

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Monday said it was aware of infrastructure construction by China in the past several years “along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)” and that India has also stepped up its construction. The statement came after a report by NDTV showed satellite images of a **new Chinese settlement in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- This is the first time the government has acknowledged Chinese construction, although official sources say the land has been under the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) control since 1959.
- “The Chinese have been holding the area since 1959 and it is not a new development. Prior to that, there was an Assam Rifles post there which was overrun. They have been doing construction there on and off. There were some temporary constructions few years back. They have now done permanent construction there,” an official source said.
- A second official source said, “They are doing it [the construction] on their side and we are doing it on our side.”
- Satellite images show the construction of a big village on the banks of **Tsari Chu river in Upper Subansiri district** between November 2019 and November 2020.
- Stating that the government remains committed to the objective of creating infrastructure along the border areas for the improvement of the livelihood of its citizens, including in Arunachal Pradesh, the MEA said in a statement, “Government keeps a constant watch on all

developments having a bearing on India’s security and takes all the necessary measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.” It said that India, too, has stepped up border infrastructure, including the construction of roads and bridges among others, which it added has provided “much needed connectivity to the local population along the border.”

Donald Trump (USA President) Impeachment

- Impeachment is a provision that allows Congress to remove the President of the United States.
- The House of Representatives (Lower House) has the “the sole power of impeachment” while the Senate (Upper House) has “the sole power to try all impeachments”.
- The Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court has the duty of presiding over impeachment trials in the Senate.

What are the grounds for impeachment:

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

What is the process of USA Impeachment?

- It begins with an investigation by a House committee.
- If they find that there is enough evidence of wrongdoing, it will refer the matter to the full House.
- When the full House votes, if one or more of the articles of impeachment gets a majority vote, the President is impeached.
- Next, the proceedings move to the Senate.
- The Senate holds a trial, overseen by the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

chief justice of the Supreme Court. A team of lawmakers from the House, known as managers, play the role of prosecutors.

- The President has defence lawyers, and the Senate serves as the jury.
- If at least two-thirds of the Senators present find the President guilty, he is removed and the Vice President takes over as President.

Uganda Political crisis

- Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's 76-year-old leader who has been in power since 1986, won another five-year term in the January 14 presidential election, but the contested result has pushed the country into its worst political crisis in decades.
- According to Uganda's Electoral Commission, he won nearly 59% of the vote, while his main rival, Robert Kyagulanyi, a pop musician better known by his stage name Bobi Wine, secured 34%.
- Mr. Wine has alleged voter fraud, which the government was quick to dismiss, while putting him and several other leaders of his National Unity Platform under house arrest.
- The government cracking down on the opposition is not new, but this time, there were widespread reports of state repression of Mr. Wine's movement in the run-up to the election.
- He was detained several times, his rallies broken up by security personnel, and the Internet shut down and social networks blocked before the election.
- Mr. Museveni's government refused to accredit election monitors from the West, saying the U.S., after its election crisis, did not have the authority to monitor the elections.
- Observers from Africa have documented irregularities, including illegal opening of ballot boxes and arrests of members of civil society groups observing elections.
- According to Ugandan law, **Mr. Wine has 15 days to prove election irregularities**, which is unlikely to happen as he is under

house arrest and party offices have been raided by security personnel.

- The Internet was restored almost a week after the shutdown, but social media platforms, which his campaign used to connect with the public, are still blocked.
- It appears that Mr. Museveni, whose National Resistance Movement came to power by waging a guerrilla war in the 1980s, seems determined to prevent Mr. Wine even coming close to power.
- Uganda has long been torn by coups and violence before Mr. Museveni's rise.
- Even after **Idi Amin**, the infamous dictator, was overthrown in 1979, politics remained volatile and violent. Mr. Museveni, when he captured power, promised reforms and stability. Consolidating power rather quickly, he offered a stable government and made Uganda an ally of the West in the fight against radicalism in East Africa.
- But his grip on power tightened and he forcefully kept the opposition below the radar.
- In 2005, Mr. Museveni amended the Constitution to remove the presidential term limits and in 2017, signed a law scrapping the age limit of 75 for presidential candidates.
- He might continue in office, but his greed for power and disregard for a fair electoral process and rights, coupled with economic woes, have already left cracks in his support base.
- Mr. Wine, in a short span, has emerged as the President's most potent political rival. Mr. Museveni must realise that short-circuiting the democratic process might force Uganda to repeat its history of violent transfer of power.

Indian Diaspora in USA - Biden Cabinet



- US President-elect Joe Biden has either nominated or named at least 20 Indian Americans, ahead of the historic inauguration.
- Of those named, 13 are women who are likely to hold key positions in Biden's administration, setting a new record in itself.
- While, 17 of them would be part of the powerful White House complex.
- Biden would be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States is already historic in the making as for the **first time ever a woman Kamala Harris** would be sworn as the vice president of the country.
- It is also for the first time ever that so many Indian-Americans have been roped into a presidential administration ever before the inauguration. Biden is still quite far away from filling all the positions in his administration.
- Harris, 56, is also the first ever **Indian-origin and African American** to be sworn in as the vice president of the United States.
- Topping the list is **Neera Tanden**, who has been nominated as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget and **Dr Vivek Murthy**, who has been nominated as the US Surgeon General.
- **Vanita Gupta** has been nominated as Associate Attorney General Department of Justice, and on Saturday, Biden nominated a former foreign service official **Uzra Zeya** as the Under Secretary of State for

Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.

- “The dedication that the Indian-American community has shown to public service over the years has been recognised in a big way at the very start of this administration! I am particularly pleased that the overwhelming majority are women. Our community has truly arrived in serving the nation,” Indiaspora founder M R Rangaswami told PTI.
- **Mala Adiga** has been appointed as Policy Director to the future First Lady **Dr Jill Biden** and **Garima Verma** would be the Digital Director of the Office of the First Lady, while **Sabrina Singh** has been named as her Deputy Press Secretary.
- For the **first time ever** among the Indian-Americans include two who trace their roots to **Kashmir**: **Aisha Shah**, who has been named as Partnership Manager at the White House Office of Digital Strategy, and **Sameera Fazili**, who would occupy the key position of Deputy Director at the US National Economic Council (NEC) in the White House.
- White House National Economic Council also has another Indian American, **Bharat Ramamurti**, as Deputy Director.
- **Gautam Raghavan**, who served at the White House in the previous Obama Administration returns to the White House as Deputy Director in Office of Presidential Personnel.

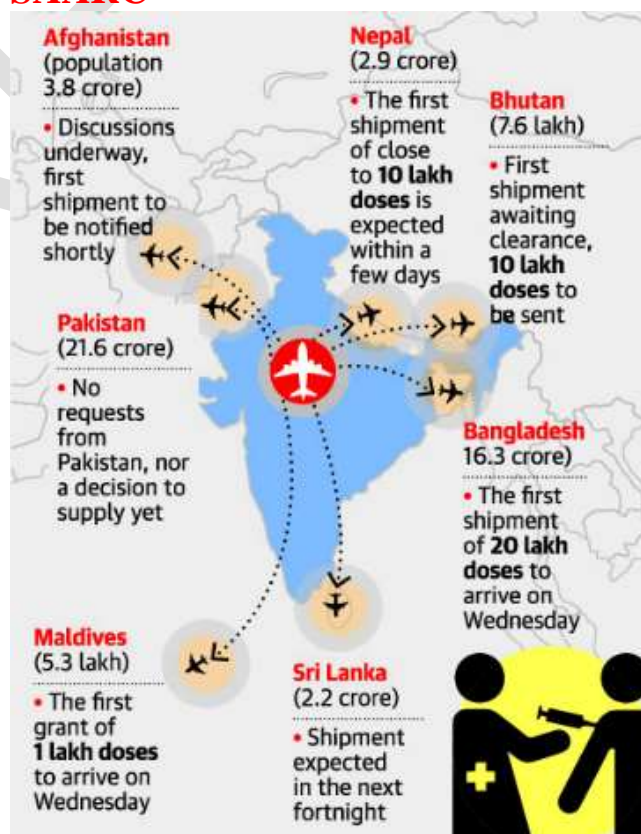
Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Among Biden’s inner circle is his top confident for year **Vinay Reddy**, who has been named as Director Speechwriting.
- **Young Vedant Patel** all set to occupy a seat in the White House lower press, behind the briefing room, as Assistant Press Secretary to the President. He is only the third-ever Indian American to be part of the White House press shop.
- Three Indian-Americans have made their way to the crucial National Security Council of the White House, thus leaving a permanent imprint on the country’s foreign policy and national security.
- They are **Tarun Chhabra**: Senior Director for Technology and National Security, **Sumona Guha**, Senior Director for South Asia, **Shanthi Kalathil**: Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights.
- **Sonia Aggarwal** has been named Senior Advisor for Climate Policy and Innovation in the Office of the Domestic Climate Policy at the White House and **Vidur Sharma** has been appointed as Policy Advisor for Testing for the White House COVID-19 Response Team.
- Two Indian Americans women have been appointed to the Office of the White House Counsel: **Neha Gupta** as Associate Counsel and **Reema Shah** as Deputy Associate Counsel.
- Also, for the first time in any administration, the White House would have three other South Asians in key positions.
- Pakistani-American **Ali Zaidi** as Deputy National Climate Advisor White House; Sri Lankan American **Rohini Kosoglu** as Domestic Policy Advisor to the Vice President and Bangladeshi-American **Zayn Siddique**: Senior Advisor to the White House Deputy Chief of Staff.
- During the campaign, Biden had indicated that he would rope in a large number of Indian Americans.
- “As President, I’ll also continue to rely on Indian-American diaspora, that keeps our two nations together, as I have throughout my career,” Biden had said in his address

to the Indian-American community during a virtual celebration of India’s Independence Day on August 15, 2020.

- “My constituents in Delaware, my staff in the Senate, the Obama Biden administration, which had more Indian Americans than any other administration in the history of this country and this campaign with Indian Americans at senior levels, which of course includes the top of the heap, our dear friend (Kamala Harris) who will be the first Indian American vice president in the history of the United States of America,” Biden said in his video address.

India sends COVID-19 vaccines to 6 countries: Vaccine diplomacy and SAARC



- India on Wednesday began the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to six “neighbouring and key partner countries”. They are **Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles**.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The delivery began with two special flights carrying the first consignments of Covishield to the **Maldives and Bhutan**. Sources said Bangladesh and Nepal will receive two large consignments of the same vaccine on Thursday followed by supplies to Myanmar and the Seychelles.
- As part of the **vaccine diplomacy**, a consignment of 1,50,000 doses reached Thimphu on Wednesday. **Bhutan is the first country** to receive the vaccine manufactured by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII).
- The vaccine is part of an overall programme to build Bhutanese capacity to fight the pandemic. On the request of Bhutan, India has also fast tracked the release of Rs. 501 crore for Thimphu’s “**reprioritised projects**” to meet the emerging challenges caused by the pandemic.
- Later, a consignment of 1,00,000 doses was received at the Male airport by Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid and Health Minister Ahmed Naseem.
- “**Maldives** is [among] the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. It’s a gift from India. India has proved to be a solid friend of the Maldives. India gave us support when our students had to be evacuated from Wuhan in China. **In these difficult circumstances, India is the first country.** We thank India for supporting us always in our challenging moments,” Mr. Shahid said.
- In a press statement, the High Commission of India in Male said, “India gifted 1,00,000 doses of the India-manufactured COVID-19 vaccine to the Maldives today to meet the immediate requirements of vaccinating healthcare workers, frontline workers and those with co-morbidities.”
- India will ‘gift’ one million doses of Covishield to Nepal and two million doses to Dhaka.
- The Health Department of Bangladesh had earlier announced that it was expecting the vaccine on Wednesday but the delivery was finally slotted for Thursday. Nepal said the announcement of the ‘gift’ of the

vaccine from India is a ‘wonder’.

- The announcement came days after Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali placed requirement of the India-manufactured vaccine to fight the pandemic in the Himalayan country.
- The Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday declared that India will continue to supply vaccine to “neighbouring and key partner countries”, “keeping in view the domestic requirements of the phased roll-out”.
- “It will be ensured that domestic manufacturers will have adequate stocks to meet domestic requirements while supplying abroad,” said the Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday informing that India has also carried out capacity building and training workshops for neighbouring countries.

Economic Data

- Fitch Ratings on Wednesday said India’s medium-term growth potential is at about 6.5% but weak implementation of reforms, combined with continued financial sector problems, could lower its potential.
- It said the revival of the reform agenda is among the Indian government’s policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shock.

‘Partially offset’

- “If implemented effectively, we believe these reforms may help to support India’s medium-term growth and partially offset downside pressures to investment from renewed asset-quality challenges in the financial sector and damaged corporate balance sheets,” the ratings agency said.
- “We expect India’s central government to remain generally reform-minded over the next few years, and potential areas for further reform seem plentiful, in our view. However, the process of reform in India remains complex, and implementation at times has proven difficult,” Fitch said.
- “Our projected annual medium-term GDP growth is relatively high, nevertheless, at

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

around 6.5% reflecting above-trend growth rates needed to close the output gap.” Fitch estimates medium-term growth potential to be some 1.7 percentage point lower than otherwise as a result of the scarring effects of the health crisis and financial sector weaknesses.

- The ratings agency last week said India’s gross domestic product (GDP) would expand by 11% in the financial year 2021-22, after witnessing a 9.4% contraction in the current fiscal period ending in March 2021.

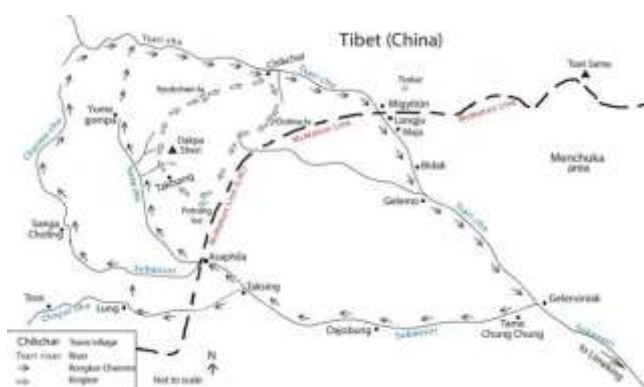
Donald Trump and Presidential Transitions

- After one of the most contentious elections and presidential transitions in recent history, it was a relatively scaled-back inauguration ceremony that finally placed 46th President of the U.S. Joe Biden in the Oval Office.
- The devastating human and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with deep partisan rancour and the bitter aftertaste of the Capitol building attack earlier this month, meant that Inauguration Day was less a flamboyant extravaganza than a quiet celebration of multicultural America reasserting itself.
- There could have been no greater symbol of that assertion than the swearing-in of Kamala Harris, his running mate of Indian and African descent, as Vice-President — the first woman ever to hold that position. Mr. Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump, chose to not attend the event, making him only the fourth President to do so.
- Nevertheless, bipartisan goodwill was present on the dais before the Capitol building, as Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath of office to Mr. Biden, including former Vice-President Mike Pence, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, and former President George W. Bush.
- It was bipartisanship and societal healing that appeared to be the theme of Mr. Biden’s speech, as he vowed to unite all

Americans to fight the foes they faced, of “Anger, resentment, hatred. Extremism, lawlessness, violence. Disease, joblessness, hopelessness”.

- To the world, he committed to lead “by the power of our example”.
- It was a demonstration of not only power but political intent when, on his first day in office, Mr. Biden expediently reversed a range of Trump-era actions by issuing 17 executive orders and directives to cancel the U.S.’s exit from the Paris Climate Agreement and WHO, include non-citizens in the census count, protect immigrants under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme from heightened risk of deportation, revoke the “Remain in Mexico” policy, halt construction of the infamous southern border wall and end the egregious “Muslim ban”.
- While these decisive actions may have felt like a balm to Democrats, he would do well to remember, as he goes about dismantling the Trump legacy, that 74 million people voted for his opponent, and Mr. Trump has encouraged them to believe that the election was stolen.
- If the Capitol building attack was an indication of the unhinged rage seething below the ostensibly peaceful transfer of power, it may not be long before the America of economically disenchanted white privilege again rears its head in a manner that today’s political victors find unsavoury.
- The fact that the White House, Senate and House of Representatives are now firmly in the grip of Democrats should not be cause for giving up on bipartisan moderation. Or else Mr. Biden’s search for a more perfect Union may take longer.

India – China Border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh



- China said its construction of a village across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh was “beyond reproach” because it had “never recognised” Arunachal.
- India’s Ministry of External Affairs said earlier this week it was aware of the construction “along the LAC”.
- This followed a report showing satellite images of the village, built between November 2019 and November 2020 and located a couple of kilometres across the LAC, beyond what India sees as the border separating Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet, on the banks of the Tsari Chu river in Upper Subansiri district in Arunachal.
- Indian officials said this area has been under Chinese control since 1959. There are close to two dozen spots along the entire length of the LAC in all sectors where India and China do not agree on its alignment.
- Indian officials said China had earlier built a permanent construction of military

barracks in this area. The construction of the village has been seen by analysts as a move to bolster China’s claim to the area, and part of a broader recent push by China to build civilian settlements in disputed frontier areas, which it has also done with Bhutan.

- The Chinese Foreign Ministry said that China’s “position on **Zangnan** [or South Tibet, as China refers to Arunachal] region is consistent and clear”. “We never recognised the so-called Arunachal Pradesh,.
- “China’s development and construction activities within our own territory is normal. This is beyond reproach as it is in our territory.”
- The Communist Party-run Global Times newspaper, in a report earlier this week, said the area “has never been recognised by the Chinese government”.
- “China and India haven’t demarcated the border line of this area yet. So they cannot accuse China of building a village on the Indian side,”.
- That is in large part because China has refused to exchange maps showing its LAC perception in the eastern sector, leaving unclear the extent of its claims on what is under its control. There is no doubt that the Tsari Chu basin is an inherent part of China’s territory” said Chinese side.
- The site of the village is close to where China had attacked an Assam Rifles post in 1959, in what is known as the **Longju incident**, said south India-based Tibet scholar Claude Arpi. He said it is at least 2 km south of the McMahon Line, which China doesn’t recognise. After the 1962 war, India stopped patrolling the area.
- Mr. Arpi said the construction appeared to be part of a programme by China to build what it calls “poverty alleviation” villages. He estimates that under the initiative, launched after a Tibet economic work conference in 2015, some 600 villages have been built, of which around 100 are in border areas. “While the government calls them poverty alleviation villages, some of the villages in border areas are

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

very remote with little economic activity there, so they appear to have a strategic purpose,” he said, adding that people had been moved to some of the new villages from other parts of Tibet, including families of herders, to occupy the newly built houses. Another village built last year, called Pangda, was built 2-3 km inside what Bhutan sees as its territory, in another disputed area.

- The new village in Arunachal is around 30 km from another well-known border village called Yumai, which made headlines in China in 2017 when President Xi Jinping sent a letter to its residents saying he hoped they “will motivate more herders to set down roots in the border area like galsang flowers, and become guardians of Chinese territory”.
- In 2015, the Chinese National Geography magazine reported that “the Tibetan family’s residence there had helped China maintain control of the territory”, said a report in the South China Morning Post. “Yumai would be occupied by India already if the family had decided to leave,” the village’s head was quoted as saying.

State Election Commission vs Andhra Pradesh Govt

- SEC issues notification for the first phase Gram Panchayat polls in A.P. amidst raging legal battle
- A.P. State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar releasing the phase one Gram Panchayat elections notification in Vijayawada on January 23, 2021. | Photo Credit: Raju V.
- The conflict between the **A.P. government and the State Election Commission (SEC) over holding Gram Panchayat (GP) elections** reached a flashpoint on January 23 with commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar issuing a notification for the first phase of the four-phase elections even as the government’s petition in the Supreme Court against the High Court order permitting elections to be held as per schedule is due for hearing on

January 25.

- Mr. Kumar said the High Court believed the SEC fixed the election schedule after duly taking the safety of voters and government employees into consideration, and insisted that the elections be held in tandem with the COVID-19 vaccination programme.
- He said the Panchayat Raj Department (PRD) had failed in discharging its duties. Further, Mr. Kumar said the SEC was adopting the 2019 electoral rolls in the absence of the final ones for 2021, which should have been made available by the PRD. Youth who attained more than 18 years of age would be forfeiting their right to vote due to the adoption of 2019 rolls.
- Appropriate action would be taken against the derelict officials of PRD Mr. Kumar said, adding that due attention would be paid to ‘unanimous elections’ and an Inspector General-rank police officer posted to check electoral malpractices and offences.

State Election Commissions (SECs)

- The State Election Commission has been entrusted with the function of conducting free, fair and impartial elections to the local bodies in the state.
- **Article 243K(1):** It states that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats (Municipalities under Article 243ZA) shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.
- **Article 243K(2):** It states that the tenure and appointment will be directed as per the law made by the state legislature. However, State Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his/her office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court.

India, China - Corps Commander dialogue

- India and China are scheduled to hold the ninth round of Corps Commander talks after a long delay in the senior military-level talks to work out a phased disengagement and de-escalation along the disputed border in **Eastern Ladakh**.
- The talks will be held on the Chinese side **at Moldo** opposite Chushul, a defence source said. As the earlier round, the Indian side will be led by Lt. Gen. P.G.K. Menon, General Officer Commanding of the 14 Corps.
- Last November, officials said both sides are close to finalising a **phased withdrawal plan of troops** and equipment but there was no progress since in concluding it.
- With no breakthrough in several rounds of military and diplomatic-level talks, both sides have dug in for the harsh winter in the high-altitude region.
- The Indian stand continues to be complete disengagement and de-escalation along the entire Eastern Ladakh.

No progress

- After the sixth round on September 21, both sides for the first time issued a joint statement in which they agreed to “stop sending more troops to the frontline” and “refrain from unilaterally changing the situation on the ground”. There has been no progress towards resolution in the subsequent rounds.
- Early this month, Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane said the forces were ready to hold the ground for as long as it takes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to achieve “national objectives”. He had also downplayed reports of Chinese troop withdrawal from the training areas in the depth which he said were 500-1,500 km away from the border and one should not lay “too much significance” on these comings and goings.
- With the long-term view, the Army is reorganising some of its strike elements from the western border to the northern

border for deployment along the LAC.

USA to review Taliban deal

Biden govt. to review U.S.-Taliban deal

- It wants to ascertain if the outfit is ‘living up to its commitments to reduce violence in Afghanistan’
- The Biden administration said it will review a landmark U.S. deal with the Taliban, focusing on whether the insurgent group has reduced attacks in Afghanistan, in keeping with its side of the agreement.
- Washington struck a deal with the Taliban in Qatar last year, to begin withdrawing its troops in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to kickstart peace talks with the Afghan government.
- But violence across Afghanistan has surged despite the two sides engaging in those talks since September.
- 1. President Joe Biden’s newly appointed National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, spoke with his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib and “made clear the United States’ intention to review” the deal said.
- Specifically, Washington wants to check that the Taliban is “living up to its commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, to reduce violence in Afghanistan, and to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders,” she said.
- It added that Mr. Sullivan “underscored that the U.S. will support the peace process with a robust and regional diplomatic effort, which will aim to help the two sides achieve a durable and just political settlement and permanent ceasefire.”
- Mr. Sullivan also discussed the U.S.’s support for protecting recent progress made on women and minority groups’ rights as part of the peace process.
- When contacted, the Taliban said they remained “committed to the agreement and honour our commitments”.
- “We expect the other side to remain committed to the agreement too,”

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Mohammad Naeem, the group’s spokesman in Qatar, said.

Kabul welcomes move

- Washington’s move was met with a sigh of relief from officials in Kabul after months of speculation over how the new administration would potentially recalibrate the Afghan policy.
- Mr. Mohib tweeted that during the call the two sides “agreed to work toward a permanent ceasefire and a just and durable peace” in the country.
- Another top Afghan government official lambasted the Taliban’s failure to live up to the February 2020 deal, saying the agreement had failed to achieve its stated goals.
- “The agreement so far, did not deliver a desired goal of ending Taliban’s violence and bringing a ceasefire desired by the Afghans,” Sediq Sediqqi, Deputy Interior Minister and former spokesman to President Ashraf Ghani said on Twitter.
- “The Taliban did not live up to its commitments.”
- Deadly attacks and high-profile assassinations have increased in recent months, particularly in Kabul where several journalists, activists, judges and politicians have been murdered in brazen daylight attacks.
- The Taliban have denied responsibility for these killings, but Afghan and U.S. officials have blamed the group for the murders.

China - Taiwan issue

Taiwan reports Chinese air incursions

- Eight Chinese bomber planes and four fighter jets entered the southwestern corner of Taiwan’s air defence identification zone on Saturday, and Taiwan’s Air Force deployed missiles to “monitor” the incursion, the island’s Defence Ministry said.
- China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, has conducted almost daily flights over the waters between the

southern part of Taiwan and the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands in the South China Sea in recent months.

- However, they have generally consisted of just one or two reconnaissance aircraft.
- The presence of so many Chinese combat aircraft on this mission — Taiwan said it was made up of eight nuclear-capable H-6K bombers and four J-16 fighter jets — is unusual.
- A map provided by Taiwan’s Defence Ministry showed that the Chinese aircraft, which also included a Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft, flew over the same waters where the most recent Chinese missions have been taking place near the Pratas Islands, though still well away from mainland Taiwan.
- Taiwan’s Air Force warned away the Chinese aircraft and deployed missiles to monitor them, the Ministry added, using standard wording for how it responds to such activities.
- “Airborne alert sorties had been tasked, radio warnings issued and air defence missile systems deployed to monitor the activity,” it said in a brief statement.
- There was no immediate comment from China. In the past China has said it has been carrying out exercises to defend the country’s sovereignty and security.
- Beijing has watched with growing concern increasing U.S. support for democratic Taiwan.
- The flight by the Chinese bombers and fighters on Saturday came just days after Joe Biden assumed the U.S. presidency.

Yemen crisis: Explained

The origins

- The roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to “**Believing Youth**” (Muntada al-Shahabal-Mu’min), a **Zaydi revivalist group founded by Hussein al-Houthi** and his father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, in the early 1990s.
- Badr al-Din was an influential Zaydi cleric in northern Yemen.
- Inspired by the **Iranian revolution of**

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

1979 and the rise of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, Badr al-Din and his sons started building vast social and religious networks among the Zaydis of Yemen, who make up roughly one-third of the Sunni-majority country population.

About the Zaydis

- The Zaydis are named after Zayd Bin Ali, the great grandson of Imam Ali. Zayd Bin Ali had led a revolt against the Ummayyad Caliphate in the eighth century.
- He was killed, but his martyrdom led to the rise of the Zaydi sect.
- For centuries, the Zaydis were a powerful sect within Yemen. In the 16th century, they established an imamate and in the 17th, they ousted the Ottomans from Yemen.
- The imamate went into decline and got fractured in the 19th century, faced with challenges from repeated attacks from the Ottomans and the rising influence of Wahhabism in Arabia.
- After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Zaydis, once again, consolidated power in northern Yemen and established the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. This lasted till 1962 when the Egypt-backed republicans overthrew the monarchy.
- When Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Hussein launched Believing Youth, the plan was to reorganise the Zaydi minority.
- But when the movement turned political and started attacking the “corrupt” regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh and his support for the U.S.’s war on terror, it became a thorn on Saleh’s side.
- They called themselves **Ansar Allah (Partisans of God)**, mobilised tribesmen in the north against the government and chanted the “Death to America” slogans.
- In 2004, Saleh’s government issued an arrest warrant against Hussein al-Houthi. He resisted the arrest, starting an insurgency.
- In September 2004, the government troops

attacked the rebels and killed Hussein. Since then, the government launched multiple military campaigns in **Sa’dah, the Zaydi stronghold**, to end the resistance, which was locally called the **Houthi movement**, after their “martyred” leader. But the government’s heavy hand backfired.

- It only strengthened the Houthis, who, by 2010 when a ceasefire was reached, had captured Sa’dah from the government troops.

2011 Arab Spring

- When protests broke out in Yemen in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring protests, the Houthis backed the agitation.
- President Saleh, a Zaydi who was in power for 33 years, resigned in November, handing the reins to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Saudi-backed Sunni.
- Yemen, under the tutelage of the Saudis and the Emiratis, started a national dialogue to resolve internal differences.
- The Houthis were part of the dialogue. But they fell out with the transition government of Mr. Hadi, claiming that the proposed federal solution, which sought to divide the Zaydi-dominated north into two land-locked provinces, was intended to weaken the movement. They soon got back to insurgency.
- Saleh, who was sidelined by the interim government and its backers, joined hands with his former rivals and launched a joint military operation.
- By January 2015, the **Houthi-Saleh alliance** had captured Sana’a and much of northern Yemen, including the **vital Red Sea coast**. (Later the Houthis turned against Saleh and the latter was killed in December 2017).
- The Houthis and security forces loyal to Saleh - who was thought to have backed his erstwhile enemies in a bid to regain power - then attempted to take control of the entire country, forcing Mr Hadi to flee abroad in March 2015.
- The rapid rise of the Houthis in Yemen set off alarm bells in Riyadh which saw them

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

as Iranian proxies.

- Saudi Arabia, under the new, young Defence Minister, **Mohammed Bin Salman**, started a military campaign in March 2015, hoping for a quick victory against the Houthis.
- Alarmed by the rise of a group they believed to be backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, **Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign** aimed at defeating the Houthis, ending Iranian influence in Yemen and restoring Mr Hadi's government. The coalition received logistical and intelligence **support from the US, UK and France**.
- At the start of the war Saudi officials forecast that it would last only a few weeks. But four years of military stalemate have followed.
- Coalition ground troops landed in the **southern port city of Aden** in August 2015 and helped drive the Houthis and their allies out of much of the south over the next few months.
- Mr Hadi's government has established a temporary home in Aden, but it struggles to provide basic services and security and the president continues to be based in Saudi Arabia.
- The Houthis meanwhile have not been dislodged from Sanaa and north-western Yemen. They have been able to maintain a siege of the **third city of Taiz** and to launch regular ballistic missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia.
- In **September 2019, Saudi Arabia's eastern oil fields of Abqaiq and Khurais were attacked by air**, disrupting nearly half the kingdom's oil production - representing around 5% of global oil output.
- The Houthis claimed responsibility but Saudi Arabia and the US accused Iran of carrying out the attacks.
- Militants from **al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)** and the local affiliate of the rival **Islamic State group (IS)** have taken advantage of the chaos by seizing territory in the south and carrying out deadly attacks, notably in Aden.
- The launch of a ballistic missile towards Riyadh in November 2017 prompted the Saudi-led coalition to tighten its blockade of Yemen.
- It said it wanted to halt the smuggling of weapons to the rebels by Iran - an accusation Tehran denied - but the restrictions led to substantial increases in the prices of food and fuel, helping to push more people into food insecurity.
- The warring parties agreed a ceasefire at talks in Sweden. **The Stockholm agreement** required them to redeploy their forces from **Hudaydah**, establish a prisoner exchange mechanism, and to address the situation in Taiz.
- While hundreds of prisoners have since been released, the full redeployment of forces from Hudaydah has not yet taken place, raising fears that the Stockholm agreement will collapse and that the battle for Hudaydah will resume.
- In July 2019, the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, a key ally of Saudi Arabia in the war, facing international criticism of its conduct, announced a **withdrawal of its forces from Yemen**.
- In August 2019, fighting erupted in the south between Saudi-backed government forces and an ostensibly allied **southern separatist movement** supported by the UAE, the **Southern Transitional Council (STC)**.
- Forces loyal to the STC, which accused Mr Hadi of mismanagement and links to Islamists, seized control of Aden and refused to allow the cabinet to return until Saudi Arabia brokered a power-sharing deal that November.
- The UN hoped the agreement would clear the way for a political settlement to end the civil war, but in January 2020 there was a sudden escalation in hostilities between the Houthis and coalition-led forces, with fighting on several front lines, missile strikes and air raids.
- In **April 2020 the STC declared self-rule in Aden**, breaking a peace deal signed with the internationally recognised government,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

saying it would govern the port city and southern provinces.

- Saudi Arabia announced a unilateral ceasefire the same month due to coronavirus pandemic but the Houthis rejected it, demanding the lifting of air and sea blockades in Sanaa and Hudaydah.

Present situation

Yemen: Areas of control and conflict



- The Houthis have established a government in the north. The Supreme Political Council, headed by its President, Mahdi al-Mashat, is the executive branch of their rule. Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, Hussein's brother, leads the movement. There are serious allegations against both the Saudis and the Houthis in the war.
- While the Saudi bombings caused a large number of civilian deaths, the Houthis were accused, by rights groups and governments, of preventing aid, deploying forces in densely populated areas and using excessive force against civilians and peaceful protesters.
- The conflict appears to have entered a stalemate. Yemen, often dubbed the poorest Arab country, is **now divided into**

three parts

1. The Houthi-controlled northern territories,
2. The Southern Transition Council-controlled areas in the south (which has the backing of the UAE) and
3. The rest held by the internationally recognised government of President Hadi.

- All sides are trying to maximise their interests with attempts to find a political solution reaching nowhere. In the meantime, Yemen's suffering is mounting.

Impact on the World

- What happens in Yemen can greatly exacerbate regional tensions. It also worries the West because of the threat of attacks - such as from al-Qaeda or IS affiliates - emanating from the country as it becomes more unstable.
- The conflict is also seen as part of a regional power struggle between Shia-ruled Iran and Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia.
- Gulf Arab states - backers of President Hadi - have accused Iran of bolstering the Houthis financially and militarily, though Iran has denied this.
- Yemen is also strategically important because it sits on a strait linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, through which much of the world's oil shipments pass.

Analysis of Yemen crisis

- Ansar Allah (now Houthi movement), which began as a Zaydi socio-religious movement, is now the country's strongest war machine that has withstood Saudi attacks
- The roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to '**Believing Youth**', a **Zaydi revivalist group** founded by Hussein al-Houthi and his father Badr al-Din in the 1990s
- In 2004, Hussein was killed by Yemeni troops, but the group he founded, called Houthis, after its leader, continued to the battle against the government.
- In 2014, three years after President Saleh resigned amid protests, the Houthis reached Sana'a, and by early 2015, they

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

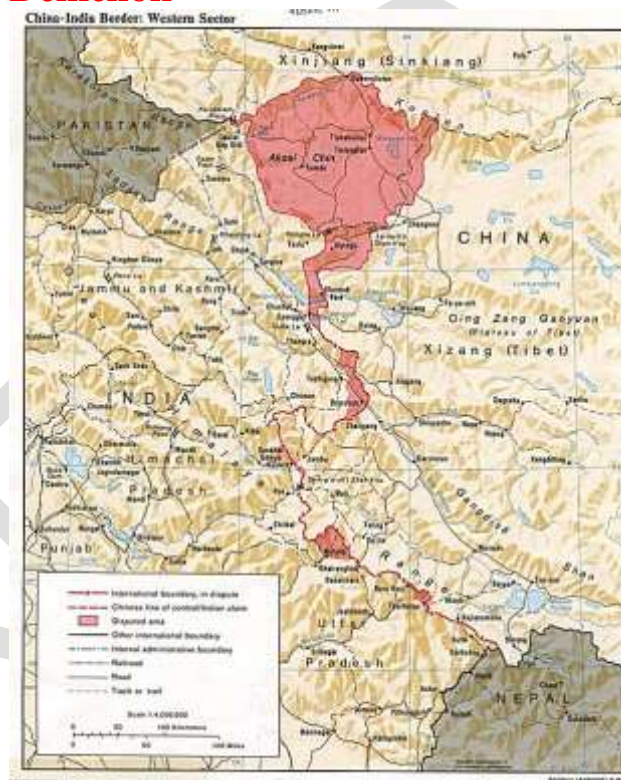
took over the city.

The USA Angle

- After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, when anti-Americanism was at its peak in the Muslim world, several Islamist organisations had tried to mobilise supporters riding the public sentiments.
- For the Houthis in northern Yemen, it was a tipping point.
- What started as a religious revivalist movement aimed at restoring the fading glory of the Zaydi sect of Islam, the Houthis, under the leadership of Hussein al-Houthi, were turning political.
- When the second intifada broke out in the Palestinian territories in 2000, the Houthis staged solidarity protests. They mobilised supporters against the U.S.’s war on Afghanistan in 2001.
- After the Iraq war, they adopted a new slogan, “Death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam”.
- Not many had foreseen back then that this tiny group of tribesmen from the **Marran Mountains of the northern province Sa’dah** would grow into the most powerful rebel war machine in Yemen and, within little over a decade, capture the capital Sana’a and establish their rule over much of the country.
- For the past six years, the Houthis have been controlling Sana’a, while attempts to dislodge them, including a Saudi-led military intervention, failed to meet their goals.
- The success story of the Houthis is also the story of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our times.
- **The Saudi military intervention, the Houthi resistance and a separatist movement in the south** have collectively turned Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.
- And then, **there is Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula**, exploiting the lawlessness and expanding its operations.
- Making matters worse, the administration of Donald Trump in the U.S. designated the Houthis a ‘terrorist organisation’ in its final days in office. This is expected to

make providing aid to the Houthi-held territories and finding an eventual political solution to the crisis difficult. The ball is now in U.S. President Joe Biden’s court.

India China Border Disputes: Demchok



- Nomads were asked to vacate traditional grazing areas in **Demchok**.
- As India and China started the ninth round of **Corps Commander talks** to address the 9-month-long standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, the head of one of the border villages claimed that Chinese vehicles were using Indian roads to enter Indian territory.
- “On December 10, some villagers went there and saw that the Chinese had entered Indian territory and had transgressed more than 1 km from the border. We contacted the authorities who asked us to camp there and not recede even by an inch. We stood guard for four or five days. The two Chinese vehicles came back again on December 16, but this time the SDM and

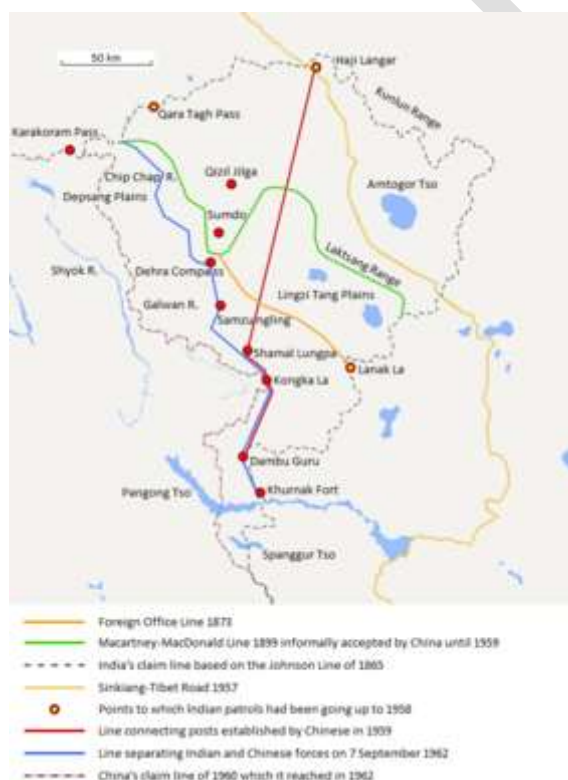
Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

ITBP officials were there.

- He said People's Liberation Army personnel were interspersed with Chinese civilians.
- He said the Chinese aggression could be caught red-handed as everything was recorded on phones.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed Rajya Sabha last September that face-offs with the Chinese PLA happened because “patrols were interrupted”.
- Mr. Singh had said there was no commonly delineated LAC and there was an overlap in the perception of the LAC in many areas.

What is Line of Actual Control (LAC)?

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is a demarcation line that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, formed after the 1962 war.
- The border is not fully demarcated and the LAC is neither clarified nor confirmed by the two countries.



India-China border is divided into three sectors:

- **Western Part:** The LAC in the western sector falls in the union territory of Ladakh and is 1597 km long,
- **Middle Part:** The middle sector of 545 km length falls in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and
- **Eastern Part:** The 1346 km long eastern sector falls in the states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- So basically, the entire Sino-Indian border (including the western LAC, the small undisputed section in the centre, and the MacMahon Line in the east) is 4,056 km (2,520 mi) long and traverses one Indian union territory – Ladakh and four Indian states: Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- The main differences are in the Western and Eastern sectors. India sees China as occupying 38,000 sq km in Aksai Chin. In the east, China claims as much as 90,000 sq km, extending all across Arunachal Pradesh.
- The middle sector is the least disputed sector, while the western sector witnesses the highest transgressions between the two sides.

Electoral Reforms: Remote voting project, e-EPIC

Electoral Reforms: Remote voting project, e-EPIC

- 25th January is the National Voters Day. On this occasion Chief Election Commissioner **Sunil Arora** said that the trials of the Election Commission's **remote voting project** would be carried out soon.
- “We have already started a research project on remote voting using **cutting-edge technology** with IIT-Chennai and other leading institutions and it has made good progress. Mock trials of this project will begin soon,” he said.
- The system being developed by the IIT-M **uses blockchain** for two-way remote voting at designated centres, an EC official had said when the project was started in 2020.

Blockchain Technology

- Blockchains are a new data structure that is secure, cryptography-based, and distributed across a network. The technology supports cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset.
- Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.
- The technology allows transactions to be simultaneously anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless.
- It does this by distributing trust from powerful intermediaries to a large global network, which through mass collaboration, clever code and cryptography, enables a tamper-proof public ledger of every transaction that's ever happened on the network.
- A block is the “current” part of a blockchain which records some or all of the recent transactions, and once completed, goes into the blockchain as permanent database. Each time a block gets completed, a new block is generated.

Blocks are linked to each other (like a chain) in proper linear, chronological order with every block containing a hash of the previous block.

• Benefits of blockchain technology:

1. As a public ledger system, it records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
2. All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
3. Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
4. It allows decentralization of the technology.

Electronic versions of the elector photo ID card, or e-EPIC

- In another development, electors will be able to download electronic versions of the elector photo ID card, or **e-EPIC** with the Election Commission launching it during the National Voter Day celebration.
- The digital version of EPICs would be available for download from the voter helpline app, **voterportal.eci.gov.in** and **nvsp.in**, the EC said.
- The e-EPIC would be a **non-editable PDF version** of the EPIC that can be downloaded on the phone and stored on the DigiLocker app or printed from a computer.
- All general voters who have valid EPIC numbers would be able to do so from February 1 and those who applied in November and December will be able to download it from Monday till January 31.

Chronology of Electoral Reforms

Electoral Reforms Pre-2000

- Lowering of Voting Age: The 61st Amendment Act to the Constitution reduced the minimum age for voting from

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

21 to 18 years. (read about important amendments in the Indian Constitution, in the linked article.)

- Deputation to Election Commission: All personnel working in preparing, revising and correcting the electoral rolls for elections shall be considered to be on deputation to the EC for the period of such employment, and they shall be superintended by the EC.
- Increase in the number of proposers and the security deposit: The number of electors required to sign as proposers in the nomination papers for elections to the Rajya Sabha and the State Legislative Councils has been raised to 10% of the electors of the constituency or ten such electors, whichever is less chiefly to prevent frivolous candidates. The security deposit has also been hiked to prevent non-serious candidates.
- Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs): First introduced in 1998 during the state elections of Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, EVMs are used widely now as they are fool-proof, efficient and a better option in terms of the environment.
- Disqualification on conviction for violating the National Honours Act, 1971: This shall lead to disqualification of the person for 6 years from contesting to the Parliament and the state legislatures.
- Restriction on contesting from more than 2 constituencies: A candidate cannot contest from more than 2 constituencies.
- Death of a contesting candidate: Previously, the election was countermanded on the death of a contesting candidate. In the future, no election will be countermanded on the death of a contesting candidate. If the deceased candidate, however, was set up by a recognized national or state party, then the party concerned will be given an option to nominate another candidate within 7 days of the issue of a notice to that effect to the party concerned by the Election Commission.
- It is prohibited by law to go to or near a polling booth bearing arms. This is

punishable by imprisonment for up to 2 years.

- On poll days, employees of organisations get a paid holiday and violation of this is punishable by a fine.
- Prohibition on sale of liquor: No liquor or other intoxicants shall be sold or given or distributed at any shop, eating place, or any other place, whether private or public, within a polling area during the period of 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for the conclusion of poll.
- Time limit for bye-elections: Bye-elections to any House of Parliament or a State Legislature will now be held within six months of the occurrence of the vacancy in that House. (Read about Parliament & State Legislature in the linked article.)
- The period of campaigning has been reduced.

Electoral Reforms Post 2000

- The electoral reforms target the election process in the country. The list of such electoral reforms are given below:
- Ceiling on election expenditure: At present, there is no limit on the amount a political party can spend in an election or on a candidate. But, the Commission has put a cap on individual candidates' spending. For the Lok Sabha elections, it is Rs. 50 – 70 lakh (depending on the state they are contesting the Lok Sabha seat from), and Rs. 20 – 28 lakh for an assembly election.
- Restriction on exit polls: The EC issued a statement before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saying that exit poll results could be broadcast only after the final phase of the elections were over. This was done to avoid prospective voters being misguided or prejudiced in any manner.
- Voting through postal ballot: In 2013, the EC decided to expand the ambit of postal ballot voting in the country. Previously, only Indian staff in missions abroad and defence personnel in a limited way, could vote via postal ballots. Now, there are 6 categories of voters who can use the postal

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

ballot: service voters; special voters; wives of service voters and special voters; voters subjected to preventive detention; voters on election duty and Notified voters.

- Awareness Creation: The government decided to observe January 25th as ‘National Voters Day’ to mark the EC’s founding day. Read more on the National Voters’ Day here.
- Political parties need to report any contribution in excess of Rs 20000 to the EC for claiming income tax benefit.
- Declaring of criminal antecedents, assets, etc. by the candidates is required and declaring false information in the affidavit is now an electoral offence punishable with imprisonment up to 6 months or fine or both.

Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)



- VVPAT is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines.
- It allows voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate.
- When a voter presses a button in the EVM, a paper slip is printed through the VVPAT. The slip contains the poll symbol and name of the candidate.
- It allows the voter to verify his/her choice.
- After being visible to the voter from a glass case in the VVPAT for seven seconds, the ballot slip will be cut and dropped into the dropbox in the VVPAT machine and a beep will be heard.
- VVPAT machines can be accessed by polling officers only.

cVIGIL APP

- The cVIGIL App provides time-stamped, evidence-based proof of the Model Code of Conduct / Expenditure Violation, having live photo/video with auto location data.
- Any citizen can lodge a complaint through the Mobile App. Flying Squads will then investigate the matter and the Returning Officer takes the decision.
- The status of cVIGIL can be shared with the cVIGIL complainant within a specified time limit.

Prelims PT Pointers regarding Electoral Reforms

- 1st Electoral Reforms committee was V M Tarkunde Panel during Janta Party Government. Dinesh Goswami Committee – Electoral reforms. Indrajit Gupta Committee. – State funding of elections.
- Election Commission of India established on 25th Jan, 1950. Hence Voters Day is celebrated on this day 1st time in 2011.
- 1st General Elections conducted in 1951-52.
- EVM universalised in 2000. SVEEP launched in 2010.
- Introduction of NOTA and filing of Affidavit by Candidates in 2013.
- National Voter's Services Portal (NVSP) launched in 2015.
- Use of VVPAT in 2017. Electoral Literacy Club launched in 2018.
- 2019: Record participation of 67.4% voters in 2019. Gender gap reduced to 0.1%. Special facilitation to PwD and Senior Citizens.

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

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

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.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- 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 interaction.
- 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

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

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

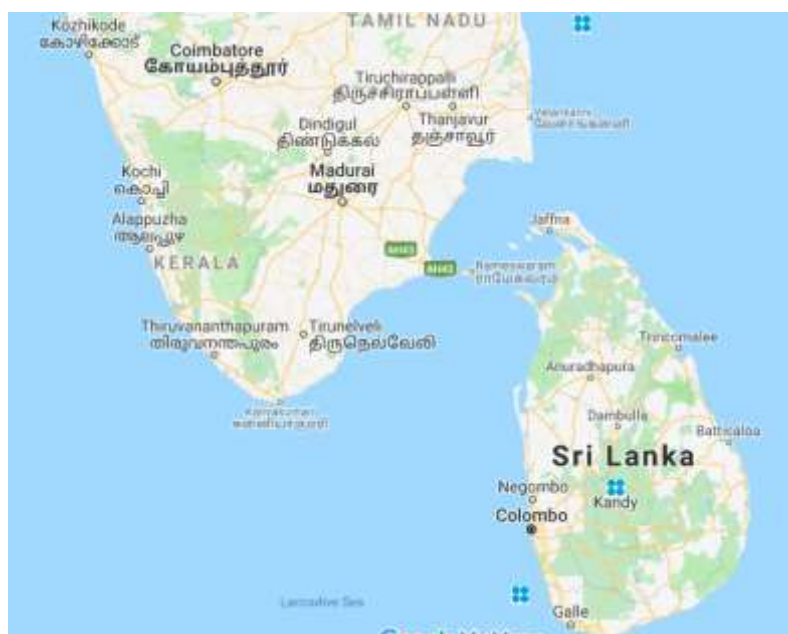
- China's relationship with Sri Lanka has been a challenge for India since years. In recent years, China has extended billions of dollars of loans to the Sri Lankan government for new infrastructure projects, which is not good for India's strategic depth in Indian Ocean Region.
- Sri Lanka also handed 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 included building of Colombo international container terminal by China Harbor Corporation.

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.

India China Border disputes: Naku La



THE FLASHPOINTS

Spot 1	Finger 5	Spot 2	Naku La sector
	(Pangong Tso, eastern Ladakh)		(ahead of Muguthang, Sikkim)
	Date: May 5-6		Date: May 9
	Troops involved: 250		Troops involved: 150
	Injured: Several (on both sides)		Injured: 4 Indian, 7 Chinese

- India China Border disputes has gone a long way now.
- Indian and Chinese troops clashed at **Naku La in north Sikkim** last week, in what the Army termed a “minor face-off”, resulting in some minor injuries on both sides, it has been learnt.
- “It is clarified that there was a minor face-off at Naku La area of north Sikkim on January 20, 2021, and the same was resolved by local commanders as per established protocols,” the Army said in a statement.
- The clash occurred as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops attempted to intrude into Indian territory, a defence source said.

May 9 clash

- There was a clash at **Naku La** on the night of May 9 last, which also saw injuries on both sides.
- There was a clash at **Pangong Tso** also at that time as the nine-month-long stand-off began at several locations across Eastern Ladakh.
- The clash occurred amid high alert and

heavy deployment of troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on both sides since the stand-off began.

- With peak winters and extremely low temperatures, the situation has been largely quiet as both sides dug in while diplomatic and military-level talks continue attempts to work out an agreement for disengagement and de-escalation.

Abuse of social media

- The warning by the Bihar police of legal action being taken against users of social media for “offensive” posts targeting the government, its Ministers and officials, betrays both hypersensitivity and ignorance of the law.
- It represents an unacceptable combination of low tolerance for criticism and a zeal to cow down the public.
- The **Economic Offences Wing**, which also deals with cyber-crime, has sent a circular to the department secretaries that they could inform the wing about such “offensive posts” so that it could act against them, terming such actions as “against prescribed law”.
- Presumably, the action contemplated is for an alleged cyber-crime.
- Even though the letter from the Inspector General of Police concerned makes no mention of any specific penal provision, it is a possible reference to **Section 66A of the IT Act**, as there is no other section that deals with “offensive” remarks.

Section 66A of the IT Act

Section 66A, which dealt with “Punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc.” was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015, as being too broadly defined.

The Act’s remaining penal provisions pertain only to other offences — sending obscene or prurient messages, hacking, stealing computer resources, identity theft, personation, and violation of

privacy.

- There is nothing specific in the law that would render strong, even offensive and intemperate, criticism of the government a cyber-offence.
- The tenor of the warning suggests that the cyber-crime wing may initiate proceedings against those who post offensive messages.
- However, it ought to be remembered that the police cannot register FIRs for defamation, as the offence can only be dealt with by way of criminal complaints before magistrates, and cannot be the subject of a police investigation.
- The government, indeed, has the power to institute criminal defamation cases through public prosecutors, if the alleged defamation is in respect of the official duties of public servants, but such measures do not exactly shore up a regime’s popularity.
- In response to criticism, the State government has clarified that the proposed action would only be against rumour-mongering and insulting language.
- RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav has reacted by daring the government to jail him for exposing its wrongdoing. CM Nitish Kumar has not helped his cause by claiming that the government’s good work is not reaching the people because of criticism on social media.
- There is much on social media that can be seen as crimes (hate speech, inflammatory and insulting remarks or defamation), but it ill-behoves an elected government to take note of these, unless the offenders are influential enough to cause major social divisions and foment violence.
- The government would do well not to act on the police circular, lest it be seen as an attempt to suppress its critics and those who make allegations of corruption.

Nepal Political crisis

- The political crisis triggered by Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's decision to **dissolve Nepal's Parliament and call fresh elections** led to a vertical split in the ruling party, with the rival faction led by **Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'** sacking Mr. Oli from its general membership.
- The Prachanda faction of the Nepal Communist Party had removed Mr. Oli as the party's chairman earlier.
- It had issued a notice to him seeking an explanation for his decision to recommend Parliament's dissolution, to which he did not respond. Following this, the central committee of the Prachanda bloc met on Sunday and decided to expel Mr. Oli.
- His aides have rejected this, saying their leader remains the PM. This puts Nepal and its fractious communist movement in limbo.
- Mr. Oli has claimed that he represents the party, while Mr. Prachanda and Madhav Kumar Nepal, a former PM and leader of Mr. Oli's erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal (UML), have ruled out any future compromise with the PM.
- The constitutional validity of the decision to dissolve Parliament is being reviewed by the Supreme Court.
- Also, the Election Commission will decide which faction could retain the party's name and symbol, the Sun.
- These decisions will have a lasting impact on which side would emerge stronger.
- Mr. Oli was elected PM in February 2018 after his CPN-UML fought the 2017 general election in an alliance with the Maoists.
- Within months of coming to power, the CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre of Prachanda merged to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which gave him nearly two-thirds majority in Parliament.
- But the pre-election unity did not last long. When the government was formed, the tacit understanding between the CPN-UML and the Maoists was that Mr. Oli and

Mr. Prachanda would share the five-year term.

- But Mr. Oli refused to step down after two and a half years, pushing the NCP into a bitter intra-party feud.
- The widening rift was not along the former UML-Maoist ideological lines.
- Rather, Mr. Oli's authoritarian style of governance and refusal to share power led to an erosion of support for the PM in the top echelons of the ruling party.
- To overcome his own weakness within the party and deny his rivals power, he dissolved Parliament.
- It is a typical case of greed for power and personality clashes trumping over the greater interests of a party, a government or a nation.
- When they formed a united front, it was a historic opportunity for Nepal's otherwise divided communists to script a brighter future for the fledgling republican democracy.
- But in three years, Nepal is in chaos — Parliament has been dissolved, the PM has been sacked from the ruling party, and the party is split down the middle. Mr. Oli cannot escape responsibility for the crisis Nepal is in today.

AP Govt vs State Election Commission

- The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea by the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government against the Andhra State Election Commission's decision to conduct gram panchayat elections amid COVID-19 vaccination drive, saying “elections have been held in this country in far more difficult times”.
- The court said the State government's reluctance to conduct the elections and the wording of its appeal suggested an “ego battle” between the government and State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar.
- “Ego problem between two authorities is leading to lawlessness. We cannot allow lawlessness. How can resolutions be

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

passed against State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar,” Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, heading the Bench, asked.

- The court said it was “highly deplorable” to see State employees’ federations issuing resolutions against the Election Commissioner.
- “The purpose of the State Election Commission [SEC] is to take over elections... Every time this process is started, some reason is being given to postpone the elections... The SEC is alive to the fact of the vaccination drive, the court should not take over such functions from the Election Commission. There is only a very limited scope of judicial review here,” Justice Kaul, flanked by Justice Hrishikesh Roy on the Bench, told Andhra’s lawyers, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and Mahfooz A. Nazki.

Andhra Pradesh three Capital issue

In Jan 2020, the Andhra Pradesh (AP) government, based on the recommendations of a High Power Committee (HPC), approved a proposal to create three capitals for the state. The Committee had recommended that

1. Visakhapatnam be made the executive capital and
2. Kurnool in the Rayalaseema region the judicial capital.
3. The Committee also suggested that Amaravati could house the governor’s office as well as the state assembly and become the legislative capital.



Other situations

Similar situation is for the South Africa. Republic of South Africa has three capitals:

1. Pretoria, the administrative capital
2. Cape Town, the legislative capital
3. Bloemfontein, the judicial capital
4. The Constitutional Court is located in Johannesburg.

Which other Indian states have multiple capitals?

- Maharashtra has two capitals– Mumbai and Nagpur (which holds the winter session of the state assembly).
- Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamshala (winter).
- The former state of Jammu & Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu (winter) as capitals.
- Uttarakhand recently has 2 capitals – Gairsain and Dehradun (winter).

Analysis

- The physical locations of the three state capitals are spread over the elongated shape of the state.
- Kurnool is on the western side; Amravati is centrally located and Vishakhapatnam is on the eastern corner.
- According to the state government, the purported objective of the Bill is decentralisation and inclusive development of all regions in the state.
- The Bill also provided for dividing the state into various zones and establishing zonal planning and development boards.
- The AP Legislative Assembly passed this Bill on 20 January 2020.

Positives

- The state government claims that it would allow an even development of the state. It would ensure justice to everyone and every region.
- It also claims it’s a good idea to decentralise power across the state as there have been several imbalances among the regions which had often led to agitations. Three capitals will lead to equitable development.
- Furthermore, it would be a boost to urbanisation and then economic development. In India, cities contribute anywhere between 59% and 70% of the

GDP.

Concerns

- **Separation of executive and legislative capital** can be challenging. In the Parliamentary system of government, which has been adopted in India, functions of the executive and the legislature are closely connected. For example,
- The development of a region can be done through policy interventions like industrial policy. However, separating the capitals can be against the convenience of the administration as well as the people. Also, it will be **logistically difficult** to implement.
- However, coordinating between seats of legislature and executive in separate cities will be easier said than done, and with the government offering no specifics of a plan, officers and common people alike fear a logistics nightmare.
- Andhra Pradesh has shrunk in size after Telangana was carved out of it in 2014, and it's hard to see how having government functions sprawled across three locations would lend itself to efficient governance.
- Its immediate effect, though, would mostly be an artificial spike in real estate prices in the two new proposed capital regions, and land sharks would move into part people from their land before the state turns up with offers.
- Instead of pursuing experiments of this sort, the state should dedicate itself to fulfilling the aspirations of its people. Assuredly, a single capital would be good enough.

Conclusion

However, the idea of three capitals can also restore regional balance in governance. But the state needs to have an effective plan for coordination among all sector and especially the three institutes of the democracy as the three pillars cannot operate from far away places.

Delay in Judicial Appointments

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday questioned the government about the delay in clearing Collegium recommendations for judicial appointments to various High Courts. A Bench of Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde and Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant asked the Centre if there was a timeline for government clearance of such recommendations.
- “If you don’t give comments for five months on Collegium recommendations, it is a matter of great concern,” Justice Kaul said.
- The Bench noted how recommendations from the High Courts of Bombay and Allahabad dated back to May or June last year. It said 189 proposals for judicial appointments were still pending. “What is your timeline to respond to these recommendations of judges’ appointment? The government has taken more than a year to respond... You say something is pending with Intelligence Bureau and some Chief Minister has not responded. We want to know your timeline,” the court addressed Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal.
- The Bench served notice on the High Courts which were not party to the petition filed by Lok Prahari, an NGO, seeking the appointment of additional judges. “We expect the High Courts to express their views in the present matter. The High Courts that are not impleaded shall be impleaded as party respondents in the instant matter,” the court said.
- In February last year, the Supreme Court had conveyed its alarm at the rising number of judicial vacancies in various High Courts. Some of them were functioning only with half their sanctioned strength.
- Mr. Venugopal, at the time, explained that the Collegium had also delayed the appointment process. The government’s delay was largely because it thoroughly combed through the antecedents of the candidate. The process, on an average, takes at least 127 days. On the other hand,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

the judiciary takes 119 days on an average merely to forward the file to the government, he said.

What is Collegium?

- Collegium system of the Supreme Court (SC) and the High Courts (HCs) of India is based on the precedence established by the “Three Judges Cases (1982, 1993, 1998) “.
- It is a legally valid system of appointment and transfer of judges in the SC and all HCs.
- It is a system of checks and balance, which ensures the independence of the senior judiciary in India.

The Judges Cases

1. The First Judges Case (1981) ruled that the “consultation” with the CJI in the matter of appointments must be full and effective. However, it rejected the idea that the CJI’s opinion, albeit carrying great weight, should have primacy.
2. The Second Judges Case (1993) introduced the Collegium system, holding that “consultation” really meant “concurrence”. It added that it was not the CJI’s individual opinion, but an institutional opinion formed in consultation with the two senior-most judges in the SC.
3. On a Presidential Reference in its opinion, the SC, in the Third Judges Case (1998) expanded the Collegium to a five-member body, comprising the CJI and four of his senior-most colleagues.

The procedure followed by the Collegium:

Appointment of CJI

- The President of India appoints the CJI and the other SC judges.
- As far as the CJI is concerned, the outgoing CJI recommends his successor.
- In practice, it has been strictly by seniority ever since the supersession controversy of the 1970s.
- The Union Law Minister forwards the recommendation to the PM who, in turn, advises the President.

Other SC Judges

- For other judges of the top court, the proposal is initiated by the CJI.
- The CJI consults the rest of the Collegium members, as well as the senior-most judge of the court hailing from the High Court to which the recommended person belongs.
- The consultees must record their opinions in writing and it should form part of the file.
- The Collegium sends the recommendation to the Law Minister, who forwards it to the Prime Minister to advise the President.

For HC

- The CJs of HC is appointed as per the policy of having Chief Justices from outside the respective States. The Collegium takes the call on the elevation.
- High Court judges are recommended by a Collegium comprising the CJI and two senior-most judges.
- The proposal, however, is initiated by the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned in consultation with two senior-most colleagues.
- The recommendation is sent to the Chief Minister, who advises the Governor to send the proposal to the Union Law Minister.

Does the Collegium recommend transfers too?

- Yes, the Collegium also recommends the transfer of Chief Justices and other judges.
- Article 222 of the Constitution provides for the transfer of a judge from one High Court to another.
- When a CJ is transferred, a replacement must also be simultaneously found for the High Court concerned. There can be an acting CJ in a High Court for not more than a month.
- In matters of transfers, the opinion of the CJI “is determinative”, and the consent of the judge concerned is not required.
- However, the CJI should take into account the views of the CJ of the High Court concerned and the views of one or more SC judges who are in a position to do so.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- All transfers must be made in the public interest, that is, “for the betterment of the administration of justice”.

West Asia Peace Conference

- Russia backed a Palestinian proposal for a **West Asia peace conference**, suggesting that it could be held at the ministerial level in spring or summer, as the U.S. said it would move towards renewing ties with the Palestinians under Joe Biden.
- The U.S. — which sided with Israel under the administration of Donald Trump — said on Tuesday it intended to “restore credible U.S. engagement with Palestinians as well as Israelis”.
- “The roughly 10 participants would include Israel, the Palestinians, the four members of the West Asia diplomatic quartet (Russia, the UN, the U.S. and the EU), along with four Arab states — Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE,” Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

Stopping hate on Television is also essential for law and order: SC

- The Supreme Court said stopping hate on television was as essential for law and order as arming policemen with lathis and putting up barricades to prevent the spread of violence and riots.
- **Control over certain kind of news which agitate people to violence and riots is a law and order problem.**
- Preventing it is as powerful as putting up barricades. Preventing instigation is as important as providing lathis to policemen.
- The CJI referred to how the government had shut down Internet facility on January 26 amid violence during the farmers’ tractor rally.
- “You shut down the internet mobile facility because of the farmers’ visit to Delhi,” Chief Justice Bobde remarked.
- The CJI said the court, by government control, did not mean to curb free speech on TV.

China and the New World Order

- In 2017, China’s President Xi Jinping became the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of China to attend the **World Economic Forum** at Davos, a gathering synonymous with global capitalism.

World Economic Forum

- WEF is a **Swiss non profit foundation** established in 1971 based in **Geneva, Switzerland**. Recognised by the Swiss authorities as the international institution for **public-private cooperation**.
- It engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.
- Founder and Executive Chairman – **Klaus Schwab**.

Reports of WEF:

1. **Global Competitiveness Report:** Monitors on the set of **12 categories** called 'pillars of competitiveness' institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business application and innovation.
2. **Global IT Report:** by WEF along with **INSEAD, and Cornell University**. It examines the increasing proliferation of technology and its effects on advancing global prosperity.
3. **Global Gender Gap Report**
4. **Global Risk Report:** It enlists the threats which the world will face in future ranging from geopolitical and geo-economic tensions to environmental degradation and disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
5. **Global Travel and Tourism Report:** It measures set of factors and policies that enable sustainable development of travel and tourism sector.
6. **WEF Annual Meeting, 2019:** Theme was

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Globalisation 4.0, which includes a strong cultural dimension.

- He delivered a robust defence of globalisation, three days before newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump was set to be sworn in, and six months after the Brexit vote in the U.K. On January 25, Mr. Xi returned to the Davos platform, albeit virtually.
- His speech carried many of the similar themes from four years ago, **calling for global unity, closer coordination on macroeconomic policy, and more equitable growth.**
- It did also carry two messages that appeared to be aimed at Washington, a reflection of four turbulent years of a tariff and technology war between the world's two biggest economies.
- He hit out at attempts “to build small circles or start a new Cold War, to reject, threaten or intimidate others, to wilfully impose decoupling, supply disruption or sanctions” and said a “misguided approach of antagonism and confrontation, be it in the form of cold war, hot war, trade war or tech war, would eventually hurt all countries’ interests.”
- If Mr. Xi’s first Davos speech found a broadly receptive audience amid a crisis in capitalism, with the rise of populism in the West creating the space for China to try and fill a void in global economic leadership, China will find a harder sell four years on.
- His message “to stay committed to international law and international rules instead of seeking one’s own supremacy” and for “the strong [to] not bully the weak” will appear especially jarring to those in China’s neighbourhood.
- Indeed, only the day before the speech, military commanders from India and China spent over 16 hours in talks, the latest unsuccessful attempt to disengage two forces that have been eyeball-to-eyeball for months, after China’s unprecedented military mobilisation across the LAC starting in May.

- It is not only India that is dealing with a harder Chinese military posture in the midst of a global pandemic.
- On January 23, eight bombers and four fighters from China entered Taiwan’s air defence identification zone, the latest warning to Taipei.

Conclusion

- One cannot find fault with Mr. Xi’s statement that “decisions should not be made by simply showing off strong muscles or waving a big fist”.
- Indeed, its importance is in its relevance to all the big, militarised powers. And, China is one of them.

India China Ties: Way Forward

- **Recognition of mutual respect, mutual sensitivities and mutual interests** is key to repairing India-China relations, after what he called a year of “**exceptional stress**” in a relationship “profoundly disturbed” by the border crisis.
- China’s actions last year had “not only signalled a disregard for commitments about minimising troop levels” but also “showed a willingness to breach the peace and tranquillity” on the border that had been the foundation for the relationship.
- For all the differences and disagreements that we may have had on the boundary the central fact was that border areas still remained fundamentally peaceful. The relationship is today truly at a crossroads and choices that are made will have profound repercussions, not just for the two nations but for the entire world.
- Twenty Indian soldiers, and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers, lost their lives in a clash on June 15 last year in the Galwan Valley, following tensions that erupted in early May triggered by transgressions by China across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), massing of troops, and what India has described as a unilateral attempt to redraw the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in several areas in eastern Ladakh.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Even before the events of 2020, the relationship had reflected “a duality of cooperation and competition”. While both sides had made a common cause on development and economic issues and common membership of plurilateral groups was a meeting point, there were divergences when it came to interests and aspirations.
- He cited as examples China’s issuing of stapled visas to Indian citizens from Jammu and Kashmir in 2010, a reluctance from China to deal with some of India’s military commands (Beijing had that same year refused to host the Northern Army Commander), China’s opposition to India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the UN Security Council as a permanent member, the blocking of UN listings of Pakistani terrorists, and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project under China’s Belt and Road Initiative, violating India’s sovereignty in J&K.
- Over the years, he said, there was no significant progress of arriving at a common understanding of the alignment of the LAC, while there was “increasing construction of border infrastructure, especially on the Chinese side.” India, he added, had made efforts to reduce the considerable infrastructure gap since 2014, including through greater budget commitments and road building.

The External Affairs Minister suggested “**three mutuals**” and “**eight broad propositions**” as a way forward for the relationship. “**Mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests**” were “**determining factors**”.

- The first proposition, he said, was that agreements already reached must be adhered to in their entirety, both in letter and spirit.
- Both sides also needed to strictly observe and respect the LAC, and any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo was completely unacceptable.
- Peace and tranquillity in border areas was the basis for the development of the

relationship in other domains. If that was disturbed, he said, the rest of the relationship would be too.

- The fourth proposition, he said, was that while both remain committed to a multipolar world, they should recognise that a multipolar Asia was one of its essential constituents.
- While each state had its interests, concerns and priorities, sensitivities to them could not be one-sided and relations were reciprocal in nature.
- As rising powers, neither should ignore the other’s set of aspirations, he added.
- While there “will always be divergence and differences”, their management is essential to ties, Mr. Jaishankar said.

India China Ties: Way Forward

- In response to a question on whether **India, Germany and Japan** should become permanent members of the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, U.S. President Joe Biden’s pick for UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said discussions on the subject were under way.
- She noted that there were arguments for and opinions against these countries becoming permanent members.
- “There are some strong arguments for that but I also know that there are others who disagree within their regions that they should be the representative of their region. That too is an ongoing discussion,” she said during her Senate confirmation hearing.
- Ms. Thomas-Greenfield was presumably referring to the opposition that the **Uniting for Consensus (UFC) group** — Pakistan, South Korea, Italy and Argentina — has to the **G4 (Brazil, Germany, Japan and Italy)** becoming permanent members. In addition, China opposes permanent membership for India and Japan.
- The U.S. has for some years supported India’s permanent membership to the Council — with former President Barack Obama declaring his country’s support in

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

his address to Parliament in 2010.

- In 2017, former President Donald Trump reaffirmed the U.S.’s support for the idea in a joint communique issued during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the White House.
- “Recognizing India’s growing role on the world stage, the **Obama-Biden Administration formally declared U.S. support for India’s membership** in a reformed and expanded United Nations Security Council,” Mr Biden’s campaign website had said. India has just embarked on a two-year non-permanent term at the UNSC.

India China Ties: Way Forward

USA Iran relations and JCPOA

- On his first full day on the job, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed the administration’s position that if Iran were to become compliant with the terms of the now defunct Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or the “Iran deal”), the U.S. would re-enter it too. The Trump administration had pulled out of the deal in 2018.
- “With regard to Iran, President Biden has been very clear in saying that if Iran comes back into full compliance with its obligations under the JCPOA, the United States would do the same thing and then we would use that as a platform to build, with our allies and partners, what we called a longer and stronger agreement and to deal with a number of other issues that are deeply problematic in the relationship with Iran,” Mr. Blinken told reporters during his first briefing as Secretary.
- “But we are a long way from that point. Iran is out of compliance on a number of fronts. And it would take some time, should it make the decision to do so, for it to come back into compliance in time for us then to assess whether it was meeting its obligations,” Mr. Blinken said.

India – China ties

- China said it “appreciates” External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar emphasising the importance of India-China relations, but reiterated its calls for the **boundary dispute to “not be linked with the overall bilateral relations”**.
- In a speech on Thursday, Mr. Jaishankar said the relationship needed to be built on “mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests”.
- The Minister outlined eight propositions to take the ties forward after what he called a year of “exceptional stress”.
- Mr. Jaishankar underlined India’s view that peace on the border was a prerequisite for the rest of the relationship to develop. China’s actions last year had “not only signalled a disregard for commitments about minimising troop levels”, but also “showed a willingness to breach the peace and tranquillity” on the border that had been the foundation of the relationship.
- The advancement of ties, he added, was “predicated on ensuring that peace and tranquillity was not disturbed, and the Line of Actual Control [LAC] was both observed and respected by both sides”.
- “He stressed the importance of India-China relations; it shows the Indian side attaches importance to the ties with China, we appreciate this,” Mr. Zhao said.
- “Meanwhile, we stress that the **boundary issue shall not be linked with the overall bilateral relations**. That is important experience we have gathered through the countries many years efforts to keep the ties moving forward. We hope the Indian side will work with us to properly manage difference, promote practical cooperation and bring bilateral relations back on track.”
- China has in recent months hit out at India’s economic measures, such as the banning of apps and tightening the curbs on investment, saying events on the border should not be linked to other aspects of relations.
- India has reiterated its view that such a proposition is untenable, and normal relations can’t be restored until there is

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

peace on the border and a full restoration of the status quo, prior to last summer's transgressions.

- Mr. Jaishankar underlined that view in his speech, saying that any expectation that the events on the border “can be brushed aside and that life can carry on undisturbed despite the situation in the border is simply not realistic”.

India – China Trade relations

- China still remains the largest source of critical imports for India, from **mobile phone components to pharmaceutical ingredients**, and India is working on a multi-pronged strategy to reduce this reliance, which is a bigger concern than the imbalance in trade.
- **The trade deficit is not in dollars, it is in overdependence.**
- “A mobile phone requires 85% content coming from one country. If China were to stop the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for penicillin, we would not be able to produce it in this country. When somebody controls your production, that is a sentiment which raises concern.”
- Mr. Chadha said that India was working on a multi-pronged strategy to reduce this dependence, ranging from the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to boost domestic manufacturing, a global effort involving India's foreign missions to find alternatives to China, and the use of free trade agreements (FTAs) with other trading partners.

Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks Scheme

- APIs, also called bulk drugs, are significant ingredients in the manufacture of drugs.
- The Hubei province of China is the hub of the API manufacturing industry.
- India is heavily import-dependent for APIs from China (~ 70%) despite being 3rd largest in the world by volume.
- The scheme is expected to reduce manufacturing cost of bulk drugs in the country and dependency on other countries for bulk drugs.

- The government aims to develop 3 mega Bulk Drug parks in India in partnership with States.
- Govt will give Grants-in-Aid to States with a maximum limit of Rs. 1000 Crore per Bulk Drug Park. Thus 3000 crore for next 5 years.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme

- To promote domestic manufacturing and reduce India's import dependence of critical Key Starting Materials/Drug Intermediates and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) in the country.
- Financial incentive to be given to eligible manufacturers of identified 53 critical bulk drugs.
- It will reduce India's import dependence on other countries.
- COVID-19 had helped accelerate this change. When production in China was hit early in 2020, although its economy would recover by the summer and become the only major economy to avoid contraction last year, India shared with its foreign missions lists of items critically dependent on China, following which the missions linked up with suppliers in their countries.
- What offered opportunities for India was the push from many countries to not necessarily relocate from China - which still remains integral to global supply chains - but to diversify, with future capacity expansion up for grabs. The PLI scheme is hoping to capture that diversification.
- **China still remained the biggest source of India's imports, but imports last year fell 10.8%, the lowest since 2016.**
- Two-way trade in 2020 reached \$87.6 billion, down by 5.6%, while the trade deficit declined to a five year-low of \$45.8 billion.
- Mr. Chadha noted that steel imports had fallen from a high of \$2.8 billion to less than \$1 billion, with China replaced by South Korea in part because of an FTA. India in 2019 withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

(RCEP), which would have put India and China in the same trading bloc.

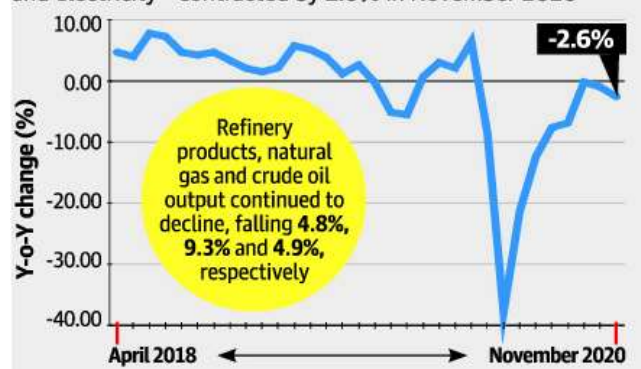
- On the trade front with China, he said India’s exporters had struggled for years but made little headway because of a number of non-tariff barriers. In 2018, both sides signed a number of protocols, including for rice and tobacco, but “none of this materialised in substantial trade”. India’s exports to China did, however, cross \$20 billion for the first time last year.

GS - III

Core Industries, IIP and Annual Survey of India

Three-month low

The volume of production in eight core sectors - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement and electricity - contracted by **2.6%** in November 2020



What is in the news?

- Output from India's eight core sectors hit a three-month low in November, contracting 2.6% in the festive month with **coal, fertilizers and electricity the only sectors to record positive growth** on a year-on-year basis, suggesting the economy is still not out of the woods.
- The good news is that the Index of Eight Core Industries was revised upwards for both August and October, based on updated data inputs received by the Office of Economic Adviser in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade that compiles the data.
- Core sector output shrank by just 0.9% in October compared to an earlier estimate of 2.5% contraction.
- On a cumulative basis from April to November, the eight sectors' index has declined 11.4% from the same period a year ago.

Index of Core Industries

1. Index of Core Industries (ICI) is a production volume index.
2. It's aim is to provide an advanced indication on production performance of core industries before IIP releases.
3. It is compiled by DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce.
4. There are 8 Core industries: 4 Energy related = Coal production (but not Coking Coal), Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Electricity

(includes imports from Bhutan) and 4 infrastructure related = Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel and Cement.

5. Index of Core Industries covers 40.27% in IIP. The weight of Petroleum Refinery is maximum followed by Electricity, Steel, Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Cement and Fertilizers is minimum.
6. It is released monthly like IIP. The ICI is calculated by using Laspeyre's formula.

Index of Industrial Production

1. IIP measures the changes in the industrial production and captures the general level of industrial activity.
2. Base year is 2011-12. It is compiled on the basis of data of 15 ministries.
3. It is compiled by CSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, every month.
4. There are 3 broad Component sectors in IIP – Manufacturing (77.6%), Mining (14.3%) and Electricity (7.9%).
5. Use based classification: 4 components:
 1. Basic goods (45.68%)
 2. Consumer Goods (29.81%)
 3. Intermediate goods (15.68%) and
 4. Capital Goods (8.83%).
6. It is a short term indicators of industrial growth till results from ASI and National Account Statistics

NIA (national income accounts) vs IIP

1. The data of IIP is used to calculate NIA and GDP forecasts.
2. NIA uses IIP data to proxy the growth in unorganised sector (otherwise it is estimated only with the gap of 5 years).

Annual Survey of Industries

1. It is a most comprehensive and the principle source of industrial statistics which provides information on organized manufacturing sector only.
2. ASI is calculated on an annual basis published every 2 years by CSO (while ICI & IIP on a monthly basis).
3. It comes with a 2 year lag.
4. Base year is 2013-14.
5. ASI obtains comprehensive and detailed statistics of industrial sector.

Covishield and COVID Vaccine

Welcome jab

Panel recommends restricted emergency use of Covishield

■ Covishield is equivalent (but not exactly the same) to the vaccine candidate developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca

■ The Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) is testing the vaccine's efficacy in a double-blinded placebo controlled trial in 1,600 volunteers in India



■ The U.K. had on Dec. 30 granted approval to AstraZeneca for emergency use of the vaccine in that country

■ Interim data based on trials in the U.K. and Brazil suggest that the vaccine protected 70% of the volunteers from showing disease symptoms

- Covishield, the vaccine candidate from the Pune-based Serum Institute of India, was approved by a subject expert committee (SEC) of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).
- The SEC gives its recommendation to the DCGI which is the approving authority for drugs and vaccines.
- Similar to that in the United Kingdom, we've approved the vaccine to be given in two doses 4-12 weeks apart.
- Covishield, which is similar to the 'Oxford vaccine' developed by the Oxford University vaccine group and marketed by AstraZeneca, was approved by the health regulator in the U.K. under emergency use conditions. Under this, the company is allowed to deploy its vaccines to priority groups and then the larger public, even though a full safety assessment hasn't been completed.

Goods and Service Tax – GST (Indirect Tax)

What is the news?

GST Collections touch all time high at Rs. 1.15 lakh crore in December 2020.

- 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 filing 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),

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Additional Duties of Excise (Goods of special importance), Additional Custom Duties, Special Additional Custom duties, Service Tax, Central Surcharges and Cess.

2. State Taxes = State VAT, Central Sales Tax, Luxury Tax, Entry tax, Entertainment tax, Tax on Ads (other than Newspapers), Tax on Lotteries, Betting and Gambling, Purchase Tax, State Surcharge 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 loss-making 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 \leq 1.5 crore then the Trader and Manufacturer must pay 1% of GST and Restaurant can pay 5% of GST. But they are not eligible for input 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 input 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

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

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.

Analysis of Telecom Sector: IUC Charges

- The end of the Interconnection Usage Charges (IUC) regime on January 1, under which one telecom operator paid a charge to another on whose network a subscriber's voice call was completed, creates a new era in which these companies can focus on upgrading their networks and service.
- The measure was delayed by a year by regulator TRAI due to concerns that not all operators were ready, and the shift to more efficient 4G networks and compatible subscriber handsets was slower than anticipated.
- Now that the need to monitor call termination data and make IUC payments no longer exists, and a spectrum auction is also scheduled this year, the focus should shift to giving the users a better deal — as reliable call quality and competitive tariffs.
- For the subscriber, other than those who had to pay higher access tariffs on one wireless network due to the IUC system, the latest measure may not carry a significant impact, since providers sold unlimited call packs even earlier.
- One operator, Jio, had a higher proportion of outgoing calls to other wireless operators since its launch a few years ago, thus having to pay significant net interconnection charges, which was six paise per minute since 2017.
- That imbalance has reduced, and TRAI has now introduced an arrangement called bill and keep, which does away with the IUC.
- India's high density telecom market is poised for further growth as it awaits expansion through 5G and Internet-connected devices.
- Yet, as the Economic Survey of 2019-20 pointed out, intense competition has reduced the number of private players.
- Public sector operators BSNL and MTNL still face a challenge and their future must be clarified early, with efforts to improve their technological capabilities and service levels.
- A parallel trend has been the rise in 4G subscribers from 196.9 million in September 2017 to 517.5 million out of a total wireless subscriber base of 1,165.46 million in June 2019.
- The end of the IUC should spur an expansion of high-capacity networks, going beyond 2G and 3G that some telcos continue to use. The removal of interconnection charges was opposed by them just a year ago.
- For TRAI, which has stressed the importance of consumer welfare through adequate choice, affordable tariff and quality service, it is important to tread cautiously on claims made on behalf of the sector, that higher tariffs alone can ensure the health of telecoms.
- India is a mass market for voice and data services that fuel the digital economy. Badly priced spectrum could lead to auction failures and lack of genuine competition is bound to hamper the growth of the next big wave of telecoms, of which the 5G piece is critical for new services.
- On the consumer side, helping more people migrate to 4G services quickly through affordable handsets will help telcos put their infrastructure to better use.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

- It was established in 1997. It is a statutory body.
- It is an independent regulator for telecom services and tariffs in India. Before TRAI, Central Govt used to regulate it.
- Objectives: Digital India: Ubiquitous and Affordable Connectivity.
- In 2000 it was amended to include TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal). It has adjudicatory functions of TRAI.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

National Digital Communications Policy, 2018

Objectives:

The overall objectives of the policy, to be achieved by 2022, are:

- Broadband for all to ensure Digital Sovereignty.
- Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector.
- Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017
- Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) from 134 in 2017.
- Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains.

Specific Aims of the NDCP Policy 2018:

- - Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen;
 - Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022;
 - Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector;
 - Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill;
 - Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices,
 - Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.

Strategy:

The policy also suggests the strategy by which these aims are to be achieved.

- Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority;
- Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects;
- Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines;

- Removal of barriers to approvals; and
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks

Conclusion:

With continuous expansion of India as a knowledge driven economy, 'customer focused' and 'application driven' policy for the Indian Telecom Sector, which can form the main pillar of Digital India has become the need of the hour.

Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India) initiative

Providing a roof

A look at some of the features of the Light House Projects

- 1,000 houses each will be built in Indore, Rajkot, Chennai, Ranchi, Agartala and Lucknow
- Prefabricated sandwich panel system will be used in Indore
- Modern construction practices from France, Germany & Canada will be adopted
- In Chennai, precast concrete system will be used for faster, cheaper construction



- With continuous expansion of India as a knowledge driven economy, 'customer focused' and 'application driven' policy for the Indian Telecom Sector, which can form the main pillar of Digital India has become the need of the hour.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of six Light House Projects in six cities as part of the Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India) initiative.
- The aim of the programme is to build around 1,000 houses each in Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Rajkot (Gujarat), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Agartala (Tripura) and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) over a period of 12 months. Modern construction practices from countries such as France, Germany and Canada would be adopted.
- Addressing the Chief Ministers, Governors and other officials of the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

respective States via videoconference, Mr. Modi said the country was getting new technologies for providing resilient, and comfortable housing for the poor and the middle class. The cooperation extended by the States was strengthening cooperative federalism, he said.

- The GHTC provided the scope for incubating new technologies for construction and innovation, he pointed out, and called upon planners, architects and students to visit the project sites, learn from the technologies, and mould them for use in accordance with the local requirements.
- He said another major initiative — the Central rental housing complex project — was conceived last year, for migrant labourers.
- The project was being implemented in coordination with industrialists and other investors.

those features.

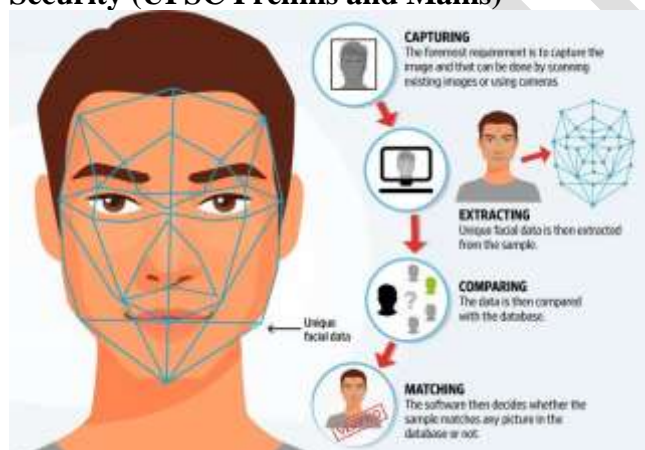
- The captured face along with its features is stored into a database, which can be integrated with any kind of software that may be used for security purposes, banking services, etc.
- In the Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS), the large database (containing photos and videos of peoples' faces) is used to match and identify the person. Image of an unidentified person, taken from CCTV footage, is compared to the existing database using Artificial Intelligence technology, for pattern-finding and matching.

Uses of Facial recognition

- It is used for identification and authentication purposes with a success rate of almost 75%.
- For instance, the NCRB's Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) managing crime data for police, uses automated facial recognition to identify criminals, missing people, and unidentified dead bodies, as well as for “crime prevention”.
- The project is aimed at being compatible with other biometrics such as iris and fingerprints.
- The integration of fingerprint database, face recognition software and iris scans will massively boost the police department's crime investigation capabilities.
- In India, where there are just 144 constables per 1 lakh citizens, this can act as a force multiplier. It neither requires too much manpower nor regular upgradation. Hence, this technology coupled with the present manpower in place can act as a game-changer.
- It is increasingly being used for everything from unlocking of mobile phones to validating the identity, from auto-tagging of digital photos to finding missing persons, and from targeted advertising to law enforcement.
- However, China's reported use of facial recognition technologies for surveillance

Facial Recognition System

Context: GS III Internal Security-Cyber Security (UPSC Prelims and Mains)



- It is a biometric technology that uses distinctive features of the face to identify and distinguish an individual.
- Over a period of almost 6 decades, it has evolved in many ways- from looking at 3D contours of a face to recognizing skin patterns.
- The facial recognition system works primarily by capturing the face & its features through the camera and then using various kinds of software to reconstruct

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

in the Xinjiang province opens the possibility of its abuse which becomes problematic in the absence of privacy and data security laws..

- European Commission is considering imposing a five-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition technologies in the European Union (EU). The United States municipalities are also passing rules for its prohibition. But, India is keen to adopt public facial recognition techniques.
- Facial recognition systems have been made active at several major Indian airports, including Delhi airport, installed under DigiYatra Initiative.

But there are certain challenges

- Technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Big Data are costly to implement. The size of stored information is extremely large and requires huge network & data storage facilities, which are currently not available in India.
- In today's world of cybercrime, there is a dire need to put appropriate safeguards in place in order to ensure the integrity of the repository/database, so that it doesn't leak out the information and is not privatized or monetized.
- Also, International & domestic accessibility interests need to be properly addressed.
- The collected data from social media profiles where anybody can put anybody's image, puts to risk the authenticity of the data. Hence, experts are needed to verify such details before storing them who should be provided proper training to protect & avoid abuse and misuse of the collected data & database.
- As the data collected may be used in the court of law during the course of a criminal trial, the reliability and the admissibility of the data along with standards and procedure followed would be taken into consideration. Hence, the authenticity of the data is crucial.
- Government although plans to address the question of privacy through the legal framework like data privacy regime, but keeping in mind the objectives it aims to

achieve with the use of such technology, it comes into conflict with one another.

- In the absence of data protection laws, Indian citizens become more vulnerable to privacy abuses. As it is sensitive data, it has tremendous potential of being misused. Hence, the constitutional mandate of right to privacy needs to be safeguarded along with the nature of technology, addressing the fears of invasion & surveillance.

Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS):

1. It is a component of CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems) and is implemented by NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau).
2. It is a repository of photographs of criminals in the country.
3. It is also used to track missing children & unidentified dead bodies by putting cameras in critical locations.
4. Only law enforcement agencies can use it.
5. The system will treat each person captured in CCTV images as potential criminal creating a map of the face with biometrics & measurements and match features against CCTNS database.
6. San Francisco has complete ban on police use of facial recognition.

Type of Vaccines

Context: UPSC GS Paper III - Vaccines, S&T, COVID-19 (Prelims Mains)

Each type is designed to teach your immune system how to fight off certain kinds of germs — and the serious diseases they cause.

What do scientists consider when they create a vaccine?

1. How your immune system responds to the germ
2. Who needs to be vaccinated against the germ
3. The best technology or approach to create the vaccine

Based on a number of these factors, scientists decide which type of vaccine they will make.

There are 4 main types of vaccines:

1. Live-attenuated vaccines

2. Inactivated vaccines
3. Subunit, recombinant, polysaccharide, and conjugate vaccines
4. Toxoid vaccines

Live-attenuated vaccines

- Live vaccines use a weakened (or attenuated) form of the germ that causes a disease.
- Because these vaccines are so similar to the natural infection that they help prevent, they create a strong and long-lasting immune response.
- Just 1 or 2 doses of most live vaccines can give you a lifetime of protection against a germ and the disease it causes.
- But live vaccines also have some limitations:
 1. Because they contain a small amount of the weakened live virus, some people should talk to their health care provider before receiving them, such as people with weakened immune systems, long-term health problems, or people who've had an organ transplant.
 2. They need to be kept cool, so they don't travel well. That means they can't be used in countries with limited access to refrigerators.
- Live vaccines are used to protect against:
 1. Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR combined vaccine)
 2. Rotavirus
 3. Smallpox
 4. Chickenpox
 5. Yellow fever

2. Inactivated vaccines

- Inactivated vaccines use the killed version of the germ that causes a disease.
- Inactivated vaccines usually don't provide immunity (protection) that's as strong as live vaccines. So you may need several doses over time (booster shots) in order to get ongoing immunity against diseases.
- Inactivated vaccines are used to protect against:
 1. Hepatitis A
 2. Flu (shot only)

3. Polio (shot only)

4. Rabies

3. Subunit, recombinant, polysaccharide, and conjugate vaccines

- Subunit, recombinant, polysaccharide, and conjugate vaccines use specific pieces of the germ — like its protein, sugar, or capsid (a casing around the germ).
- Because these vaccines use only specific pieces of the germ, they give a very strong immune response that's targeted to key parts of the germ.
- They can also be used on almost everyone who needs them, including people with weakened immune systems and long-term health problems.
- One limitation of these vaccines is that you may need booster shots to get ongoing protection against diseases.
- These vaccines are used to protect against:
 1. Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b) disease
 2. Hepatitis B
 3. HPV (Human papillomavirus)
 4. Whooping cough (part of the DTaP combined vaccine)
 5. Pneumococcal disease
 6. Meningococcal disease
 7. Shingles

Toxoid vaccines

- Toxoid vaccines use a toxin (harmful product) made by the germ that causes a disease.
- They create immunity to the parts of the germ that cause a disease instead of the germ itself.
- That means the immune response is targeted to the toxin instead of the whole germ.
- Like some other types of vaccines, you may need booster shots to get ongoing protection against diseases.
- Toxoid vaccines are used to protect against:
 1. Diphtheria
 2. Tetanus

T. S. R. Subramanian Committee Report on Education

The T.S.R. Subramanian committee was entrusted with preparing a new education policy for India. The major recommendations are

- I. An **Indian Education Service (IES)** should be established as an all India service with officers being on permanent settlement to the state governments but with the cadre controlling authority vesting with the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry.
- II. The outlay on **education** should be raised to at least **6% of GDP** without further loss of time.
- III. There should be **minimum eligibility condition** with 50% marks at graduate level for entry to existing B.Ed courses. **Teacher Entrance Tests (TET)** should be made compulsory for recruitment of all teachers. The Centre and states should jointly lay down norms and standards for TET.
- IV. **Compulsory licensing or certification** for teachers in government and private schools should be made mandatory, with provision for renewal every 10 years based on independent external testing.
- V. **Pre-school education** for children in the age group of 4 to 5 years should be declared as a **right** and a programme for it implemented immediately.
- VI. The **no detention policy** must be continued for young children until completion of class V when the child will be 11 years old. At the upper primary stage, the system of detention shall be restored subject to the provision of remedial coaching and at least two extra chances being offered to prove his capability to move to a higher class.
- VII. **On-demand board exams** should be introduced to offer flexibility and reduce year end stress of students and parents. A National Level Test open to every student who has completed class XII from any School Board should be designed.
- VIII. The **mid-day meal (MDM) program** should now be extended to cover

students of secondary schools. This is necessary as levels of malnutrition and anaemia continue to be high among adolescents.

- IX. **UGC Act** must be allowed to lapse once a separate law is created for the management of higher education. The University Grants Commission (UGC) needs to be made leaner and thinner and given the role of disbursal of scholarships and fellowships.
- X. Top **200 foreign universities** should be allowed to open campuses in India and give the same degree which is acceptable in the home country of the said university.

IIM Bill, 2017

1. To grant IIMs power to grant degrees and not Post Graduate Diploma.
2. Allows students to acquire Doctoral degrees (not fellowships) from IIMs and increase research.
3. 20 IIMs to get INI status (Institute of National Importance) and functional autonomy.
4. Board of Governors to appoint Director of each IIM through Search cum select committee.

Ramsar sites in India

Ramsar Convention or Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

- It is an intergovernmental treaty for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- It was adopted in 2 Feb, 1971 (Thus World Wetlands Day) in the Iranian city of Ramsar (Caspian Sea) and came into force in 1975.
- It is the only global environmental system treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem.

Criteria for Wetlands of International Importance

- If it has a unique, rare example of natural wetland type.
- If it supports vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- If it supports plant or animal species important for maintaining biodiversity of a region.
- If it regularly supports > 20000 waterbirds or 1% of individuals in 1 species or subspecies of waterbird.
- If it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies; if it is an importance source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and migration path.
- It is an important source of food and water resource, increased possibilities for recreation and eco-tourism, improved scenic and educational values.

Ramsar Sites in India

- **Chillika lake was designated the first Ramsar site in India in 1981. Sundarbans = largest Ramsar site.**
- **As on January 2021, there are 42 Ramsar sites in India.**



Sundarbans declared as the Ramsar Wetland:

- Sundarbans = 10000 sq km 60% in Bangladesh. It covers ~ 43% of Mangrove forests of India.
- It is the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.
- It is located in delta region of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basins.
- West Bengal has 2 Wetlands now = East Kolkata Wetlands & Sundarbans (which has now become the largest Ramsar Site in India).
- The Sundarbans was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.
- They are the only mangrove habitat which supports a significant population of Royal Bengal Tigers, and they have unique aquatic hunting skills.
- It is home to critically endangered northern river terrapin (Batuga, Basaka), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, and the endangered fishing cat. It also has Chital Deer, Crocodile & Snakes.
- It met 4 out of 9 criteria of Ramsar: presence of rare species and threatened ecological communities, biological diversity, significant and representative fish and fish spawning ground and migration path.
- The part of the Sundarban delta, which lies in Bangladesh, was accorded the status of a Ramsar site in 1992.

Latest Ramsar sites of India

- **Nandur Madhameshwar** (1st in Maharashtra);
- **Keshopura, Miani, Beas Conservation, Nangal** in Punjab;
- **Nawabganj, Parvati, Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi, Sarsai Nawar** in UP.
- **Kabartal Wetland**, also known as Kanwar Jheel, covers 2,620 hectares of the Indo-Gangetic plains in the northern Bihar State. Five critically endangered species inhabit the site, including three vultures – the red-headed vulture, white-

NEED FOR CONSERVATION

WHAT IS WETLAND

- Land area covered by water, either temporarily/seasonally or permanently (marsh, fen and peatland come under this category)
- It has characteristics of a distinct ecosystem

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT

- Play a key role in hydrological cycle and flood control, water supply, providing food, fibre and raw materials
- Wetlands support lakhs of migratory birds from colder regions of the world in summers, apart from mangroves that protect coastlines and filter pollutants

WETLANDS IN NUMBERS

- Isro had in 2011 prepared a national wetlands atlas on the basis of satellite images
- It mapped **2,01,503** wetlands
- They comprise around **4.63%** of the geographic area of India
- No. of wetland sites in India under Ramsar Convention | **37**

INDIA'S PROMINENT WETLANDS

Chilika lake areas (Odisha) | **Wular lake** (J&K) | **Renuka** (Himachal Pradesh) | **Sambhar lake** (Rajasthan) | **Deepor Beel** (Assam) | **East Kolkata wetlands** (West Bengal) | **Nal Sarovar** (Gujarat) | **Harike** (Punjab) | **Rudra Sagar** (Tripura) and **Bhoj wetland** (Madhya Pradesh)

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES WITHIN WETLANDS

- Any kind of encroachment
- setting up of any industry
- Expansion of existing industries
- Solid waste dumping
- Discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, cities, towns, villages and other human settlements
- Poaching
- Any construction of a permanent nature except for boat jetties within 50 metres from the mean high flood level observed in the past 10 years

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

rumped vulture and Indian vulture.

- **Asan Conservation Reserve** is a 444-hectare stretch of the Asan River running down to its confluence with the Yamuna River in Dehradun district of Uttarakhand.
- **Sur Sarovar**, commonly known as Keetham Lake, is a human-made reservoir in the State of Uttar Pradesh in northern India.
- **Lonar Lake** (Site no. 2441), on the Deccan Plateau in Maharashtra State, is an endorheic or closed basin, almost circular in shape, formed by a meteorite impact onto the basalt bedrock. The Site includes the lake as well as escarpments, which form the crater walls, and forested zones. The lake is high in salinity and alkalinity, as the lack of an outflow leads to a concentration of minerals as the lake water evaporates. Specialized micro-organisms such as anaerobes, cyanobacteria and phytoplankton survive in this harsh chemical environment.
- India has designated its 42nd Ramsar Site: **Tso Kar Wetland Complex** is found at more than 4,500 metres above sea level in the Changthang region of **Ladakh**. The complex includes two connected lakes, the freshwater Startsapuk Tso and the larger hypersaline Tso Kar.

Montreux Record:

- It is a register of wetlands maintained as a part of Ramsar Sites where changes in the ecological character have occurred or are occurring as a result of technological developments, pollution or human influence.
- 2 Sites from India included in this are Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan and Loktak Lake, Manipur.

Indian Rhino/ Great One Horned Rhino

- It is the largest of Rhino species found in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and India.
- It is Vulnerable and in Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act.

- 22 September is Rhino Day.
- India is home to 2,200 rhinos, or over 85 % population. In India it is found in UP, West Bengal and Assam.
- According to WWF data of 2012, Assam has 91 % of total Rhino of India which is mainly concentrated in Kaziranga National Park (Largest absolute population), Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (largest density in World). Others are Manas Tiger Reserve, Orang Tiger Reserve and Laokhowa Reserved Forests. Kaziranga has 70% of World population.
- Kaziranga National Park or Tiger Reserve is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Biodiversity Hotspot, home to 2/3rd of Indian Rhinos. Circumscribed by Brahmaputra, Dhansiri, Dhiplu Rivers. It is an Important Bird Area given by Birdlife International.
- Manas National Park/ Tiger Reserve/ Biosphere Reserve/ Elephant Reserve = UNESCO World Heritage Site. Continuous in Bhutan. Manas River splits into Beki & Bholkaduba river. Manas is also the border between India & Bhutan. Important for Roofed Turtle, Hispid Hare, Golden Langur and Pygmy Hog.



Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020)

1. IRV 2020 was launched in 2005 and implemented by Assam Govt with the Bodo autonomous council as an active partner and supported by WWF- India.
2. It is an ambitious effort to attain a wild population of at least 3,000 greater one horned rhinos spread over 7 protected areas Assam by 2020.
3. IRV 2020 aims to translocate Rhinos from

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Kaziranga NP and Pabitora WS to 5 other protected areas namely Manas, Laokhowa, Buracharpori-Kochmora, Dibrusaikhowa and Orang.

New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019 by 5 Rhino range nations (Indian)

- Organised by MoEF in collaboration with IUCN, Asian Rhino Specialist Group, WWF- India and Aaranyak NGO.
- 5 Rhino range nations are India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- To increase the population of 3 species of Asian rhinos (Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos) and to conserve and review the population every four years.

Threats

- It is threatened by poaching for horn, habitat destruction, flooding etc.
- Kaziranga NP has largest population and has reached its carrying capacity and might not be support any more Rhinos. Entire population can be decimated by a disease outbreak, natural disaster etc. Hence, translocation is done.

Other Rhinos

1. Javan and Sumatran rhinos/ Andatu are currently classified as critically endangered. Both are regionally extinct in India.
2. The Sumatran rhino, the smallest of all rhino species and the only Asian rhino with two horns, became extinct in the wild in Malaysia.
3. World's last male Northern white rhino = Sudan. Now only 2 females left.
4. The 3 species of Rhino in Asia — Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran.
5. Black Rhino and White Rhino also have 2 horns but are in Africa.
6. Javan and Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered.
7. Greater one-horned (or Indian) rhino is vulnerable in the IUCN Red List. They are spread across India, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia and Malaysia. These countries are also known as Asian Rhino Range Countries.

8. Sumatran rhinoceros has become extinct in Malaysia. It is the smallest of all Rhino species. These are the only Asian Rhino with 2 horns. It is Critically Endangered in IUCN.
9. Uttarakhand State Wildlife Board has cleared a proposal by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to introduce rhinoceroses in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR).

FATF, Terrorism and Pakistan

What is the news?

- Nearly five years after he was released on bail in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks case, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operations commander Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakhvi was arrested in Pakistan by its Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on charges of using terror funds.
- The timing of the arrest is significant as it comes ahead of meetings of the global watchdog **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** and its Asia Pacific Joint Group (APJG, which will consider Pakistan's "greylist" status, meant for countries "under increased monitoring".
- Lakhvi is accused of running a dispensary using funds collected for terrorism financing. He and others also collected funds from this dispensary and used them for further terrorism financing and for personal expenses.
- The statement added that Lakhvi's offences were compounded by the fact that he is on the United Nation's Security Council list of banned terrorists, and thus cannot have recourse to any funds without special clearance.
- However, Indian officials questioned the seriousness of the action, saying it had become routine for Pakistan to showcase arrests of key terrorist figures just before FATF meetings.
- The arrest of LeT founder Hafiz Saeed in July 2019 came three months before an FATF plenary session was due to decide on downgrading Pakistan to the 'blacklist' or "High Risk Jurisdictions" that face severe financial sanctions.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Pakistan has been retained on the greylist, but faces blacklisting if it fails to complete a 27-point action plan to curb terror financing and money laundering.

2020, it will be on black list.

- China, Turkey and Malaysia are supporting Pakistan, hence can't be blacklisted.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF), 1989

- It is an intergovernmental body established in 1989 by **G7 Summit** in Paris.
- Secretariat is at OECD HQ in Paris. It is a 39 member body. India is a member of FATF.
- **Purpose**
 1. It was established initially to combat money laundering.
 2. Later in 2001 it added terrorist financing and
 3. In 2012, added proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- The FATF is a “policy-making body”.
- The objectives of the FATF are
 1. To set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures
 2. For combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- **Grey/ Black Listing of Countries**
 1. Out of 39 countries, 18 countries are on Grey List. Iran and North Korea are black listed. Pak is in Grey List.
 2. Pakistan to remain in the Grey List of FATF. FATF blacklists Iran on Blacklists.
 3. IMF doesn't give loans to Grey and Black list of FATF.

Pakistan and FATF

- FATF to keep Pakistan in grey list to monitor its record against terror financing.
- 27 Point Action Plan - is not completed by Pakistan. Pakistan needs to tighten security and restrict banking services to block loopholes and take actions against terrorists.
- UNSCR 1267 is not being fully implemented. It is a list of people associated with Al Qaeda or Taliban.
- If it doesn't fulfil criteria by February

Covishield and Covaxin approved for emergency use as COVID vaccines

Welcome jab

Panel recommends restricted emergency use of Covishield

- Covishield is equivalent (but not exactly the same) to the vaccine candidate developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca
- The U.K. had on Dec. 30 granted approval for emergency use of the vaccine in that country
- The Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) is testing the vaccine's efficacy in a double-blinded placebo controlled trial in 1,600 volunteers in India
- Interim data based on trials in the U.K. and Brazil suggest that the vaccine protected 70% of the volunteers from showing disease symptoms



- The Central Drugs and Standards Committee (CDSCO) formally approved the COVID-19 vaccines by Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India (SII).
- This allows the vaccines — Covishield by SII and based on the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, and Covaxin by Bharat Biotech — to be offered to healthcare workers and frontline workers in India.
- The Health Ministry had said that 3 crore such personnel, considered at the highest risk for COVID-19, would be given the vaccine for free.
- **Neither Covishield nor Covaxin has completed the crucial Phase-3 trial**, under which a vaccine candidate is administered to volunteers at multiple locations across the country.
- Both approvals accorded are for “restricted use in emergency situation” and in the case of Bharat Biotech, the approval wording notes that it is in “...public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode, to have more options for vaccinations, especially in case of infection by mutant strains”. These conditions were not specified.

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

- CDSCO under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.
- Functions: Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for approval of New Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country and coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice.
- CDSCO along with state regulators, is jointly responsible for grant of licenses of certain specialized categories of critical Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

Income Tax Dept. to crack down on GST fraud

- Tightening the noose around fraudsters rigging the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, the government has roped in the Income Tax Department to tap illicit incomes as part of a crackdown against 7,000 fraud companies, identified using data analytics tools.
- Any income traceable to the use of fake bills and other GST frauds shall be considered concealed income and attract severe penalties so that direct tax collections may also get a leg-up while better compliance pushed GST collections to a record high of Rs. 1.15 lakh crore in December 2020.
- For a fiscally strapped government, scrambling to arrest the economy's recessionary decline, the GST collections in the last month of 2020, of over Rs. 1.15-lakh crore, come as welcome tidings.
- With revenue receipts at just 40% of the Budget target in the first eight months of 2020-21, the government would hope that December's indirect tax inflow, the highest since the indirect tax regime's launch in July 2017, shall sustain over the last quarter of the year. GST inflows have now stayed above Rs. 1-lakh crore for three months in a row, averaging Rs.1.05-lakh crore through October and November, before the December spike.
- After two quarters of a sharp shrinkage in the economy following the COVID-19 lockdown last March, this also infuses hope that the third quarter might see India's headline growth rate resurfacing from subterranean depths.
- The Finance Ministry has stressed that the 12% year-on-year buoyancy in GST's December kitty, the highest growth rate recorded in 21 months, reflects 'rapid post-pandemic economic recovery', bolstered by improvements in compliance following a recent crackdown on indirect tax evaders.
- It is important to discern how much of an impact stricter oversight and better compliance had on these revenues so as to distil what came from normal economic activity in November, which is what December revenues largely account for.
- Moreover, November included the fag end of India's festive season so the numbers may moderate in the months to come, even though growth rates may stay high due to a low base effect as it gets close to a year after the lockdown.
- But new GST rules, effective January 1, are expected to tighten GST compliance further so that part of the revenue booster should persist. Second, the GST on imports grew a robust 27% in November, even though overall merchandise imports contracted 13.33%.
- With December recording a 7.6% surge in imports, growing for the first time since February 2020, GST on imports should rise further in the coming month.
- Similarly, car sales surged for the fifth month in a row in December, which should not only boost the GST receipts in January but also bring in precious compensation cess.
- Whatever trajectory revenues take from here, pain points persist and some key niggling issues seem to be aggravating further. Core sectors recorded yet another

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

contraction in November, with cement and steel slipping back after a minor uptick.

- New investments in the October to December 2020 quarter declined a whopping 88% from a year ago, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).
- Employment levels declined significantly in October, followed by almost 35 lakh job losses in November and continue to deteriorate through December, CMIE reckons. The Centre needs to address some of these challenges — in the coming Union Budget or outside — to recover lost ground faster.

FSSAI and Nutrition

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.
- The FSSAI notified the amendment on December 29, more than a year after it issued a draft on the subject for consultation with stakeholders.
- The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.
- Transfats are associated with an increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease.
- According to the World Health Organization, approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of the intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids.
- The WHO has also called for the global elimination of transfats by 2023.
- “The FSSAI rule comes at the time of a pandemic where the burden of non-communicable diseases has risen. Cardiovascular diseases, along with diabetes, are proving fatal for COVID-19

patients,” says Ashim Sanyal, chief operating officer of Consumer VOICE, adding that the regulation must not be restricted to oils and fats, but must apply to all foods. “It is hoped that the FSSAI will address this as well before January 2022 to eliminate chemical trans fatty acids from the Indian platter.”

- While the regulation comes into effect immediately, industry players were made to take a pledge back in 2018 that they would comply with the WHO’s call for action to reduce TFA by 3% by 2021 allowing them three years to comply with the latest norm.
- It was in 2011 that India first passed a regulation that set a TFA limit of 10% in oils and fats, which was further reduced to 5% in 2015.

About Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

- FSSAI has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is the administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI. Chairperson is appointed by Govt of India and is the rank of Secretary. But FSSAI is not under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, it has an independent charge. Pawan Kumar Agrawal is the Chairperson.
- FSSAI to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- **Functions of FSSAI under FSS Act, 2006**
 1. Framing of Regulations: to lay down the Standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food.
 2. Laying down mechanisms and guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies, laboratories.
 3. Provide scientific advice and technical support to Center and State.
 4. Collect and collate data regarding food consumption. Promote general awareness.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

5. Create an information network across India so that the public, consumers, Panchayats etc. receive credible information.
6. Provide training programmes, contribute to the development of international technical standards for food, sanitary and phyto sanitary measures.

• Highlights of FSS Rules, 2011

1. It provides for the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal for adjudication of food safety cases.
2. It covers licensing and registration, Packaging and Labelling of Food Businesses, Food Product Standards and Food Additives Regulation.
3. It prohibits and restricts on sales or approval of Non Specified Food and Food Ingredients (harmful).
4. It also provides rules on Organic Food and regulates Food advertising.

Recent Initiatives of FSSAI

Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and Healthy Diets for School Children) Regulations, 2019

1. Malnourishment accounts for ~ 7 lakh deaths (68%) in children under 5 years in 2017.
2. It proposed ban on sale, ads of junk foods in schools.
3. HFSS foods (High in Fats, Salts and Sugar) cannot be sold to children in school canteens, mess premises, hostel kitchens or within 50 m of the school campus.
4. Schools should adopt a comprehensive programme for promoting healthy diets among children.
5. Focus on “Eat Right School” focusing on local and seasonal food and no food wastage.
6. Encourage children to have balanced diet as per National Institute of Nutrition guidelines.
7. Food companies are prohibited to use their logos, brand names and product names on

books and other educational material, as well as on school property like buildings, buses and fields.

8. FSSAI recommends the use of a combination of whole grains, milk, eggs, and millets; it also listed a set of guidelines for selection of food products in schools.
9. It is a combination of healthy food and regular physical activity that will go a long way in bringing up healthier children.
10. Challenge would be in enforcement. The onus of healthy eating should come from home and then school.

National Milk Sample Safety Quality Survey by FSSAI

- 37.7% of processed milk samples unsafe from > 1100 cities/ towns. It finds most adulteration in Telangana followed by MP and Kerala.
- Contaminants like Aflatoxin M1, antibiotics and pesticides were found. About Aflatoxin M1
- Aflatoxin comes in the milk through feed and fodder that are currently not regulated in India and it is for the 1st time that such a detailed survey of Aflatoxin in milk has been done in India.
- Aflatoxin M1 was more widely present in processed milk samples than in raw milk. Aflatoxin M1 is possibly carcinogenic to humans.
- Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Kerala were top 3 states where Aflatoxin residue was found the most.
- It is a public health concern especially in infants and young children. Hence focus on proper storage of food harvest in warm and humid conditions and on facilities to test for aflatoxin M1.
- India is World’s largest producer of milk. The total production in 2017-18 was 176.35 million tonnes.

Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)

- Center for Science and Environment (CSE) tested salt, fat, trans-fat and carbohydrates in junk foods.
- The aim was to find out the level of these products in actual servings/ packets of

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

these foods.

- To calculate how unsafe the foods tested were CSE relied on RDA - a daily ceiling on the amount of salt, fat, carbs and trans fats.
- RDA is based on scientific consensus agreed upon by WHO and National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad.
- It says that ideally, an adult should consume maximum 5 gm salt, 60 gm fat, 300 gm carbs and 2.2 gm trans fat. A snack should ideally have < 0.5 gm of salt and 6 gm of fat.
- CSE said all the popular snacks and fast foods should display a 'Red Octagon' warning symbol used in Chile and Peru.
- FSSAI set up a committee in 2013. It recommended that a packet should have clear information on calories, sugar, fat, saturated fats and salt.
- In 2018, FSS (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 recommended that salt must be declared as sodium chloride and that those ingredients which breached the RDA should be marked in 'red'.
- B. Sesikeran Committee recommendations led to a new draft FSS Regulations, 2019 which replaced Sodium Chloride with salt, total fat with saturated fat and total sugar with added sugar. CSE says this, dilutes the information on health harm posed by packaged foods.
- Industry fears that the norms are unscientific and that instead they should be advised on healthy diet, exercise and consuming appropriate amount of food.
- To brand packaged food in different colours sends out the message that they are 'toxic' and this would be counter productive to the larger aim of having a regulated but viable packaged food industry and people being educated for their food choices.
- In Chile, they have Black Hexagon and in Europe some have front of pack labelling. CSE says proposed labelling regulations and too many color codes will confuse people especially because India has a vast non English speaking population.

Other initiatives

- FSSAI has operationalized regulations on fortification of food articles and also introduces + F Logo for fortified foods (used in MDM and ICDS schemes).
- It has undertaken 'Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF)' initiative to promote awareness towards consumption of safe and nutritious food.
- FSSAI has tied up with Amazon's Alexa to tell the kids and youth to 'eat right'.
- FSSAI asks industry to reduce level of unsafe food to < 1% over next 4 years.

Education Reforms

Context: UPSC Mains GS III Education (Prelims Mains Interview)

- The Directorate of Education has issued a circular asking schools to follow the new 'School Bag Policy, 2020' released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- According to the circular, schoolteachers should inform the students in advance about the books and notebooks to be brought to school on a particular day and frequently check their bags to ensure that they are not carrying unnecessary material.
- The weight of the school bags, as per the policy, should be 1.6 to 2.2 kg for students of Classes I and II, 1.7 to 2.5 kg for Classes III, IV and V, 2 to 3 kg for Classes VI and VII, 2.5 to 4 kg for Class VIII, 2.5 to 4.5 kg for Classes IX and X and 3.5 to 5 kg for Classes XI and XII.
- It adds that the teachers should take the responsibility of checking the weight of school bags of the students every three months on a day selected for the whole class and any information about heavy bags should be communicated to the parents.
- To reduce the weight of the school bag, the circular says that it is the duty and the responsibility of the school management to provide quality potable water in sufficient quantity to all the students in the school so that they do not need to carry water bottles from their homes.
- “Heavy school bags are a serious threat to

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

the health and well-being of students. The heavy school bag has severe/adverse physical effects on growing children which can cause damage to their vertebral column and knees,” the circular reads.

- “Heads of Schools under the Directorate of Education are hereby directed to adhere to the revised guidelines to reduce the weight of school bags for students in Primary, Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools,” the notice says.

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)

- CBSE is the 2nd oldest board of India formed in 1929.
- It deals with the affiliated institution are inside & outside India.
- It conducts 10th and 12th exams and entrance exam of Medical and Engineering colleges (now NTA and NEET).
- It updates & designs curriculum.
- It empowers teacher and heads.
- It is also responsible for surprise inspection for quality control.
- SARANSH is an online facility for schools by CBSE to look at their performance and at the level of each student. It also compares with other CBSE and affiliated schools.
- **NIOS (National Institute for Open Schooling)**
 1. It was formed in 1979 under CBSE for quality education to out of school children. It has International recognition and presence.
 2. It deals with 27 subjects in Secondary and 21 subjects in Higher Secondary.
 3. NIOS gives open basic education programme for 14+ and at 3 levels: Class 3, 5 and 8.

NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training)

1. It is an apex organization founded in 1961 as an autonomous body under Societies Registration Act, 1860.
2. It assists and advises MHRD and is responsible for All India school survey.
3. **Programmes:** Research, Development, Training, International Cooperation and

information dissemination. (No funding by NCERT)

4. It implements bilateral and cultural exchange programmes.
5. Teacher education and counselling.
6. DD and All India Radio education channel of NCERT is - Gyan Darshan and Gyan Vaani and education through Edusat.
7. It has advisory role in National Policy of Education, 1986 and National Curriculum Framework.

FATF and arrest of Lakhvi by Pakistan

- The timing of Pakistan’s arrest of Zaki Ur Rahman Lakhvi, the LeT operations commander, and linked to the 2008 Mumbai attacks, just ahead of the next meet of global watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), has been greeted with scepticism in India.
- Whenever Pakistan has faced a decision on its “grey list” status, it has carried out similar actions that appear to be aimed more at ensuring a better outcome for itself at the FATF.
- Its arrest and conviction of Hafiz Saeed and other LeT leaders in terror-financing cases, the passing of anti-terrorism and money laundering laws in the Pakistan Assembly to bring them in line with FATF-mandated international norms, and the publication of new lists of terrorists at various times, all timed before FATF reviews of Pakistan’s status, have been cited as more of the same.
- The FATF’s Asia Pacific Joint Group is to meet in January to prepare recommendations for a final decision on Pakistan’s status to be presented to the FATF plenary session in February.
- Pakistan was brought back onto the grey list in June 2018, and given a 27-point action plan list to be completed by October 2019. Since then, it received at least four reprieves, and was judged at last count to have completed 21 of 27 points, with six outstanding.
- The plenary session can choose one of

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

three options therefore, in keeping Pakistan on the grey list, where it is subject to some financial restrictions, to downgrade it to the black list, where it will face stringent sanctions, or close the review and let Pakistan off the lists altogether.

- Pakistan will now hope that its progress in the action plan and having key terror figures in prison earn it a reprieve.
- The fear for India is that if Pakistan earns that reprieve, it can reverse all its actions. India has watched the arrests of all these men and other terrorists on India's “most wanted” lists in the past, only to find that they are released on bail, or let off over prosecutorial lapses once the world's gaze is averted.
- Last month, a Pakistan court's decision to overturn the conviction of al Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Sheikh Saeed, a terrorist India was forced to release during the 1999 IC-814 hijacking, for the 2002 murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, shows how Pakistan's investigating agencies and judicial system treat terrorism.
- Hafiz Saeed has been convicted only of terror financing charges and faces concurrent sentencing of about six years at the most, as would Lakhvi, who faces similar charges, despite a long record in transnational terror attacks.
- Others like Masood Azhar continue to evade any kind of prosecution despite UN sanctions. For India and its battle to have Pakistan's establishment held accountable on this issue, the FATF grey listing (from 2012-2015 and 2018-now) is a necessary lever to keep that process going.

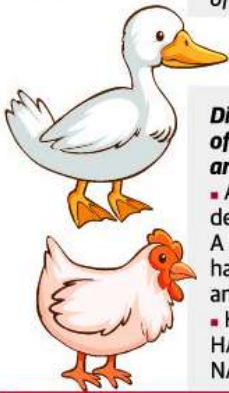
Bird Flu in India

- Kerala was placed on high alert on Monday after an outbreak of bird flu was confirmed in Kottayam and Alappuzha districts.
- The presence of the H5N8 subtype of the Influenza A virus was reported in ducks in Thalavadi, Thakazhy, Pallipad and

Karuvatta in Alappuzha district and Neendoor in Kottayam district.

- The Alappuzha district authorities have decided to cull birds within a 1 km radius of the infected areas.
- While it can prove lethal for birds, the H5N8 strain of avian influenza has a lower likelihood of spreading to humans compared to H5N1.

Influenza Type A Viruses



Subtypes

- Hemagglutinin (HA)
- Neuraminidase (NA)

(Viruses are divided into subtypes on the basis of two proteins on the surface of the virus)

- 18 known HA subtypes
- 11 known NA subtypes

Different combinations of HA and NA proteins are possible

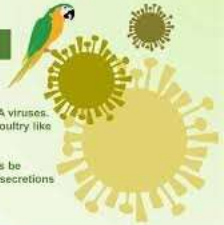
- An H7N2 virus designates an influenza A virus subtype that has an HA7 protein and an NA2 protein
- H5N1 virus has an HA5 protein and an NA1 protein

All known subtypes of Influenza A viruses can infect birds, except subtypes H17N10 and H18N11, which have only been found in bats

Influenza A H5

- There are nine known subtypes of H5 viruses
- H5N1, H5N2, H5N3, H5N4, H5N5, H5N6, H5N7, H5N8, H5N9

About Bird Flu



What is Bird Flu?

Bird flu is an infectious disease in birds caused by avian influenza type A viruses. It may cause mild to severe illness or sudden death in birds. Domestic poultry like chickens are particularly vulnerable.

Avian influenza viruses do not usually infect humans but may sometimes be transmitted to humans who have contact with infected poultry and their secretions and faeces, or contact with contaminated surfaces.

Signs in infected birds

- Lack of energy and appetite
- Combs and wattles of chickens turn purplish
- There is discharge from the nose, and coughing and sneezing
- Diarrhoea
- Head region and legs swell

How does bird flu spread between birds?

- Direct contact with nasal and respiratory secretions from infected birds
- Direct contact with infected bird faeces
- Contamination of feed and water
- Contact with contaminated equipment and humans

Keeping pet birds safe

- Keep your pet birds away from wild birds and their droppings.
- Use a bird-proof cage or enclosure with fine wire mesh netting preferably with a roof over the aviary.
- Separate all new birds from existing ones for at least 21 days to monitor for signs of illness.
- Adopt hygiene practices such as washing hands thoroughly with soap after handling birds and their cage(s).
- Do not bring birds back to Singapore without a valid import permit from NParks/Animal & Veterinary Service.

What if my pet bird falls sick or dies?

- Immediately bring your sick bird to see a vet.
- Keep it away from healthy birds.
- Wash and disinfect the cage regularly while wearing a mask and gloves.
- Wear a mask and gloves when disposing of dead birds. Place the bodies in a plastic bag tightly sealed with a rubber band or cable tie.
- Adopt hygiene practices such as washing hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling the bird and its cage.

Is it safe for me to come into contact with free-roaming chickens in Singapore?

- As a precaution, please avoid touching or feeding free-roaming chickens.
- If you come into contact with free-roaming chickens, you should practise good hygiene habits and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

For more information on bird flu infection in humans, you may refer to the Ministry of Health's website: <https://www.moh.gov.sg/diseases/updates/avian-influenza>

About Bird Flu

- Bird flu, also known as Avian influenza (AI), is a highly contagious viral disease affecting several species of food-producing birds (chickens, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, etc.) as well as pet birds and wild birds.
- Occasionally mammals, including humans, may contract avian influenza.

Types of Bird Flu:

- Influenza viruses are grouped into three types; A, B, and C. Only type A is known to infect animals and is zoonotic, meaning it can infect animals and also humans. Type B and C mostly infect humans and typically cause mild disease.
- Avian influenza virus subtypes include A(H5N1), A(H7N9), and A(H9N2).
- Influenza viruses are classified into subtypes based on two surface proteins, Hemagglutinin (HA) and Neuraminidase (NA). For example, a virus that has an HA 7 protein and NA 9 protein is designated as subtype H7N9.
- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus occurs mainly in birds and is highly contagious among them.
- HPAI Asian H5N1 is especially deadly for poultry.

Can the virus transfer to humans?

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

Control measures:

- Culling is usually undertaken to control the infection when it is detected in animals.

Besides culling, safe disposal of all such culled animals and animal products is also important.

- The authorities also need to strictly enforce decontamination of infected premises and undertake quarantine of contaminated vehicles and personnel.

Impact:

- Avian Influenza outbreaks can lead to devastating consequences for the country, particularly the poultry industry.
- Farmers might experience a high level of mortality in their flocks, with rates often around 50%.

India's Status:

- Previously in 2019, India was declared free from Avian Influenza (H5N1), which had also been notified to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).
- The status will last only till another outbreak is reported.

Pipeline Network of India

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that as part of efforts to make India a natural gas-based economy, 10,000 more CNG (compressed natural gas) stations would be opened and several lakh PNG (piped natural gas) household connections given in the coming days.
- Inaugurating the **450-km Kochi-Koottanad-Mangaluru LNG (liquefied natural gas)**, Mr. Modi said the facility was part of his government's “**one nation, one gas grid**” policy.
- The government has a concrete plan to move towards a gas-based economy that would be cheaper, convenient and environment-friendly, he said.
- The Prime Minister said the government would make substantial investments in coal and gas sectors.
- The plan was to increase the share of natural gas in the energy sector from the present 6% to 15% by 2030.
- Mr. Modi said the government had definite plans for the future to make the country

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

energy-sufficient and reduce expenditure on foreign exchange through diversification of energy requirement.

- Focus was being given on increasing production of ethanol to increase its content in petrol to 20% from the present 5%.
- The world's largest hybrid energy plant (wind and solar) was coming up in Gujarat.
- The electric mobility sector too was being encouraged. Through these, alternative, cheap and pollution-free fuel and energy would be made available to people, he said.
- Giving out statistics on efforts to boost the alternative energy sector, Mr. Modi said while 15,000 km of LNG pipeline was laid between 1978 (when the first inter-State pipeline was commissioned) and 2014, work on 16,000 km that started in 2014 would be completed in the next four years.
- As against 900 CNG stations between 1992 and 2014, 1,500 new stations were built thereafter and the numbers would increase to 10,000 soon. As against 25 lakh PNG connections till 2014, 72 lakh PNG connections were given till date.
- The Kochi-Mangaluru pipeline would provide another 21 lakh PNG connections.

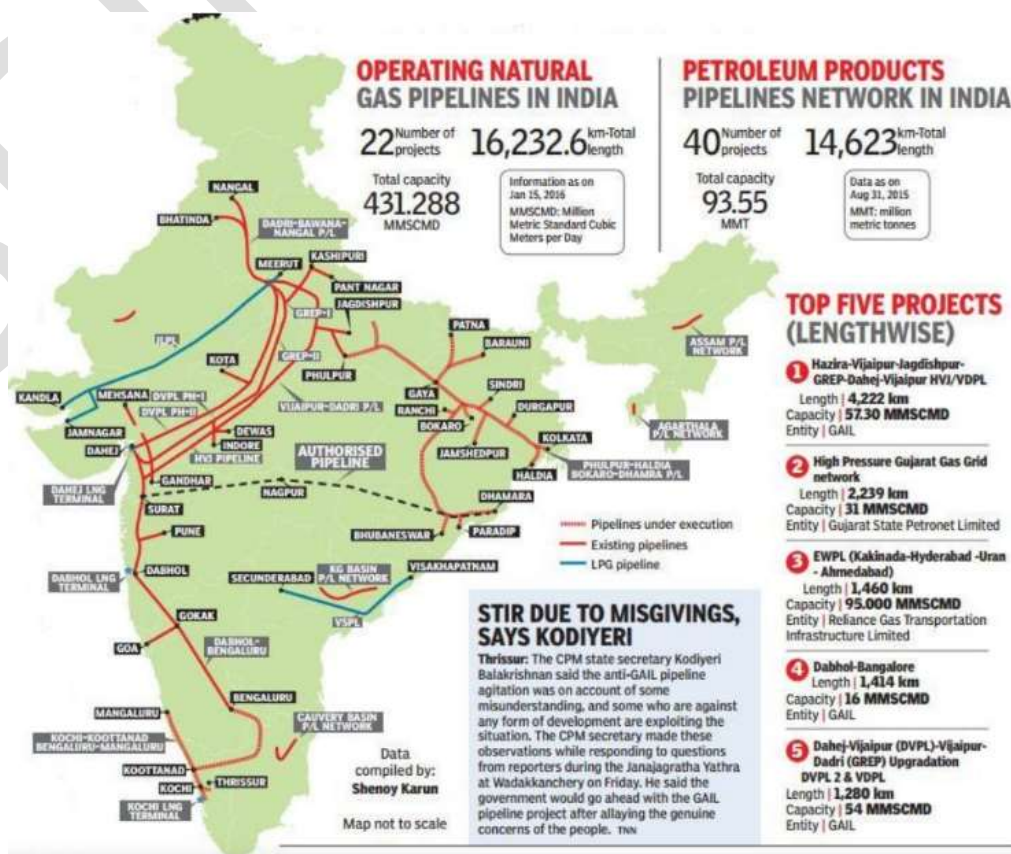
National Gas Grid Objectives

- To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access to natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
- To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.

Major Gas Pipeline

Projects

- Jagdishpur – Haldia/Bokaro – Dhamra Pipeline Project (JHBDPL) & Barauni-Guwahati Pipeline project (BGPL): Timely development of this project is supporting the revival of 3 Fertilizer Plants namely located at Gorakhpur, Barauni and Sindri, and new Fertilizer Unit at Durgapur.
- North East Region (NER) Gas Grid: A joint venture of five (05) oil and gas CPSEs i.e. GAIL, IOCL, OIL, ONGC, and NRL named as “Indradhanush Gas Grid Ltd” (IGGL) has been entrusted to develop trunk pipeline connectivity in all North Eastern States i.e. Assam, Sikkim, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya in a phased manner.
- Kochi-Koottanad- Bangalore-Mangalore (Ph-II) Pipeline Project (KKBMPL)
- Ennore-Thiruvallur-Bangalore-Nagapattinam– Madurai – Tuticorin Natural gas pipeline (ETBNMTPL): This pipeline will connect new Ennore LNG Terminal with various demand centers in the region.



Atmanirbhar Bharat and India's Recovery

- While the global economic recovery has been hit by second waves of infections and more stringent lockdowns in several countries, India's economy is 'riding against the COVID-19 wave' with persistent improvements in economic indicators showing a V-shaped recovery.
- The new year has dawned with the approval of long-awaited COVID-19 vaccine and initiation of vaccination drives in various countries. This gives strength to the optimism on both health and economic fronts despite continuing surge in global cases and the potential challenge of a mutant strain.
- “In the global economy, rise in lockdown stringency following second waves has slowed... recovery, as seen in tapering Purchasing Managers' Index estimates, decline in port traffic activity, and stagnating commercial flight activity...,” the review noted, contrasting that trend with India's recovery path.
- “The effective management of the COVID-19 spread despite the festive season and onset of winter season, combined with sustained improvement in high-frequency indicators and V-shaped recovery, along with easing of lockdown restrictions distinguish Indian economy as one riding against the COVID-wave.
- Stressing that the agriculture sector — which clocked 3.4% growth in the first two quarters of FY21 — remained the bright spot of the Indian economy, the review pointed to a 2.9% rise in rabi sowing this year, along with accelerating tractor sales suggesting rural distress had been successfully addressed by the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY).
- “Rise in minimum support prices accompanied by record procurement, and accelerated wage employment generation through MGNREGS, bodes well for rural incomes and bears testimony to PMGKY's success in alleviating rural distress... This rise in rural incomes is mirrored in the healthy, though moderated, sales in

passenger vehicles, two- and three-wheelers and tractors, and a rebound in vehicle registrations for the first time after March 2020,” it said.

- **Mega vaccination drive:** Asserting that the government was well-prepared to undertake a mega vaccination drive, following the emergency use approval for two vaccines in India, the Finance Ministry said a blueprint was 'ready with priority for health workers among others, **real-time Intelligence Network Co-WIN** in place, upgradation of cold-chain infrastructure for last-mile delivery, and ongoing dry runs'.

About Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-reliant India Mission) is a campaign launched by the Central Government of India which included an Rs.20 lakh crore economic stimulus package and a number of reform proposals.
- It is equivalent to almost 10% of India's GDP.
- The meaning of the term 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' is self-reliant India.

Significance of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

- Remaking that self-reliance is the only way out for India, the PM quoted from our scriptures “Eshah Panthah”, that is – self-sufficient India.
- Self-reliance will make globalization human-centric.
- The definition of self-reliance has changed in a globalized world and it is different from being self-centred. India's fundamental thinking and tradition of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” provides a ray of hope to the world.
- This should be seen in the context of Human-Centric Globalization versus Economy Centralized Globalization.
- Self-reliance does not mean cutting India off from the world. India believes in the welfare of the world and India's progress is linked with the world. The world trusts that India has a lot to contribute to the development of the entire humanity.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The PM also stressed on the need to be vocal for local products and urged people to buy only local products.

Five Pillars of a Self-reliant India



- Economy:** contemplates not an Incremental change but a quantum leap so that we can convert the current adversity into an advantage.
- Infrastructure:** that can be an image of modern India or it can be the identity of India.
- Systems:** driven by 21st-century technology, and that is not based on old rules.
- Democracy:** a vibrant democracy that is the source of energy to make India self-reliant.
- Demand:** where the strength of our demand and supply chain is utilized intelligently.

The reforms and stimulus measures under Rs 20 lakh crore package were subsequently elaborated by the Finance Minister in five tranches:

The first tranche of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan – Total Rs 5,94,550 Cr

- Collateral free loans and emergency credit

to restart business including MSME – 3,00,000 Cr.

- Subordinate debt for stressed MSMEs – 20,000 Cr
- Fund of Funds for an equity infusion to MSMEs – 50,000 Cr. It will also encourage MSMEs to get listed on the main board of Stock Exchanges.
- Extended EPF support via and government contributions to EPF accounts of eligible establishments – 2800 Cr
- Reduced EPF rates of both employer and employee – 6750 Cr
- Special Liquidity Scheme for NBFCs/HFCs/MFIs – 30,000 Cr
- Partial credit guarantee scheme for liabilities of NBFCs/MFIs – 45,000 Cr
- Liquidity injection for DISCOMs via Power Finance Corp/REC – 90,000 crore
- Reduction of TCS / TDS rates – 50,000 Cr

The second tranche of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan – Total Rs 3,10,000 Cr

- Free food grains to migrant workers for 2 months – 3500 Cr
- Interest subvention of MUDRA-Shishu loans – 1500 Cr
- Special credit facility to street vendors – 5000 Cr
- Extension of credit linked subsidy scheme in the housing sector for the middle-income group – 70,000 Cr
- Additional emergency working capital for farmers through NABARD – 30,000 Cr
- Additional concessional credit through Kisan Credit Cards – 2,00,000 Cr
- One Nation One Ration card to enable a migrant beneficiary to purchase grains from any ration shop in the country.
- Affordable housing for migrants and urban poor via a scheme under PMAY and affordable rental housing complexes (ARHC) under PPP mode.

The third tranche of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan – Total Rs 1,50,000 Cr

- Agri Infrastructure Fund for farm gate infrastructure including cold chain and post-harvest infrastructure – 1,00,000 Cr
- Food micro-enterprises with a cluster-

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

based approach– 10,000 Cr

- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) – 11,000 Cr for activities in Marine, Inland fisheries and Aquaculture and 9000 Cr for Infrastructure – Fishing Harbours, Cold chain, Markets, etc.
- Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund – 15,000 Cr
- Promotion of Herbal Cultivation – 4000 Cr
- Extending Operation Greens project from Tomatoes, Onion, and Potatoes (TOP) to all fruits and vegetables – 500 Cr
- Beekeeping initiatives – 500 Cr

The fourth and fifth tranches of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (combined) – Total Rs 48,100 Cr

- Viability gap funding – 8,100 Cr
- Additional MGNREGA allocation – 40,000 Cr
- Earlier measures – Total Rs 1,92,800 Cr
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package for the poor – 1,70,000 Cr:
- Insurance cover of Rs 50 lakh per health worker
- Free cereals and pulses, gas cylinders to poor families for 3 months
- Direct cash transfer via Jan Dhan account to poor women.
- PF credits to low-income workers and advances from EPF.
- Collateral-free lending for Women SHG up to Rs 20 lakhs.
- Revenue lost due to tax concessions – 7,800 Cr
- PM’s announcement in the health sector – 15,000 Cr

Measures taken by the Reserve Bank of India – Total Rs 8,01,603 Cr

- RBI enhanced liquidity by Rs 1.37 lakh crores by reducing CRR
- Targeted long-term repo operations of Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Raised the Ways and Means advance limits of the state governments by 60 percent.
- Raised borrowing limits of banks under the marginal standing facility to avail additional Rs 1.37 lakh crore.

- Special refinance facilities to NABARD, SIDBI, and NHB
- Special liquidity facility for mutual funds
- Moratorium on loan repayments

Other major decisions taken under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

Apart from the above, under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan decisions are also made to reform labour, agriculture, coal sector etc.

Labour sector reforms

- To avoid regional disparity in minimum wages, National Floor Wage to be introduced.
- Appointment letter to be provided to all workers to promote formalization.
- Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) code to cover all establishments engaged in hazardous work.
- Definition of the inter-state migrant worker to include migrant workers employed directly by the employer.
- ESIC coverage will be extended to all districts and all establishments employing 10 or more employees as against those in notified districts/areas only.
- Mandatory ESIC coverage for employees in hazardous industries with less than 10 employees.
- Introduction of re-skilling funds for retrenched employees.
- Provision for Social Security Fund for unorganized workers.
- Provision of gratuity on completion of one-year service as against 5 years.
- Agriculture Marketing Reforms to provide choices to farmers
- Now, farmers are bound to sell agriculture produce only to licensees in APMCs.
- A law will be formulated to provide choices to farmers to sell produce at an attractive price and enable barrier-free inter-state trade.
- The legal framework will be created towards contract farming and enable farmers to engage with processors, aggregators, large retailers, exporters in a fair and transparent manner.
- Risk mitigation for farmers assured returns and quality standardization to be an

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

integral part of the framework.

Coal sector reforms

- Introduction of commercial mining in the coal sector through a revenue-sharing mechanism instead of the regime of fixed Rupee/tonne
- To lower impact on the environment, coal gasification and liquefaction will be incentivized through rebate in revenue share
- Coal Bed Methane (CBM) extraction rights to be auctioned from Coal India Limited's (CIL) coal mines.

Self-reliance in defence production

- Ban the import of several weapons and a separate budget provisioning for domestic capital procurement to help reduce the huge defence import bill.
- Corporatize the Ordnance Factory Board to improve autonomy, accountability, and efficiency.
- Increased FDI limit in the defence manufacturing under the automatic route from 49 percent to 74 percent.

Aircraft and airspace sector

- Restrictions on the utilization of the Indian airspace will be eased so that civilian flying becomes more efficient.
- Development of world-class airports through PPP,
- The tax regime for Aircraft Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul ecosystem rationalized and the convergence between the defence sector and the civil MROs will be established to create economies of scale.
- Boosting private participation in space activities. The private sector will be allowed to use ISRO facilities and other relevant assets to improve their capacities.

Technology-driven education

- PM e-VIDYA — a program for multi-mode access to digital/online education — will be launched. The program will comprise one earmarked TV channel per class from 1 to 12. Special e-content will

be prepared for visually and hearing impaired. Top 100 universities will be permitted to automatically start online courses by 30 May 2020.

- Manodarpan, an initiative for psycho-social support of students, teachers, and families for mental health and emotional wellbeing, will also be launched simultaneously.
- National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission will be launched in December 2020 to ensure that every child attains learning levels and outcomes in grade 5 by 2025.

Ease of doing business related measures

- The minimum threshold to initiate insolvency proceedings raised to Rs 1 crore
- Suspension of fresh initiation of insolvency proceedings up to one year.
- Special insolvency resolution framework for MSMEs to be notified soon.
- Decriminalization of violations under Companies Act
- Allow direct listing of securities by Indian public companies in permissible foreign jurisdictions.
- The government will announce a new, coherent policy where all sectors are open to the private sector while public sector enterprises (PSEs) will play an important role in defined areas.
- A list of strategic sectors requiring the presence of PSEs in the public interest will be notified.
- In strategic sectors, at least one enterprise will remain in the public sector but the private sector will also be allowed.
- In other sectors, PSEs will be privatized

GDP to contract by 7.7% this year

- India's real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is estimated to contract by 7.7% in 2020-21, with GVA (Gross Valued added) shrinking by 7.2%, advance estimates released by the National Statistical Office show.
- India's economy had expanded 4.2% in

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

2019-20, but entered a recessionary phase with two successive quarters of sharp contraction triggered by the COVID-19 lockdowns.

- Following a 23.9% collapse in the economy in the April-June period, the GDP shrank by 7.5% in the second quarter — leading to a real GDP contraction of 15.7% in the first half of 2020-21.
- The economy will surface in the second half to record near-zero growth, or a mere 0.1% contraction, the estimates suggest.
- Based on an uptick in several indicators in the past few months, several agencies have upgraded their estimates, with the RBI recently projecting a 7.5% contraction in the year compared to its earlier estimate of a 9.5% decline.

Economy terms

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

- GDP is the total money value of final goods and services produced inside the territory of India irrespective of whom produced it – whether by Indians or foreigners.

Gross National Product (GNP)

- GNP is the total value of goods and services produced by the people of a country in a given year. It is not territory specific. If we consider the GNP of India, it can be seen that GNP is lesser than GDP.

Gross Value Added

- In 2015, India opted to make major changes to its compilation of national accounts and decided to bring the whole process into conformity with the United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA) of 2008.
- The SNA is the internationally agreed standard set of recommendations on how to compile measures of economic activity.
- It describes a coherent, consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts in the context of a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules.
- As per the SNA, GVA is defined as the

value of output minus the value of intermediate consumption and is a measure of the contribution to growth made by an individual producer, industry or sector.

- It provides the rupee value for the number of goods and services produced in an economy after deducting the cost of inputs and raw materials that have gone into the production of those goods and services.
- It can be described as the main entry on the income side of the nation's accounting balance sheet, and from an economics perspective represents the supply side.
- At the macro level, from a national accounting perspective, GVA is the sum of a country's GDP and net of subsidies and taxes in the economy.
- Gross Value Added = GDP + subsidies on products - taxes on products
- Earlier, India had been measuring GVA at 'factor cost' till the new methodology was adopted in which GVA at 'basic prices' became the primary measure of economic output.
- GVA at basic prices will include production taxes and exclude production subsidies.
- GVA at factor cost included no taxes and excluded no subsidies.
- The base year has also been shifted to 2011-12 from the earlier 2004-05.
- The NSO provides both quarterly and annual estimates of output of GVA. It provides sectoral classification data on eight broad categories that includes both goods produced and services provided in the economy. These are:
 1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.
 2. Mining and Quarrying.
 3. Manufacturing.
 4. Electricity, Gas, Water Supply and other Utility Services.
 5. Construction.
 6. Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication and Services related to Broadcasting.
 7. Financial, Real Estate and Professional Services.
 8. Public Administration, Defence

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

and other Services.

Importance of GVA

- While GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side, the GDP gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective.
- Both measures need not match because of the difference in treatment of net taxes.
- GDP is the sum of private consumption, gross investment in the economy, government investment, government spending and net foreign trade (the difference between exports and imports).
- $GDP = \text{private consumption} + \text{gross investment} + \text{government investment} + \text{government spending} + (\text{exports} - \text{imports})$
- GVA is considered a better gauge of the economy. GDP fails to gauge the real economic scenario because a sharp increase in the output can be due to higher tax collections which could be on account of better compliance or coverage, rather than the real output situation.
- A sector-wise breakdown provided by the GVA measure helps policymakers decide which sectors need incentives or stimulus and accordingly formulate sector-specific policies.
- But GDP is a key measure when it comes to making cross-country analysis and comparing the incomes of different economies.
- From a global data standards and uniformity perspective, GVA is an integral and necessary parameter in measuring a nation's economic performance.
- Any country which seeks to attract capital and investment from overseas does need to conform to the global best practices in national income accounting.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator

- It is a measure of general price inflation. It is calculated by dividing nominal GDP (market value) by real GDP (adjusted for inflation) and then multiplying by 100.

CPI/ WPI vs GDP Deflator

<https://www.aspireias.com/daily-news-analysis-current-affairs/Inflation-and-Monetary-Policy-Committee>

- GDP deflator is a much broader and comprehensive measure than CPI and WPI.
- GDP deflator reflects the prices of all domestically produced goods and services in the economy whereas, CPI and WPI are based on a limited basket of goods and services.
- WPI does not have services but GDP includes services.
- WPI and CPI are available on monthly basis whereas deflator comes with a lag (yearly or quarterly). Hence, monthly change in inflation cannot be tracked using GDP deflator, limiting its usefulness.
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation comes out with GDP deflator in National Accounts Statistics as price indices.

Dedicated Freight Corridors

New Freight Corridor

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the New **Rewari-New Madar section** of the **Western** Dedicated Freight Corridor and flagged off the world's first 1.5-km-long electrified double stack long haul container train.
- Mr. Modi said the project was part of the mission to modernise the country's infrastructure and was being seen as a game changer for the India of 21st century.
- The section, which became operational after a hard work of five to six years, would be beneficial to farmers, industrialists and businessmen in the National Capital Region, Haryana and Rajasthan.

Significance

- The corridor would lead to the development of growth centres and points in several cities, creation of job opportunities and conditions attracting more investments.
- It would give a new fillip to the local

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

industries and manufacturing units by providing them faster and cheaper access to the national and international markets.

- They would get easy access to the ports in Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- In all, 133 railway stations in nine States would be impacted by the Dedicated Freight Corridor.
- New multi-model logistic parks, freight terminals, container depots/terminals and parcel hubs would be developed at these places.
- It would not only benefit villages, farmers, the poor and the small businesses, but also attract big manufacturers, he said.
- With the launch of the double stack long haul container train between New Ateli in Haryana and New Kishanganj in Rajasthan, India had also entered the club of nations with such high capabilities.

Northeast link

- Given the rapid infrastructural expansion, all the Northeast State capitals would soon be linked to the national rail network. The work of indigenously developing high-speed tracks was also under way.
- Earlier, Mr. Modi listed several initiatives, including a digital payment of Rs.18,000 crore to farmers under the direct benefit transfer scheme, taken by the government in the past couple of weeks, to highlight the speed with which important projects were being implemented despite the COVID-19 induced crisis.

Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC):



- It is a high speed and high capacity railway corridor that is exclusively meant for the transportation of freight, or in other words, goods and commodities.
- DFC involves the seamless integration of better infrastructure and state of the art technology.
- DFC consists of two arms:
 1. Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC)
 2. Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)

Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC):

- It starts at Sahnewal (Ludhiana) in Punjab and ends at Dankuni in West Bengal.
- The EDFC route has coal mines, thermal power plants and industrial cities. Feeder routes are also being made for these.
- The EDFC route covers Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal
- The World Bank is funding a majority of the EDFC.
- The 351-km-long 'New Bhaupur-New Khurja section' will decongest the existing Kanpur-Delhi main line and double the speed of freight trains from 25 kmph to 75 kmph.

Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC):

- The other arm is the around 1,500-km WDFC from Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai, touching all major ports along the way.
- The WDFC covers Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.
- It is being funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency.
- Connecting Link for Eastern and Western Arm: It is under construction between Dadri and Khurja.
- The industrial corridor of Delhi-Mumbai and Amritsar-Kolkata are also being developed around both these DFCs.

Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Ltd.

- DFCCIL under the Ministry of Railways is

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

a special purpose vehicle tasked with planning and completion of 3,306 kms of DFCs.

- It is headquartered in New Delhi and is a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU).
- It engages in the planning and development, deployment of monetary resources, building, upkeep, and the operation of the DFCs.

Issues related to Poverty and Hunger: Nutrition Committees of India

Nutrition Committees of India

- The three top committees responsible for policies regarding nutrition are:
 1. The National Nutrition Council (NNC), headed by NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar and including 12 Union Ministers and five Chief Ministers on a rotational basis;
 2. The Executive Committee (EC) of the National Nutrition Mission headed by the Secretary of the Women and Child Development Ministry Ram Mohan Mishra; and
 3. The National Technical Board on Nutrition (NTBN), headed by Member, NITI Aayog, V.K. Paul.
- These committees were set up after the Cabinet approved the National Nutrition Mission in December 2017 and were mandated to meet once every quarter.
- They have to supervise the policy framework and the implementation of the government programmes, review the performance of various States, give scientific and technical recommendations for the execution of various schemes and propose corrective measures.
- The government's three top committees on nutrition responsible for providing policy directions, monitoring the implementation of various schemes and reviewing the nutritional status of various States and Union Territories have failed to meet even once since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, though they are required to meet every quarter.
- This is despite global warnings of rising

levels of hunger, malnutrition and child mortality.

- A leading member of one of these bodies, **Chandrakant S. Pandav**, who is also known as the “**Iodine Man of India**”, told that “he is depressed and angry” at the “collapse” of the nutrition system as the “situation has gone from bad to worse, which could have been prevented”.
- Another member of the Executive Committee of the National Nutrition Mission said on the condition of anonymity that “structures created by the PM under the Nutrition Mission need to be used and not be kept idle”.
- Dr. Pandav said: “COVID-19 is the reason why these meetings should have been held urgently. COVID-19 has scuttled everything. I am depressed and angry. The situation [poverty and hunger] has gone from bad to worse, which could have been prevented. We could have used imaginative ways of engaging communities, but we lost the opportunity to reach them.”
- Another expert, who is a member of the EC that met last in February 2020, said: “COVID-19 has put a lot of pressure on the underprivileged, especially women and children, who need nourishment at a time income levels have gone down. We need to put our heads together to ensure this.”

India's Fiscal Deficit to exceed 7%

- India's fiscal deficit for the year ending in March is likely to exceed 7% of gross domestic product, three sources told Reuters, as revenue collections suffered from a lockdown and restrictions to rein in the spread of COVID-19.
- The government had in February projected a deficit of 3.5% for the current year.
- It estimated government borrowing of Rs. 7.8 trillion, later revised to Rs. 12 trillion, to provide relief to millions of people and businesses hurt by the pandemic.
- “The fiscal deficit will be bigger than what is estimated by some ... our revenue

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

collections suffered due to the complete lockdown in the first three months and that is hard to recover,” said a source with direct knowledge of budget discussions. “We’re looking at a 7% plus.”

- Two of the sources said the revenue shortfall from tax and divestment of state-run companies could be as much as Rs. 7 trillion.
- The pandemic and stringent lockdown imposed in the early stages hit India hard.
- Asia’s third-largest economy recorded its first-ever recession with a contraction of 23.9% in the April-June quarter and a 7.5% fall in the September quarter.
- Another senior government source said finances were in poor condition because of the shortfall in tax receipts, but the government has little room to cut spending as revival of the growth remains top priority.
- “We could see the worst-ever fiscal deficit numbers in the current financial year,” said another government source, adding the fiscal deficit could touch 8% of GDP.
- The final deficit estimates will be announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Feb. 1, when she presents the annual budget.

Different Measures of Government Deficit

Revenue Deficit

- It refers to the excess of government’s revenue expenditure over revenue receipts.
- Revenue Deficit = Revenue expenditure – Revenue receipts
- The revenue Deficit includes only such transactions that affect the current income and expenditure of the government.
- When the government incurs a revenue deficit, it implies that the government is dissaving and is using up the savings of the other sectors of the economy to finance a part of its consumption expenditure.

Fiscal Deficit

- It is the gap between the government’s expenditure requirements and its receipts. This equals the money the government needs to borrow during the year. A surplus

arises if receipts are more than expenditure.

- Fiscal Deficit = Total expenditure – (Revenue receipts + Non-debt creating capital receipts).
- It indicates the total borrowing requirements of the government from all sources.
- From the financing side: Gross fiscal deficit = Net borrowing at home + Borrowing from RBI + Borrowing from abroad
- The gross fiscal deficit is a key variable in judging the financial health of the public sector and the stability of the economy.

Primary Deficit:

- Primary deficit equals fiscal deficit minus interest payments.
- This indicates the gap between the government’s expenditure requirements and its receipts, not taking into account the expenditure incurred on interest payments on loans taken during the previous years.
- Primary deficit = Fiscal deficit – Interest payments

N K Singh Committee Review of FRBM, 2016

- The Committee consisted of Urjit Patel, Sumit Bose, Dr. Arvind Subramanian etc.
- Fiscal Deficit as the operating target: to bring down public debt. Reduce it to 2.5% by 2023 (from current 3.5% in 2017).
- Public Debt to GDP ratio to be considered as a medium term anchor for fiscal policy. Combined Debt to GDP ratio to be reduced to 60% by 2023 (40 for Center and 20 for States). Currently it is 49.4% and 21% respectively.
- Reduce Revenue Deficit steadily by 0.25% each year, to reach 0.8% by 2023 (from 2.3% in 2017). It recommended not to finance Govt’s day to day expenditure through borrowings.
- Formation of Fiscal Council to advice the government.
- Escape Clause to accommodate counter cyclical issues and exceptional circumstances like during recession. The Committee set 0.5% as escape clause for

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

FD target. These situations are

- National security, acts of war, calamities of national proportion and collapse of agriculture severely affecting farm output and incomes.
- Far-reaching structural reforms in the economy with unanticipated fiscal implications.
- Sharp decline in real output growth of at least 3 percentage points below the average for the previous four quarters.
- Deviation from the stipulated fiscal deficit target shall not exceed 0.5 percentage points in a year.
- The Escape Clauses can be invoked: by the Government after formal consultations and advice of the Fiscal Council and with a clear commitment to return to the original fiscal target in the coming fiscal year.
- Fiscal consolidation should also be made by the States.
- Both monetary and fiscal policies must ensure growth and macroeconomic stability in a complementary manner.
- Buoyancy: With the higher Economic growth, FD should be reduced accordingly.

Dolphin killed by a group in UP

- A video of a group of men and boys in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh district beating to death a Gangetic river dolphin surfaced on social media on Friday.
- An endangered species, the Gangetic River Dolphin is recognised as the National Aquatic Animal.
- The Pratapgarh police said they had arrested three persons and sent them to jail. Further legal action was being taken.
- Killing the Gangetic River Dolphin is a punishable offence under Section 9/51 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the FIR said. The motive behind the crime is not yet known.
- In August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Project Dolphin, for the conservation of the aquatic mammal.

About Dolphins

- Dolphins are keystone & indicator species. Barrage is a threat.
- They are Cetaceans: 4 species of Freshwater (FW) Dolphins, 2 Saltwater (SW) & 1 Porpoise.
 1. Boto or Pink River Dolphin: Amazon + Orinoco. FW.
 2. Yangtze or Baiji: Functionally extinct in 2006. FW.
 3. Susu or Ganges River Dolphin:
 1. In India, Nepal & Bangladesh = Ganga - Brahmaputra - Meghna - Karnaphuli - Sangu. It is blind and rely on sonar.
 2. Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary at Bhagalpur (Sultanganj to Kahalgaon). It is Endangered.
 4. Bhulan or Indus River Dolphin:
 1. Indus Dolphin (Platanista Gangetica Minor) is found in Pakistan & India - Beas River (Punjab between Talwara & Harike Barrage).
 2. Not in Satluj anymore. They are freshwater, and functionally blind species of dolphins which rely on echolocation to navigate, communicate and hunt prey including prawns, catfish and carp.
 3. It is Endangered in IUCN; Indus Dolphins have reduced by > 50% since 1944.
 5. Tucuxi = SW + FW. East coast of Central & South America. Orinoco.
 6. Irawaddy R Dolphin: SW + FW. S & SE Asia.
 7. Finless Porpoise = only FW Porpoise species in East & Southeast Asia.
- Punjab and WWF - India conducting 1st organized Census to estimate Indus Dolphin. Recently Punjab declared the

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Indus Dolphin as Punjab's 'State Aquatic Animal'.

- India's and Asia's 1st National Dolphin Research Center (NDRC) in Patna University campus

- 5 Oct = Dolphin day. For Ganges River Dolphin.
- Threats are unintentional killing through entanglement in fishing gear; direct harvest for dolphin oil (used as fish attractant and meds); Water Development projects (barrage, dams); Industrial waste and pesticides; municipal sewage discharge; noise from vessel and overexploitation of prey.

- Humpback Dolphins** found in Indian Ocean from South Africa to India. They are mostly present in shallow waters. It has Endangered category and listed in Schedule 1 of WPA, 1972.

- Irawaddy River Dolphins:** are present in Bhitarkanika NP and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. Even in Chilka Lake.

- Annual Dolphin Census by Odisha, Feb 2019**

- The dolphin species sighted during the state wide census included the Irrawaddy, the Bottle Nose and the Humpback.
- The census covered important aquatic ecosystems in the state including the Chilika lake, the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, Bhitarkanika National Park and Rushukulya River.
- Gahirmatha is the home of the state's largest dolphin population, having 126 animals. Largest population of Irawaddy dolphin found in Gahirmatha > Chilika due to its bigger areas > Rushukulya River >, Balasore.

- 146 Endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins sighted in Chilka under Dolphin Census in Odisha. Chilka Lake has the highest single lagoon population of Dolphin in the World.

- Ganges River Dolphin/ Susu Census by WWF-India**

- Along a 250 km stretch of Upper Ganga basin between Hastinapur Wildlife sanctuary and Narora Ramsar site. Tandom boat survey method used. Population increased from 33 in 2018 to 36 in 2019.
- Found in the parts of Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- It is also called a Blind Dolphin because it does not have an eye lens and use echolocators. It is an indicator species for the health of the river system. Endangered in IUCN, Appendix 1 in CITES, Schedule 1 in WPA, 1972.
- Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur district is India's only sanctuary for Ganges River Dolphin.
- For the first time, a population of Gangetic River Dolphins has been found in the Mahananda river, in Bihar's Kishanganj district.

- Vaquita Porpoise:** World's most endangered marine mammal may go extinct by 2018 if no action taken to save them. It is known as Panda of the sea. It is endemic to Upper Gulf of California. It is Critically Endangered.

Project Dolphin

- Project Dolphin will be on the lines of Project Tiger, which has helped increase the tiger population.
- Project got in-principle approval in December 2019, at the first meeting of the National Ganga Council (NGC), headed by the Prime Minister.
- It is expected to be implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Special Conservation program needs to be taken up for Gangetic Dolphin which is a national aquatic animal and also indicator species for the river Ganga spread over several states. As the Gangetic dolphin is

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

at the top of the food chain, protecting the species and its habitat will ensure conservation of aquatic lives of the river.

- So far, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), which implements the government’s flagship scheme Namami Gange, has been taking some initiatives for saving dolphins.
- Global Experience: The Rhine Action Plan (1987) of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) — representing Switzerland, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands — helped in conservation of the salmon fish (also an indicator species).



Quantum Technology

- In last year’s budget session, the Finance Minister of the Government of India proposed that Rs.8,000 crore be set aside to develop quantum science and technology.

- The detailed project report for a National Mission on Quantum Technology and Applications (NM-QTA) has been drawn out and finalised, and in the next couple of months, this mission might get approval.
- Recognising the importance of quantum technology, the Department of Science and Technology of the Government of India had initiated a programme called QuEST at a modest 200-crore-rupee budget to explore the possibilities and engage with the researchers.

Potential applications

- “In the international arena, huge investments, both public and private, are carried out to roll out quantum-based products.
- Potential applications include secure communication, fast computers that established quantum supremacy, sensors and quantum inspired devices,” says Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary DST.
- “The first mover has the advantage in garnering market share and technology supremacy.”

Quantum technology

- Knowledge of quantum mechanics is an indivisible part of the electronics industry.
- However, in the twenty-first century, the term ‘quantum technology’ refers to something even more disruptive and radical.
- It involves exploiting the properties of individual, or a few fundamental particles, to achieve revolutionary changes in technology. One example is the property known as entanglement.
- When two objects, say two particles of light, also called photons, are in an entangled state, any changes made to the state of one, for example, its spin, are reflected in the other particle, however far they move from each other without breaking the entanglement.
- If developed, this property can be used to transmit a message at a very high level of secrecy from one point to another.
- In June 2020, China demonstrated

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

quantum communication technology using the satellite Micius, by conducting a secret conference between two ground stations about 1,120 km apart.

- They used the satellite not to transmit the entire communication, but to simultaneously send a pair of secret keys to the two ground stations. Each secret key is one of two strings of entangled photons.

Inter-ministerial mission

- The several areas in which this technology can be applied includes quantum communication, quantum encryption and quantum metrology.
- “In the years 1970-1980, people thought photonics would replace electronics, but it has actually augmented the latter.
- Similarly, now there is a big drive to look for domains where quantum effects can be harvested.
- “NM-QTA is an inter-ministerial mission, and Department of Science and Technology is the nodal department,” he added.
- The NM-QTA is yet to be approved by the government, and it is under process. “Around 300 scientists, faculty and researchers; 30 institutes and good number of stakeholders were involved in developing Detailed Project Report on NM-QTA. Mostly, these researchers and institutes shall be involved while implementing the mission once approved,”

Good progress

- There has been progress on several fronts as far as quantum technology is concerned, within India.
- “There is a good progress in quantum communication, particularly in free space as well as in fibre. Prototypes have been developed and protocols are in place,” Dr. Sharma explains.
- “Once satellite-based transponders are available, free space communication could be demonstrated. Work is progressing smoothly and very soon, in less than six months, it will be demonstrated,” he adds.
- According to Dr. Sharma, on the fibre

front, stretching beyond 150 km is being worked out. This includes development of repeaters so that signals could be boosted at every 150 km so that the desired communication can go for long distances.

Identical twins are not exactly genetically the same

- Scientists in Iceland sequenced DNA from 387 pairs of identical twins – those derived from a single fertilized egg – as well as from their parents, children and spouses.
- That allowed them to find “early mutations that separate identical twins.
- A mutation means an alteration in a sequence of DNA – a tiny change that is not inherently good or bad, but can influence physical features or susceptibility to certain diseases.
- They can occur when a cell divides and makes a slight error in replicating DNA.
- On average, identical twins have 5.2 of these early genetic differences, the researchers found. But about 15% of identical twin pairs have more genetic differences, some of them up to 100.
- These differences represent a tiny portion of each twin's genetic code, but they could influence why one twin is taller or why one twin is at greater risk for certain cancers.
- Previously, many researchers believed that physical differences between identical twins were related mostly to environmental factors, such as nutrition or lifestyle.
- The new study goes beyond earlier work by including DNA of parents, children and spouses of identical twins.
- That allowed the researchers to pinpoint when genetic mutations occurred in two different kinds of cells – those present in just one individual and those inherited by that person's children.
- They also found mutations that occurred before the developing embryo split into two, setting the stage for twins.

Investments in India

- A continued rise in private investments in the third quarter (Q3) of 2020-21, led by a 102% surge in manufacturing investments, helped India register a healthy 10.3% increase in fresh project spending in Q3 over the previous quarter.
- However, new capital expenditure proposals from the government collapsed between October and December 2020, as funding constraints began to pinch the States, dragging their new project investments down nearly 25% from the previous quarter.
- The Q3 project investment numbers suggest a reversal from recent years' trend of government capital expenditure propping up the economy while the private sector remained reluctant to invest due to flat consumer demand and weak balance sheets, said Projects Today, an independent firm that tracks investment projects.
- “The fall in state-promoted investment in Q3 is not a good sign. We hope this will be a short-term phenomenon,” said Shashikant Hegde, director and CEO of Projects Today. This has raised private sector's share in new projects from 40% in the previous quarter to 49.5% in Q3, he added.
- Mr. Hegde said the sequential increase registered in fresh projects by the private sector of 102.5% in the second quarter, and 36.5% in the third quarter, indicates willingness of private promoters to undertake capacity building in the future.

SOP for COVID Vaccination

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Immunisation Division) has issued a Standard Operating Procedure for the Ministry of Home Affairs in case of Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI).
- The vaccination drive will start from January 16.
- The Hindu has a copy of SOP that provides

a step by step guide to the police and other response agencies.

- The SOP is meant to help the investigator ensure appropriate handling of the vaccine, victim assistance as well as timely and effective law enforcement.
- In case of an AEFI, the officer must ensure proper handling of the vaccine and diluent as **evidence**, and make sure the samples are preserved maintaining proper cold chain, reads the SOP.
- The police officer must also ensure that the AEFI victims, and any witnesses, are provided assistance and appropriate protection, care and attention.
- “The police officer/inspector and the medical officer/district immunisation officer, investigating the case shall ensure that all serious AEFI cases are provided immediate assistance.”
- If post-mortem examination of the case is required, the Department of Health shall provide the necessary assistance, states the SOP.
- Documentation and completed requisition form for transportation of AEFI samples to a laboratory must have same official stamp. The seal will ensure the samples and details sent to the lab are not tampered with during transportation, it reads.
- The SOP also provides for investigation/interrogation of the vaccinator, if needed.
- This will help in monitoring immunisation safety, correcting unsafe immunisation practices, reducing negative impact of the event on health and contributing to the quality of immunisation.
- While probing serious AEFI, which has resulted in death, the police must “always keep the perspective that the event might be coincidental and/or reaction to the vaccine and it may not be criminal negligence of the vaccinator and/or other workers, for which causality assessment report by an expert is needed”, it reads.

COVID and impact on Schooling

- The Union Education Ministry's directive

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

to the States to launch a mission to avoid large-scale dropouts in schools in the coming year, partly by relaxing the detention policy, should end the anxiety of millions of students about their academic prospects.

- Managing schooling during COVID-19 has been a challenge, with UNESCO estimating that at the end of 2020, about 320 million students were locked out of schools globally.
- South and West Asia are among the regions where students are at highest risk of not returning to schools and tertiary institutions, along with sub-Saharan Africa.
- Assessing the problem is key to planning for 2021. The Indian school education system remains top-down in making policy, which may not advance educational reform, but the vast administrative resources can be used to quickly assess the pandemic's impact on students, teachers and schools.
- The pandemic year has thus far witnessed apprehensive governments keeping the majority of school instruction online, and treading carefully when it comes to reopening campuses.
- They must prioritise the door-to-door surveys needed to identify students who are not in a position to return to classes when schools reopen, and whose economic circumstances have changed due to the pandemic's impact on their families.
- Clearly, the priority should be to draw up a database, to plan incentives that will prevent dropouts.
- Education continues to be covered by a cess on tax, and the funds could be deployed in 2021 towards this objective, through the Centre's Samagra Shiksha scheme and other COVID-19 relief plans.
- The irrevocable role played by examinations in determining the fate of students, who come from varied backgrounds and preparation, has long been criticised for its rigidity, and these arguments were raised afresh when the Centre removed the no-detention policy

under the RTE Act a couple of years ago.

- In the year of the virus, asymmetries among groups of students stand aggravated, and any detention would be illogical and unjustified.
- Particular mention should be made of the situation for girls, whose enrolment in higher numbers has been achieved over the years with considerable effort, as well as children in less-urbanised States where access to schools is weak.
- When the pandemic had still not swept India in February last year, Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal said, among the reasons for children remaining out-of-school or dropping out were poverty, economic reasons, and ill-health.
- The economic factors have, over the past dozen months, been exacerbated by COVID-19, while the digital divide witnessed in online education became an unprecedented cause of deprivation.
- Moreover, vaccination cannot cover the bulk of the population quickly, and education can possibly achieve a semblance of normality only well into the next academic year.
- This is the time to create a safety net for education, letting no student fall through.

Emergency in Malaysia due to COVID-19

- Malaysia's king declared a nationwide state of emergency on Tuesday to fight a coronavirus surge and Parliament was suspended, with critics charging that it was a bid by the unstable government to cling to power.
- The surprise move came a day after the Prime Minister announced sweeping new curbs across much of the Southeast Asian nation, including the closure of most businesses, and warned the health system was “at breaking point”.
- Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah agreed to declare an emergency until August 1 following a request from Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, the national palace said in a statement.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- It is the first time Malaysia has declared a national state of emergency in over half a century and Mr. Muhyiddin, in a televised address, confirmed Parliament would be suspended and elections would not take place for the time being.

Inflation trends in India

- India's retail inflation decelerated appreciably to 4.59% in December, from 6.93% in November, dipping below 6% for the first time since March 2020 as food prices cooled. Other data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Tuesday, however, showed that a nascent industrial recovery, which had begun in September, retreated in November as industrial output shrank 1.9%.
- The lowest consumer price inflation (CPI) print in 14 months was driven by a sharp slowdown in food price inflation, which eased to 3.4% in December, from the preceding month's 9.5%.
- India's index of industrial production (IIP) for November was dragged lower by mining and manufacturing, which both shrank, as per quick estimates. Mining output contracted 7.3% in the month, while manufacturing declined 1.7%, indicating an unwinding of inventory build-ups with the quenching of pent-up and festive demand.
- Electricity production grew for the third month in a row, rising 3.5% year-on-year. The NSO also revised upwards the index for the preceding three months by incorporating more production data. As per the final data for August 2020, the IIP had shrunk 7.1% in the month, narrower than the 8% estimated earlier.
- In September, industrial output had edged up 0.5% — higher than the 0.2% growth estimated earlier — after shrinking for six months. Industrial output grew 4.19% in October, higher than the 3.6% quick estimate.
- “The November data once again shows that the uptick witnessed in the month of September and October was due to a

combination of festive and pent-up demand and the recovery is still shallow and fragile,” said Sunil Kumar Sinha, principal economist at India Ratings & Research. “The unevenness and fragility of the current recovery is evident with only 10 out of 23 industry group showing positive growth in November,” he pointed out.

Inflation surprise

- Vegetable prices witnessed a 10.4% deflation in December, compared with inflation of 15.5% in November. An accompanying moderation in the inflation rates for meat and fish, eggs and pulses, helped the consumer food price index record its slowest pace of increase in 16 months at 3.4%.
- Core inflation too eased marginally to 5.5% in December, helping overall inflation moderate after having remained above the central bank's tolerance band for price gains — of plus or minus two percentage points from its medium-term target of 4% — for a prolonged period.
- “While the considerable softening in the CPI in December 2020 offers welcome relief, it is unlikely to prove adequate to allow for rates to be eased in the upcoming policy review, as the headline inflation may only record a limited further decline before resuming an uptrend,” said Aditi Nayar, principal economist at ICRA.
- Initial data for this month also suggest a continued plunge in vegetable prices, but point to a broad-based rise in prices of other food items, especially edible oils, Ms. Nayar observed. “Additionally, the hardening prices of crude oil, and its partial transmission into domestic retail prices, remain a concern,” she added.

FATF, Pakistan and India

- In his speech to the UN Security Council (UNSC) marking 20 years since the resolutions that announced a global commitment to the war against terror after the U.S. 9/11 attacks, External Affairs

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Minister S. Jaishankar made a pitch for greater coordination between counter terrorism agencies worldwide.

- He highlighted the necessity to streamline the process of the UN’s top body in designating terrorists while strengthening coordination in the agencies that check their financial resources.
- First, the world must acknowledge that terrorist organisations use not only extortion and money laundering, drugs and wildlife trafficking to raise funds, but, in the present and future, will use loopholes in digital security and the “anonymity” provided by block chain technology to access finances.
- Second, in a clear reference to Pakistan, he spoke of the need to link actions between the UN and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and for countries that “wilfully provide financial assistance and safe havens” as well as “5 star” treatment to criminals and terrorists, to be held to account by them. His words are significant given that a FATF committee, the Asia Pacific Joint Group (APJG), is meeting this week to finalise recommendations for the FATF on whether to continue Pakistan’s ‘greylisting status’, downgrade it to a blacklist, or let it off, decisions that India is watching closely.
- Finally, he pointed to countries that allow their “political and religious” affinities to decide on issues of designation of terrorists, blocking and unblocking requests at the UNSC for such reasons rather than technically evaluate the evidence against these individuals.
- While the broad message here was for China, which has often blocked India’s efforts to designate individuals at the UNSC, this also includes Turkey and Malaysia which have helped Pakistan avoid stringent measures at the FATF thus far.
- While Mr. Jaishankar’s words were meant for the global struggle with terrorism since 2001, their import is for India’s particular problems with Pakistan and cross-border terrorism in the present for the impending

decision at the FATF plenary next month.

- Pakistan’s recent actions, including the sudden arrests and quick convictions of most wanted figures Zaki Ur Rehman Lakhvi and Hafiz Saeed, and the warrant for JeM chief Masood Azhar, all in cases of terror financing, indicate that Islamabad is aware of the importance of these decisions for its economic future; for the moment, the government is appearing to fall in line with the FATF’s 27-point action plan.
- By drawing the connection between the actions of the UNSC and the FATF together, Mr. Jaishankar is indicating that India is not only watching what Pakistan does but also how the international community “walks the talk” on “zero tolerance to terrorism”.

World’s largest vaccination programme

Calling the shots

The Health Ministry has ruled out certain population groups from the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. A lowdown:



WHO SHOULD NOT BE VACCINATED

- Those aged 18 or below
- Pregnant and lactating women
- People with a history of allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccine or to vaccines in general or injectable therapies, pharmaceutical products and food items

WHO ARE PERMITTED (apart from the general population)

- People with a history of COVID-19 infection
- Those with a history of chronic diseases and co-morbidities
- People who have immunodeficiency or HIV, and patients on immunosuppression drugs

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first phase of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive.
- The world’s largest vaccination programme will begin at a total of 3,006 session sites across all the States and the Union Territories, which will be connected virtually throughout the exercise. Nearly 100 beneficiaries will receive the vaccine at each of the session sites on Saturday.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- A **dedicated 24x7 call centre** — 1075 — has been set up to address queries related to the pandemic and the vaccine roll-out, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement.
- Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday said adequate doses of both the vaccines — **Covishield and Covaxin** — had been delivered across the country. He reviewed the functioning of the CoWIN system, the online digital platform that will be used to drive the vaccination programme.
- The vaccination drive, where the beneficiaries currently will not have a choice between the two vaccines, has been planned in a phased manner after identifying the priority groups, the Ministry said.
- Healthcare workers, both in the government and private sectors, including Integrated Child Development Services workers, will receive the vaccine in the first phase.

Gujarat River Pollution

- The unchecked flow of untreated industrial effluent into rivers in Gujarat has led to increasing pollution in the Sabarmati, Mahisagar, Narmada, Vishwamitri and Bhadar.
- According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), the **Sabarmati** is among the most polluted rivers in the country.
- Gujarat ranks fourth among the top five States with highly polluted rivers, with as many as 20 rivers in the critically polluted category.
- Recently, a thick froth on the Mahisagar, along a stretch of several kilometres, raised serious concern, prompting the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) to constitute a high-level committee to study the rising level of pollution in the river.
- “Pollution in rivers has emerged as a major threat in the last few years because the lackadaisical approach of the authorities has emboldened the industries to discharge untreated effluents into flowing rivers,” said Vadodara-based environmental activist Rohit Prajapati.
- He said that both treated and untreated effluent is released into the estuary of the Mahisagar and Gulf of Cambay, flouting the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
- As per the official parameters, if the chemical oxygen demand (COD), which indicates organic pollutant load, is higher than 250 mg per litre, then it should not be released into the rivers.
- “Most of the Gujarat rivers where the effluents are dumped into, the COD level is in the range of 700 to 1000 mg per litre. While Dissolved Oxygen (DO) level [indicating the health of a river] in perennial rivers like Mahisgar should be in the range of 6 to 8 mg per litre, it is actually below 2.9 mg per litre,” he added.
- In December 2020, Mr. Prajapati and a few others wrote a letter to the State authorities providing evidence, including videos and photographs, of how toxic effluents were being dumped into the Mahisagar and other rivers by industries.
- “The Vadodara Enviro Channel Ltd, which runs a 55-km-long pipeline to discharge treated effluents into the deep sea, releases the effluents into the river.
- The effluents are not getting discharged into the deep sea as required,” a former official of the Gujarat Pollution Control Board told The Hindu.
- Now, the State government has proposed a Rs. 2,300 crore project for a deep sea effluent disposal pipeline to cater to nearly 4,500 industrial units. The project will serve four highly industrialised districts (Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Kheda and Rajkot), which are the main sources of pollution.

Migratory birds in Harike wetland, Punjab

- Winter migratory water birds using the central Asian flyway have started making a beeline to Punjab's Harike wetland, offering a delight for bird lovers.
- Birds such as the Eurasian coot, greylag goose, bar-headed goose, gadwall and the northern shoveler are the prominent ones that could be sighted at Harike. Among others species, common pochard, spot-billed duck, little cormorant, pied avocet, great cormorant, ferruginous pochard and common teal have been spotted.
- “On an average, the number has been anywhere between 92,000 and 94,000 over the years. The average number has been stable,” Geetanjali Kanwar, Coordinator - Rivers, Wetlands and Water Policy, WWF-India, told The Hindu. But the number of some species, including northern lapwing, Pacific golden plover, black-bellied tern and cotton pygmy goose, has dwindled, she noted.

Wetlands

- Wetlands are the lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem where the water table is usually at or near the surface or land is covered by shallow water.
- Productivity of Estuaries > Swamp, Marshes, Wetlands > Coral Reefs > Equatorial & Tropical rainforests > Savannah.
- **Definition:** Areas of marsh, fen, peatland/ water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with static or flowing water, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the "depth of which is < 6 m".
- Waterlogged soil for at least 7 days, adapted plant life (hydrophytes) and hydric soils (not enough Oxygen) are main characteristics of Wetlands.
- It occupies 18.4% of area of which 70% is under paddy.
- Inland wetlands are more than Coastal Wetlands in India.
- Natural wetlands in India range from high

altitude wetlands in Himalayas; flood plains of the major river systems; saline and temporary wetlands of arid and semi arid regions; coastal wetlands like lagoons, backwaters, estuaries, mangroves, swamps and coral reefs.

There are 5 major wetland types are

- Marine (coastal lagoons, rocky shores and coral reefs).
- Estuarine (deltas, tidal marshes and mangrove swamps). Salt pans and Aquaculture also come under Wetlands.
- Lacustrine (lakes even oxbow lakes, reservoir, tanks etc.) Riverine (wetlands along rivers and streams).
- Palustrine (marshes, swamps and bogs).

Functions of Wetlands:

- They retain water during dry periods (keeping water table high) and mitigate flood by trapping suspended solids and nutrients.
- Habitat to flora, fauna and migratory birds; filtration of sediments; nutrient recycling; water purification; flood mitigation; maintenance of stream flow; ground water recharge; drinking water; buffer shorelines against erosion; tourism, recreation and cultural heritage; stabilisation of local climate; livelihood to local people etc.
- Threats to Wetlands: Conversion for Agriculture; Overgrazing; Removal of sand from beds; Aquaculture; Habitat destruction and deforestation; Pollution; Domestic waste and agricultural run off; industrial effluents and climate change.

Difference from Lakes:

- National Lake Conservation Program (NCLP) considers Lakes as standing water bodies having minimum water depth of 3 m. Wetlands have depth < 6 m.
- Foodchain: Lakes have grazing pathway and Wetlands have detritus pathway.
- Productivity and Biodiversity of Wetland > Lakes.
- Lakes do not do waste treatment but Wetlands perform waste treatment

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

function.

- Lakes have thermal stratification but not Wetlands.
- Dominant producer of Lake is phytoplankton but Wetlands have macrophytes.
- Lakes are Oligotrophic while Wetlands are mostly Eutrophic.

Wetlands (Conservation and Mgt) Rules, 2010

- It specifies activities harmful to Wetlands like industrialization, construction, dumping of untreated waste & reclamation + prohibit these activities in wetlands.
- Central Wetland Regulatory Authority set up to implement rules. (Replaced in 2017 by National Wetland Committee).
- Harvesting & dredging can be carried out with prior permission.

Wetland Rules, 2017

- Wetlands are defined as an area of marsh, fen, peatland or water. It can be natural or artificial, permanent or temporary. It includes areas of marine water with the depth of maximum 6 m.
- The rules apply to Ramsar Wetlands and those notified by Central, State Govts and UT administration.
- Digital inventory of all wetlands: mandatory for State authorities. Wetland management given to States and UTs Authority. It is to be updated every 10 years.
- Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) is replaced by National Wetland Committee, which has merely an advisory role. It is to be headed by MoEF Secretary. It will also recommend designation of Ramsar sites/ Wetlands of International importance.
- It stipulates setting up State Wetlands Authority in each State/ UT headed by State MoEF. It will develop a comprehensive list of activities to be regulated and permitted within notified wetlands.
- **Restrictions:**

1. Encroachments on wetlands have been banned.
 2. It also prohibits solid waste dumping, discharge on untreated waste and effluents from industries and human settlements.
- The rules prohibited activities like conversion of wetland for non-wetland uses including encroachment of any kind, industries, waste dumping and discharge of untreated wastes and effluents.

National Wetland Inventory and Assessment:

- The 1st scientific national inventory of wetlands in India was carried out by Space Applications Center (ISRO), Ahmedabad at the behest of MoEF.
- Lakshadweep has the largest % of Wetlands (96.12%) followed by A&N. Gujarat has the highest % (statewise).

National Wetland Conservation Programme (NWCP), 1985-86

- Under this programme, 115 wetlands have been identified which needs urgent conservation.

Objective is

- To prevent further degradation and ensuing wise use for the benefit of local communities and conservation of biodiversity.
- To provide financial assistance for conservation of priority wetlands and monitor implementation of programme.
- To prepare an inventory of the Indian wetlands.
- Since Land Resources belong to State, State Govt or UT are responsible for management of wetlands and implementation

Wetlands International

- It is a global organization that works to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources for people and biodiversity. It is an independent, not for profit organization supported by Govt and

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

NGOs.

- It does not fund. It was founded in 1937 as an International Wildfowl Enquiry. Not under UN.
- Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) across Asia and Australia is coordinated by Wetlands International and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).

Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices raised for the 4th time

What is Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF)?

- ATF is Kerosene based fuel used for powering jet and turboprop engine aircraft.
- ATF doesn't come under the GST (Goods and Services Tax) regime.
- States charge ~30% in sales tax on ATF on top of Excise duty of Center.

What is the news?

- Jet fuel, or ATF, price on Saturday was hiked by 3% — the fourth increase in two months — on firming international oil prices, while petrol and diesel rates remained unchanged after hitting new highs.
- Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was raised by Rs. 1,512.38 per kilolitre (kl), or 2.96%, to Rs. 52,491.16 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.
- This is the fourth increase in price since December 1. Rates had gone up by 7.6% (Rs. 3,288.38 per kl) on December 1, by 6.3% (Rs. 2,941.5 per kl) on December 16 and by Rs. 1,817.62 (3.69%) on January 1.
- The increase in ATF price, which makes for close to 40% of the running cost of an airline, will put additional burden on airlines that have been struggling to return to normal business after COVID-19 lockdown had halted their operations.

Biojet Fuel

- Biojet Fuel is made from Jatropha crop.
- The flight Spicejet Bombardier Q400 is using Biojet fuel developed by CSIR - IIP (Indian institute of Petroleum).
- It was 75% ATF + 25% Biojet fuel blend.

- Biojet fuel is made from biomass resources like animal fat, used cooking oil, waste dairy fat, sewage sludge.
- It doesn't freeze at high altitudes.
- It has lower sulfur content.

Analysis of Whatsapp Privacy Policy

- WhatsApp's decision to delay the update of its privacy policy, following a backlash from its users, is an implicit acknowledgement of the increasing role played by perceptions about privacy in the continued well-being of a popular service.
- Problems for the Facebook-owned app started earlier this month when it announced an update to its terms of service and privacy policy, according to which users would no longer be able to opt out of sharing data with Facebook.
- February 8 was kept as the deadline for the new terms to be accepted. This triggered a mass exodus from WhatsApp, the likes of which it has never encountered, not even in the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which did bring a lot of bad press to its parent, or when the messaging app's co-founders called it quits a few years ago.
- The WhatsApp policy update has clearly spooked many users, who, concerned about their privacy getting compromised, have shifted to alternative platforms such as Signal and Telegram.
- In recent weeks, according to media reports, messaging app Signal has topped the app store charts in India and many other countries.
- Interestingly, WhatsApp uses the same end-to-end encryption protocol as Signal.
- An under-fire WhatsApp, on its part, has tried to allay fears about privacy being compromised because of the updates. It has put out numerous messages and taken out advertisements to convey that the changes are “related to optional business features on WhatsApp, and provides further transparency about how we collect and use data”.
- Millions of business interactions take

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

place every day on WhatsApp, and the new privacy updates are supposedly to make these easier while also enabling personalised ads on Facebook.

- After all this, WhatsApp has pushed the update to May 15. The change will ultimately be inevitable, given that WhatsApp, bought by Facebook for a whopping \$19 billion and having subsequently given up plans to charge its users, would be betting on its handling of business interactions to make its big monies.
- Even then, it cannot force these changes on its users in Europe. For, Europe's stringent General Data Protection Regulation, more popularly called GDPR, prevents such sharing between apps.
- Users there are in control of their data much more than anywhere else in the world. India could do with such a law. All it has is a draft version of a law, and it has been so for a few years now.
- Privacy of a billion citizens is too important a thing to be left just to the practices of a commercial enterprise.
- It will be reassuring if it is guaranteed by a strong law.

Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)

- CSIR is the largest R&D organisation in India. CSIR has a pan-India presence and has a dynamic network of 38 national laboratories, 39 outreach centres, 3 Innovation Complexes and 5 units.
- It was established in Sep 1942 with HQ at Delhi.
- CSIR is funded by MoS&T and it operates as an autonomous body through the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- CSIR covers a wide spectrum of streams – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and

information technology.

Organizational Structure

- Prime Minister is the ex-officio President of CSIR.
- Vice President: Union Minister of Science and Technology (Ex-officio).
- Governing Body: The Director-General is the head of the governing body. Shekhar C Mande (Director General of CSIR)
- CSIR Advisory Board: 15-member body composed of prominent members from respective fields of S&T.
- Member terms are of 3 years.

Objectives of CSIR

- Promotion, guidance and coordination of scientific and industrial research in India.
- Establishment and assistance to special institutions or departments of existing institutions for the scientific study of problems affecting particular industries and trade.
- Establishment and award of research studentships and fellowships.
- Utilization of the results of the research conducted under the auspices of the Council towards the development of industries in the country.
- Payment of a share of royalties arising out of the development of the results of research to those who are considered as having contributed towards the pursuit of such research.
- Establishment, maintenance and management of laboratories, workshops, institutes and organisations to further scientific and industrial research.
- Collection and dissemination of information in regard not only to research but to industrial matters generally.
- Publication of scientific papers and a journal of industrial research and development.

CSIR Vision & Strategy 2022:

- Pursue science which strives for global impact, the technology that enables innovation-driven industry and nurtures trans-disciplinary leadership thereby

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

catalyzing inclusive economic development for the people of India.

Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) Prize for Science and Technology

- It is named after the founder Director of the CSIR, the late Dr Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar. He played a key role in post independent S&T infrastructure and in the formulation of S&T Policies. He was also the 1st Chairman of UGC.
- It was instituted in 1957 as the most coveted and revered prize in the field of S&T in the country.

CSIR Key Achievements

Strategic Sector:

- Drishti transmissometer: It is an Indigenous - Innovative –Cost-effective visibility measuring system that provides information to pilots on visibility for safe landing & take-off operations.
- CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) made a significant contribution by developing indigenous Head-Up-display(HUD) for Indian Light Combat Aircraft, Tejas. HUD aids the pilot in flying the aircraft and in critical flight manoeuvres including weapon aiming.
- Design and development of Indigenous Gyrotron for nuclear fusion reactor have been accomplished. A gyrotron is a vacuum electronic device (VED) capable to generate high-power, high-frequency THz radiation.

Energy & Environment:

- Solar Tree: It designed by CSIR- The Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI) lab in Durgapur. It occupies minimum space to produce clean power.
- Lithium-Ion Battery: The Central Electrochemical Research Institute (CECRI), Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu, has set up the first indigenous Li-ion fabrication facility that has applications in defence, solar-powered devices, railways and other high-end usages.

Agriculture:

- Enhanced cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants in the country brought through the development of new varieties and agro-technologies.
- Samba Mahsuri Rice Variety: CSIR in collaboration with ICAR developed an improved bacterial blight resistant Samba Mahsuri variety.
- Rice Cultivar (Mukdashree) for Arsenic Contaminated Areas: A rice variety has been developed which restricts assimilation of Arsenic within the permissible limit.
- White-fly resistant Cotton variety: Developed a transgenic cotton line which is resistant to whiteflies.

Healthcare:

- Johne's Disease Vaccine for Farm Animals: affecting Sheep, Goat, Cow and Buffalo so as to immunize them and increase milk & meat production.
- Plasma Gelsolin Diagnostic Kit for Premature Births, and Sepsis-related Deaths: It is developed to diagnose premature birth and sepsis.
- A programme called GOMED (Genomics and other omics technologies for Enabling Medical Decision) provides a platform of disease genomics to solve clinical problems.

Food & Nutrition:

- Ksheer-scanner: It is a new technological invention by CSIR-Central Electronics Engineering Research Institute (CEERI) to detect the level of milk adulteration.
- Double-Fortified Salt: Salt fortified with iodine and iron having improved properties developed and tested for addressing anaemia in people.
- Anti-obesity DAG Oil: Oil enriched with Diacylglycerol (DAG) instead of conventional triacylglycerol (TAG) developed.

Water:

- Aquifer Mapping of Water Scarce Areas: in 6 different geological locations in

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Rajasthan (2), Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

- Understanding the Special Properties of the Ganga Water: An assessment of water quality & sediment analysis of Ganga from different parts being done.

Waste to Wealth:

- Non-toxic Radiation Shielding Material for X-ray Protection: They are utilizing industrial waste like red mud (from aluminium industries) and fly ash (Thermal Power Plants). It has been accredited by Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) for application in diagnostic X-Ray rooms.
- Waste Plastic to Fuel: Process for conversion of waste plastics to gasoline/diesel or aromatics developed.
- The Indelible Mark: The Indelible ink used to mark the fingernail of a voter during elections is a time-tested gift of CSIR since 1952 to the spirit of democracy. It is also exported to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Turkey and other democracies.
- Skill development: covers Leather process Technology; Leather Footwear & Garments; Paints & coatings for corrosion protection; Electroplating & Metal Finishing; Lead Acid Battery maintenance; Glass Beaded Jewellery / Blue Pottery; Industrial Maintenance Engineering; Internet of Things (IoT); and Regulatory – Preclinical Toxicology.

Aviation:

- The CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories has designed a plane 'SARAS'.
- In 2011, successfully tested India's 1st indigenous civilian aircraft, NAL NM5 made in association with National Aerospace Laboratories and Mahindra Aerospace.

CSIR has established the first-ever 'Traditional Knowledge Digital Library' in the world.

- CSIR developed this in collaboration with Ministry of AYUSH.
- It is accessible in 5 international

languages(English, German, French, Japanese and Spanish).

- CSIR successfully challenged the grant of patent in the USA for use of Haldi (turmeric) for wound healing and neem as an insecticide on the basis of traditional knowledge.

10% of CSIR staff exposed to COVID-19, survey finds

- A first such pan-India survey tracking nearly 10,000 employees of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) on the prevalence of COVID-19 found that nearly 10% of the staff were infected.
- Key neutralising antibodies that protect against the virus waned after infection, but were at “detectable levels” even after six months — a proxy for the period of effectiveness of future vaccination and general immunity, the serology survey found.
- About three-fourths of the respondents could not recall having experienced a single one of the symptoms commonly associated with the disease, and a vegetarian diet and smoking appeared to be “protective” against the infection.
- In August, the CSIR announced a project to track 10,000 employees of the organisation for at least 30 years to track an array of health vitals and genes.
- The overarching aim is to be able to build a medical cohort to give long-term perspective on the malaises that affect Indians, and determine if such a data bank can be used to help with predicting, say, the onset of diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

‘Longitudinal study’

- The CSIR has some 40 labs across the country in nearly every State and its staff — from scientific staff to contractual employees — is a microcosm of India, Shantanu Sengupta, Scientist at the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB), among the corresponding authors of the study, told The Hindu.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- “This is a first-of-its-kind longitudinal study anywhere in the world in that we are tracking a cohort over time and will continue to do so. Some of the associations, of smoking and vegetarianism, are significant, but we can now only speculate on why this is so. We don’t yet have a cause,” he said in a phone conversation.
- An association between smoking and protection against SARS-CoV-2, or lower odds of infection by the virus, has also been reported in studies in China and France.
- CSIR staff and family members who volunteered to be part of the survey filled out questionnaires on their lifestyle, food and disease histories.
- They were also tested with two different kinds of antibody tests to study the kinds of antibodies that were produced following infection.
- It usually takes a week to a fortnight after being infected for antibodies to be detected in the blood.
- A serology survey by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has estimated 7% exposure to SARS-CoV-2 until mid-August, and a modelling exercise by the National Supermodel Committee estimated that 30% may have been exposed by September.

other serious health-related issues as determined by the vaccinator or the officer supervising the vaccination.

- “There is remote chance that Covaxin could cause severe allergic reaction including difficulty in breathing, swelling of face/throat/fast heart beat, rash all over the body and dizziness and weakness,” it said.
- Faith in entities is often an act of personal commitment not amenable to falsification, but trust in a scientific process can be established with confidence-building measures and full disclosure of all relevant data.
- Any mass campaign that involves voluntary effort on the part of the public can succeed only when transparency and open communication channels are the tools of choice.
- If the poor rate of uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine in most of the States in the country is any indication, the government has not taken the people of the country along, in what is a purely voluntary exercise, but one vested with great power to retard the pace of the epidemic.
- For instance, Tamil Nadu, a State perceived to be largely health literate, and relatively well-equipped with health infrastructure, achieved only over 16% of its targeted coverage on the launch day.
- On the second day of vaccination, the compliance further dropped; in some States, vaccination was suspended.
- A marked favouring of the Covishield vaccine over Covaxin was also noticed in multiple States. But none of this is a surprise.
- The signs, verily, were out there for everyone to see, for a long time indeed. Studies measured high levels of vaccine hesitancy among the general population, and among health-care workers, the first in the line list of people to receive free vaccination.
- Clearly, vaccine hesitancy was not addressed sufficiently, or not taken seriously enough.
- With the sequence of events that followed

Guidelines for the use of Covaxin

Guidelines for the use of Covaxin and Vaccine Hesitancy

- Those with a history of allergies, fever and bleeding disorder, people on blood thinners and those with compromised immunity or on medication that affects the immune system have been told by Bharat Biotech, manufacturer of Covaxin, not to take the COVID-19 vaccine.
- A statement uploaded on the company website on Monday said the vaccine was also contraindicated for pregnant and lactating women, those using other COVID-19 vaccines and people with any

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

the clearance of Emergency Use Authorisation (in Covaxin, it is emergency use authorisation in ‘clinical trial mode’) — a high-handed announcement with little attempt to put out compelling evidence in the public domain, or answer multiple queries in press conferences — vaccine hesitancy merely dug its heels in deeper.

- The inability of the government and agencies involved to amicably resolve controversies surrounding the clearance for Covaxin, even before it was able to produce interim data on efficacy from phase-3 trials, has had a direct consequence, as witnessed by poor numbers in its uptake so far.
- A vaccine, unequivocally, is public good, but the lack of transparency surrounding the roll-out of the COVID vaccines has done little to enhance trust in this experiential principle.
- This uncommon haste in trying to lunge towards the tape while still some distance from the finish line might have been justified if the state had taken the people along.
- Vaccinating the nation, however, is less a race than a slow and steady process.
- Building confidence in the process is crucial to achieving the task at hand. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s oft-repeated mantra, ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas’, is very relevant here.
- And the Health Ministry must do whatever it takes to make a success of the vaccination drive.

reflect manipulation of ratings but is also about power play, it said.

- The messages exchanged go on to refer to the appointment of Secretaries, Cabinet reshuffle, access to the PMO (Prime Minister’s Office) and the workings of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- “This only confirms the many and continuous allegations made by NBA in the last four years that ratings were being manipulated by a non-NBA member broadcaster in connivance with BARC’s top management officials,” the statement said.
- “It is indeed with dismay that NBA notes the fact that in spite of having a damning verdict in its possession since July 2020, BARC sat on the forensic report for several months, which brought to light these manipulations. This is a glaring example of the systemic lack of transparency that has prevailed right since the inception of BARC,” it said.
- The NBA Board demanded that BARC make a statement about the veracity of its ratings for the period that is under audit, conduct an audit of Hindi news genre, expunge the data of Republic TV and re-state the rankings of all news channels.

Whatsapp chats of Arnab Goswami

- The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) on Monday said the WhatsApp chats of Arnab Goswami were shocking.
- In a statement, the NBA said Republic TV be expelled from the Indian Broadcasting Foundation.
- The NBA Board called for Republic TV to be left out of the BARC rating system till the final court order in the matter.
- These WhatsApp messages not only

Labor laws in India

- The Union Labour and Employment Ministry is likely to appoint legal consultants this month to look at whether the States’ labour laws are in consonance with the Centre’s four new labour codes, according to senior Ministry officials.
- The codes on wages, social security, industrial relations and occupational safety, health and working conditions could be implemented before the April 1 target.
- Labour and Employment Secretary Apurva Chandra told that the rules framed under the codes on social security, industrial relations and occupational safety would be finalised by the end of the month. The rules under the Code on Wages, 2019 have already been finalised.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Along with the implementation of the codes, an official said the Ministry would appoint legal consultants soon to review the various State laws.
- The official added that the matter would be taken up with the States if the laws are found to be out of tune with the codes. The work would start with two or three States, the official said.
- The four codes have amalgamated 29 Central labour laws, including those covering matters of minimum wages, benefits for workers and strikes. For the first time, gig and platform workers have been covered under the social security schemes.
- Most Central trade unions, however, have protested against the codes, terming them anti-worker.
- Both Ikea and Tesla executives have previously expressed concerns about the steep duty structure their products already face in India.
- The list of items likely to attract steeper duties is set to include appliances such as **refrigerators and air conditioners** too, three of the sources said.
- India's finance minister will on Feb. 1 unveil the central government's annual budget for the 2021-22 financial year, which begins on April 1.
- The sources said the proposals may still be tweaked further before they are finalised.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will unveil the budget on Feb. 1 in the shadow of a projected economic contraction of 7.7% for the current fiscal year.
- India has in recent years taken a series of measures that industry executives say discriminate against foreign companies. Government officials say such taxes are essential to promote India as a destination for local manufacturing and to support domestic businesses.

Government may raise import duties by 5-10%

- India is considering raising import duties by 5%-10% on more than 50 items including smartphones, electronic components and appliances in the upcoming budget.
- The move to increase import duties is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's self-reliant India campaign that aims to promote and support domestic manufacturing, said the sources, who asked not to be named as the discussions are not public.
- One of the sources said the government was seeking to target **additional revenue** of about Rs. 200 billion to Rs. 210 billion, as it looks to shore up revenue amid the COVID-19 pandemic-driven slowdown that has stung the economy.
- Two of the government sources also said the duty increases could impact furniture and electric vehicles, potentially hurting the likes of Swedish furniture maker **Ikea and Tesla**, which is planning to launch its cars in India this year.
- The officials, however, did not specify how much of an increase was planned on **furniture and electric vehicles**.

Water Pollution: Yamuna Project

- The Centre accused Delhi of being a “habitual offender” in polluting the waters of the Yamuna.
- The State of Haryana, on the other hand, objected to Delhi's accusations about it releasing untreated effluents into the river due to faulty treatment plants, saying the “problem is not with Haryana, but within Delhi”.
- A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde gave Haryana a week's time to file its affidavit.
- The Centre has also been asked to place on record its views.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The Bench was hearing an urgent petition filed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), represented by advocate Shadan Farasat, to “immediately stop” Haryana from discharging pollutants into the Yamuna, which is causing an alarming increase in ammonia levels in the water.
- The Board said the **increased ammonia level** has impaired its water treatment plants and a drinking water and health crises loom large in Delhi.
- The DJB said the national capital’s woes were made worse with Haryana not releasing the full quantity of water entitled to Delhi at **Wazirabad**. Instead of releasing at least 450 cusecs downstream from Wazirabad, only 330 cusecs have been released.
- “Due to lesser water being released, the concentration of ammonia in the water reaching Delhi has increased,” the DJB said.

Asita Project

- Yamuna River Front Development Project.
- Yamuna originates from Bandapooch peak.
- Japan is helping in Yamuna action plan for STPs, Community toilets & e-crematoria.

Seechawal model to clean Yamuna

- It is a decentralized natural treatment system - oxidized pond and settling tanks. It removes floating material.



Whatsapp New Privacy Policy

WHAT YOU GET ON WHATSAPP, OTHER APPS			
FEATURES	WHATSAPP	SIGNAL	TELEGRAM
End-to-End Encryption (E2E)	Yes	Yes	Only 'Secret Chats' and all calls
Disappearing Messages	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chat backups	Yes, but third-party	No, stored locally on device	Yes, but on Telegram's Cloud
Screen Lock	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advertisements	No	No	No, but plans to add
Group Chat Security	Yes, E2E	Yes, E2E	No
Video and Voice Calls	Yes	Yes	Yes

What is the news?

- Center has asked WhatsApp to withdraw the proposed changes to its privacy policy, stating that it raised “grave concerns” over the implications of the choice and autonomy of Indian citizens.
- Government pointed out that by not giving the option to opt out of data-sharing with Facebook companies, Indian users were being treated differently from those in Europe.
- Whether this [the new policy] will enable better provision of service to users or not is beside the point, the issue is the impact it has on informational privacy, data security and user choice.
- The government also asked the Facebook-owned platform to reconsider its approach to respect the informational privacy, freedom of choice and data security of Indian citizens.
- “The privacy policy offered by WhatsApp to its European users specifically prohibits the use of any information shared with a Facebook company for that companies’ own purposes, while this clause is not present in the privacy policy offered to Indian users. This differential and discriminatory treatment of Indian and European users is attracting serious criticism and betrays a lack of respect for the rights and interest of Indian citizens, who form a substantial portion of WhatsApp’s user base,” it said.

What is the new Privacy Policy of Whatsapp?

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- WhatsApp has updated its terms of service and privacy policy for users in India. Users have till February 8, 2021 to accept these in order to continue using the platform.
- The messages on WhatsApp are **end-to-end encrypted** which means nobody can see your messages or share it with anyone.
- When users rely on **third-party services** or other Facebook Company Products that are integrated with our Services, those third-party services may receive information about what you or others share with them.
- WhatsApp collects **hardware information** from devices such as battery level, signal strength, app version, browser information, mobile network, connection information (including phone number, mobile operator or ISP) among others.
- If someone only **deletes** the WhatsApp app from their device without using the in-app delete my account feature, then that user's information will remain stored with the platform.
- WhatsApp mentions that it uses Facebook's global infrastructure and data centers including those in the United States to **store user data**. It also states that the data in some cases will be transferred to the United States or other parts where Facebook's affiliate companies are based.
- Even if a user does not use their **location-relation features**, Whatsapp collects IP addresses and other information like phone number area codes to estimate your general location (city, country).
- WhatsApp says that any **businesses** that users interact with may provide the platform with information as well. The content shared with a business on WhatsApp will be visible to several people in that business.
- WhatsApp says that if anyone uses their **payments services** they will process additional information about you, including payment account and transaction information.

eCommerce rules in India

What is the news?

- India is considering revising its foreign investment rules for e-commerce. This move could compel players, including Amazon.com Inc., to restructure ties with some major sellers.
- The government discussions coincide with a growing number of complaints from India's bricks-and-mortar retailers, which have for years accused Amazon and Walmart Inc.-controlled Flipkart of creating complex structures to bypass federal rules, allegations the U.S. companies deny.
- India only allows foreign e-commerce players to operate as a marketplace to connect buyers and sellers.
- It prohibits them from holding inventories of goods and directly selling them on their platforms.
- Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart were last hit in December 2018 by investment rule changes that barred foreign e-commerce players from offering products from sellers in which they have an equity stake.
- Now, the government is considering adjusting some provisions to prevent those arrangements, even if the e-commerce firm holds an indirect stake in a seller through its parent, the sources said. The changes could hurt Amazon as it holds indirect equity stakes in two of its biggest online sellers in India.
- Among other changes, the government is considering changes that would prohibit online sales by a seller who purchases goods from the e-commerce entity or its group firm, and then sells them on the entity's websites.

e-Commerce rules in India

- e-Commerce matters were transferred to DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industries in 2018.
- According to DPIIT e-Commerce means buying and selling goods and services over digital networks based on internet.
- India's e-commerce retail market is seen growing to \$200 billion a year by 2026,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

from \$30 billion in 2019, investment promotion agency Invest India estimates.

- They are governed by many Acts like Shop and Establishment Act, Sales of Goods Act, Companies Act, Income Tax Laws, IT Act, Competition Act, Consumer Protection Act, etc.
- In 2018, a Think Tank on the Framework for National Policy on E-commerce was established by Dept of Commerce. It is carried out for both wholesale trade or for retail trade.
- It can be either business to Business (B2B) trading or Business to Consumers (B2C) trading.
- 100% FDI is allowed in B2B e-commerce since 2000.
- And regarding B2C, a distinction is made between Single brand retail and multibrand retail.
- In B2C, if trade is done on 'marketplace' then 100% FDI is permitted.
- 100% FDI is permitted in single brand retail since 2012 with 49% under automatic route.
- FDI is not permitted in inventory based model (inventory is owned by the e-commerce entity).
- DPIIT also provided FDI rules in e-commerce.
- Vendors having stake owned by an e-commerce firm cannot sell their products on its portal.
- Vendor who buy $\geq 25\%$ of its inventory from an e-commerce group firm will be considered to be controlled by that firm and cannot sell their products on its portal.
- To reduce Predatory pricing.
- E-commerce export is applicable to items of worth upto 25,000.
- Audit for FDI norms must for e-commerce firms: FEMA, 1999 Amendments: E-commerce firms with Foreign Investments must obtain a statutory auditor report by end of September each year for the preceding fiscal and they must comply with FDI rules.

Draft e-Commerce policy, 2020

- **Data:** The policy acknowledges the

importance of data as a 'national asset' and seeks to establish a legal & technological framework to restrict cross-border flow of data generated in India.

- It calls for creating domestic standards for devices which are used to store, process and access data to increase interoperability, enhance data security and prevent violation of privacy.
- **Infrastructure Development:** It recommends according 'infrastructure status' to supporting digital infrastructure like data centres, server farms for data storage etc. Designated implementing agencies should establish requisite physical infrastructure (like power supply, internet connectivity etc.). Also, domestic alternatives to foreign-based clouds and email facilities should be promoted.
- **FDI Policy:** The policy aims to clearly demarcate between a marketplace model & an inventory-based model and seeks to encourage FDI in the 'marketplace' model alone.
- Other important provisions are related to anti-Counterfeiting & Anti-Piracy Measures, grievance redressal mechanism etc.

Analysis of Whatsapp Privacy Policy

- Data localisation is not the only approach towards protecting data privacy.
- Following an exodus of its users from its messaging service, WhatsApp, to apps such as Signal and Telegram, which promise more privacy options, the Facebook-owned service might have been forced to postpone the date for users to accept its new privacy policy terms to May 15.
- In just days after the earlier announcement by WhatsApp, Signal has emerged as the leading app on “app-stores” as Indian users signalled their discomfort with the former’s data sharing policies.
- WhatsApp, with 459 million users, had emerged as the leading communications application for most Indians.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- What has caused patrons discomfort is WhatsApp’s ability to seamlessly share user metadata and mobile information with its parent company and social media behemoth, Facebook.
- Facebook Inc., which also owns Instagram, has sought to integrate the offerings from WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, with the former acting also as a tool that secures payments for services and ads posted on the latter two applications, beyond its primary use as a messaging service.
- This integration of three large consumption products is a means to monetise their everyday use by consumers and considering the fact that Facebook’s revenue model uses data on its platform to allow advertisers to target ads towards users, the algorithms would benefit from the WhatsApp data as well.
- Such data transfer from WhatsApp to Facebook is not possible in regions such as the EU, where data protection laws have stringent restrictions on storage and transfer of user data.
- This regionally differential treatment has attracted the attention of the Ministry of Electronics and IT, which has sent WhatsApp a series of queries, including on why Indian users would be sharing information with Facebook, unlike in Europe.
- The onus is also on the Indian government to quickly take up the legislation for robust data protection, that aligns with the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee, which tried to address concerns about online data privacy in line with the 2018 Puttaswamy judgment.
- The draft Bill proposed by the government in 2019 diluted some of the provisos, for example, by limiting data localisation in proposing that only sensitive personal data needed to be mirrored in the country, and not all personal data as mandated by the committee.
- But data localisation as proposed by the committee may not necessarily lead to better data privacy, as it carries the

possibility of domestic surveillance over Indian citizens.

- Privacy is better addressed by stronger contractual conditions on data sharing and better security tools being adopted by the applications that secure user data.
- The proposed Bill has some of these features, similar to Europe’s General Data Protection Regulation, but it also requires stronger checks on state surveillance before it is passed.

Cambridge Analytica and FB issue



- The Central Bureau of Investigation has booked Cambridge Analytica (U.K.) Limited and Global Science Research Limited (U.K.) for alleged illegal harvesting of personal data of about 5.62 lakh Indian users on Facebook through an application.
- It stems from a preliminary enquiry launched by the agency in July 2018 on a complaint from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) following media reports alleging the illegal harvesting of personal data.
- MeitY had earlier sought details from Facebook and Cambridge Analytica about the alleged violations, the extent of leak of personal data of Indian users and their possible misuse by Cambridge Analytica for profiling and influencing elections in India.
- The CBI found that Dr. Kogan, founder and director of GSRL, had created an application that was named “thisisyourdigitallife.”
- As per Facebook’s platform policy, the app was authorised to collect certain specific data of users for academic and

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

research purposes. It, however, illegally collected unauthorised data of users as well as their friends' network on Facebook, as alleged in the FIR.

- The data was collected without the knowledge and consent of users.

Central Bureau of Investigation

1. The Special Police Establishment (SPE) was setup in 1941. It was merged with CBI which was set up in 1963 by a resolution of Ministry of Home Affairs based on the recommendations of **Santhanam Committee**.
2. CBI is **not** a statutory body. It derives its powers from **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946**. Now it an **attached office**. It assists Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal.
3. CBI is the main investigating police agency of Central govt with respect to **Prevention of corruption and maintaining integrity** in administration. The CBI is involved in major criminal probes, and is the **Interpol agency** in India.
4. **Mission:** To uphold the Constitution and laws of the land, leads and directs police forces and acts as the nodal agency for enhancing inter-state and international cooperation in law enforcement.
5. Its **motto** is "Industry, Impartiality and Integrity".
6. **Vision:** Corruption, violent crimes, Evolve effective systems and procedures for investigating and prosecution of cases in various law courts, cyber crime, support state police organizations and law enforcement agencies, play a lead role in war against organized crime, uphold human rights, develop scientific temper, humanism, spirit of enquiry and reform.
7. **Composition and Appointment:**
 1. **Head** – Director (IPS of DGP or Commissioner) for a term of 2 years
 1. According to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 amended DSPE Act, 1946. Earlier CVC (under CVC

Act appointed Director).

2. Now Central govt appoints the Director on the basis of a 3 member Committee of

1. PM (as the Chairman),
2. Leader of Opposition of Lok Sabha
3. Chief Justice of India or Judge of SC or nominated by CJI.

2. The Director of CBI as IGP, DSPE is responsible for the administration of the organization.
3. With the enactment of CVC Act, 2003 the superintendence of DSPE vests with the Central govt except investigation of offences under POCA, 1988, in which, the superintendence lies with CVC.
4. He is assisted by a Special or Additional Director. It also has Joint directors, DIGs, SPs etc.
5. **Amendments by Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013**

1. The Director of Prosecution in CBI shall be appointed by Center on CVC's recommendations.
2. The CVC as the Chairman and 2 Vice Chairmen + Secretaries of Home Affairs, Department of Personnel and Training are the members of Selection Committees, on whose recommendations the Central govt appoints SP and above in CBI except the Director of CBI.

8. Functions

1. Investigating cases of corruption, bribery, misconduct, infringement of fiscal and economic laws of Central govt employees.
2. Taking up, on the request of a State govt or when directed by SC or

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

HC, any case of public importance for investigation.

3. The CBI acts as the National Central Bureau of Interpol in India.
4. SC quashed the provision of taking prior permission of Center before conducting any enquiry by Joint Secretary and above.
9. **Special Police Establishment:** The role of SPE, a division of CBI, is supplementary to that of State Police forces.

Railways in India

Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)



- The country's first Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) is set to use an advanced signalling and train control system.
- According to the NCRTC, the RRTS will adopt a **modern European Train Control System Level 2 signalling** over the long-term evolution communication backbone with the adoption of state-of-art Hybrid Level 3.
- Adoption of this signalling technology adds to the distinction of RRTS, as the first technologically advanced rail network in India will be operational with a design speed of 180 km/hr.
- The **ETCS signalling system** will be a key enabler in ensuring interoperability and train movement at quick frequencies, thereby reducing waiting time for passengers.

Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS)

- The Planning Commission formed a Task Force in 2005 under the Chairmanship of Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) to develop a multi modal transit system for Delhi National Capital Region (NCR).
- This was included in the **Integrated Transport Plan for NCR 2032** with special emphasis on Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) connecting regional centres.
- The Task Force identified **8 corridors and prioritised three corridors namely Delhi-Meerut, Delhi-Panipat and Delhi-Alwar** for implementation.

Difference between RRTS and Train

Indian Railways and Technology for India

Technology in the year 2020 is going to be a growth driver for Indian Railways. In the coming years, Indian Railways aims to provide world-class train journey experience to passengers by embracing **technological advancements. With a focus on safety, comfort, and**

convenience, Indian Railways is aiming to transform its network.

With the launching of **engine-less, self-propelled-Vande Bharat Express** trains to implementation of passenger eco-friendly facilities, there is a sense of improved and enhanced train journey experience.

Vande Bharat Express

- It is India's first indigenously built **engineless** semi-high speed train. Earlier, it was known by the name **Train 18**.
- It runs between **Delhi and Varanasi** at a maximum speed of 160 kmph.
- It has been built by the **Integral Coach Factory, Chennai**, in a record time of 20 months.
- The train is a **100% 'Make in India' project** and is claimed to be built at half the cost of a similar train set that is

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

imported.

- It is **energy-efficient** as its coaches will be fitted with LED lights.
- Coaches will have automatic doors and retractable footsteps.
- It will be inter-connected with fully sealed gangways along with a GPS-based Passenger Information System.
- It is provided with Bio toilets.



Enhancing passenger experience

- According to Indian Railways, technology in the year 2020 is going to be a growth driver. As there is no shortage of coaches now, the focus will be on **introducing SMART coaches** on the Indian Railways network.
- Also, with modern features like CCTVs with facial recognition, emergency talk-back system, WiFi infotainment system, automatic plug-door and step control, etc. there will be a complete change in travel experience.

Introducing world-class train sets

- For Indian Railways, the introduction of 'Make in India' semi-high speed Vande

Bharat Express trains was the biggest success story of last year.

- This year as well as in the coming years, the national transporter plans to launch many other world-class train sets, improving the railway connectivity across the country.
- According to Rajesh Agrawal, the aim is to also **start exporting trains**.

Manufacturing of coaches

- The Chittaranjan Locomotive Works in **Chittaranjan** and Banaras Locomotive Works in **Varanasi** makes electric locomotives.
- The **Integral Coach Factory in Perambur, Chennai** makes integral coaches. These have a monocoque construction, and the floor is an integral unit with the undercarriage.
- The **Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala** also makes coaches.
- The **Titagarh Wagons** builds freight wagons.
- The Rail Wheel Factory at Yelahanka, Bangalore and Rail Wheel Plant, Bela, Chhapra, Bihar manufacture wheels and axles.
- **Diesel-Loco Modernisation Works, Patiala** upgrades the diesel locomotives.
- Some electric locomotives have been supplied by BHEL, Jhansi and Palakkad, and locomotive components are manufactured in several other plants around the country.
- There has been an exponential growth in **coach production**. For the first time in 2018-19, Indian Railways has witnessed more supply than demand.
- The financial year 2018-19 saw the highest production of coaches in the last two decades, with a total of 5,836 coaches.
- The Modern Coach Factory (MCF), Rae Bareilly had doubled its production, last year.

Environmental impact

- Indian Railways plans to focus on cleanliness of trains and stations.
- Beginning with the installation of 57 bio-toilets in 31 coaches in January 2011, Indian Railways has now successfully

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

installed over 2.2 lakh bio-toilets covering about 61,500 passenger carrying coaches.

- Moreover, 950 railway stations have been provided with integrated mechanised cleaning till now.
- Also, 13 railway stations have achieved Green Certification and 85 railway stations have been certified for implementation of Environment Management System.

Freight logistics

- The freight logistics of the national transporter is picking up, according to the Railway Board. The freight carrying capacity has been increased from 7 Million MT to 1 Billion MT.
- Meanwhile, Indian Railways has come up with a **wagon design for new traffic streams**, which includes bulk, cement and fly ash transportation, steel coil 1, steel coil 2, road railers, parcel wagon.
- A private parcel wagon design is also currently under consideration at RDSO.
- Additionally, a **Smart Yard** is likely to be introduced for maintenance of rolling stock.

Recent news in Railway sector

For The People

INDIA'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO SEE A MASSIVE TECHNOLOGICAL UPGRADATION

NITI Aayog draws up plan

Approves 6 new mass rapid transport systems


Transport ministry will now look at safety parameters

STATE of the ART

METRINO: fully automatic, driverless small pods travel independently suspended over an overhead network

POD TAXIS: small automated vehicles – cable cars or pod cars – equipped to carry a small group of passengers

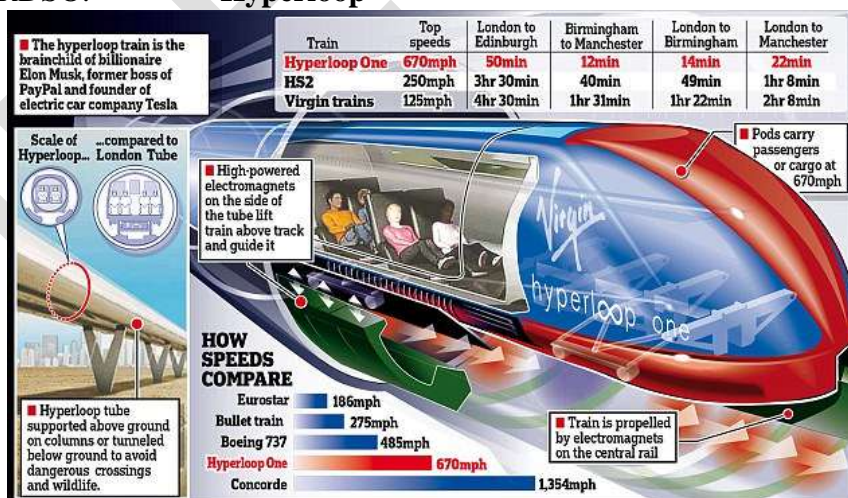
HYPERLOOP: a pod-like vehicle is propelled through a near-vacuum tube connecting cities at speeds matching that of an aircraft



This will be followed by trial runs before commercial launch

- In 2017, NITI Aayog cleared half-a-dozen proposals of the transport ministry exploring options to improve public transport.
- The think tank approved the proposals of the transport ministry with a condition that the ministry conducts trial run of all these technologies and puts in place safety measures before starting commercially operation.
- These technologies include metrinio, stadler buses, hyperloop, pod taxis, hybrid buses and freight rail road.
- The new technologies are being explored as current public transportation is unable to resolve the increasing traffic crisis in the country. Besides, some of them are more cost effective than the existing ones.

Hyperloop



- In a Hyperloop, the passenger pods or capsules travel through a **tube**, either above or below ground. To reduce friction, most but not all of the air is removed from the tubes by pumps.
- Overcoming air resistance is one of the biggest uses of energy in high speed travel.
- Airliners climb to high altitudes to travel through less dense air; in order to create a similar effect at ground level, Hyperloop encloses the capsules in a **reduced-pressure tube**, effectively allowing the trains to travel at **airplane speeds** but on

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

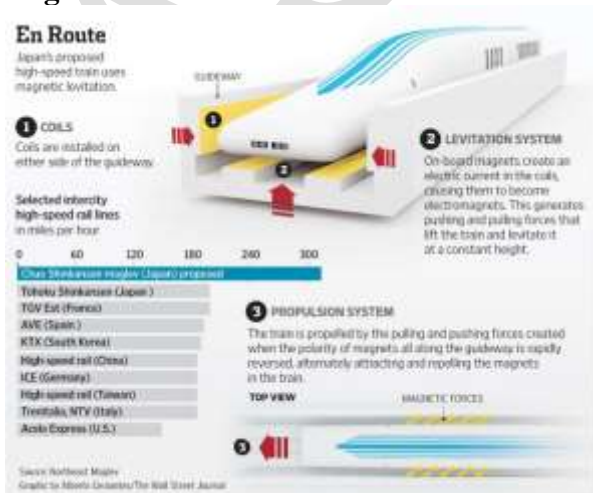
the ground.

- In model, the **pressure of air inside the Hyperloop tube is about one-sixth the pressure of the atmosphere on Mars.** This means an operating pressure of 100 pascals, which reduces the drag force of the air by 1,000 times relative to sea level conditions, and would be equivalent to flying above 150,000 feet altitude.
- The pod would get its initial velocity from an **external linear electric motor**, which would accelerate it to ‘high **subsonic** velocity’ and then give it a boost every 70 miles or so; in between, the pod would coast along in near vacuum.

Modern Train Control system

- Indian Railways has decided to modernize its Signalling system on its entire network by implementing Modern Train Control system.
- The RailTel Enterprises Ltd. (REL), a 100% subsidiary of RailTel Corporation of India Ltd. has been given the responsibility to implement these four pilot projects on behalf of Indian Railway.
- The MTCS includes provision of:
 1. Automatic Train Protection (ATP) System
 2. Electronic Interlocking System
 3. Remote Diagnostic & Predictive Maintenance System
 4. Long Term Evolution (LTE) based Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC) System
 5. Centralized Traffic Control System (CTC) /Train Management System (TMS)

Maglev trains in India



- State-run engineering BHEL announced its tie up with SwissRapide AG to bring Maglev trains (magnetic levitation) to India.
- Aimed at expanding its footprint in the urban transportation sector as part of its diversification initiatives, BHEL has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with SwissRapide AG for Maglev Train projects in India.
- The Maglev Rail system hovers in the air instead of rolling, due to magnetic levitation, thus the vehicles have no physical contact with the guideway. This enables the system to be highly energy efficient, allows operating speeds of easily up to 500 km/h and significantly reduces the total cost of system ownership.
- The agreement has been signed in the backdrop of the Prime Minister's 'Make in India' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives, and will enable BHEL to bring the latest, world-class technology to India and manufacture state-of-the-art Maglev trains indigenously.
- The SwissRapide AG is a Swiss company specialised in the promotion, project management, planning, specification, design, implementation and commissioning of international Maglev Rail projects and related technologies.
- It holds the unique position of offering Transrapid Maglev technology, the only established and commercially proven ultra-high-speed Maglev Rail system in the world.
- BHEL has been pioneering new technologies and has been a reliable partner in the growth of Indian Railways for over ve decades by supplying electric as well as diesel locomotives, EMUs (electrical multiple unit), and propulsion system sets and drives for the same.
- Kolkata Metro, the first Metro in India, is equipped with BHEL made propulsion systems. The first ever air-conditioned AC-EMUs, presently operational in Mumbai suburban, are also equipped with BHEL-made propulsion and related electrics.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

India's first pod taxi project moves a step forward



- The Union Government has approved country's first Metrino Pod project i.e. personal rapid transit (PRT) network for Gurgaon, Haryana. It is a projected pod taxi scheme.

What is a Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) Network?

RIDE SMART, RIDE SMOOTH

A lowdown of the PRT plan for Gurgaon

Cost
₹850cr

Construction period
1 year

Contract period
25 yrs

SPEED

1 min per docking system

Around 30K commuters per hour in one direction

MODE OF TRANSPORT

Hanging 1,100 pod cars

Each can carry 5 passengers



REQUIRED LAND
29 acres available with NHAI & Haryana government

LIKELY TICKET FARE
On a par with Metro

automated vehicles (dubbed as pod) running at close intervals on a guideway with docking stations for passengers to get on and get off.

- The pod can accommodate up to **five** people. The average speed of the pods is 60kmph.
- Passengers have an option to hire an entire pod that will take a passenger straight to the destination, skipping the scheduled stops.
- PRT is an advanced public transport using automated electric pod cars to provide a taxi-like demand responsive feeder and shuttle services for small groups of travelers and is a green mode of uninterrupted journey
- NHAI has been mandated to execute it on **Delhi-Gurgaon pilot corridor** from Delhi-Haryana border to Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon on a PPP (public-private partnership) basis.
- The model is in place at London's Heathrow airport, Morgantown and Masdar city.

It will be incorporating Automated People Movers (APM) standards and specifications, along with other general safety parameters with Niti Aayog recommendations.

Automated people mover (APM) standards in the US

These are recommended by the committee for the maiden PRT in India and have been prepared by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)

These constitute the minimum requirements for an acceptable level of safety and performance for the PRT

These include vehicle arrival audio and video visual warning system, platform sloping, evacuation of misaligned vehicles, surveillance/CCTV, audio communication, emergency call points and fire protection, among other advanced systems.

- A PRT network is made up of **small**

Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail (MAHSR) corridor



- The Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor is an under-construction high-speed rail line connecting the cities of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and India's economic hub Mumbai, Maharashtra. It will be India's first high-speed rail line.
- The bullet train is symbol of strong trust between the India and Japan as it involves the technology transfer at the core of this deal.
- By L&T constructions.
- Length 508 kms double line. Mumbai Ahmedabad High Speed Rail will be passing through two states, Maharashtra 155.642 KMs and Gujarat 350.530 KMs and one Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli 2 KMs.
- 12 stations: Mumbai, Thane, Virar, Boisar, Vapi, Bilimora, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Ahmedabad, Sabarmati. Except Mumbai, all other stations will be elevated.
- Maximum Design Speed - 350 kmph while Maximum Operating speed of 320 kmph.
- Journey time: 2.07 hrs (limited stops), 2.58 hrs (stopping at all stations).
- Maintenance of Trains: Sabarmati (Depot & Workshop) and Thane Depot.
- A 21-km-long tunnel will be built between Boisar and BKC in Mumbai, of which 7km will be under water.
- The Railways will only require around 825 hectares of land for the project as 92 per cent of the route will be elevated, six per cent will go through tunnels and only the remaining two per cent will be on ground.

India's new draft “Arctic policy”

India's new draft “Arctic policy”

- India has unveiled a new draft ‘Arctic’ policy that, among other things, commits to expanding **scientific research**, “**sustainable tourism**” and **mineral oil and gas exploration** in the Arctic region.
- India expects 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 by expanding “earth sciences, biological sciences, geosciences, climate change and space related programmes, dove-tailed with Arctic imperatives in Indian universities.”

NCPOR (National Center for Polar and Ocean Research), Goa

1. It was earlier known as National Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) and is now renamed as National Center for Polar and Ocean Research.
2. NCAOR was established in 1998 for expeditions to Antarctic first and later its mandate was expanded to include **both Arctic and Antarctic**.
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 Exclusive Economic Zone 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

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

of 6 research vessels viz Sagar Kanya, Sagar Sampata, Sagar Nidhi, Sagar Manjusha, Sagar Purvi & Sagar Paschmi currently, and a 7th being the Polar Research Vessel (PRV) is being constructed.

- **Other objectives** of the policy include “...putting in place Arctic related programmes for mineral/oil and gas exploration in petroleum research institutes and encouraging tourism and hospitality sectors in building specialised capacities and awareness to engage with Arctic enterprises,” according to the document available online at www.arcticpolicy.nic.in.
- “Arctic research will help India’s scientific community to study melting rates of the **third pole — the Himalayan glaciers**, which are endowed with the largest freshwater reserves in the world outside the geographic poles,” the document notes.

India and Arctic Programmes

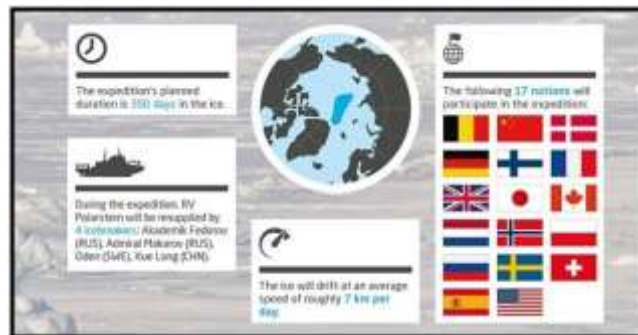
1. India initiated its Arctic Research program in 2007 with thrust on Climate change at Poles. Its objectives were to
2. Study connections between Arctic climate and Indian monsoon.
3. Study sea ice to estimate the effect of global warming at Poles.
4. Study on effects of glaciers on Sea level change.
5. Flora & Fauna Assessment and their response to anthropogenic activities.
6. Comparative study of both Poles.
7. India launched its 1st science expedition in 2007 and opened “**Himadri**” at **Ny-Alesund, Spitsbergen Island, Svalbard (Norway)**.
8. India has established a high altitude **research station** in the Himalayas called **HIMANSHI at Spiti, HP**.
9. **India - Sweden: MoU for Polar Science Cooperation** (both for Arctic & Antarctic).
10. **Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS)** with Russia will give access to India for the Russian bases in Arctic for logistics & operational turnaround.

IndARC Project



1. It is **India's 1st underwater observatory** in the frigid waters of Arctic Ocean in the Kongsfjorden fjord (natural lab).
2. It is executed with the help of Norway.
3. 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.
4. It is designed and developed by the scientists from (Earth System Science Organisation) ESSO; NCAOR, Goa; National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai and INCOIS, Hyderabad.

MOSaIC mission (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the study of Arctic Climate.)



1. 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.
2. It is the **largest ever Arctic expedition**.
3. 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.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

4. 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.
5. 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.

Draft policy to help grow nano, micro enterprises

- Udyog Sahayak Enterprises Network put together by FICCI, TISS and Azim Premji University
- A new policy on the anvil, the **Udyog Sahayak Enterprises Network (USENET)**, may give a major fillip to the growth-stunted nano and micro-enterprises in India's informal sector.
- The proposed framework, whose draft was jointly put together by the Azim Premji University, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (**FICCI**), and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (**TISS**), is aimed at providing a slew of growth-driven services to over 62 million nano and micro-enterprises that currently employ over 100 million people.
- Each of these small enterprises currently has one to three employees, and if given a boost, they have the potential to grow and create a large number of jobs, says the draft.
- The draft proposes the **creation of a support system** that will improve Ease of Doing Business for the largely informal nano, micro and small entrepreneurs.
- **Udyog Sahayak Enterprises**, to be set up across the country, will deliver services such as digitisation and formalisation; availing of government loans, subsidies or other benefits; ensuring compliance with local, regional and national regulation; and aiding partnership with digital marketing platforms and digital payment platforms to these enterprises.
- Each of these centres will be headed by

a **Udyog Sahayak**, who will have a mandate to help and monitor the growth of 15 to 50 enterprises.

- The Union government is likely to sanction upto ₹5,000 crore to part-fund CAPEX to set up at least 19 lakh USENET centres.

Significance

- Through USENET, we are trying to create a countrywide entrepreneurial network.
- The platform will give millions of nano and micro-enterprises, which are facing harassment and growth challenges, information on policies, schemes and credit options, and visibility to lenders and customers, thereby help them grow and go digital.
- Rather than creating more nano-entrepreneurs, the country has to help existing MSEs grow in size. We can do this by creating a support system which enables them to go digital, avail of government schemes, adopt new technologies, and increase productivity. This will create millions of new jobs.
- By enabling scale-up, the draft claims, USENET can aid in the creation of an additional 10.3 million jobs over five years, going up to nearly 56.9 million jobs over 10 years.
- If the value-added per worker can be computed, according to the draft, it could bring in a 12% nominal growth in GVA (gross asset value), amounting to an economic value of ₹2.16 lakh crore in five years and over ₹19 lakh crore at the end of 10 years.

Defense procurement for India

- The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is scheduled to deliver the first batch of three indigenous **Light Combat Helicopters (LCH)** to Army and Air Force before March 31.
- They are part of the 15 Limited Series Production (LSP) LCH helicopters approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC).

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Early this month, the Defence Ministry said in its annual report the contracts for the procurement of the LCH from HAL, additional **Harop (P-IV) loitering drones from Israel** and upgrade of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAV) in service are “likely to be signed in the first quarter of 2021”.
- The Army variant of the **Light Utility Helicopter (LUH)**, which has completed all tests and also demonstrated its high-altitude capability in hot and high weather conditions last September, is scheduled to receive its Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) at the Aero India.
- With a range of helicopters in the smaller range, HAL is working on a 12-tonne **Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH)** as a replacement for the MI-17 helicopters in service. The Army and the Air Force are working out the Service Quality Requirements (SQR), the source said.
- The LCH and the LUCH along with the weaponised **Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH)** will be showcased inside the Indian pavilion at Aero India to showcase the range of indigenous development.
- The LUH is a three-tonne helicopter positioned as **replacement for the Cheetah and Chetak helicopters**.
- According to HAL, it is capable of flying at 220 kmph, service ceiling of 6.5 km and a range of 350 km with 500 kg payload.

Light Combat Aircraft Tejas



- The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme was started by the Government of India in 1984 when they

established the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) to manage the LCA programme.

- LCA Tejas was designed and developed by India's HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited).
- It replaced the ageing Mig 21 fighter planes.
- It was in 2003 that the Light Combat Aircraft programme was named 'Tejas' (meaning radiance in Sanskrit) by the then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- It is the second supersonic fighter jet that was developed by HAL (the first one being HAL HF-24 Marut).
- LCA Tejas is a single-engine multirole light combat aircraft.
- It is the lightest and smallest multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- It is designed to carry a range of air-to-air, air-to-surface, precision-guided, and standoff weaponry.
- Tejas has a single-engine, compound Delta wing, and has a tailless design.
- The idea behind the LCA programme was to expand and develop India's indigenous aerospace capabilities.
- Since the 1970s, the MiG 21 planes were the mainstay of the Indian Air Force. The primary goal of the LCA programme was to replace the ageing MiGs.
- The secondary goal was the advancement of indigenous domestic aviation capabilities.
- HAL plans to deliver 123 Tejas aircraft to the Indian Air Force by 2024-25.

Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)



- India is expected to launch its indigenous fighter Advanced Medium Combat

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Aircraft (AMCA) by 2032. The AMCA will feature geometric stealth and will initially fly with two GE-414 engines. The engines will be replaced by the indigenous engines.

- There are two major ways of making a military platform stealthier.
- 1. **Geometric stealth:** the shape of the aircraft is designed at such angles so as to deflect away maximum radar waves thereby minimising its radar cross-section.
- 2. **Material stealth:** radar-absorbing materials are used in making the aircraft which will absorb the radio waves thus reducing the radar footprint.
- The AMCA will initially be based on geometric stealth, the material stealth shall be focussed upon at a later stage.
- The plan is to build on the capabilities and expertise developed during the development of the light combat aircraft (LCA) and produce a medium fifth generation fighter aircraft. AMCA is being conceived as a progression from the LCA Tejas.
- Apart from the technologies developed from the LCA project, the new fighter programme is important as technologies coming in through that will flow into the AMCA project.
- India had expressed its unwillingness to go ahead with the joint development of a fifth-generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) with Russia primarily due to the high cost involved in the project. This is India's only fifth-generation aircraft programme after the decision.

Specifications of AMCA

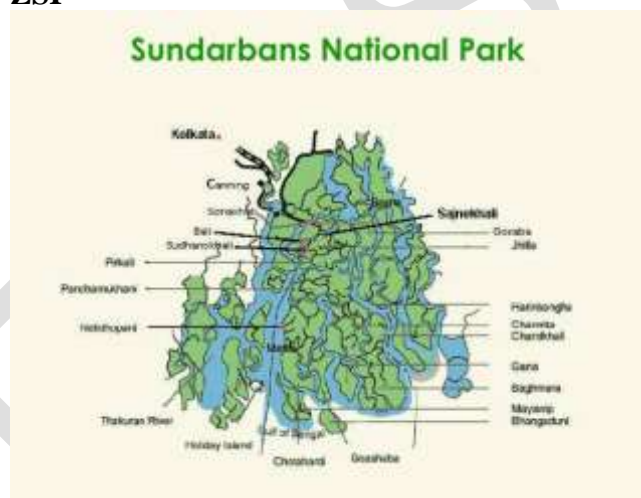
- The aircraft will incorporate advanced technologies like super maneuverability, supercruise, stealth, state of the art sensor suite with fusion.
- It is being developed by an aerospace industry team which consist of Aeronautical Development Agency as a design firm and to be manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- The AMCA is being designed as a stealth, medium weight, twin-engine, fifth

generation multi-mission aircraft with the capability to swing roles.

- The stealth mission features the Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (SEAD), precision strike and maritime operations.

Sunderbans

Sunderbans is home to 428 species of birds, says ZSI



- The Indian Sunderbans, which is part of the largest mangrove forest in the world, is home to 428 species of birds, a recent publication of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) states.
- The publication, Birds of the Sunderban Biosphere Reserve, released earlier this month by the ZSI, not only documents the avifauna of the Sunderbans, but also serves as a comprehensive photographic field guide, with detailed distribution and locality data for all the species from the region.
- Authors of the publication said the book, with photographs of the males and females of various species, is aimed to kindle interest and spread knowledge about birds among people from all walks of life — from forest staff to tourists to amateur birdwatchers.
- The Indian Sunderbans, which covers 4,200 sq. km, also includes the Sunderban Tiger Reserve of 2,585 sq. km — home to

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

about 96 royal Bengal tigers (as per the last census in 2020). It is a world heritage site and a Ramsar site (a wetland site designated to be of international importance).

- The scientists said of the 428 birds listed, some, like the **masked finfoot and the Buffy fish owl, are recorded only from the Sunderbans.**
- The area is home to 9 out of 12 species of kingfishers found in the country as well rare species such as the Goliath heron and the spoon-billed sandpiper.
- India has over 1,300 species of birds and if 428 species of birds are from the Sunderbans, it means that one in every three birds in the country is found in the unique ecosystem.
- The publication not only highlights the ecological and conservation aspect of the Sunderbans, but through detailed description of bird species and localities where they are found we want to encourage birdwatching.
- Pointing out that scientists and nature lovers are observing the 125th **birth anniversary year of Salim Ali, the Birdman of India**, the ZSI Director said birdwatching not only brings people closer to nature, but also creates awareness and livelihood opportunities for the locals.
- Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Head of Forest Force, West Bengal, Ravi Kant Sinha said the Sunderbans are the most diverse of natural landscapes and accounts for 60% of all mangrove forests in the country.
- The mudflats exposed in the low tides, rich in microorganism deposited during tidal activity, are ideal feeding for migratory birds.
- The mudflats and wetlands of the Sunderbans act as a stopover site for migratory flight south [southwards] and back.

Sundarbans

- Sundarbans = 10000 square km 60% in Bangladesh. It covers ~ 43% of Mangrove forests of India.

- It is the **largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest** in the world.
- It is in delta region of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basins.
- West Bengal has 2 Wetlands now = East Kolkata Wetlands & Sundarbans (which has now become the largest Ramsar Site in India).
- The Sundarbans was made a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1987.
- They are the only mangrove habitat which supports a significant population of Royal Bengal Tigers, and they have unique aquatic hunting skills.
- It is home to critically endangered northern river terrapin (Batuga, Basaka), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, and the endangered fishing cat. It also has Chital Deer, Crocodile & Snakes.
- It **met 4 out of 9 criteria of Ramsar**: presence of rare species and threatened ecological communities, biological diversity, significant and representative fish and fish spawning ground and migration path.
- The part of the Sundarban delta, which lies in Bangladesh, was accorded the status of a Ramsar site in 1992.

Status of Education in India during COVID-19

- **On January 24**, we celebrated the third edition of the **International Day of Education**, a day proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to honour education and its value to humanity and sustainable development.
- Our theme for 2021, **‘Recover and Revitalize Education for the COVID-19 Generation’**, places an emphasis on the way the pandemic has negatively affected learning outcomes for students globally and how we should innovate and combine resources to invest more in education.
- About **1.6 billion students** from some 190 countries were affected by the shutdown of schools caused by COVID-19, reversing years of progress in education.
- In India, more than 1.5 million school

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

closures affected about **286 million schoolchildren**. This added to the **six million girls and boys who were already out of school** prior to the crisis.

- According to UNESCO estimates, schools worldwide were closed for an average of three and a half months since the onset of the pandemic. This figure rises to more than five months when localised school closures are taken into account.
- Because of dire fiscal challenges and the overwhelming need to prioritise public health and social safety spending, global education financing has been significantly reduced.
- UNESCO estimates that of the \$11.8 trillion global COVID-19 fiscal response, a mere 0.78% (or \$91 billion) was allocated to education, with \$73 billion spent in high-income countries.
- Yet, the governments of South Asia have made some real progress towards protecting education funding.
- On average, it is estimated that South Asia allocated 0.85% of its fiscal package to education, compared to 0.73% for Europe and North America and 0.69% for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- These shifts in public expenditures were mainly driven by **Information and Communication Technology** measures to support the delivery of education through a mix of radio, television, and mobile technology, as well as the **home delivery** of printed learning materials for the most vulnerable students who are excluded from technology.
- In India, inspired by the release of the National Education Policy (NEP), the Education Ministry has made significant efforts to develop courses to reach all learners via the Internet and the airwaves. The introduction of the NEP and the counter-effects of the pandemic have in fact provided a groundswell of change on which true reform is riding.
- Still, much more needs to be done as remote learning remains out of reach for more than 500 million students globally.
- As we continue to struggle through this

volatile situation, it is more than ever our duty to ensure that learning never stops.

- To highlight the remaining challenges, UNESCO is releasing new global figures now, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, which show that over 800 million students, or more than half the world's student population, still face significant disruptions to their education, ranging from full school closures to reduced or part-time academic schedules.

Way Forward

- The learning crisis brought about by the pandemic therefore represents a clarion call to governments, development partners and businesses to increase funding and make education systems more resilient, inclusive, flexible, and sustainable.

Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFC)

1. NBFCs are Companies registered under **Companies Act, 1956** engaged in giving loans; acquisition of shares, stocks, bonds, debentures & securities issued by Govt or local authorities; leasing higher purchase insurance, chit fund business..
2. It **does not include** any institution whose principle business is Agriculture, Industry, buying or selling of goods other than security or providing any services and sale and purchase constitution of immovable properties.
3. Both NBFC and Banks can issue Demand Draft and has Deposit insurance. NBFCs can't issue Cheque book.
4. RBI recently strengthened its hold over NBFCs mainly those engaged in infrastructure, deposit, lending and housing sector.
5. After IL&FS case, Forensic auditing is now mandatory. As per RBI, service providers need to maintain the same high standard of cadre in performing services as it is expected by RBI. These NBFCs can

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

also maintain SLR.

6. Chit Funds: They are regulated under Chit Funds Act, 1982. They regulated by RBI as they come under NBFC.

Non Banking Financial Companies

- Companies registered under **Companies Act, 1956** engaged in
 1. Giving loans;
 2. Acquisition of shares, stocks, bonds, debentures & securities issued by Govt or local authorities;
 3. Leasing higher purchase insurance, chit fund business.
- It holds 12.3% assets in Financial systems
- It **does not include** any institution whose principle business is Agri, Industry, buying or selling of goods other than security or providing any services and sale and purchase constitution of immovable properties.
- NBFC **cannot accept Demand deposits**.
- They are **not a part of Payment and Settlement System**. Hence cannot issue cheques drawn on itself.
- Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) **deposit insurance not available**.
- A Non banking institution which is a Company and can receive deposit in any scheme also comes under NBFCs (Deposit taking NBFCs) aka **Residuary Non-Banking Company**. SLR is applicable to them.
- NBFC with the paid up capital of 500 crore has to set aside Capital Adequacy Ratio.
- **Chit Funds**: regulated by RBI under Chit Funds Act, 1982. They are NBFCs.
- RBI prohibited NBFCs from outsourcing key functions like
 1. Internal audit,
 2. Investment portfolio and
 3. KYC compliance.
- Forensic auditing is now mandatory.

The different types of NBFCs:



The NBFCs can be categorised under two broad heads:

On the nature of their activity:

- Asset Finance Company
- Loan Company
- Mortgage Guarantee Company
- Investment Company
- Core Investment Company
- Infrastructure Finance Company
- Micro Finance Company
- Housing Finance Company

On the basis of deposits:

- Deposit accepting Non-Banking Financial Corporations
- Non-deposit accepting Non-Banking Financial Corporations

Recent news for NBFCs

- **RBI to create Specialised Supervisory and Regulatory cadre** for Commercial Banks, Urban Cooperative Banks and NBFCs. RBI is also internally setting up a Research and Analysis wing within the department of supervision which will collate and correlate all the data, see the inter-connectedness and will comprehensively look at the banking structure.
- RBI directs NBFCs with asset size > 5000 crore to appoint **Chief Risk Officer**. To be functioned independently.
- **Budget 2019-20 widens RBI autonomy**:
 1. Housing Finance Companies to be treated as NBFCs. To be regulated by RBI now.
 2. RBI can supersede the board of NBFCs in the public interest. RBI can also remove auditors, call for audit of any group company of an NBFC.
- RBI raises cap on Bank's exposure to a

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

single NBFC to 20% of Tier I capital from 15%. On lending to Agri sector 10 lakh, 20 lakh to MSME and Housing will be treated as Priority Sector Lending. Mutual Funds and Insurance Companies are creditors to NBFCs. Hence Insurance companies are now part of Inter Creditor Agreement.

- **RBI has decided to merge 3 categories of NBFCs** into a single category to provide greater operational flexibility to non-banking lenders. NBFCs categorized as Asset Finance Companies (AFC), Loan Companies (LCs) and Investment Companies (ICs), will be merged into a new category called **NBFC - Investment and Credit Company (NBFC-ICC)**.

- **RBI intro Liquidity Management Framework for NBFCs**

1. All non deposit taking NBFCs with asset size of ≥ 10000 crore and all deposit taking NBFCs have to maintain a liquidity buffer in terms of Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR)
2. From 1 Dec, 2020 with the minimum High Quality Liquid Assets (HQLAs) to be held being 50% of the LCR, progressively reaching up to the level of 100% by 1st December, 2024.
3. Assets to be included as HQLA include cash, government securities and marketable securities issued or guaranteed by foreign sovereigns. These assets should be free of any financial liability.

- **ECB Reforms: Relaxed norms for end use of funds via ECB**

1. ECBs are done by Companies and NBFCs. Regulated by RBI. Now it is a bidder under IBA.
2. Relaxation was for 3 things: Working capital requirements, General Corporate purposes and Repayment of Rupee loans.
3. Borrowers can raise ECB for 10 years of Working capital and General corporate purposes requirements.
4. For repayment of rupee loans and

for on-lending by NBFC = 7 years.

- **Partial Credit Guarantee Facility for PSBs (Public Sector Banks)**

- It would enable the PSBs to purchase the high-rated pooled assets of financially sound NBFCs and housing finance companies (HFCs) worth rs 1 lakh crore. For a period of 6 months.
- It is expected that this measure would provide liquidity to the NBFC Sector.
- To address temporary asset liability mismatches of otherwise solvent NBFCs/HFCs without having to resort to distress sale of their assets for meeting their commitments.

- **RBI moots lighter norms for CICs (Core Investment Companies)**

0. CICs are a specialized NBFCs. It has an asset size of Rs. 100 crore.
1. Main business is Acquisition of shares and securities with certain conditions like: These should not hold $< 90\%$ of its net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in a group company.
2. CIC should have a 2 Tier structure and stronger boards with atleast 50% independent directors.
3. Step down CICs will not be permitted to invest in any other CICs, but can 'freely' invest in other group companies.

- **Peer to Peer (P2P) Lending**

- P2P lending is a form of crowdfunding used to raise unsecured loans which are repaid with interest. It serves as a link between borrower & lenders. It refers to financing of projects with small amounts of money raised from large number of people, with a portal serving as an intermediary.
- The borrowing could be an individual or a legal person

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

(such as company). Minimum Net worth of P2P lending is Rs. 2 crore. RBI in 2017 enabled P2P entities as NBFC. However, an existing NBFC will not be able to operate as NBFC P2P.

• Ombudsman Scheme for NBFCs, 2018

- It covered all deposit accepting NBFCs. Now it is extended to all eligible non-deposit taking NBFC having an asset size of \geq Rs 100 crore with customer interface.
- There is also an appellate mechanism against the decision of Ombudsman.
- It still excludes various NBFC groups such as
 1. Infrastructure Finance Companies (NBFC-IFC),
 2. Core Investment Company (CIC),
 3. Infrastructure Debt Fund-Non-Banking Financial Company (IDF-NBFC) and
 4. also NBFCs under liquidation.

• RBI changes the definition of "Relative" under Companies Act, 2013:

To check outward remittances. Now only to immediate relatives like parents, spouses, children and their spouses.

Analysis of NBFCs

- The RBI has proposed a **significant shift in its regulatory approach** towards India's non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), from a general approach of light touch regulation to one that **monitors larger players almost as closely as it does banks**.
- If implemented, this could be the **biggest overhaul** of the regulatory framework for such finance companies (or shadow banks) in over two decades.
- After multitudes of investors were left high and dry as CRB group firms reneged on high-interest fixed deposits in 1997, Parliament bestowed greater powers over such firms to the central bank to fix the mess.
- The trigger now is similar though the scale of the problem has changed.
- The size of NBFC balance sheets is now more than a quarter of that of banks' balance sheets, from just about 12% in 2010.
- In absolute terms, their balance sheets have more than doubled, from ₹20.7-lakh crore in 2015 to ₹49.2-lakh crore in 2020. While this growth is a reflection of how lighter regulations have given them the flexibility to meet a range of financing needs, from home loans to micro-finance and large infrastructure projects, it also manifested into a systemic risk.
- And that risk was apparent when one of the largest infrastructure investment-focused NBFC players, IL&FS, unravelled in 2018, with its payment defaults catalysing a crisis for the entire sector.
- The collateral damage meant NBFCs could not raise funds easily, and faced liquidity pressures that escalated to solvency concerns in some instances.
- The descent of one such player, **Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Limited (DHFL)**, began around the same time — its creditors approved a resolution plan for the firm last week.
- The RBI's proposed regulatory reaction to such large NBFC failures that have had a **systemic impact on the sector**, could not have come sooner. It has sought to **strike a balance** between the need to be nimble and mitigate systemic risks, with a four-tiered regulatory structure.
- This entails a largely laissez-faire approach for smaller NBFCs, plugging some of the arbitrages available to mid-sized NBFCs vis-à-vis banks, and imposing tougher 'bank-like' capitalisation, governance and monitoring norms for the largest players and those which could pose a systemic risk due to the nature of their operations.
- A top tier has been envisaged with even more scrutiny, but the RBI wants to ideally use this approach only when a certain large player poses 'extreme risks'. Given the banking sector's own woes over the past

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

two years (PMC Bank, Yes Bank, Lakshmi Vilas Bank), a holistic reboot of the oversight mechanism for NBFCs and banks is critical to retain confidence and maintain financial stability which central bank Governor Shaktikanta Das has termed a ‘public good’.

- It is hoped that the blueprint for the regulation of NBFCs which can lend for activities banks often do not support, be it micro-loans or infrastructure projects, is formalised soon.
- This would ensure the fledgling economic recovery is not hampered by funding constraints.

Budget during COVID-19

- India’s GDP is estimated at ₹200 lakh crore.
- The first priority for spending should be **health and infrastructure**.
- India has only five beds for 10,000 Indians and ranks 155th on bed availability in the Human Development Report of 2020.
- Experts opine that the government should increase healthcare spending from 1.5% of the GDP to 2.5%.
- The **National Infrastructure Pipeline** aims to invest ₹111 lakh crore by 2025 in over 6,800 projects.
- The proposal to set up a Development Finance Institution is still on the anvil.
- The Chinese government has entered into building social housing projects. As pointed out by the economists in India Today, expenditure on infrastructure can have a large multiplier effect on economic output.
- Suggestions have been made for the introduction of an **urban employment guarantee scheme** on the lines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This will be far better than direct cash transfers.
- The stumbling block to budgetary efforts to spend can be the resource crunch.
- Despite historic lows in fuel prices, the government chose to increase fuel prices to record levels.

- The Goods and Services Tax has been a big source of revenue.
- There is a strong case for reducing GST tariff.
- Cess or surcharge can be levied on the super-rich.
- Disinvestment must go on at high speed.
- The average tariff must come down to 10% from its current level of 14% by 2024, as suggested by Professor Arvind Panagariya.
- He wrote: “With several key reforms – new labour codes, new farm laws, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, low corporate profit tax, single nationwide GST and widespread digitisation – already in place, the addition of privatisation and trade liberalisation would nearly guarantee a double digit growth and millions of additional well-paid jobs for the masses in the post-Covid-19 decades.”
- Ms. Sitharaman has left significant imprints in the Budgets she has presented. The lowering of corporate tax rates, the introduction of the option to choose the tax rate both for companies and for individuals up to fixed monetary limits, the introduction of the Vivad se Vishwas scheme without sacrificing revenue, and the structured infusion of fiscal stimulus without accelerating inflation all point to a right approach to Budget-making.
- We can expect a never-before Budget to be presented to meet the crisis created by COV

Inequality Virus Report: Oxfam

- Indian billionaires increased their wealth by 35% to ₹3 trillion during the lockdown, ranking them behind their counterparts in U.S., China, Germany, Russia and France, says the “Inequality Virus Report” brought out by Oxfam, a non-profit organisation.
- The rise in fortunes of the top 100 billionaires is enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest Indian people a cheque for ₹94,045, the report released on the opening day of the World Economic Forum in Davos said.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The wealth of just the top 11 billionaires during the pandemic could easily sustain the MGNREGS or the Health Ministry for the next 10 years, it said underscoring the deepening inequalities due to COVID-19 where the wealthiest escaped the worst impact of the pandemic while the poor faced joblessness, starvation and death.
- Mukesh Ambani, who emerged as the richest man in India and Asia, earned ₹90 crore an hour during the pandemic when around 24% of the people in the country were earning under ₹3,000 a month during the lockdown.
- The increase in his wealth alone could keep 40 crore informal workers out of poverty for at least five months, the report said.
- It recommended reintroducing the wealth tax and effecting a one-time COVID-19 cess of 4% on taxable income of over ₹10 lakh to help the economy recover from the lockdown.
- According to its estimate, a wealth tax on the nation's 954 richest families could raise the equivalent of 1% of the GDP.
- According to the report, only 6% of the poorest 20% have access to non-shared sources of improved sanitation, compared to 93.4% of the top 20%. As much as 59.6% of India's population lived in a room or less, which meant that protocols necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 cannot be followed.
- Till October, 32 crore students were hit by closure of schools, of whom 84% resided in rural areas and 70% attended government schools.
- Oxfam India's survey across five States said that close to 40% of teachers in government schools feared that a third of the students would not return once schools reopened. It was estimated that out-of-school rates would double in a year. Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims were likely to see a higher dropout rate. Girls were also most vulnerable as they were at risk of early and forced marriage, violence and early pregnancies, it noted.
- Unemployment of women rose by 15%

from a pre-lockdown level of 18%, which could result in a loss of India's GDP of about 8% or ₹15 trillion.

- Women who were employed before the lockdown were also 23.5 percentage points less likely to be re-employed compared to men in the post lockdown phase.

Meghalaya Illegal Mining

- According to available government data, Meghalaya has a total coal reserve of 640 million tonnes, most of which is mined unscientifically by individuals and communities.
- In 2011–12, rat-hole mines produced about 10 million tonnes of coal. This large coal production in a small state had a devastating impact on the environment.

Some of the areas of Coal mining in Meghalaya are

- Ksan in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills



What is a rat hole mine?



'Rat-hole' mines

It is a primitive method of coal mining in Meghalaya in which hills are dug both vertically and horizontally. The tunnels are often three to four feet in diameter. The tunnels are so narrow that the miners can just crawl inside and so they are called 'rat-holes'. Some of the pits are too narrow for an adult to enter and so the children were engaged to crawl inside and extract coal, until it was banned in 2014. The land is first cleared by cutting and removing the ground vegetation and then pits ranging from 5 to 100 metre are dug into the ground to reach the coal seam. Thereafter, tunnels are made into the seam sideways to extract coal which is first brought into the pit by using a conical basket or a wheelbarrow and then taken out and dumped in a nearby area from where it is carried to the dumping places close to the highways.

Meghalaya coal

The Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya is a major coal producing area having an estimated coal reserve of about 40 million tonnes. Meghalaya coal contains low ash, high volatile matter, high calorific value and comparatively high sulphur content. The coal is mostly sub-bituminous in character.

No policy

Unlike the rest of the country, local communities in Meghalaya own the hills and possess rights over its minerals to a large extent, as it is a tribal state under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. So, the state government has little control to check illegal and unscientific mining. The state is yet to have a safe mining policy despite an instruction by National Green Tribunal in 2014.

Environmental impact

Entire coal mining area of Jaintia Hills is full of mine pits and caves. These open, unfilled pits are the places where surface water percolates and disappears. This leads to pollution in the rivers, air pollution due to destruction of vegetation and severe impact on agriculture land.



- Since the coal seam is extremely thin in Meghalaya, no other method would be economically viable. Removal of rocks from the hilly terrain and putting up pillars inside the mine to prevent collapse would be costlier. In Meghalaya this is the locally developed technique and the most commonly used one.

Government policy?

- The government does not have a policy in place to regulate mining and the new mining policy drafted in 2012 has not yet been implemented,
- Moreover, the NGT found the 2012 policy inadequate as it does not addresses rat-hole mining.

Impact of Meghalaya coal mining

- A rat-hole mine comprises a **deep vertical shaft with narrow horizontal tunnels**, two to four feet in dimension, dug on its sides.
- Miners (mostly child labors) go into these horizontal tunnels for hundreds of feet to take out coal. Primitive tools are used to build and operate these mines and accidents are common and most are not reported.
- Rat hole mining involves digging of very small tunnels, usually only 3-4 feet high, which workers (often children) enter and extract coal.
- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned it in 2014**, on grounds of it being unscientific and unsafe for workers. The state (Meghalayan) government has challenged the NGT ban in the Supreme Court.
- Despite a ban, rat-hole mining remains a prevalent practice for coal mining in Meghalaya, where a mine has recently collapsed.
- Meghalaya coal has **high sulphur content**, leading to **discharge of sulphuric acid** from these mines. The acid discharge in some areas is so severe that they have made the **rivers acidic**, affecting aquatic life and corroding machinery at hydroelectric projects and dams.
- The water also has high concentration of sulphates, iron and toxic heavy metals, low dissolved oxygen (DO) and high BOD, showing its degraded quality.
- The roadside dumping of coal is a major source of air, water and soil pollution.
- None of the rat-hole mines had leases; they simply didn't exist on paper. All of them were **operating without any environment clearance** from the environment ministry or from the pollution control board. These illegalities were enabled by the so-called legal ambiguity regarding mining in Sixth Schedule areas as mentioned in the Constitution.
- As Meghalaya is a **Sixth Schedule state**, and the power to make laws with respect to land belongs to the **Autonomous District Councils**, **landowners can mine without any permission from the state or the**

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Union governments. To bolster the argument, it was alluded that the coal mines in Meghalaya were **never nationalised**.

- However, it was found that the **coal mines of Khasi and Jaintia were nationalised under the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973**.
- It is also found that paragraph 9 of the Sixth Schedule clearly stipulates the need for “Licences or leases for the purpose of prospecting for, or extraction of, minerals”.
- In addition, it is legally established that all central mining and environmental laws are applicable to the coal mines in Meghalaya.
- On a case filed by the All Dimas Students’ Union that highlighted the unregulated coal mining in the **Jaintia Hills**, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned them in April 2014. But reports now indicate that in the guise of transporting already-mined coal, illegal mining was happening all along in collusion with the local and the state government.
- The political class supports these mines. The state government has challenged the ban in the Supreme Court and the state assembly in 2015 adopted a resolution urging the Centre to exempt Meghalaya from central laws so that rat-hole mining can continue.
- But such mines are environmentally damaging and unsafe to be allowed, and hence must be banned. The bottom line is the right to self-governance does not translate into the right to destroy the environment, even in the Sixth Schedule areas.
- Off road movement of trucks and other vehicles in the area for coal transportation also adds to the ecological and environmental damage of the area.
- The practice has been declared as unsafe for workers by the NGT.
- The mines branch into networks of horizontal channels, which are at constant risk of caving in or flooding.

New Scrapping Policy

- The Centre’s proposed policy to **raise road tax on vehicles** of a certain age from April 1 next year has the potential to renew a big part of India’s vehicular fleet, reducing air pollution, raising fuel efficiency, and improving safety standards.
- It has taken the government years to finalise a **“tax on clunkers” proposal**, under which commercial transport vehicles will have to pay 10%-25% extra on road tax after **eight years** when renewing the fitness certificate, and, similarly, personal vehicles after 15 years; public transport is given concessions, while hybrids, electrics and farm vehicles are exempt.
- A higher tax in the most polluted cities, and on diesel engines is also on the cards.
- States, which enforce motor vehicles law, now have to weigh in on the proposed changes.
- Unlike similar programmes, such as the post-2008 recession **CARS rebate plan in the U.S.**, India’s scheme relies on penal taxation to persuade owners to scrap their old vehicles, with no cash-for-trade-in arrangement.
- For this approach to work efficiently, the additional tax proposed should exceed the resale value of the polluting motor, making its disposal more attractive, with enough safeguards to ensure that it is indeed scrapped and recycled under a monitored system.
- Equity features can be built into the scheme, offering a discount to income-vetted marginal operators such as autorickshaw drivers, on the lines of the 2009 stimulus given under the JNNURM scheme for buses.
- This should ideally be part of a green post-pandemic recovery plan, with an emphasis on electric vehicles.

Analysis

- When the **scrappage policy** was on the drawing board last year, Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari envisioned a

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

reduction in automobile prices of 20% to 30%, driven by recovery of scrap steel, aluminium and plastic, all of which would be recycled.

- Now that he has a better-scoped plan, the focus must be on building capacities in the organised sector to manage the task of efficient materials recovery.
- Provisions will have to be built in to see that the sudden demand stimulus available to the auto industry does not disadvantage consumers, particularly those selling junk vehicles.
- The vehicle registration database for all States also requires updating, to reflect true numbers of old vehicles on the road, eliminating those scrapped; a significant number, more than 15 years old, still run. Such data will help target scrappage policy benefits better.
- Moreover, many transport vehicles are operated by small entrepreneurs who lack the resources to transition to newer ones and need help as loans and grants.
- India's policy to eliminate polluting fuel guzzlers has had a long gestation, and States should see the value of operationalising it as planned.
- New vehicles and cleaner fuels should help clear the toxic air in cities and towns and make roads safer.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 3.0 and Analysis

- On January 15, 2021, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) launched the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 3.0**.
- PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana was launched in 2015. It is an outcome based and demand driven skill training scheme. The objective is skill certification and reward scheme. It is implemented by Center along with states.
- This is the third phase of the scheme to give a boost to skilling in the country. In this third version, the government wants to focus on **matching local skilling requirements with local job**

opportunities.

- The thrust of PMKVY 3.0 is on **empowering States and districts** to implement skilling schemes by making regional-level plans.
- The scheme guidelines state that the **scheme shall be implemented in two phases**. The first is being implemented on a pilot basis during the 2020-21 fiscal year, while simultaneously initiating the creation of an implementation framework for the second phase (2021-2026).

Role of the Private Sector

- Over the last few years, there has been increasing evidence of the **government and external partners working together** on complex policy problems. At the more senior level, the government has formalised the **induction of private individuals** into the system by opening up **lateral entry**.
- Lower down the hierarchy, several central government ministries and entities, such as **NITI Aayog, routinely recruit private individuals** as consultants, officers on special duty or young professionals.
- Most of the lateral recruitment in government happens at this level. The role of this category of staff is primarily supporting the existing bureaucracy and providing them research and logistical support as and when the need arises.
- Given the staggering vacancies in the central government, such support is critical since civil servants are generally overburdened and under-resourced.
- Lack of capacity also often becomes evident in suboptimal policy decisions and poor implementation of those policies.
- For the stage of development India is at, it is as critical as it is difficult for the government to take a step back and reflect on how to deliver on its mandate across sectors in the most effective manner.
- If capacity within the government is lacking, it is necessary to leverage the domain knowledge and resources of private individuals and entities to forge thought partnerships.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Thought Partnerships

- It is important here to emphasise that **thought partnerships are different from the recruitment of consultants** to provide government officials additional manpower to manage routine tasks.
- **Thought partnerships** are a structured mechanism for private entities to lend relevant strategic expertise to the government on policy design, evaluation and implementation.

Issue of funding

- From the government perspective, a practical question to be resolved in any such exercise which involves external partners, is funding.
- Normally, the government would be rightly wary of accepting funding from agencies which come with caveats, associated obligations or other agendas, both implicit and explicit.
- It is also not always feasible for the government itself to fund projects involving private partners, more so when such projects are unconventional thought partnerships.
- It is not the quantum of money required to fund a thought partnership that becomes a roadblock (in most cases it would be a fraction of the department or Ministry's budget), but the process of getting requisite approvals for funding external agencies.
- Given this context, it is ideal if a committed external partner funds the thought partnership expeditiously without strings attached.
- The good news is that several domestic and international philanthropies and impact investing firms are already investing billions of dollars into critical sectors in developing countries including India.
- The not-so-good news is that much of this funding goes into supporting projects or interventions that work in limited, contextual settings rather than systemic or sectoral transformation programmes.
- This is the difference between trying to improve learning levels in a district

through direct classroom interventions versus rethinking how the government school system works in a State or the country.

- It is here that philanthropies and impact investing firms can make a huge difference.

Previous programmes

In the past, systemic thought partnerships have been attempted sporadically across ministries.

- **In 2005, the Ashok Lahiri Committee**, constituted by the Ministry of Finance, came out with a report which stated that there was not enough knowledge about external capital flows and controls in India. The committee's recommendation resulted in the establishment of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, Department of Economic Affairs research programme. The programme led to the creation of a rich body of world-class research on capital controls and flows in India, developed by Indian researchers, that was used to inform government policy on the matter.
- **In 2015**, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs constituted a research secretariat headed by the **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy**, to support the Companies Law Committee to make “informed decisions...on the principles involved as well as international practices in the areas of insolvency, raising of capital, penalties, related party transactions and other areas”.
- The **National Institute of Financial Management** is working with the Department of Economic Affairs to provide legal research and technical assistance on Indian and foreign financial markets, policy analysis, formulation as well as conduct of impact assessment studies on decisions taken by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.
- In late-2018, the MSDE itself started engaging with multiple private firms such as Dalberg Global Development Advisors and Samagra-Transforming Governance to conceptualise and design its vision for 2025.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Conclusion

- These attempts at establishing thought partnerships between the government and private entities, while instructive, are largely disparate and episodic.
- They do not provide the definitive way forward on government-private collaboration.
- India faces a dearth of scholars and practitioners who are singularly focused on researching and solving India's problems.
- As such, policy choices made in isolation from the rigorous debate, research and questioning which thought partnerships facilitate, can produce suboptimal results.
- It is therefore in the public interest that more such partnerships are forged and funded to channel external expertise and skills towards finding scalable solutions to the pressing policy challenges the country faces.

its 2019 levels, but it's still below... Why do we have these upgrades (in IMF's growth projections for India)... because the activity and mobility particularly came back much faster than expected in India. We have not seen another wave,” Ms. Gopinath said.

‘Faster pace of recovery’

- “In fact, we are seeing a very strong decline in cases, which is again a bit different from other parts of the world. So, these factors, including what we're seeing in terms of high frequency indicators, point to [a] somewhat faster pace of recovery. But again, there is still some distance to go,” she added.
- Earlier this month, **IMF MD Kristalina Georgieva** had said India “actually has taken very decisive action, very decisive steps to deal with the pandemic and to deal with the economic consequences of it”.

India's growth rate for 2021: IMF

- The IMF on Tuesday projected an **11.5% growth rate** for India in 2021, making the country the only major economy to register double-digit growth this year amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The International Monetary Fund's growth projections for India reflected a rebound in the economy, which is estimated to have contracted by 8% in 2020 due to the pandemic.
- China is next with 8.1% growth in 2021 followed by Spain (5.9%) and France (5.5%). The IMF said that in 2020 China is the only major country which registered a positive growth rate of 2.3%.
- India's economy, the IMF said, is projected to grow 6.8% in 2022 and that of China by 5.6%.
- **IMF Chief Economist Gita Gopinath**, during a virtual press conference to release the update, said that India had a somewhat faster pace of recovery, but cumulatively by the end of 2022, its GDP is expected to be 9% below its pre-pandemic projected level. “We are seeing India come back to

Analysis of Oxfam: Inequality Virus Report

- Inequality in India has risen to levels last seen when it was colonised.
- The additional wealth acquired by India's 100 billionaires since March when the lockdown was imposed is enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest ₹94,045, according to the Oxfam: Inequality Virus Report.
- An unskilled worker in India would take three years to earn what the country's richest person earned in one second last year, the report calculates.
- The worsening inequality in income and opportunities impacts some sections disproportionately due to discrimination based on gender, caste and other factors. The poorer people were worst affected by the disease itself.
- The focus on growth had led politicians and policy makers to accept rising inequality as inevitable for decades.
- Inequality came to be seen as a benign outcome of economic growth that led to

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

reduction of absolute poverty.

- Concerns about inequality could also be easily dismissed as being informed by socialism.
- Any criticism of capitalism was viewed with scepticism in the mainstream of development debates, until the crisis of capitalism could no longer be ignored.
- The literature on capitalism and its linkage with democracy is now growing fast. There is now universal agreement among economists that the distribution of new wealth between capital and labour has become so one-sided that workers are constantly being pushed to penury while the rich are getting richer.
- This has social and political consequences as upheavals in democratic societies around the world show.
- The environmental costs of a development model that hinges on higher and higher growth are also obvious.
- On the one hand, there is an acknowledgment of the crisis among capitalist moghuls.
- The theme of the World Economic Forum at Davos this week is ‘**the Great Reset**’ which it says is a “commitment to jointly and urgently build the foundations of our economic and social system for a more fair, sustainable and resilient future”.
- On the other, measures that favour capital at the cost of labour continue; for instance, changes in labour laws in several States during the pandemic. Lip service is not enough to tackle inequality.

Republic Day violence: Analysis

- The chaos and mindless violence unleashed on the national capital by a section of protesting farmers on Republic Day were abhorrent. It is plausible that agents provocateurs infiltrated the farmers’ march but that does not absolve the leaders of responsibility.
- The chances of fatigued agitators breaking loose were high as were the possibilities of vested interests triggering violence.
- The leaders of the agitation should have taken note of the divergence in the rank and the rejection by certain recalcitrant groups of the routes for the march they had agreed with the Delhi police.
- True, no popular mobilisation can be held hostage to the threat of violent deviation by a handful, but there is judgement to be made at each turn.
- The leadership, itself an association of disparate individuals and organisations, should have been more realistic about its capacity to manage such a gathering. In the end, unruly elements took over the streets of Delhi.
- They broke barricades, thrashed, and tried to mow down police personnel. The police resorted to lathi charge and used tear gas, but, given the circumstances, showed restraint.
- More than 300 personnel were injured, at least 40 of them seriously. All this, and the march itself, was avoidable.
- The Delhi police must investigate and hold to account individuals and groups responsible for the violence.
- Farmer leaders have the unenviable task of cooperating with the police in the investigation.
- False friends and real enemies of the agitators have painted them with a communal brush.
- Bringing the culprits to book is essential not only to salvage the reputation of an agitation that had remained largely peaceful for nearly two months but also to nip in the bud a dangerous communal slant before it slips out of control.
- The Centre has said it would continue to engage the protesters in negotiations.
- The offer of the government to keep in abeyance for up to 18 months the three controversial farm laws that are at the heart of the current face-off remains an opportunity for the leaders to seek a negotiated settlement.
- The agitators want the laws to go lock, stock, and barrel but their maximalist approach is unhelpful.
- They must discontinue the protest for now

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

and disperse, while reserving the option of restarting it later.

- They should consider options short of a complete repeal of the laws.
- The Centre must consider more concessions, including the suspension of the laws until a broader agreement can be arrived at.
- It must make more efforts to allay the fears of those most affected by these reforms.
- The Centre's imperious refusal to engage with political parties and State governments on critical questions of agriculture reforms has come back to haunt it.
- The resolution to this impasse can come only by involving them all.

National Health Policy for Rare Diseases, 2020

- The Delhi High Court directed the Centre to finalise the National Health Policy for Rare Diseases of 2020 by March 31 and make operational provision of crowdfunding envisaged under the law for treatment of high-cost rare diseases.
- Justice Prathiba M. Singh passed the direction while hearing two different pleas concerning children, who are suffering from **duchenne muscular dystrophy**, a condition that causes progressive muscle degeneration and weakness in the victim.

About National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2020

- It proposes to **set up a registry** under the Indian Council of Medical research (ICMR) to create a database.
- To provide **financial assistance of up to Rs 15 lakh to Ayushman Bharat beneficiaries for rare diseases** that require a one-time treatment in **tertiary hospitals only**.
- It also suggests **voluntary crowdfunding** as an alternate means of financial support and notifying government hospitals to facilitate treatment.
- Alternatively, the draft proposes to set up a **digital platform** for voluntary

crowdfunding.

- The draft policy also **categorises rare diseases under three categories** based on clinical experiences and treatment availability.
- The policy also states that in the absence of data to clearly define rare diseases, such diseases in India will construe the three categories as identified in the policy.

Rare diseases

- According to the government, so far **only about 450 diseases** have been recorded in India from tertiary care hospitals that are globally considered as rare diseases.
- The **most commonly reported diseases** include Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Sickle-cell Anaemia and Primary Immuno Deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.
- There are 7,000 - 8,000 rare diseases, but **less than 5% have therapies available**.
- About 95% rare diseases have no approved treatment and less than 1 in 10 patients receive disease specific treatment.
- Where drugs are available, they are **expensive**.

Criticism of the Draft Policy

- It offers **no clarity on long-term financial assistance**, appears designed on donations
- The government, in its policy paper, has proposed financial support of up to ₹15 lakh under an umbrella scheme of the **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi** for those rare diseases that require a one-time treatment.
- Beneficiaries for such financial assistance would not be limited to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, but extended to 40% of the population eligible as per the norms of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, for their treatment in government tertiary hospitals only.
- “The 2017 policy on rare diseases had proposed a ₹100 crore corpus fund

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

allocation for the treatment of patients with rare diseases, which was a Centre-State partnership of 60:40, with each State forming a technical committee to evaluate patients' applications. That has come down to ₹15 lakh support for diseases needing one-time treatment. Clearly, now, after a major lag, the policy has come with no hope in sight,” noted a release from the Lysosomal Storage Disorders Support Society.

- It appears the entire policy is drafted to justify that government cannot provide treatment due to high cost as it is resource constrained.
- The policy has adopted a very narrow scope limited to only 3 categories, while ignoring those where treatment is yet to be developed and R&D is required.

Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) (formerly National Illness Assistance Fund)

It was set up in 1997 and provides financial assistance to patients living BPL and suffering life threatening diseases like heart, liver, kidney and cancer.

Funding: Initial contribution of Rs. 5 crore by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW). Apart from that, Fund could also be subscribed to by individuals, corporate bodies in public or private sector, philanthropic organisations etc. in India and Abroad (subject to FCRA regulations)

A revolving fund has been set up in 12 Govt hospitals

For financial assistance upto ceiling of Rs 2 lakhs per patient (Rs 5 lakh for emergency cases since 2015).

In 2015, Govt enhanced the power of Govt hospitals to sanction assistance from 2 lakhs to Rs. 5 lakhs. For assistance beyond Rs 5 lakhs (since 2015), the matter is referred to MoHFW.

Upto Rs. 10 Lakh can be sanctioned to 1 patient, subject to approvals by the technical committee of RAN.

Reimbursement of medical expenditure already incurred by the patients is not permissible under RAN.

No grant is released for patients seeking treatment

at private hospitals.

Common diseases and for which other schemes provide free treatment are also not eligible for grants.

All contributions to TAN by resident entities are exempted from Income tax.

All States / UTs have been “advised” to set up State Illness Assistance Fund.

Within RAN, Govt also provides financial assistance through Health Minister's Cancer Patient Fund (HMCPF) set up in 2009 for cancer patients. It has an amount of 100 crore.

Those who are not covered under RAN, are covered under Health Minister's Discretionary Grant with financial assistance upto Rs. 1.25 lakhs.

Analysis of COVID-19 situation in 2021

- The course of the coronavirus pandemic in the new year presents a **picture of contrasts**, with some rich countries running out of vaccines, experiencing a tide of new cases and deaths, and poorer countries going without access to vaccination, while India reports a case decline.
- **Vaccine hesitancy** may even be wasting precious vials in some States. Amidst suggestions that the worst is over, the Home Ministry has proposed further relaxations in the protocols for public activity from February, including occupancy levels in cinema theatres, holding of exhibitions and access to swimming pools.
- This will come as a relief to some of the outlying sectors that could not fully unlock so far, although, as the Ministry points out, all other activities have been permitted.
- The January 27 guidelines for **Surveillance, Containment and Caution** also create a window for further **relaxation of international air travel**, but the DGCA has decided to maintain status quo on scheduled flights till February end.
- Full-fledged inter-city rail services await a decision too.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- In an economy struggling with a **demand contraction for goods and services**, a graded opening is the prudent course, with strict enforcement of public health measures.
- It would be wrong to read the MHA's unlock advisory, without taking cognisance of the protocols that must continue to be followed: use of face masks, healthy distancing, staggering of working hours, workplace sanitisation and firm action against spitting in public. These legal requirements, however, have been rendered moot in many instances by crowded election campaigns, agitations and gatherings. Many States are not even trying to persuade recalcitrant people in public.
- India's declining infections have prompted a further relaxation of activity curbs, but there is **no cause to lower the vigil**.
- **Genetic mutations** of the coronavirus in South Africa, the U.K. and Brazil pose a new worry, with implications for those who have avoided infection so far or have recovered after a difficult battle.
- Poor communication and lack of transparency on vaccine efficacy data have produced hesitancy, resulting in low uptake in some States.
- On the other hand, the virus variants have turned the spotlight on second generation vaccines that are expected to protect against them but will take time to arrive.
- Without ready pharmaceutical remedies, citizens and policymakers have to fall back on the default toolkit of safe behaviour.
- There will be considerable interest in new measures in Europe, where governments now require use of masks of N95 or FFP2 standards, to offer higher protection in public places and transport; Germany is to give these free to people over 60 and to vulnerable individuals.
- In India, even with a sizeable population exposed to the virus, as seropositivity surveys show, the spate of infections in Kerala and Maharashtra underscores the value of the precautionary principle on the road to universal vaccination.

Analysis of the Whatsapp and its Monopoly

- There are ongoing investigations worldwide, including in the European Union and the United States, on the **abuse of monopolistic power by the Big Tech firms**, especially Facebook and Google.
- Many compare this with the earlier antitrust investigations in the U.S. on the telecom industry and the break-up of the AT&T dictated by the Department of Justice in its Modified Final Judgment in 1982.

What is different this time?

However, there are important differences this time around when compared with the earlier investigations.

1. First, the **information good** that is being provided by the **Internet** firms of today, is **largely non-rival**. The consumption of information by one does not alter the value for the others. However, **in telecom**, due to limited network capacity, the **consumption by one has an effect of decreasing value for the others** and, hence, is **rival** in nature.
2. Second, **telecom** services are within the **jurisdictional boundaries of regulators** and, hence, the regulators have the power to lay down rules of the orderly behaviour of the licensed telecom operators. **On the other hand, the Internet firms operate globally**, thanks to the ubiquitous Internet. Therefore, it is often **difficult to lay down international rules** of obligation and fulfilment by the different country regulators.
3. Third, while it is debatable whether the goods and services provided by the Internet firms are excludable, **telecom is certainly excludable** due to the need for consumers to obtain connections from the respective telcos and pay the subscription charges for the same.
4. It is this factor that was leveraged by the Internet firms to provide search, navigation, and social connectivity with no charge to the consumers, and, consequently, making these services non-excludable.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

5. In fact, the Internet, started as the **Department of Defense project** in the U.S., was created to be non-excludable.
6. However, commercialisation of the Internet has created this new avatar of non-excludability that includes subtle trade-offs of personal information for availing services of the Internet firms.

Monetisation models

It must be pointed out that such non-excludable and non-rival goods, also known as public goods, are provided by governments. On the other hand, in a peculiar way, the information goods as described above are being provided by private firms. This arrangement poses several problems.

1. First, while governments can cover the expense of providing public goods (such as police protection, parks and street lights) through tax-payers' money, **private firms need to have monetisation models** to cover the costs of providing their services. **Hence, the Internet firms have resorted to personalised advertisements and third-party sharing of the personal information** of their users for monetisation purposes.
2. Second, the strong network effects present in these Internet platforms warrant increasing the subscriber base and garnering as much market share as possible. This results in near monopoly of some firms in their defined markets. In order to retain their pole position, these firms may resort to anti-competitive behaviour including acquiring rivals to vertically integrate; erecting entry barriers by refusing to interconnect and inter-operate with competing firms, and leveraging their capital base, thereby engaging in predatory pricing, and driving out competitors.

Indispensable applications

- However, network effects create a huge consumer surplus. Even without our knowledge, these Internet firms have now become an indispensable part of our lives.
- We cannot do without Google Maps for our day-to-day commute to various destinations; Google Searches are indispensable in our quest for information

and news; Google Scholar is a necessary tool for academicians to explore relevant research artefacts.

- There are positive externalities as well. For example, Google Maps Application Program Interface (APIs) is being used by almost all logistic and transport companies; Facebook APIs are used for advertisement by almost all firms across the industry. Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, recently announced that its Search is being expanded to provide accurate and timely information on vaccine distribution to enable quick recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Hence, **the question before policymakers is how to regulate these Internet firms** from abusing their monopoly power while at the same time encouraging the positive externalities and consumer surplus they create.
- This is a tough nut to crack as it is often very difficult to prove that the firms engage in the abuse of their monopoly power.
- Due to strong network effects, it is not possible to ban or curtail these services. Even if other options are available (such as Signal and Telegram for messaging), the network effects bind customers to their often used platform (WhatsApp), even if it is not their favourite.

Possible solutions

A traditional view is to subsidise the good that creates positive externalities.

- Should the governments provide tax subsidy to these Internet firms in return for their orderly behaviour in the marketplace?
- Should the governments mandate sharing of Non-Personal Data (NPD) owned by these firms for societal and economic well-being as pointed out in the expert committee on NPD?
- It is legitimate as pointed out by the Australian government in its media legislation, that Google and Facebook must negotiate a fair payment with news organisations for using their content in Facebook's newsfeed and Google's

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Search.

- Controlled expansion of products and services without hurting the interests of consumers and smaller competing firms shall be the mantra used by these firms to minimise litigation, lawsuits and, eventually, wastage of tax-payers' money.

The other way to control any abusive behaviour of the Internet firms is to use the power of public voice.

- The million mails that were sent to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in March 2015, effectively put an end to the Free Basics programme of Facebook in India, thereby prohibiting any violation of Net Neutrality principles.
- Similarly, the huge public outcry and subsequent government actions have delayed the recent changes to privacy policy relating to the sharing of personal information between WhatsApp and its parent firm, Facebook.

While governments and regulators deal with these dilemmas, should not the Internet firms adhere to core ethical principles in conducting their businesses?

- Lessons from the Enron scandal, and collusions between large banks and financial institutions during the 2008 financial crisis, indicate that firms that aim at super monopoly profits and are greedy to become powerhouses of the world, often end up in the ditch.

Vaccines are safe for those who are on blood thinners: ICMR

- Both COVID-19 vaccines approved for emergency use in India — Covaxin and Covishield — are safe for people on blood thinners, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Director-General Balram Bhargav said on Thursday.
- At a Health Ministry press conference, he said manufacturers of both the vaccines had approached the **Drugs Controller-General of India (DCGI)** for revision of this contraindication on their fact sheets.
- “Relative contraindications regarding blood thinners have been mentioned in the

fact sheets of both the vaccines and both the companies have written to the DCGI regarding revision of this. The revision will happen every soon. Blood thinners are of two categories — anti-platelets and anti-coagulants. For those on anti-platelets like aspirin, the vaccine causes no problem but for those on anti-coagulants, the tendency to bleed is much higher. This is also a relative contraindication and the anti-coagulant can be stopped a day or two before administering the vaccine,” Mr. Bhargav said

- The Health Ministry added that it was engaging with private stakeholders to look at increasing the future coverage of COVID-19 vaccines.
- “The Ministry is also actively working at reducing wastage of the vaccine by bringing in a more flexible digital platform and issuing an exhaustive guideline to States/UTs to manage waste below 10%,” Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said.

COVID-19 “performance index”

- New Zealand and Vietnam** were ranked the **best performing countries** in their response to the pandemic, according to a COVID-19 “performance index” put together by the **Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank**, which sought to assess the impact of geography, political systems and economic development in assessing outcomes.
- The index, which was based on **six different indicators**, including confirmed cases and deaths per million people and the scale of testing, sought “to gauge the relative performance of countries”, assessing **98 countries** in the 36 weeks that followed their hundredth case.
- “Fewer reported cases and deaths, both in aggregate and per capita terms, point towards a better response to the virus,” the Sydney-based think tank said.
- “More tests conducted on a per capita basis reveal a more accurate picture of the extent of the pandemic at the national level. Lower rates of positive tests, meanwhile,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

indicate greater degrees of control over the transmission of COVID-19.”

- **India ranked 86 out of 98 countries**, while the U.S. stood at 94 and Brazil at the bottom of the index. Taiwan, Thailand and Cyprus were in the top five. Sri Lanka was the best faring nation in South Asia, ranking 10, while the **Maldives was at 25, Pakistan at 69, Nepal at 70, and Bangladesh at 84.**
- The think tank said China was not included “due to a lack of publicly available data on testing”.
- Assessing regional responses, the institute found that although the outbreak began in China, the Asia-Pacific region fared the best, while Europe and the U.S. were initially overwhelmed. Europe, however, “registered the greatest improvement over time of any region” before succumbing to a second wave, which it attributed to more open borders.
- Population size was one factor. Smaller countries with fewer than 10 million people “consistently outperformed their larger counterparts throughout 2020”.
- The level of economic development and regime-type were less significant than expected, which it attributed to “the relatively ‘low-tech’ nature of the health measures used to mitigate the spread of the virus” which “may have created a more level playing field between developed and developing countries”. “In general, countries with smaller populations, cohesive societies, and capable institutions have a comparative advantage in dealing with a global crisis such as a pandemic,” the think tank concluded.

Funding for NGOs

- The Union Home Ministry has laid down a charter for banks which says that “donations received in Indian rupees” by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations **from “any foreign source even if that source is located in India** at the time of such donation” should be treated as “**foreign contribution**”.

- As per the existing rules, all banks have to report to the Central government **within 48 hours** the “receipt or utilisation of any foreign contribution” by any NGO, association or person whether or not they are registered or granted prior permission under the FCRA.
- Last September, the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010**, was amended by Parliament and a new provision that makes it **mandatory for all NGOs to receive foreign funds in a designated bank account** at the State Bank of India’s (SBI) New Delhi branch was inserted.
- FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect the internal security of the country.
- All NGOs seeking foreign donations have to open a designated FCRA account at the SBI branch by March 31.
- The NGOs can retain their existing FCRA account in any other bank but it will have to be mandatorily linked to the SBI branch in New Delhi.
- The Ministry has laid out a series of guidelines and charter to make the NGOs and the banks comply with the new provisions.
- The charter for the banks said, “It may be noted that foreign contribution has to be received only through banking channels and it has to be accounted for in the manner prescribed. Any violation by the NGO or by the bank may invite penal provisions of the FCRA, 2010.” It added that “donations given in Indian rupees (INR) by any foreigner/foreign source including foreigners of Indian origin like OCI or PIO cardholders” should also be treated as foreign contribution.

Key Highlights of Economic Survey 2020-21

Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Economic Survey 2020-21 in the Parliament today. The key highlights of Economic Survey 2020-21, which is

dedicated to the COVID Warriors, are as follows:

The recovery story

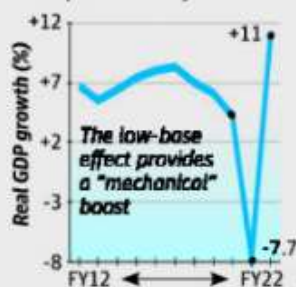
From being one of the fastest contracting economies in FY21, the Economic Survey estimates India to post one of the rapidest GDP expansions in FY22. A lowdown:



Testing times: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who tabled the Economic Survey, during the budget session of the Parliament on Friday. • PTI

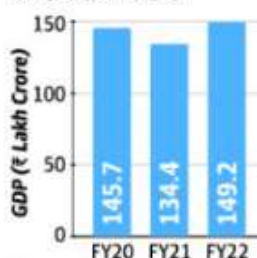
V-shaped growth

India's real GDP is expected to contract by 7.7% in FY21, compared to the 4.2% growth in FY20, due to the COVID-19 related lockdown. The economy is estimated to grow by 11% in FY22, completing a V-shaped recovery



In absolute terms

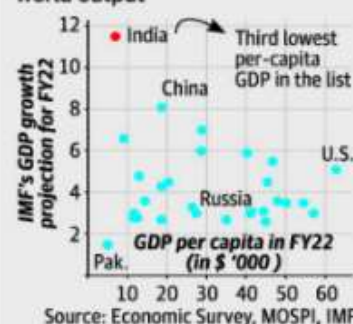
India's GDP was ₹145.7 lakh crore in FY20. A contraction of 7.7% in FY21 would reduce it to ₹134.4 lakh crore. And an expansion of 11% in FY22 would take it to ₹149.2 lakh crore



The economy would have grown by ₹3.5 lakh crore over the two years

Proportionately small

India's estimated GDP growth in FY22 is the highest among economies picked by the IMF. However, in terms of per capita GDP, India lags most other nations. Nations represented in the chart account for 83% of world output



Saving Lives and Livelihoods amidst a Once-in-a-Century Crisis

- India focused on saving lives and livelihoods by its willingness to take short-term pain for long-term gain, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Response stemmed from the humane principle that:
- Human lives lost cannot be brought back
 - GDP growth will recover from the temporary shock caused by the pandemic
- An early, intense lockdown provided a win-win strategy to save lives, and preserve livelihoods via economic recovery in the medium to long-term
- Strategy also motivated by the Nobel-Prize winning research by Hansen & Sargent (2001): a policy focused on minimizing losses in a worst-case scenario when uncertainty is very high
- India's strategy flattened the curve, pushed the peak to September, 2020
- After the September peak, India has been unique in experiencing declining daily cases despite increasing mobility
- V-shaped recovery, as seen in 7.5% decline in GDP in Q2 and recovery across all key economic indicators vis-à-vis the 23.9% GDP contraction in Q1
- COVID pandemic affected both demand

and supply:

- India was the only country to announce structural reforms to expand supply in the medium-long term and avoid long-term damage to productive capacities
- Calibrated demand side policies to ensure that the accelerator is slowly pushed down only when the brakes on economic activities are being removed
- A public investment programme centered around the National Infrastructure Pipeline to accelerate the demand push and further the recovery
- Upturn in the economy, avoiding a second wave of infections - a sui generis case in strategic policymaking amidst a once-in-a-century pandemic

State of the Economy in 2020-21: A Macro View

- COVID-19 pandemic ensued global economic downturn, the most severe one since the Global Financial Crisis
- The lockdowns and social distancing norms brought the already slowing global economy to a standstill
- Global economic output estimated to fall by 3.5% in 2020 (IMF January 2021 estimates)
- Governments and central banks across the globe deployed various policy tools to

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

support their economies such as lowering policy rates, quantitative easing measures, etc.

- India adopted a four-pillar strategy of containment, fiscal, financial, and long-term structural reforms:
 - Calibrated fiscal and monetary support was provided, cushioning the vulnerable during the lockdown and boosting consumption and investment while unlocking
 - A favourable monetary policy ensured abundant liquidity and immediate relief to debtors while unclogging monetary policy transmission
- As per the advance estimates by NSO, India's GDP is estimated to grow by (-) 7.7% in FY21 - a robust sequential growth of 23.9% in H2: FY21 over H1: FY21
- India's real GDP to record a 11.0% growth in FY2021-22 and nominal GDP to grow by 15.4% – the highest since independence:
- Rebound to be led by low base and continued normalization in economic activities as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines gathers traction
- Government consumption and net exports cushioned the growth from diving further down, whereas investment and private consumption pulled it down
- The recovery in second half of FY2020-21 is expected to be powered by government consumption, estimated to grow at 17% YoY
- Exports expected to decline by 5.8% and imports by 11.3% in the second half of FY21
- India expected to have a Current Account Surplus of 2% of GDP in FY21, a historic high after 17 years
- On supply side, Gross Value Added (GVA) growth pegged at -7.2% in FY21 as against 3.9% in FY20:
 - - Agriculture set to cushion the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Indian economy in FY21 with a growth of 3.4%
 - Industry and services estimated to contract by 9.6% and 8.8% respectively during FY21
- Agriculture remained the silver lining while contact-based services, manufacturing, construction were hit hardest, and recovering steadily
- India remained a preferred investment destination in FY 2020-21 with FDI pouring in amidst global asset shifts towards equities and prospects of quicker recovery in emerging economies:
 - Net FPI inflows recorded an all-time monthly high of US\$ 9.8 billion in November 2020, as investors' risk appetite returned
 - India was the only country among emerging markets to receive equity FII inflows in 2020
- Buoyant SENSEX and NIFTY resulted in India's market-cap to GDP ratio crossing 100% for the first time since October 201
- Softening of CPI inflation recently reflects easing of supply side constraints that affected food inflation
- Mild contraction of 0.8% in investment (as measured by Gross Fixed Capital Formation) in 2nd half of FY21, as against 29% drop in 1st half of FY21
- Reignited inter and intra state movement and record-high monthly GST collections have marked the unlocking of industrial and commercial activity
- The external sector provided an effective cushion to growth with India recording a Current Account Surplus of 3.1% of GDP in the first half of FY21:
 - - Strong services exports and weak demand leading to a sharper contraction in imports (merchandise imports contracted by 39.7%) than exports (merchandise exports contracted by 21.2%)
 - Forex reserves increased to a level so as to cover 18

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

months worth of imports in December 2020

- External debt as a ratio to GDP increased to 21.6% at end-September 2020 from 20.6% at end-March 2020
- Ratio of forex reserves to total and short-term debt improved because of the sizable accretion in reserves
- V-shaped recovery is underway, as demonstrated by a sustained resurgence in high frequency indicators such as power demand, e-way bills, GST collection, steel consumption, etc.
- India became the fastest country to roll-out 10 lakh vaccines in 6 days and also emerged as a leading supplier of the vaccine to neighbouring countries and Brazil
- Economy's homecoming to normalcy brought closer by the initiation of a mega vaccination drive:
 - - Hopes of a robust recovery in services sector, consumption, and investment have been rekindled
 - Reforms must go on to enable India realize its potential growth and erase the adverse impact of the pandemic
- India's mature policy response to the 'once-in-a-century' crisis provides important lessons for democracies to avoid myopic policy-making and demonstrates benefits of focusing on long-term gains

Does Growth lead to Debt Sustainability? Yes, But Not Vice- Versa!

- Growth leads to debt sustainability in the Indian context but not necessarily vice-versa:
- Debt sustainability depends on the 'Interest Rate Growth Rate Differential' (IRGD), i.e., the difference between the

interest rate and the growth rate

- - In India, interest rate on debt is less than growth rate – by norm, not by exception
- Negative IRGD in India – not due to lower interest rates but much higher growth rates – prompts a debate on fiscal policy, especially during growth slowdowns and economic crises
- Growth causes debt to become sustainable in countries with higher growth rates; such clarity about the causal direction is not witnessed in countries with lower growth rates
- Fiscal multipliers are disproportionately higher during economic crises than during economic booms
- Active fiscal policy can ensure that the full benefit of reforms is reaped by limiting potential damage to productive capacity
- Fiscal policy that provides an impetus to growth will lead to lower debt-to-GDP ratio
- Given India's growth potential, debt sustainability is unlikely to be a problem even in the worst scenarios
- Desirable to use counter-cyclical fiscal policy to enable growth during economic downturns
- Active, counter-cyclical fiscal policy - not a call for fiscal irresponsibility, but to break the intellectual anchoring that has created an asymmetric bias against fiscal policy

Does India's Sovereign Credit Rating Reflect Its Fundamentals? No!

- The fifth largest economy in the world has never been rated as the lowest rung of the investment grade (BBB-/Baa3) in sovereign credit ratings:
- Reflecting the economic size and thereby the ability to repay debt, the fifth largest economy has been predominantly rated AAA
 - - China and India are the only exceptions to this rule – China was rated A-/A2 in 2005 and now India is rated

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

BBB-/Baa3

- India's sovereign credit ratings do not reflect its fundamentals:
- A clear outlier amongst countries rated between A+/A1 and BBB-/Baa3 for S&P/Moody's, on several parameters
 - - Rated significantly lower than mandated by the effect on the sovereign rating of the parameter
- Credit ratings map the probability of default and therefore reflect the willingness and ability of borrower to meet its obligations:
- India's willingness to pay is unquestionably demonstrated through its zero sovereign default history
 - - India's ability to pay can be gauged by low foreign currency denominated debt and forex reserves
- Sovereign credit rating changes for India have no or weak correlation with macroeconomic indicators
- India's fiscal policy should reflect Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's sentiment of 'a mind without fear'
- Sovereign credit ratings methodology should be made more transparent, less subjective and better attuned to reflect economies' fundamentals

Inequality and Growth: Conflict or Convergence?

- The relationship between inequality and socio-economic outcomes vis-à-vis economic growth and socio-economic outcomes, is different in India from that in advanced economies.
- Both inequality and per-capita income (growth) have similar relationships with socio-economic indicators in India, unlike in advanced economies
- Economic growth has a greater impact on poverty alleviation than inequality
- India must continue to focus on economic growth to lift the poor out of poverty
- Expanding the overall pie - redistribution in a developing economy is feasible only if

the size of the economic pie grows

Healthcare takes centre stage, finally!

- COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of healthcare sector and its inter-linkages with other sectors - showcased how a health crisis transformed into an economic and social crisis
- India's health infrastructure must be agile so as to respond to pandemics - healthcare policy must not become beholden to 'saliency bias'
- National Health Mission (NHM) played a critical role in mitigating inequity as the access of the poorest to pre-natal/post-natal care and institutional deliveries increased significantly
- Emphasis on NHM in conjunction with Ayushman Bharat should continue
- An increase in public healthcare spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP can decrease the out-of-pocket expenditure from 65% to 35% of overall healthcare spending
- A regulator for the healthcare sector must be considered given the market failures stemming from information asymmetry
- Mitigation of information asymmetry will help lower insurance premiums, enable the offering of better products and increase insurance penetration
 - - Information utilities that help mitigate the information asymmetry in healthcare sector will be useful in enhancing overall welfare
- Telemedicine needs to be harnessed to the fullest by investing in internet connectivity and health infrastructure

Process Reforms

- India over-regulates the economy resulting in regulations being ineffective even with relatively good compliance with process
- The root cause of the problem of overregulation is an approach that attempts to account for every possible outcome
- Increase in complexity of regulations, intended to reduce discretion, results in even more non-transparent discretion

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The solution is to simplify regulations and invest in greater supervision which, by definition, implies greater discretion
- Discretion, however, needs to be balanced with transparency, systems of ex-ante accountability and ex-post resolution mechanisms
- The above intellectual framework has already informed reforms ranging from labour codes to removal of onerous regulations on the BPO sector

continued for years

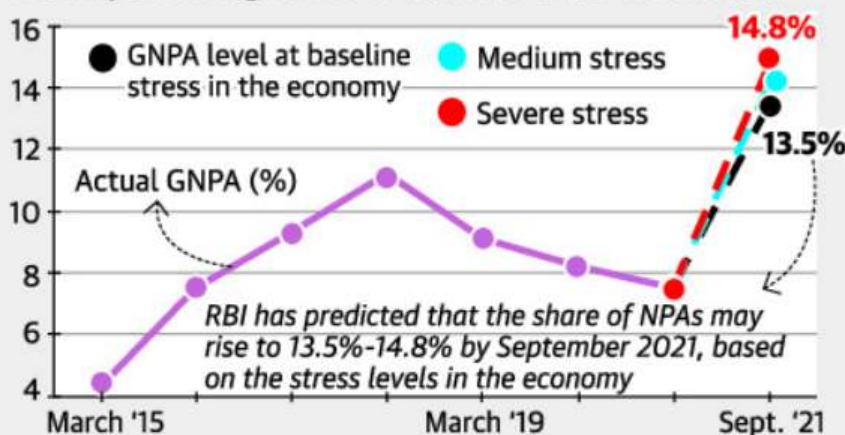
- To promote judgement amidst uncertainty, ex-post inquests must recognize the role of hindsight bias and not equate unfavourable outcomes to bad judgement or malafide intent
- An Asset Quality Review exercise must be conducted immediately after the forbearance is withdrawn
- The legal infrastructure for the recovery of loans needs to be strengthened de facto

Regulatory Forbearance an emergency medicine, not staple diet!

Innovation: Trending Up but Needs Thrust, Especially from the Private Sector

Present perfect, future tense

The NPAs of scheduled commercial banks surged after the RBI carried out an expansive asset quality review in 2015. The share of bad loans came down in the last two years. However, the effect of the COVID-19 related lockdown is not known yet as a high share of loans are under moratorium



- During the Global Financial Crisis, regulatory forbearance helped borrowers tide over temporary hardship
- Forbearance continued long after the economic recovery, resulting in unintended consequences for the economy
- Banks exploited the forbearance window for window-dressing their books and misallocated credit, thereby damaging the quality of investment in the economy
- Forbearance represents emergency medicine that should be discontinued at the first opportunity when the economy exhibits recovery, not a staple diet that gets

India entered the top-50 innovating countries for the first time in 2020 since the inception of the Global Innovation Index in 2007, ranking first in Central and South Asia, and third amongst lower middle-income group economies

India's gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) is lowest amongst top ten economies

India's aspiration must be to compete on innovation with the top ten economies

The government sector contributes a disproportionately large share in total GERD at three times the average of top ten economies

The business sector's contribution to GERD, total R&D personnel and researchers is amongst the lowest when compared to top ten economies

- This situation has prevailed despite higher tax incentives for innovation and access to equity capital
- India's business sector needs to significantly ramp up investments in R&D
- Indian resident's share in total patents filed in the country must rise from the current 36% which is much below the average of 62% in top ten economies
- For achieving higher improvement in innovation output, India must focus on improving its performance on institutions and business sophistication innovation

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

inputs.

JAY Ho! PM‘JAY’ Adoption and Health outcomes

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) – the ambitious program launched by Government of India in 2018 to provide healthcare access to the most vulnerable sections demonstrates strong positive effects on healthcare outcomes in a short time
- PM-JAY is being used significantly for high frequency, low cost care such as dialysis and continued during the Covid pandemic and the lockdown.
- Causal impact of PM-JAY on health outcomes by undertaking a Difference-in-Difference analysis based on National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-20) is following:
- Enhanced health insurance coverage: The proportion of households that had health insurance increased in Bihar, Assam and Sikkim from 2015-16 to 2019-20 by 89% while it decreased by 12% over the same period in West Bengal
- Decline in Infant Mortality rate: from 2015-16 to 2019-20, infant mortality rates declined by 20% for West Bengal and by 28% for the three neighbouring states
- Decline in under-5 mortality rate: Bengal saw a fall of 20% while, the neighbours witnessed a 27% reduction
- Modern methods of contraception, female sterilization and pill usage went up by 36%, 22% and 28% respectively in the three neighbouring states while the respective changes for West Bengal were negligible
- While West Bengal did not witness any significant decline in unmet need for spacing between consecutive kids, the neighbouring three states recorded a 37% fall
- Various metrics for mother and child care improved more in the three neighbouring states than in West Bengal.
- Each of these health effects manifested similarly when we compare all states that implemented PM-JAY versus the states that did not

- Overall, the comparison reflects significant improvements in several health outcomes in states that implemented PM-JAY versus those that did not

Bare Necessities

- Access to the ‘bare necessities’ has improved across all States in the country in 2018 as compared to 2012
 - It is highest in States such as Kerala, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat while lowest in Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Tripura
 - Improvement in each of the five dimensions viz., access to water, housing, sanitation, micro-environment and other facilities
 - Inter-State disparities declined across rural and urban areas as the laggard states have gained relatively more between 2012 and 2018
 - Improved disproportionately more for the poorest households when compared to the richest households across rural and urban areas
- Improved access to the ‘bare necessities’ has led to improvements in health indicators such as infant mortality and under-5 mortality rate and also correlates with future improvements in education indicators
- Thrust should be given to reduce variation in the access to bare necessities across states, between rural and urban and between income groups
- The schemes such as Jal Jeevan Mission, SBM-G, PMAY-G, etc. may design appropriate strategy to reduce these gaps
- A Bare Necessities Index (BNI) based on the large annual household survey data can be constructed using suitable indicators and methodology at district level for all/targeted districts to assess the progress on access to bare necessities.

Fiscal Developments

- India adopted a calibrated approach best suited for a resilient recovery of its economy from COVID-19 pandemic impact, in contrast with a front-loaded

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

large stimulus package adopted by many countries

- Expenditure policy in 2020-21 initially aimed at supporting the vulnerable sections but was re-oriented to boost overall demand and capital spending, once the lockdown was unwound
- Monthly GST collections have crossed the Rs. 1 lakh crore mark consecutively for the last 3 months, reaching its highest levels in December 2020 ever since the introduction of GST
- Reforms in tax administration have begun a process of transparency and accountability and have incentivized tax compliance by enhancing honest taxpayers' experience
- Central Government has also taken consistent steps to impart support to the States in the challenging times of the pandemic

External Sector

- COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp decline in global trade, lower commodity prices and tighter external financing conditions with implications for current account balances and currencies of different countries
- India's forex reserves at an all-time high of US\$ 586.1 billion as on January 08, 2021, covering about 18 months worth of imports
- India experiencing a Current Account Surplus along with robust capital inflows leading to a BoP surplus since Q4 of FY2019-20
- Balance on the capital account is buttressed by robust FDI and FPI inflows:
 - Net FDI inflows of US\$ 27.5 billion during April-October, 2020: 14.8% higher as compared to first seven months of FY2019-20
 - Net FPI inflows of US\$ 28.5 billion during April-December, 2020 as against US\$ 12.3 billion in corresponding period of last year
- In H1: FY21, steep contraction in merchandise imports and lower outgo for travel services led to:
 - Sharper fall in current payments (by 30.8%) than current receipts (15.1%)
 - Current Account Surplus of US\$ 34.7 billion (3.1% of GDP)
- India to end with an Annual Current Account Surplus after a period of 17 years
- India's merchandise trade deficit was lower at US\$ 57.5 billion in April-December, 2020 as compared to US\$ 125.9 billion in the corresponding period last year
- In April-December, 2020, merchandise exports contracted by 15.7% to US\$ 200.8 billion from US\$ 238.3 billion in April-December, 2019:
 - Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) exports have contributed negatively to export performance during the period under review
 - Non-POL exports turned positive and helped in improving export performance in Q3 of 2020-21
 - Within Non-POL exports, agriculture & allied products, drugs & pharmaceutical and ores & minerals recorded expansion
- Total merchandise imports declined by (-) 29.1% to US\$ 258.3 billion during April-December, 2020 from US\$ 364.2 billion during the same period last year:
 - Sharp decline in POL imports pulled down the overall import growth
 - Imports contracted sharply in Q1 of 2020-21; the pace of contraction eased in subsequent quarters, due to the accelerated positive growth in Gold and Silver imports and narrowing contraction in non-POL, non-Gold & non-Silver imports
 - Fertilizers, vegetable oil, drugs & pharmaceuticals and computer hardware & peripherals have contributed positively to the growth of non-POL, non-Gold & non-Silver imports
- Trade balance with China and the US improved as imports slowed
- Net services receipts amounting to US\$ 41.7 billion remained stable in April-

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

September 2020 as compared with US\$ 40.5 billion in corresponding period a year ago.

- Resilience of the services sector was primarily driven by software services, which accounted for 49% of total services exports
- Net private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, totaling US\$ 35.8 billion in H1: FY21 declined by 6.7% over the corresponding period of previous year
- At end-September 2020, India's external debt placed at US\$ 556.2 billion - a decrease of US\$ 2.0 billion (0.4%) as compared to end-March 2020.
- Improvement in debt vulnerability indicators:
 - Ratio of forex reserves to total and short-term debt (original and residual)
 - Ratio of short-term debt (original maturity) to the total stock of external debt.
 - Debt service ratio (principal repayment plus interest payment) increased to 9.7% as at end-September 2020, compared to 6.5% as at end-March 2020
- Rupee appreciation/depreciation:
 - In terms of 6-currency nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) (trade-based weights), Rupee depreciated by 4.1% in December 2020 over March 2020; appreciated by

published on the lower house website on Friday, showed.

- The legislation, listed for debate in the current Parliamentary session, seeks “to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India, however, it allows for certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses,” the government said.
- In mid-2019, a government panel recommended banning all private cryptocurrencies, with a jail term of up to 10 years and heavy fines for anyone dealing in digital currencies.
- The panel had, however, asked the government to consider the introduction of an official government-backed digital currency, to function like bank notes, through the RBI.
- The central bank had in April 2018 ordered financial institutions to break off all ties with individuals or businesses dealing in virtual currencies such as bitcoin within three months.
- However, in March 2020, the Supreme Court allowed banks to handle cryptocurrency transactions from exchanges and traders, overturning a ban that had dealt the thriving industry a blow.
- Governments around the world have been looking into ways to regulate cryptocurrencies but no major economy has taken the drastic step of placing a blanket ban on owning them, even though concerns have been raised about the misuse of consumer data and its possible impact on the financial system.

Law to ban Cryptocurrencies

- India plans to introduce a law to ban private cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and put in place a framework for an official digital currency to be issued by the central bank, according to a legislative agenda listed by the government.
- The law will “create a facilitative framework for creation of the official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI),” the agenda,

How Neutrinos help in the death of massive stars?



- Many stars, towards the end of their lifetimes, form supernovas - massive explosions that send their outer layers shooting into the surrounding space.
- Most of the energy of the supernova is carried away by neutrinos – tiny particles with no charge and which interact weakly with matter. Researching the mechanisms of the so called **Type II supernovas**, a team from IIT Guwahati has come up with new insights into the part played by neutrinos in this dramatic death of massive stars.
- The collaboration includes astrophysicists from Max Planck Institute, Munich, Germany; Northwestern University, Illinois and University of California, Berkeley, in the U.S.
- All stars burn nuclear fuel in their cores to produce energy.
- The heat generates internal pressure which pushes outwards and prevents the star from collapsing inward due to the action of gravity on its own mass.
- But when the star ages and runs out of fuel to burn, it starts to cool inside.
- This causes a lowering of its internal pressure and therefore the force of gravity wins; the star starts to collapse inwards.
- This builds up shock waves because it happens very suddenly, and the shock wave sends the outer material of the star flying. This is what is perceived as a supernova. This happens in very massive stars.
- In stars that are more than eight times as massive as the Sun, the supernova is

accompanied by a collapsing of the inner material of the dying star – this is also known as core collapse supernova or Type II supernova.

- The collapsing core may form a black hole or a neutron star, according as its mass. “Our work is on these core-collapse events of type II supernova,” says Sovan Chakraborty of the physics department of IIT Guwahati, in an email to The Hindu.

Three flavours

- Neutrinos come in three ‘flavours’, another name for ‘types’, and each flavour is associated with a light elementary particle.
- For instance, the electron-neutrino is associated with the electron; the muon-neutrino with the muon and the tau-neutrino with the tau particle.
- As they spew out of the raging supernova, the neutrinos can change from one flavour to another in a process known as neutrino oscillations. As Dr. Chakraborty explains, due to the high density and energy of the supernova, several interesting features emerge as this is a nonlinear phenomenon: “This [phenomenon] may generate neutrino oscillations happening simultaneously over different energies (unlike normal neutrino oscillation), termed collective neutrino oscillation.
- The oscillation result may dramatically change when one allows the evolution with the angular asymmetry, the oscillations can happen at a nanosecond time scale, termed fast oscillation.”
- Models of this process, dubbed the effective two-flavour models, have only taken into account the asymmetry between electron neutrino and the corresponding antineutrino.
- In a paper published in Physical Review Letters, the researchers from IIT Guwahati claim that a three-flavour model is needed to predict well the dynamics of the supernova.

Fast oscillations

- The fast oscillations are important because the researchers find that these can decide the flavour information of the supernova

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

neutrinos.

- So far, this has not been done, and models have only kept terms involving a neutrino and its corresponding anti-neutrino. “We find that fast nonlinear oscillations of neutrinos are sensitive to three flavours, and neglecting the third flavour may yield the wrong answer,” says Dr. Chakraborty.
- “Thus, the presence of ...[asymmetry between] the muon neutrinos and antineutrinos will be crucial for the neutrino oscillations, in turn influencing the supernova mechanism.”
- Understanding this is important when one wants to measure the influence of neutrinos and their oscillations on supernova mechanism and heavy element synthesis in stellar environments.

PT POINTERS

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Light House Projects

- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** laid the foundation stone of **Light House projects (LHPs)** at six sites across **six States** through video conference on **1st January 2021**.
- The LHPs will be implemented at **Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Rajkot (Gujarat), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Agartala (Tripura) and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)**.
- The project is being constructed under the **Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC)-India**. It has been conceptualised by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- Under the programme, over **1,000 houses** would be built in each of the six cities in 12 months along with allied infrastructure facilities.

ADB to provide \$231 mn loan to enhance power generation capacity in Assam

- The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** has signed a **\$231 million loan** with the Government of India to augment **electricity generation capacity** in the state of **Assam**.
- This is the third tranche loan for the **‘Assam Power Sector Investment Programme’** that was approved by the **ADB Board in July 2014**.
- Under the project, **120 megawatts (MW) hydroelectric power plant** would be constructed. The programme focuses on enhancing the capacity and efficiency of the energy generation and distribution systems in Assam to improve the availability of electricity service to end-users.

ADB and India sign \$10 million loan to support horticulture in HP

- The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** and the Government of India have signed a **\$10 million project readiness financing (PRF)**.
- This agreement aims to help finance piloting activities, and design and capacity building for an ensuing project that aims to expand horticulture production and farm household income in the hill state of **Himachal Pradesh**.
- The PRF project will support advance actions to achieve a high level of project readiness through detailed design activities, capacity building of state-level agencies, and creating an enabling environment for subtropical horticulture development in the state.

UNDP and PCMC join hands for ‘first social impact bond’

- **Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, Pune** has recently signed an MoU with **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India** to co-create **India’s first Social Impact Bond (SIB)**.
- This is the first time that a government body will act as the ‘outcome funder’ in a bond, whereas traditionally most government-funded public projects require large and early investments by the government with a substantial gestation period of outcomes and involve various kinds of risks.
- A Social Impact Bond also called pay-for-success bond or pay-for-success financing or simply social bond is basically a contract with public sector authority, where it pays for better social outcomes.
- This bond is a form of outcome-based contracting and aims at improving social outcomes for a specific group of citizens.

Legendary Music Director Shantanu Mohapatra passes away

- Legendary Odia musician, **Shantanu Mohapatra** passed away. He was the first

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Odia music composer to work with legends like Lata Mangeshkar, Manna Dey and Md Rafi and also the first to work in Hindi, Bengali, Assamese and Telugu film industries.

- Mohapatra has composed music for hundreds of Odia film songs and Jatra (opera) shows in a career that spanned over three decades.
- Mohapatra, who retired as the Director of Odisha Mining Corporation, received several awards including the Odisha Film Critic Award for his contribution to Odia music.

IFSCA becomes Associate Member of IOSCO

- The **International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA)** has become an Associate Member of the **International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO)**. The Headquarter of IOSCO is at **Madrid, Spain**.
- The IOSCO is the international organization of the world's securities regulators, covering more than **95%** of the world's securities markets, and is also the global standard-setter for the securities sector.
- It works intensively with the G20 and the Financial Stability Board (FSB) on the global regulatory reform agenda.
- With this new membership, IFSCA will get the platform to exchange information at the global level and regional level on areas of common interests and help to learn from the experiences and best practices of the regulators of other well established financial centres.

Evolution of Life

Chemists have come up with a new proposition for how life may have begun. In a study published in *Angewandte Chemie*, the researchers showed a simple compound **diamidophosphate** could have knitted together the building blocks of DNA to

form the primordial structures. The possibility is that DNA and RNA arose together and that the first life forms were a mixture of the two.

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

- ICMR is India's apex scientific body for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.
- It was established in 1911 as Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) making it one of oldest and largest medical research bodies in the world. ICMR functions under Dept of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. HQ - Delhi.
- Presided by Health Minister.
- Director General– Prof. Balram Bhargava.
- It publishes Indian Journal of Medical Research.

Malayalam poet-lyricist Anil Panachooran passed away



- Poet and lyricist Anil Panachooran was 55. A lawyer by profession, Panachooran came into the limelight in 2007 with the much appreciated songs in Arabikkadha, including 'Chora Veena Mannil...' and 'Thirike Njan...'. 'Chora Veena Mannil...',

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

sung with revolutionary fervour by the poet himself, is played regularly at Left cultural events.

- Then came the song ‘Vyathyasthanam oru barber...’ from Kadha Parayumbol, a humourous song that topped the hit charts for a long time. His song ‘Jimikki Kammal...’ from Velipadinte Pusthakam, with its catchy yet simple lyrics inspired from old folk songs, had gone viral, spawning several dance videos across the globe.
- Even before his arrival in films, he had attained popularity among the poetry aficionados in the State with poems such as ‘Anaadhan’, written in the 1990s.
- Panachooran was working on his first directorial Kaadu when the end came.

which the scientific community is widely discussing now to maintain health and well-being,” the NIIST said.

- Generally consumed ripe, Nendran banana also finds use in typical Kerala dishes such as avial and thoran. The granules can be used for making upma, or it can be mixed with banana powder for porridge, with milk or coconut milk for use as a health drink. Banana powder can be used for making cakes and breads, along with refined wheat flour.
- Developing new uses for Nendran also comes as a boon to farmers who have often been struggling against falling prices, according to the scientists.

Nendran Banana grit or granules



- Scientists at the CSIR-National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST) at Pappanamcode in Kerala have come up with a new product, banana grit or granules, developed from **raw Nendran bananas**.
- Billed as an ideal ingredient for a healthy diet, banana grit can be used for making a wide range of dishes, according to the NIIST.
- The product resembles to ‘rava’ and broken wheat.
- “The concept was introduced to utilise the presence of resistant starch in bananas, which is reported to improve gut health. Hence, the dishes prepared with banana grit and its byproduct, banana powder, incline to the new focus on gut health,

Pangolin and Porcupine

Pangolin

- Out of the 8 species of Pangolin in the World, Indian and Chinese Pangolin are found in India.

Indian Pangolin



- Indian pangolin is an endangered animal that is rarely sighted in forests.
- Indian Pangolin is the only scaly mammal hunted for meat and used in traditional Chinese medicine. They are nocturnal.
- Indian Pangolins are among the most trafficked wildlife species in the World.
- The projected population declines range from 50% to 80% across the genus. Scientists radio-tag Indian pangolin for the 1st time.
- It is under Schedule I of Wildlife

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

Protection Act, 1972.

- Indian Pangolin is endangered under IUCN.

What is in the news?

- The Odisha Forest department has stressed the need for stricter monitoring of social media platforms to check pangolin poaching and trading.
- Investigations revealed that the accused were trading pangolin and scales online by forming WhatsApp groups in which videos and photos were shared with potential customers, often based outside the country, and details communicated in codes to conceal the transactions.
- Ms. Lenka said “trafficking of live pangolin and its scales is a highly lucrative business for organised mafia, who exploit poor and vulnerable forest dwelling communities for their criminal interests.”

plantations, and gardens.

- Range — Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean through southwest and central Asia
- Threats considered are agricultural pests by locals who trap and use them for food.



Chinese Pangolin



- They are also found in India.
- It is under Schedule I of WPA.
- **Chinese Pangolin is Critically Endangered.**

Porcupine

- It is a rodent native to southern Asia and the Middle East
- Least concerned – IUCN
- Habitat: Porcupine species has a broad habitat tolerance, occupying rocky hillsides, tropical and temperate shrubland, grasslands, forests, arable land,

Indian Diaspora: Raj Iyer

- Indian-American Raj Iyer has taken over as the first Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the U.S. Army after the Pentagon created the position in July 2020.
- One of the highest ranking Indian-American civilians in the U.S. Department of Defense, Dr. Iyer, who holds a PhD. in Electrical Engineering, serves as the Principal Adviser to the Secretary of the Army and directs representation of the Secretary in matters relating to information management/ information technology (IT), the Pentagon said in a statement. Equivalent in rank to a three-star General, Dr. Iyer will supervise an annual budget of \$16 billion for the U.S. Army's IT operations.
- Over 15,000 civilians and military personnel posted across 100 countries work under him.

World food price index by FAO

- World food prices rose for a seventh consecutive month in December, with all the major categories, barring sugar,

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

posting gains last month, the United Nations food agency said.

- The Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 107.5 points last month versus 105.2 in November.
- For the whole of 2020, the benchmark index averaged 97.9 points, a three-year high and a 3.1% increase from 2019.
- It was still down more than 25% from its historical peak in 2011.
- Vegetable oil prices continued recent strong gains, jumping 4.7% month-on-month in December after surging more than 14% in November. For the whole of 2020, the index was up 19.1% on 2019.
- The cereal price index posted a more modest 1.1% rise in December from the month before. For all of 2020, the index averaged 6.6% above 2019 levels.
- Export prices for wheat, maize, sorghum and rice all rose in December, moving higher in part due to concerns over growing conditions and crop prospects in North and South America as well as Russia, the Rome-based FAO said.

National Security Council. Ms. Guha co-chaired the South Asia foreign policy working group on the Biden-Harris campaign, and was a member of the transition team. She will succeed the Trump administration’s Lisa Curtis in the role.

- Ms. Guha, a former Foreign Service officer, has been a senior vice-president since mid-2018 at the Albright Stonebridge Group, whose chair is former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.
- She has also worked at the U.S.-India Business Council and, prior to that, in the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Staff with responsibility for South Asia.
- The transition team also announced other NSC appointments and roles, as part of Mr. Biden’s restructuring of the Council, which will be headed by Jake Sullivan, who said Mr. Biden had asked him to “reimagine” national security.
- The new positions include Coordinator for democracy and human rights (Shanthi Kalathil) and Senior Director for technology and national security (Tarun Chhabra).

Ms. Sumona Guha



- The Biden-Harris transition team announced the appointment of Indian-American Sumona Guha to the role of Senior Director for South Asia at the

What is Co-WIN?

- In good measure, the dry runs were not only a step to test the operational feasibility of various States to roll out the vaccine programme effectively, but also a recce to see if the electronic vaccine intelligence network, eVIN, used during routine immunisation programmes, and remodelled as Co-WIN, was functional at the field-level.
- Co-WIN aspires to be a comprehensive digital database of every COVID-19 vaccine that will be administered in India — tracking beneficiaries, intimating them about vaccine sites and dates, pre- and post-vaccination procedures, issuance of vaccination certificates, and follow up through the booster dose. On January 5, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the details of healthcare and frontline workers in line for a shot had already been

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

updated on the Co-WIN system, in bulk, by State and district health authorities. Currently, self-registration is not allowed on the application.

- It has been promised that ‘at a later stage of implementation’, Co-WIN will also be available as an application or as a website in multiple Indian languages so that beneficiaries can access it to keep track of their own progress and be connected organically to the system, if questions were to arise. It will also be a tool for others to “register” for a vaccine once the first line of targeted beneficiaries is cleared.
- Aadhar or any accepted photo ID card may be used to verify the identity of the applicant to prevent misuse. Additionally, documents authorised by specialists to indicate co-morbidities or any other health conditions may be demanded.
- Further details are also awaited on the steps that will be taken to allocate turns in the schedule after the registration and for further communication regarding the date and venue of vaccination, even to people who may not have access to devices or the Internet. As per current information, text messages will be sent out after registration, telling the registrant where and when to go to get the shot.
- After the second dose, Co-WIN will generate a digital certificate of completion for individuals who have been vaccinated. Messaging, chatbots and helpline assistance are available on the app, and any adverse event after the vaccination may be communicated back to the authorities through one of these access points.

Section 4 of the 25th Amendment of USA Constitution

- Section 4 of the 25th Amendment allows for the immediate removal of the President “whenever the Vice President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive departments or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit to the President pro tempore of the

Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.”

- When that happens, the “Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President.”

List of all valleys of India

Dzukou Valley wildfire

- The wildfire at Dzukou Valley, straddling the Manipur-Nagaland border, has been doused after it raged for two weeks, officials said on Monday.
- No fresh fire or smoke was visible.
- The Dzukou Valley, situated at an average altitude of 2,452 metres, is a popular trekking destination known for its exotic flowers.

List of all valleys of India

- Araku Valley = Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
- Barak Valley = Assam
- Chumbi Valley = Tibet, China, the intersection of India (Sikkim), Bhutan and China (Tibet) in the Himalayas
- Doon Valley = Lower Himalayas, Uttarakhand
- Dzüko Valley = Nagaland
- Johar Valley, Kumaon = Uttarakhand
- Kambam Valley = Tamil Nadu
- Kangra Valley = Himachal Pradesh
- Neelam Valley = Pakistan occupied Kashmir
- Neora Valley = Kalimpong, Darjeeling
- Nubra Valley = Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir
- Patratu Valley = Jharkhand
- Pangi Valley = Himachal Pradesh
- Pin Valley = Himachal Pradesh
- Silent Valley = Palakkad District, Kerala
- Valley of Flowers = West Himalayas, Uttarakhand
- Zaskar Valley = Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir
- Zoji La Valley = Jammu and Kashmir

Autism

What is Autism?

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a broad term used to describe a group of neurodevelopmental disorders.
- These disorders are characterized by problems with communication and social interaction. People with ASD often demonstrate restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped interests or patterns of behavior.
- ASD is found in individuals around the world, regardless of race, culture, or economic background. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Trusted Source, autism does occur more often in boys than in girls, with a 4 to 1 male-to-female ratio.

What is in the news?

- In Our World, a documentary by award-winning filmmaker Shreedhar B.S. will premiere at the 51st International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa on January 18.
- Produced by Mr. Shreedhar's Shred Creative Lab Private Ltd, the film highlights autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through the lives of three children.
- The 51-minute documentary without has made an attempt to unpack the world of the autistic children, their families and bring about a nuanced understanding. The film includes candid interviews of parents, therapists, their day-to-day activities like swimming classes, horse-riding and music lessons; their special moments with parents.
- “The message is of assimilation. We are all well aware of how autistic children are perceived; they are sidelined, treated as abnormal; often such children end up having no friends; they are not invited to birthday parties or social gatherings,” he added.

Abhilash Tomy



- Commander Tomy, the first Indian to circumnavigate the globe solo and unassisted in a sail yacht, intends to give another shot at the Golden Globe Race next year.
- The GGR, as it is called, is a daredevil ocean race with basic, read vintage, sailing equipment which he attempted in 2018.
- But a vicious storm in the southern Indian Ocean dismasted him and he sustained a spinal injury.
- He was subsequently rescued in a multi-nation effort and had to undergo a surgery.
- After recovering from his injuries, Commander Tomy, a naval pilot, was medically cleared for flying and sailing. He flew his last sortie on Dornier around Goa sometime in September and was sailing and kayaking.

All woman cockpit crew



The first non-stop flight from San Francisco to Bengaluru, flown by four women pilots, landed at Kempegowda International airport in Bengaluru at 3.07 am on Monday, flying over the North Pole and covering a distance of about 16,000 kilometers.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

The flight was operated by an all-women cockpit crew of Captain Zoya Aggarwal (P1), Captain Papagari Thanmai (P1), Captain Akansha Sonaware (P2) and Captain Shivani Manhas (P2), who responded to the cheers and clapping by showing the thumbs-up sign.

Woman power Captain Zoya Aggarwal, who headed the all-woman cockpit crew of the first Air India flight from San Francisco to Bengaluru, waves after landing at the Kempegowda International Airport on Monday. They scripted history by flying non-stop for 17 hours.

Iran and South Korea

- Iran warned on Monday its seizure of a South Korean tanker in the Gulf must not be politicised, after the U.S. and France urged the Islamic Republic to release the ship.
- “We have repeatedly told... the intervening parties, whether they are the United States or France, that the case does not concern them at all and that they will not help to solve a technical problem if they politicise it,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized the Hankuk Chemi and arrested its multinational crew of 20 near the strategic Strait of Hormuz one week ago.
- The move came as Tehran urged Seoul to release billions of dollars of Iranian assets frozen in South Korea as part of U.S. sanctions.
- The U.S. and France have called for Iran to release the ship. A State Department spokesperson called the seizure “part of a clear attempt to extort the international community into relieving the pressure of sanctions”.

Author Ved Mehta passes away

- Celebrated Indian-American author Ved Mehta, who overcame blindness and became widely known as the 20th century writer most responsible for introducing American readers to India, died in the U.S.

on Saturday.

- The New Yorker magazine, where he had been a staff writer for 33 years, announced the death on Sunday.
- Mehta was born in pre-Partition Lahore into a well-off Punjabi family in 1934.
- He lost his eyesight at the age of three from meningitis. He did not let this challenge get in the way of a flourishing career or stop him from showcasing his literary prowess to the world.
- “I felt that blindness was a terrible impediment, and that if only I exerted myself and did everything my big sisters and big brother did, I could somehow become exactly like them,” Mehta wrote.
- He is best known for his 12-volume memoir, which focused on the troubled modern history of India and his early struggles with blindness.
- Mehta brought out 24 books that included volumes of reportage on India, among them Walking the Indian Streets (1960), Portrait of India (1970) and Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles (1977), as well as explorations of philosophy, theology and linguistics.

Air India flight between Hyderabad and Chicago

- The first-ever non-stop service of Air India between Hyderabad and Chicago commenced with the maiden flight arriving at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) here early on Friday. The flight, operating on Wednesdays, left Chicago at 21.30 hours (local time) on January 13 and arrived at 1 a.m.
- The return flight AI-107 from Hyderabad to Chicago, which operates once a week every Friday, left Hyderabad at 12.50 p.m. to arrive in Chicago at 18.05 hours (local time) the same day with 226 passengers and 16 aircraft crew. amidst fanfare at the airport.
- The AI flight is a Boeing 777-200LR aircraft with a seating capacity of 238, including eight first class, 35 business class, 195 economy class seats, besides four cockpit and 12 cabin crew.

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- The total flight time from Hyderabad to Chicago will be approximately 16 hours 45 minutes, while the duration from Chicago to Hyderabad will be 15 hours 40 minutes.

The city being a gateway to south and central India, will connect Air India's direct flight from Chicago to Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Bengaluru and Chennai, said an official spokesperson. GMR Hyderabad International Airport, AI officials and others were present at the terminal to see off passengers.

done in real-world conditions. The contract marks a strategic shift in the Indian defence procurement process,” the company added.

SWITCH UAV



- The Indian Army has signed a \$20-million contract with ideaForge, a player in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, to procure undisclosed quantities of a high-altitude variant of SWITCH UAV, an indigenous system used in surveillance operations.
- SWITCH UAV is an indigenous system built to cater to the most demanding surveillance operations of the Indian forces.
- This fixed-wing vertical take-off and landing UAV can be deployed at high altitudes and under harsh environments for day and night surveillance, ideaForge said in a statement.
- “UAV player ideaForge has been awarded this one-year contract after it qualified the operational requirements in an evaluation

New Orvakal Airport

- The Orvakal airport on the outskirts of Kurnool city in Andhra Pradesh has got the approval of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) after completion of all the mandatory safety inspections and creation of infrastructure.
- “With all the efforts and budgetary support of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath, the Kurnool / Orvakal airport got the DGCA approval after completion of works as per its specifications,” the Collector said.

Musaveni win in Uganda for the 6th time

- Uganda's Electoral Commission said on Saturday that President Yoweri Museveni won a sixth five-year term, extending his rule to four decades, while top opposition challenger Bobi Wine dismissed “cooked-up, fraudulent results” and officials struggled to explain how polling results were compiled amid an Internet blackout.
- In a generational clash watched across the African continent with a booming young population and a host of ageing leaders, the 38-year-old singer-turned-lawmaker Mr. Wine posed arguably Mr. Museveni's greatest challenge yet. The self-described “ghetto president” had strong support in urban centers where frustration with unemployment and corruption is high. He has claimed victory.
- The Electoral Commission said Mr. Museveni received 58% of ballots and Mr. Wine 34%, and voter turnout was 52%, in a process that the top U.S. diplomat to Africa called “fundamentally flawed.” The vote followed the East African country's worst pre-election violence since the 76-

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

year-old Mr. Museveni took office in 1986.

Do plants share genetic material with each other?

- Genetic material of plants and animals are well protected in the nucleus of each cell and store all the information that forms an organism.
- In addition, cells contain small organelles that contain their own genetic material.
- These include chloroplasts in plants, which play a key role in photosynthesis, and mitochondria, which are found in all living organisms and represent the power plants of every cell.
- Scientists at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Plant Physiology in Potsdam have shown, through experimental approaches, (Science Advances) how the genetic material is not actually permanently stored within one cell but can migrate from cell to cell.
- They conducted experiments with tobacco plants using grafting.
- Two different tobacco plants were grafted on to each other and the cells of the junction were observed microscopically in real time.
- They could observe that genome transfer from cell to cell occurs in both directions with high frequency at this site.
- The researchers were able to observe structural changes in the cell walls in the wound tissue of the graft site.
- Protrusions formed on the cell walls, thus creating junctions between the two partners.
- The size of the created pores allowed the migration of an entire plastid. “Therefore, the genome does not migrate freely, but encapsulated from cell to cell,” Dr. Alexander Hertle says in a release.
- However, to actually make this possible, the plastids have to shrink and become mobile.
- These rod-shaped plastids grow back to normal size after transfer into the target tissue.

Budget Session to have Question Hour

- The Question Hour, which had been suspended by the government during the monsoon session, will resume when Parliament meets for the Budget session from January 29.
- The government had claimed that the suspension of the Question Hour, which gives the Opposition an opportunity to hold the government accountable, was an additional precautionary measure to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The suspension had been strongly criticised by the Opposition.
- As during the monsoon session, the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha will meet at alternate sessions to ensure that all the three chambers — Rajya Sabha hall, Lok Sabha hall and the Central Hall — were available for both Houses to seat members in keeping with the physical distancing norms

S-400 Triumph



- As India prepares to receive the first batch of **S-400 long-range air defence system** by year-end, the first group of Indian military specialists are scheduled to depart for Moscow soon to undergo training courses on the S-400.
- S-400 supplies initiative is one of the flagship projects in the Russian-Indian military and military-technical cooperation, which historically constitutes the main pillar of the special and privileged strategic partnership between our two

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

friendly countries.

- Currently Russia and India are deeply involved in joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts as well as technologies sharing, improving after-sales service system. We have developed an advanced legal base for this purpose.
- In October 2018, India signed a \$5.43-billion deal with Russia for five S-400 Triumf regiments despite objections from the U.S. and the threat of sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).
- China was the first foreign buyer of S400 to make a government-to-government deal with Russia in 2014, while Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Belarus have all acquired the system since.

Dragonfruit renamed as 'Kamalam'



The Gujarat government has decided to rename the dragon fruit as 'kamalam', and comments have flooded the Internet and social media platforms. According to Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, the fruit's outer shape resembles a lotus, which is also the election symbol of the BJP.

“We have applied for a patent of the dragon fruit to be called '**kamalam**', Mr. Rupani said at the launch of the Chief Minister **Horticulture Development Mission**, a scheme to promote horticulture in unproductive land parcels.

Farmers in **Kutch**, **Navsari** and other parts were growing the fruit and it should, therefore, have a local name too. “Though it is known as dragon fruit, it does not sound appropriate. The word ‘kamalam’ is a Sanskrit word and the shape of the fruit does resemble the lotus flower,” he said, adding that the renaming had nothing political about it.

What is a Dragonfruit?

Dragon fruit is the fruit of a species of wild cactus indigenous to South and Central America, where it is called pitaya or pitahaya. The fruit's flesh is usually white or red — although there is a less common yellow pitaya too — and is studded with tiny seeds rather like the kiwifruit.

The world's largest producer and exporter of dragon fruit is Vietnam, where the plant was brought by the French in the 19th century. The Vietnamese call it thanh long, which translates to “dragon's eyes”, believed to be the origin of its common English name.

Dragon fruit is also cultivated in — apart from its native Latin America — Thailand, Taiwan, China, Australia, Israel, and Sri Lanka. It was brought to India in the 1990s, and is grown in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It grows in all kinds of soil, and does not require much water.

Kamalam is also the name of the BJP headquarters in Koba in Gandhinagar, and the kamal — lotus — is the BJP's election symbol. Rupani, however, said no politics was involved in the renaming. “Gujarat government has decided that dragon fruit is not a suitable word. Across the world it is known as dragon fruit and one thinks of China. So we have given the name Kamalam. It is a fruit like the lotus,” he said.

Dr. V Shanta passed away



- A pioneer in cancer care in the country, and the chairperson of the Adyar Cancer Institute, V. Shanta breathed her last in Chennai early on Tuesday morning. She was admitted to Apollo Hospitals after she complained of chest pain on Monday night. She was 93.
- A crusader for cancer research and making cancer care affordable for all, Dr. Shanta and her mentor S. Krishnamurthi built the Cancer Institute from a cottage hospital into a 500-plus bedded institution, offering state-of-the-art care to people across the income spectrum. Only 40% are paying beds and the remaining are general beds where patients are boarded and lodged free of cost.
- Dr. Shanta was the recipient of several honours and awards through her life, recognising her devotion to oncology care and research. The Padma Vibhushan and Ramon Magasaysay awards were among them. Dr. Shanta encouraged research into cancer care, even as she stressed building awareness in the community, to prevent cancer.
- She was laid to rest with State-accorded police honours in the evening, with thousands participating in the funeral procession.

CoWIN software enhanced for vaccine rollout

- An enhancement in Co-WIN software has been introduced to cater to the creation of more session sites, more sessions per site, and a change in site location, which is now allowed.
- “The enhanced version also allows planning and scheduling the sessions for entire week and works for the enhanced safety of the beneficiaries, tagging of contraindications. These new features are being enabled in vaccinator module,.
- Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, unveiled an IEC (information, education, communication) campaign with a series of posters to address the issue of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, stating that India is one of the few countries to halt the march of COVID-19 and simultaneously develop a vaccine for COVID-19.
- The cumulative number of healthcare workers vaccinated against COVID-19 has touched 9,99,065 (till 6 p.m. on Thursday) through a total of 18,159 sessions, according to a provisional report.
- A total of 4,041 sessions were held till 6 p.m. on Thursday, and 1,92,581 beneficiaries were vaccinated on the sixth day of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination, said the Health Ministry on Thursday, adding that there are no cases of serious/severe AEFI (adverse event following immunisation) attributable to vaccination till date.

First-ever Khelo India Zaskar Winter Sports Festival begins in Ladakh

Union Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju inaugurated the first-ever **Khelo India Zaskar Winter Sports Festival** on January 21, 2021 at Padum in Zaskar of Kargil district.

The 13-day festival has been organised by the Ladakh UT Administration to promote Zaskar as a winter tourists destination. The Union Sports Minister said that Zaskar used to remain cut off from the rest of the world for 5-6 months due to

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

heavy snow but no more now.

The Union Sports Ministry plans to provide sports facilities in all regions of Ladakh. It aims to promote Ladakh as a centre for Ice Hockey and soon open an center for archery and polo in two areas in the region.

UPSC Attempts for Civil Services?

UPSC next attempt

The Union government’s law officer orally informed the Supreme Court on Friday that the Centre was “not agreeable” to giving Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) aspirants, whose preparations for the October 4 prelims were severely restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a second crack at the exams for the elite civil services.

UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (UPSC)



Article 315 to 323 of the Indian constitution provides for a permanent central recruiting agency to central government services called the UPSC. The commission shall consist of a **chairman** and **10 other members** appointed by the President of India, their number, service and terms of conditions are to be determined by President of India.

The members of UPSC are provided with security of tenure and can be removed only as per conditions provided in the Constitution.

Functions of UPSC

- **Recruitment to Central Services:** UPSC recruits young men and women by conducting All India examinations and selecting meritorious students to services of Union
- **Disciplinary matters:** Monitor disciplinary matter to those serving the states or Union in a civil capacity, petitions or memorials relating to such matter

- **Advice to the president:** UPSC can advise the president on any matter relating to recruitment to civil services or posts
- **Assist States:** In case of a request from 2 or more states, UPSC shall perform the duty of assisting them in developing joint recruitment from service

Powers of UPSC

- Matters related with the appointment of the civil services of the government
- Evaluation of standard and efficiencies of the candidate for appointment, promotion or transfer in all civil posts
- Affairs associated with demand and benefits of employees
- Punishing employees due to violation of discipline

India-France air exercise: Desert Knight 2021

- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Bipin Rawat flew on a French Air Force mid-air refueller aircraft at the India-France air exercise **Desert Knight 2021** which concluded on Saturday, the IAF said.
- The IAF is looking at leasing six mid-air refuelling tankers for which Airbus A330 is the lead contender.
- A first-of-its-kind bilateral exercise, Rafale aircraft from both sides along with Su-30 MKI and Mirage 2000 aircraft of the IAF undertook complex missions, the IAF statement said.
- “Both Air Forces exercised in realistic settings to enhance operational capabilities. The exercise provided an opportunity to share best practices and evolve operational concepts; particularly for effective combat employment of the Rafale fleet,” it said.

Prison Tourism Project of Maharashtra

- The State government will open to visitors jails which once held freedom fighters
- The Maharashtra government is set to launch “jail tourism” under which

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

historically significant jails in Maharashtra, which are still being used as penal centres, will be opened to visitors to see the barracks where freedom fighters were imprisoned by the British.

- “**Pune’s Yerawada Jail** will be opened for first-of-its-kind jail tourism from January 26,” said Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.
- Mr. Deshmukh said freedom fighters including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Motilal Nehru, Lokmanya Tilak and Subhas Chandra Bose were imprisoned by the British in different jails in Maharashtra during the freedom struggle.
- “Thane, Nasik, Dhule, Pune, Ratnagiri are a few places in Maharashtra where these great freedom fighters were imprisoned by British. All these jails have a significant historical value. The barracks where these great personalities were kept are preserved as memorials which remind us the dedication of these personalities in winning freedom,” the Minister said.
- “The famous Poona Pact between Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi took place beneath a mango tree at Yerawada jail. In 1899, the Chapekar brothers were given death sentence in this jail. Schools, colleges, educational institutions will be given the chance to see these historic places under the jail tourism project,” he said, adding that no outsiders have been allowed on these premises so far.
- Terrorists Jinda and Sukha, who murdered General Vaidya, and Mumbai attack convict Ajmal Kasab were all hanged in the same jail.
- Mr. Deshmukh said tourists will be provided with a guide and the number of visitors will be restricted to 50 a day. Those who want to visit should apply online to the Yerawada Jail Superintendent at yerwadacpmh@gov.in or spycppune@gmail.com on a institution’s letter head including names of visitors, stating the purpose of the visit.



Romulus’ Krait: New Species of Snake



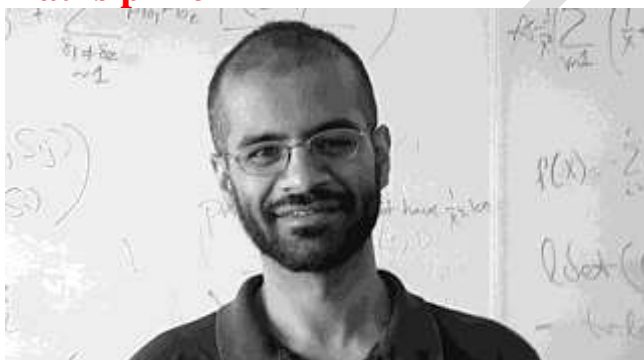
- A study of snakes in southern and western India has identified a new species of snake. Named the **Romulus’ krait** (*Bungarus romulusi*) **after the ‘snake man of India’, Romulus Whittaker**, the species has so far remained undetected because of its similarity in appearance to the common krait (*B. caeruleus*) and only a careful genetic analysis revealed that the two were distinct species.
- The study also showed that some kraits in Maharashtra that were misidentified as the Wall’s Sind krait were actually the same as the Sind krait which is also found in parts of Pakistan and Rajasthan and has been identified as the snake with the most potent venom in India.
- “The Romulus’ krait and common krait are so hard to distinguish that even **herpetologists** with years of

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

experience couldn't tell that it could be a distinct species through casual observation. Only after the genetic examination, we were surprised to discover a new species,” he adds.

- The venom of the Sind krait was 12–13 times as potent as that of the common krait, whereas the venom of the Romulus' krait was about six times as potent.
- When the Indian antivenoms were tested for their ability to neutralise the venoms of these cryptic kraits, they were found to be ineffective.
- This is because these antivenoms are made to protect against the bites of the ‘big four’ Indian snakes – the spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*) and saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*).

Nikhil Srivastava is joint winner of maths prize



- Indian mathematician Nikhil Srivastava, has been named winner of the prestigious **2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize** along with two others for solving long-standing questions on the Kadison–Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs.
- Srivastava from the University of California, Berkeley, Adam Marcus, from the Ecole polytechnique federale de Lausanne (EPFL) and Daniel Alan Spielman from Yale University will receive the 2021 Michael and Sheila Held Prize, the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S. said in the statement.
- The prize consists of a medal and

\$100,000. Srivastava, Marcus and Spielman solved long-standing questions on the Kadison–Singer problem and on Ramanujan graphs, and in the process uncovered a deep new connection between linear algebra, geometry of polynomials and graph theory it said.

- The decades-old Kadison–Singer problem asks whether unique information can be gleaned from a system in which only some features can be observed or measured, according to the Yale news.

Green Tax

- The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has approved a proposal to levy a ‘green tax’ on old vehicles.
- Personal vehicles will be charged a tax at the time of renewal of Registration Certification **after 15 years**.
- The policy will come into effect from April 1, 2022.

Provisions

- The levy may differ depending on fuel (petrol/diesel) and type of vehicle.
- The proposal will now go to the States for consultation before it is formally notified.
- It includes 10-25% of road tax on transport vehicles older than eight years at the time of renewal of fitness certificate.
- The proposal on green tax also includes a steeper penalty of up to 50% of road tax for older vehicles registered in some of the highly polluted cities in the country.
- Revenue collected from this tax will be kept in a separate account and will be used for tackling pollution, and for States to set up state-of-art facilities for emission monitoring.

Exemptions to Green Tax

- Vehicles like strong hybrids, electric vehicles and alternate fuels like CNG, ethanol, LPG etc to be exempted;
- Vehicles used in farming, such as tractor, harvester, tiller etc to be exempted;

Positives of Green Tax

- It will dissuade people from using vehicles which damage the environment
- It will motivate people to switch to newer, less polluting vehicles

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

- Green tax will reduce the pollution level, and make the polluter pay for pollution.

Other proposals

- The Ministry also approved a watered-down policy of deregistration and scrapping of vehicles, bringing only those vehicles owned by government departments and PSUs and are older than 15 years under its ambit.
- In 2016, the Centre had floated a draft **Voluntary Vehicle Fleet Modernization Programme** that aimed to take 28 million decade-old vehicles off the road.

Russia gave nod to New START

- New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. It was signed in 2010 at Prague, and, after ratification entered into force in 2011, it is expected to last at least until 2021.
- New START replaced the Treaty of Moscow (SORT), which was to expire in December 2012. It follows the START I treaty, which expired in December 2009; the proposed START II treaty, which never entered into force; and the START III treaty, for which negotiations were never concluded. The treaty calls for halving the number of strategic nuclear missile launchers.
- A new inspection and verification regime will be established, replacing the SORT mechanism. It does not limit the number of operationally inactive nuclear warheads stockpiled by Russia and the United States, a number in the high thousands.
- The deadlock over the New START and the collapse of the 1987 Soviet–U.S. Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty) in 2019 suggest that the era of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S. might be coming to an end.

Funding for NGOs

Novavax

- American company Novavax, whose COVID-19 vaccine is set to be made in large numbers by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), has reported that its vaccine has proved to have 89% efficacy in preventing the infection in some trial volunteers in the United Kingdom.
- However, the efficacy dropped to 60% when it was tested in volunteers in South Africa, a likely consequence of a mutant coronavirus variant that is now deep-rooted there.
- Since December, scientists have raised concerns over mutated variants, particularly those isolated in the U.K., South Africa and Brazil that harbour changes, allowing the virus to cheat the immune system.
- These variants are being linked to renewed waves of the virus, but haven't been shown to be more lethal. Researchers associated with the trial said 60% efficacy was good news as nearly 90% of those who participated were affected by the South African variant.

What caused the tilt to Saturn's rotation axis?

- The tilt of the rotation axis of the gas giant Saturn may in fact be caused by its moons, scientists from CNRS, Sorbonne University and the University of Pisa have reported (Nature Astronomy).
- The current tilt of Saturn's rotation axis is caused by the migration of its satellites, and especially by that of its largest moon, Titan.
- Recent observations have shown that Titan and the other moons are gradually moving away from Saturn much faster than astronomers had previously estimated.
- By incorporating this into their calculations, the researchers concluded that this process affects the inclination of Saturn's rotation axis: as its satellites move

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” January - 2021

further away, the planet tilts more and more.

- In fact, what we see today is merely a transitional stage in this shift. Over the next few billion years, the inclination of Saturn’s axis could more than double.
- The decisive event that tilted Saturn is thought to have occurred relatively recently. For over three billion years after its formation, Saturn’s rotation axis remained only slightly tilted.
- It was only roughly a billion years ago that the gradual motion of its satellites triggered a resonance phenomenon that continues today: Saturn's axis interacted with the path of the planet Neptune and gradually tilted until it reached the inclination of 27 degrees observed today, says a release from CNRS.

China’s nuclear power plant

China National Nuclear Corporation said its first nuclear power unit that uses **Hualong One, a third-generation reactor**, started commercial operation.

The reactor, located in **Fuqing city** in China’s southeastern Fujian province, was designed to have a 60-year lifespan, with its core equipment domestically produced. Each unit of the Hualong No. 1 has a capacity of 1.161 million kilowatts and can meet the annual domestic electricity demand of 1 million people in moderately developed countries, according to CNNC.

“With Hualong One online, China is now at the forefront of third-generation nuclear technology in the world, alongside countries like the U.S., France and Russia,” said CNNC President Yu Jianfeng.

A second Hualong One unit is due to be completed later this year.