

UPSC Monthly Current Affairs **March 2021**

History- Art & Culture & Geography

Pompeii chariot

(Topic- GS Paper I–History, Source-Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Archaeologists working at Pompeii have announced the discovery of a large ceremonial chariot, found with four wheels, its iron components, bronze and tin decorations, mineralised wood remains, and imprints of organic materials.
- Near the site where this chariot was discovered, the remains of three horses were found in 2018.



About Pompeii

- It was a Roman town in Southern Italy's Campania region situated along the Bay of Naples.
- The town was completely buried by volcanic ash after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, over 2,000 years ago.
- Pompeii was built on a spur formed by a prehistoric lava flow to the north of the mouth of the Sarnus (modern Sarno) River.

- Herculaneum, Stabiae, Torre Annunziata, and other communities were destroyed along with Pompeii.
- Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Torre Annunziata were collectively designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997.

Assam's Sattras

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, in a poll-bound Assam one place figures prominently in the campaign trails of political parties i.e. the Bartadrava Than/Sattra (monastery) in Nagaon.

About Sattras



- Sattras are monastic institutions created as part of the 16th century Neo-Vaishnavite reformist movement started by Vaishnavite saint-reformer Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1596).
- The Sattras/Thana was established as centres of religious, social and cultural reforms in the 16th century.
- Sattras are spread across the state, promulgating Sankaradeva's unique "worship through art" approach with music (borgeet), dance (xattriya) and theatre (bhauna).

- Each Sattra has a naamghar (worship hall) as its nucleus and is headed by an influential “Sattradhikar”.

What is Sankardeva’s philosophy?

- Sankardeva propagated a form of Bhakti called eka-sharana-naam-dhrama.
- He espoused a society based on equality and fraternity, free from caste differences, orthodox Brahmanical rituals and sacrifices.
- His teaching focused on prayer and chanting (naam) instead of idol worship.
- His dharma was based on the four components of deva (god), naam (prayers), bhakats (devotees), and guru (teacher).
- There are about 900 Sattras across Assam, but the main centres are Bordowa (Nagaon), Majuli and Barpeta.
- These institutions are of paramount importance and lie at the heart of Assamese culture

Institute of National Importance

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the government is actively considering giving the Institute of National Importance tag to the National School of Drama.

About National School of Drama



- It is foremost theatre training institutions in the world which was established in 1959.
- It is the only one of its kind in India and is an autonomous organization, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture.
- NSD was incepted under the aegis of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and became an independent entity in 1975.
- National School of Drama had been declared as deemed university by University Grant Commission in 2005.
- **It is one of the major organisations involved in preservation and propagation of the 13 Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements from India that have been inscribed till date on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.**
- In 2019, NSD was ranked 14th among the best film schools in the world by CEOWORLD Magazine of the USA.

About Institutes of National Importance

- It is a status that may be conferred on a premier public higher education institution in India by an act of Parliament of India, an institution which "serves as a pivotal player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state".
- These institutions receive special recognition and funding from the Government of India.

Note :

- Paresh Rawal is currently the Chairman of **National School of Drama**.

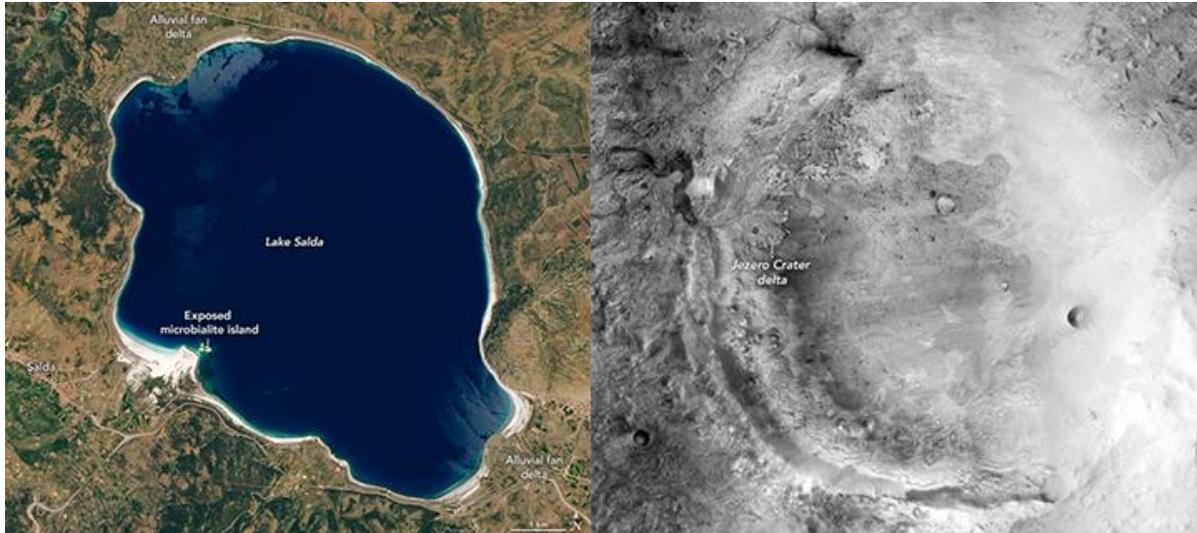
Salda lake

(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the NASA's rover Perseverance explores the surface of Mars, scientists hunting for signs of ancient life on the distant planet are using data gathered on a mission much closer to home at a Salda lake in southwest Turkey.

About Lake Salda



- It is a mid-size crater lake in southwestern Turkey, within the boundaries of Yeşilova district of Burdur Province.
- The lake is a popular excursion spot for people across the region or from beyond, the more so due to the hydromagnesite mineral found in its coastal waters, which is believed to offer remedies for certain dermatological diseases.

Significance of the lake

- NASA says the minerals and rock deposits at Salda are the nearest match on earth to those around the **Jezero Crater**.
- **Jezero Crater** is the place on Mars where the spacecraft landed and which is believed to have once been flooded with water.
- It will help the scientists as they search for fossilised traces of microbial life preserved in sediment thought to have been deposited around the delta and the long-vanished lake it once fed.
- Scientists believe that the sediments around the lake eroded from large mounds that are formed with the help of microbes and are known as microbialites.

About Microbialite

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Underwater microbialites on the eastern edge of Lake Salda. Photo credit: Bradley Garczynski

- Microbialite is a rock or benthic sedimentary deposit made of carbonate mud (particle diameter $< 5 \mu\text{m}$) that is formed with the mediation of microbes.
- The constituent carbonate mud is a type of automicrite, or authigenic carbonate mud, and therefore it precipitates in situ instead of being transported and deposited.
- Microbialite can be seen as a type of boundstone where reef builders are microbes, and precipitation of carbonate is biotically induced instead of forming tests, shells or skeletons.
- Microbialites were very important to the formation of Precambrian and Phanerozoic limestones in many different environments, marine and not.

Mankidia tribes

(Topic- GS Paper I– Art and Culture, Source- Down to Earth)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Mankidia tribe which earn by collecting and selling **siali** fibre from Similipal forests has been badly impacted their livelihood due to fire.
- Among the communities affected are two of the **13 particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in Odisha — Mankidias and Khadias** — that have lost their livelihoods to the inferno.

About Mankidia

- The Mankidia (also known as Mankidi, Mankirdia) are a nomadic tribal group found mainly in many districts of Odisha, India.
- According to the 2011 census, the population of Mankidia was 2,222.
- They are classified as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government.

About Kharia people

- The Kharia are an Austroasiatic tribal ethnic group from east-central India.
- They originally spoke the Kharia language, which belong to Austroasiatic languages.
- They are sub-divided into three groups known as the Hill Kharia, Delki Kharia and the Dudh Kharia. Amongst them, the Dudh Kharia is the most educated community.

Related Information

About Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- They are the more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
- Due to this factor, more developed and assertive tribal groups take a major chunk of the tribal development funds, because of which PVTGs need more funds directed for their development.
- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)** as a separate category, which is less developed among the tribal groups.
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the **Primitive Tribal Groups** as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**.

The criteria for identifying Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups are: -

1. Pre-agricultural level of technology
2. Low level of literacy
3. Economic backwardness
4. A declining or stagnant population

Schemes for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- Recently Ministry of Tribal Affairs implements the Scheme of “**Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**” exclusively for them.
- Under the scheme, Conservation-cum-Development (CCD)/Annual Plans are to be prepared by each State/UT for their PVTGs based on their need assessment, which are then appraised and approved by the Project Appraisal Committee of the Ministry.

Note:

- Among the 75 listed PVTG’s the **highest number are found in Odisha**

Sarasvati river

(Topic- GS Paper I–History, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Centre has reconstituted an advisory committee to chalk out a plan for studying the mythical Sarasvati River for the next two years, after the earlier panel’s term ended in 2019.

About the committee

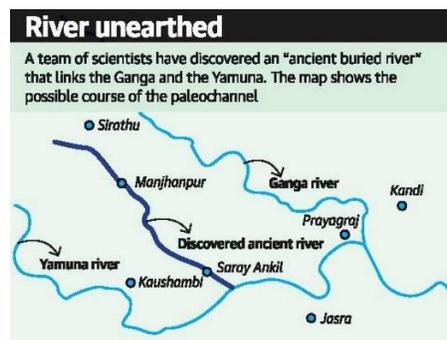
- The Archaeological Survey of India on **March 10** issued a **notification for “reconstitution of the Advisory Committee for the Multidisciplinary Study of the River Sarasvati”**.
- The ASI had first set up the committee on December 28, 2017 for a period of two years.

Members

Official members

- The committee would continue to be chaired by the Culture Minister and include officials from the Culture, Tourism, Water Resources, Environment and Forest, Housing and Urban Affairs Ministries; representatives of the Indian Space Research Organisation; officials from the governments of Gujarat, Haryana and Rajasthan; and an ASI official

About Sarasvati river



- The Sarasvati River is one of the main Rigvedic rivers mentioned in the scripture Rig Veda and later Vedic and post-Vedic texts.
- The ‘Sapta Sindhu’ in Rig Veda refers to the rivers **Saraswati**, **Satadru (Sutlej)**, **Vipasa** (Beas), **Asikni** (Chenab), **Purushni** (Ravi), **Vitasta** (Jhelum) and **Sindhu** (Indus).
- Among these, the Saraswati and the Sindhu were major rivers that flowed from the mountains right up to the sea.

Origin of river

- The river, which had originated from Kapal tirth in the Himalayas in the west of Kailash, was flowing southward to Mansarovar and then taking a turn towards west.

Tributaries

- The Sarasvati is believed to have had three tributaries, Shatadru (Sutlej) originating from Mount Kailas, Drishadvati from Siwalik Hills and the old Yamuna.
- They flowed together along a channel, presently known as the Ghaggar River, which is known as Hakra River in Rajasthan and Nara in Sindh.
- Some experts consider these two rivers as a single river whereas others consider the upper course of the Sarasvati as Ghaggar and the lower course as the Hakra River, while some others call the Sarasvati of the weak and declining stage as the Ghaggar.

Arunachal gets first formal indigenous knowledge system school

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister has recently inaugurated the state's first formal indigenous language and knowledge system school in East Kameng district.

About indigenous knowledge system school

- It is also called 'Nyubu Nyvgam Yerko'.
- The Nyubu Nyvgam Yerko is a formal institution for indigenous language and knowledge system. It literally means 'nyubu' (priest), 'nyvgam' (person having wisdom and knowledge), and 'yerko' (learning institution).
- The school will help in promoting and preserving indigenous traditions, culture and language.

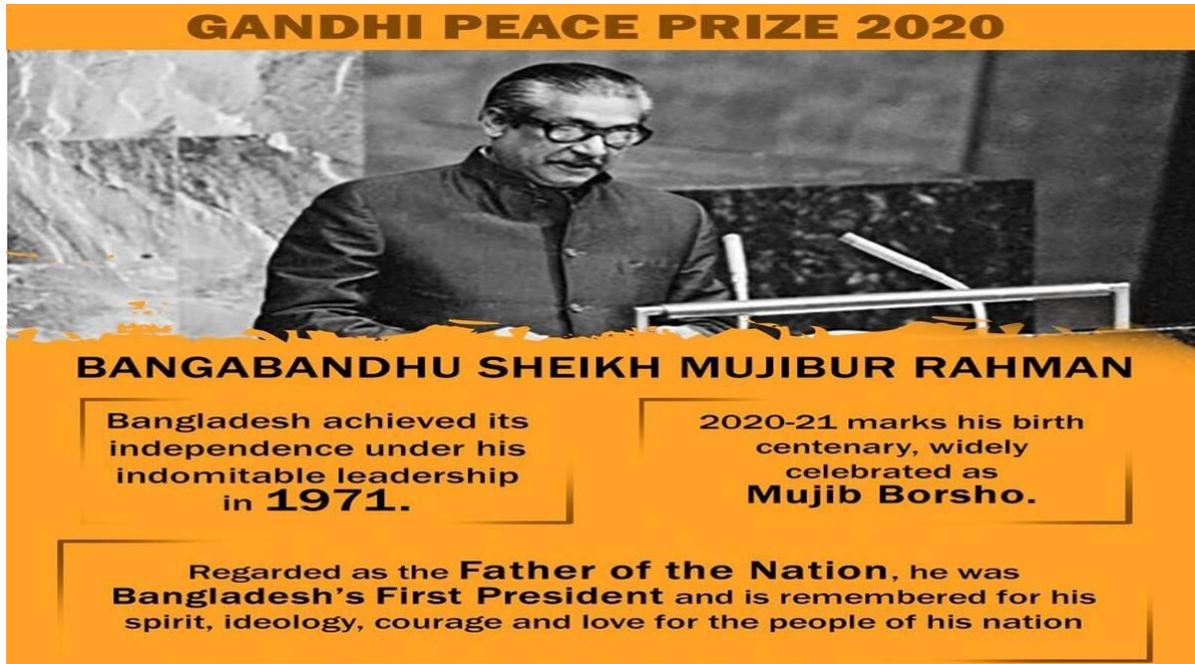
Gandhi Peace Prize for Year 2020

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2020 is being conferred on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

- Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman was awarded the prestigious prize for the year 2019 in recognition of his vision to strengthen relations with India, and his efforts to promote peace and non-violence in the Gulf region



GANDHI PEACE PRIZE 2020

BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh achieved its independence under his indomitable leadership in **1971**.

2020-21 marks his birth centenary, widely celebrated as **Mujib Borsho**.

Regarded as the **Father of the Nation**, he was **Bangladesh's First President** and is remembered for his spirit, ideology, courage and love for the people of his nation

About Gandhi Peace Prize

- It is an annual award instituted by Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi for those involved in social, economic and political transformation through non-violence.

Award

- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.

Eligibility

- The prize can be given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations.
- It can be divided between two persons/institutions who are considered by the Jury to be equally deserving of recognition in a given year.
- It is open to all persons regardless of nationality, creed, race or sex.
- In January 2019, Gandhi Peace Prize was awarded for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Note:

- Recent awardees of the Gandhi Peace Prize include include Vivekananda Kendra, India (2015); Akshaya Patra Foundation, India and Sulabh International (jointly, for 2016); Ekal Abhiyan Trust, India (2017) and Yohei Sasakawa, Japan (2018)

Ken-Betwa linking Project

(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a memorandum of agreement was signed between Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP).

Background

- In the 1970s, the idea of transferring surplus water from a river to water-deficit area was mooted by the then Union Irrigation Minister (earlier the Jal Shakti Ministry was known as Ministry of Irrigation) Dr K L Rao.

About Ken Betwa Link Project



- The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan** for interlinking of rivers.
- Under this project, water from the Ken River will be transferred to the Betwa River.
- Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.

About National Perspective Plan (NNP)

- It comprised two components:

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- a. Himalayan Rivers Development
 - b. Peninsular Rivers Development
- Based on the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) identified 30 river links—16 under **Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component**.
 - Ken Betwa Link Project is one of the 16 river linking projects under the peninsular component.

Clearances required for a river-linking project

- Generally, 4-5 types of clearances are required for the interlinking of river projects.

These are:

- a. Techno-economic (given by the Central Water Commission)
- b. Forest Clearance and Environmental clearance (Ministry of Environment & Forests)
- c. Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Plan of Tribal Population (Ministry of Tribal Affairs)
- d. Wildlife clearance (Central Empowered Committee).

Which region will get the benefits of the KBLP?

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand, especially in the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh.
- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

Will the project affect the Panna tiger reserve?

- According to a written reply given by Minister of State for Jal Shakti, out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project, 4,206 ha of area lies within the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve.

Previous examples of river-linking in India

Periyar Project

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- Under the Periyar Project, transfer of water from Periyar basin to Vaigai basin was envisaged.
- It was commissioned in 1895.

Other projects

- Parambikulam Aliyar, Kurnool Cudappah Canal, Telugu Ganga Project, and Ravi-Beas-Sutlej were undertaken.

Chuktia Bhunjia

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Chuktia Bhunjia, a particularly vulnerable tribal group protesting the lack of basic amenities has threatened to relinquish its nativity and become part of Chhattisgarh.

About Chuktia Bhunjia



- The Bhunjias are a primitive tribe of India.
- They mainly reside in Sunabeda plateau in Odisha and Chhattisgarh.
- They are mostly found in Nuapada district in Odisha.

Related Information

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Note:

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67th National Film Awards

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The 67th National Film Awards were announced recently with the honours for films from the year of 2019.

- The event is organised by the Directorate of Film Festivals, which comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Here is the complete list of all the winners:

Feature Film Awards

- Best Feature Film: Marakkar: Lion of the Arabian Sea (Malayalam)
- Best Actor (shared): Manoj Bajpayee for Bhonsle (Hindi), and Dhanush for Asuran (Tamil)
- Best Actress: Kangana Ranaut for Panga (Hindi) and Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi (Hindi)
- Best Supporting Actress: Pallavi Joshi for The Tashkent Files (Hindi)
- Best Child Artist: Naga Vishal for KD (Tamil)
- Best Choreography: Maharishi (Telugu), Raju Sundaram

Bhaona in Assam

(Topic- GS Paper I– Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Congress in Assam has tweaked Bhaona (a dramatic form of entertainment to convey spiritualism in the Vaishnav mould) as a political statement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens.

About Bhaona



- It is a traditional form of entertainment, with religious messages, prevalent in Assam, India.
- It is a creation of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva, written in the early sixteenth century.
- It is a dramatic form of entertainment to convey spiritualism in the Vaishnav mould.
- The plays of bhaona are popularly known as Ankiya Nats and their staging is known as bhaona.
- It is generally staged at **xatras and namghars** in Assam.
- There are some special characteristics of Bhaona like the plays, dialogues, costumes, ornaments, entry and foot-steps of the characters.
- **These characteristics help to differentiate Bhaona from other plays.**

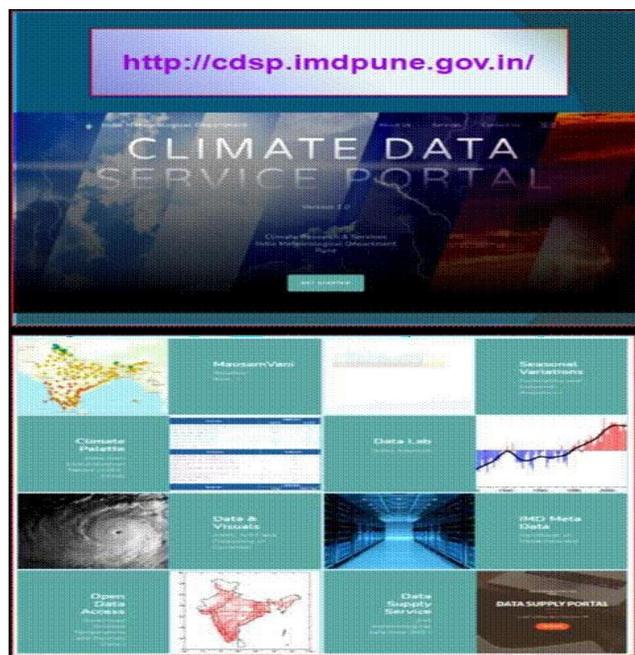
Climate data service portal

(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- India Meteorological Department (IMD) has recently launched the Climate Data Service Portal on the occasion of World Meteorological Day.

About Climate data service Portal



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- Climate Data Service Portal serves as an integrated platform that aims to provide weather and climate services to the users.

The major components of the portal are:

- Real-Time monitoring of weather observations recorded by IMD Observatories.
- Online access to meteorological data through Data Supply Portal.
- Free download facility for Gridded Temperature and Rainfall Data of India.
- Climatological Tables, Extremes and Normal.
- Information on Monsoon Rainfall and Cyclone frequencies among others.

About World Meteorological Day

- World Meteorological Day is observed on March 23rd every year.
- It is observed to mark the establishment of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).
- The theme for World Meteorological Day 2021: **“Oceans, Our Climate and Weather”**.

About World Meteorological Organization (WMO):

- It is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- It is responsible for promoting international cooperation in atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology, and geophysics.

Headquarters

- It's headquarter at Geneva, Switzerland.

History of WMO

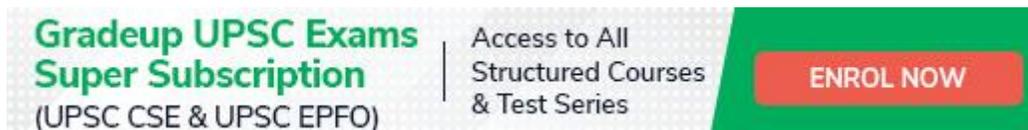
- It has originated from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO).
- The idea of IMO comes from the Vienna International Meteorological Congress, 1873.
- WMO was then established by the ratification of the WMO convention in 1950.
- After that, the organization became a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) in 1951.

Mullaperiyar dam

(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently has recently warned the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary that he shall be “personally responsible” and “appropriate action” will be taken on failure to



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give information on the **rule curve for Mullaperiyar dam to the Supreme Court-appointed Supervisory Committee.**

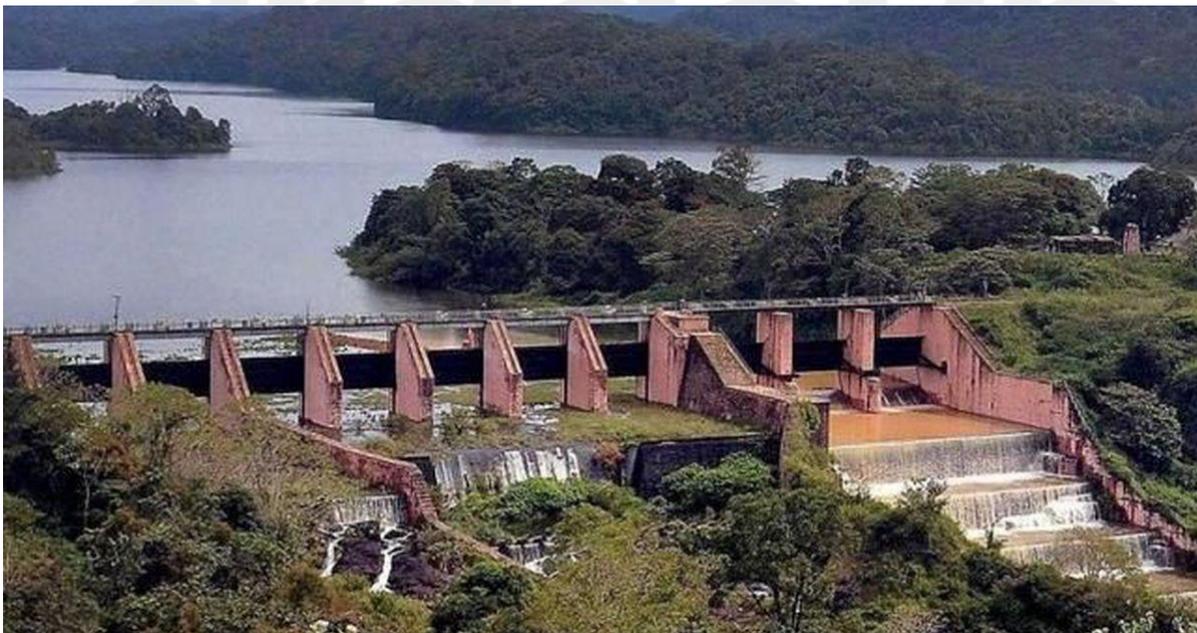
More in the news

- The Supervisory Committee has to issue directions or take steps to address the three core safety issues
 - a. the monitoring and performance of the instrumentation of the dam
 - b. finalising the rule curve
 - c. fixing the gate operating schedule

About rule curve

- The rule curve divides the storage volume of a reservoir in zones where different strategies for demand supply will be applied.
- The limits of each zone may vary seasonally or remain constant during the whole year.
- Such tool may be used for flood control or water conservation during long dry spells.

About the Mullaperiyar Dam



- The Mullaperiyar dam is located on the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers in Kerala's Idukki district.
- It is operated and maintained by the Tamil Nadu for meeting the drinking water and irrigation requirements of five of its southern districts.

- According to a 999-year lease agreement made during the British rule the operational rights were handed over to Tamil Nadu.
- The dam intends to divert the waters of the **west-flowing river Periyar** eastward to the arid rain shadow regions of the Tamil Nadu.

About Periyar River

- The Periyar River is the longest river in the state of Kerala which is perennial in nature.
- It is also known as ‘Lifeline of Kerala’ as it is one of the few perennial rivers in the state.

Origin

- The river originates from Sivagiri hills of Western Ghats and flows through the Periyar National Park.

Tributaries

Its major tributaries are:

- Muthirapuzha River
- Mullayar River
- Cheruthoni River
- Perinjankutti River
- Edamala River

Minor tributaries are: Muthayar, Perunthuraiar, Chinnar, Cheruthony, and Kattappanayar

Suez Canal

(Topic- GS Paper I–Geography, Source- Indian Express)

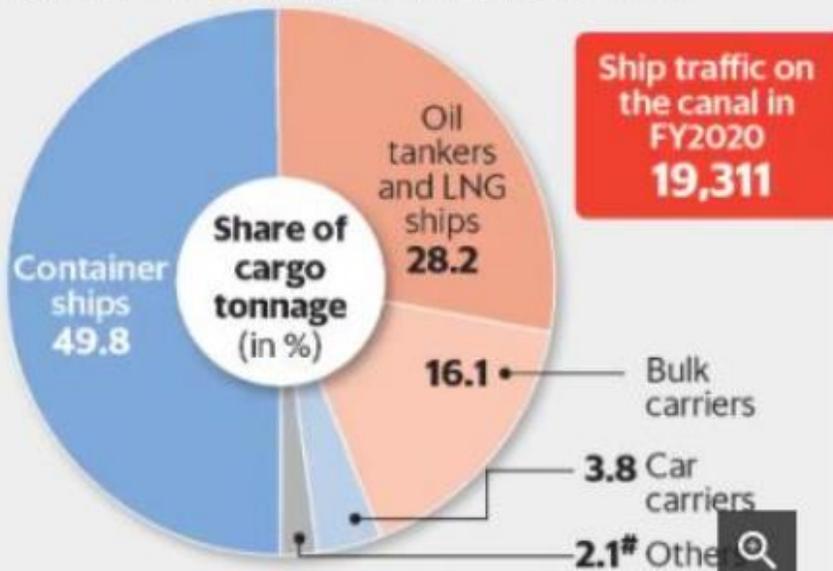
Why in the news?

- Recently, the Suez Canal has been blocked after a large cargo ship ran aground and got stuck sideways across the canal, blocking the path of other ships waiting to cross through on both sides.

Key maritime trade route

According to reports, nearly 50 ships pass through Suez Canal every day, and it accounts for 12% of world trade. The Egyptian government data shows that container ships accounted for nearly 50% of the total cargo tonnage passed through the canal in February.

Type of vessels that pass through Suez Canal*



Ship traffic on the canal in FY2020
19,311

*in February

#Others include Passenger ships 0.1%

Source: Suez Canal Authority

Background of the Suez Canal's

- It is a 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt's then leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.
- In 2015, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal, aiming to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.

About Suez Canal



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- The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez.
- It divides Africa and Asia.
- The canal offers watercraft a more direct route between the North Atlantic and northern Indian oceans via the Mediterranean and Red seas, thus avoiding the South Atlantic and southern Indian oceans and reducing the journey distance from the Arabian Sea to London.
- It extends from the northern terminus of Port Said to the southern terminus of Port Tewfik at the city of Suez.

Shigmo festivals

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Goa has recently raised questions over the scale of celebrations for the annual Shigmo festival.

About Shigmo or Shigmotsav



- Shigmo is the celebration of a ‘rich, golden harvest of paddy’ by the tribal communities of Goa.

- Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

What are the various activities that take place during Shigmo celebrations?

- The festival begins with ‘Naman’ that is the invocation of the local folk deities on the village ‘maand’ or the village stage to the beats of percussion instruments like the Ghumat, Dhol, Mhadle and Tashe by the male folk, says Sakhardande.
- This is called the ‘romta mell’ that moves from one village to another.
- The celebration is replete with traditional, colourful costumes, mythological installations, painted faces and costumes of various hues.

Polity & Governance and International Relations

MapmyIndia launches features to help locate corona vaccination centres

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

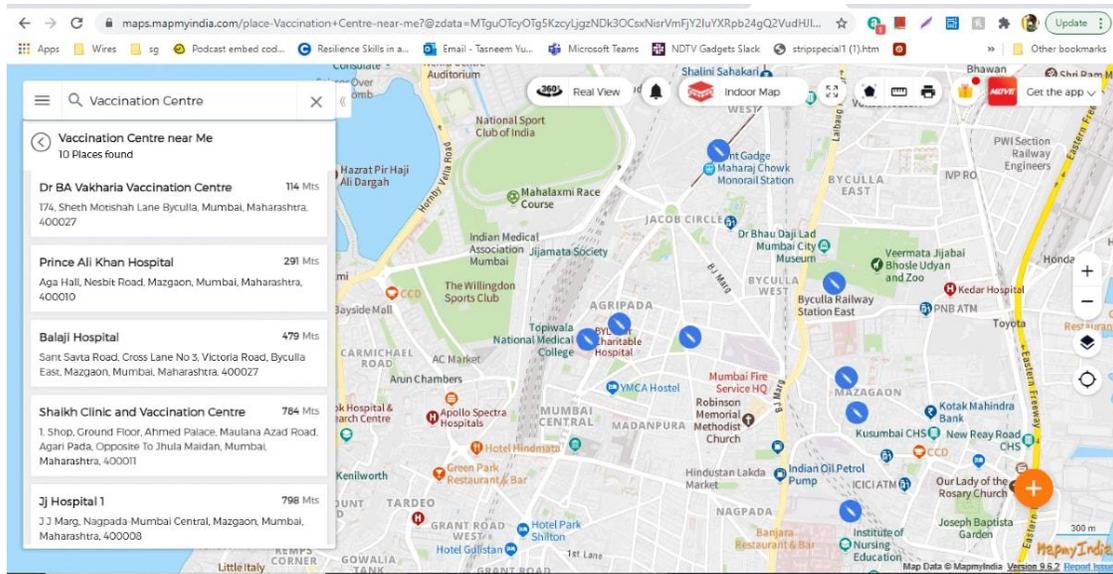
- MapmyIndia, digital mapping and location-based deep-tech product and platform company has recently launched targeted maps and nearby search features as part of its mobile application and official website, to help Indians find coronavirus vaccination centres across the country.
- The government of India has also integrated these features into cowin.gov.in, their official covid-19 vaccination registration portal to guide the people and connect them to their nearby vaccination centres.

About the MapmyIndia App

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- This app was the winner of **AatmaNirbhar App Challenge** organized by the **government of India**.
- MapmyIndia’s app is a privacy-centric, fully indigenous, and a more localised product that claims to be an alternative to foreign map apps that come default in operating systems.
- MapmyIndia has built various location-based solutions using technologies like geo-spatial analytics, big data, artificial intelligence (AI)/machine learning (ML), computer vision, cloud computing, edge computing, and internet of things (IoT).

Note:

- COVID-19 vaccination for people aged 60 and above and those in the 45-59 age bracket with comorbidities started in Delhi.

Reviving the Iran deal: On Biden attempt to revive JCPOA

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relations, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, U.S. President Joe Biden’s attempts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- The Biden administration says it would return to the deal if Iran starts complying with its terms.

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Background

- Tehran, on the other side, asks the U.S., which unilaterally quit the deal under the Donald Trump administration in May 2018, to return to the agreement first and lift sanctions on Iran.

About the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

- The Iran nuclear deal (or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed between Iran and the P5, plus Germany and the EU in 2015.
- The P5 is the 5 permanent members of **the UNSC (US, China, France, Russia, and UK)**.
- The deal aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme.

Under the deal

- most of Iran's enriched uranium was shipped out of the country
- a heavy water facility was rendered inoperable
- operational nuclear facilities were brought under international inspection
- In return, the deal involved lifting of international sanctions on Iran.

Why has US pulled out of the deal?

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

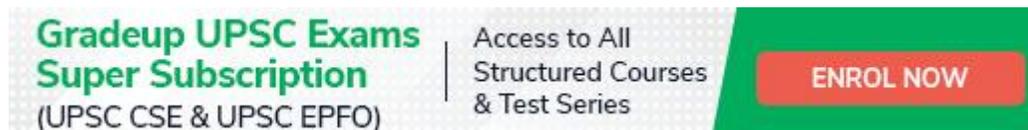
LSTV-RSTV now merged under banner of Sansad TV

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the merger of the Lok Sabha TV (LSTV) and the Rajya Sabha TV (RSTV) has been finalised and will be replaced by Sansad TV.

Background



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Committee

- In November 2019, after deliberations between Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu, a committee headed by former **Prasar Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash** was set up.
- It submitted a report in February 2020.
- Three different sub-committees are currently examining the report to finalise the integration of technical and manpower resources of both the channels.

Functions

- Under the banner of Sansad TV, the LSTV would continue to telecast live the House proceedings and the RSTV that of the Upper House.
- The LSTV platform would telecast programmes in Hindi, while RSTV would do so in English. The two language variants, it was felt, enables better branding and increased viewership,.

[St. George's Orthodox Church](#)

(Topic- GS Paper I–Art and Culture, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a centuries-old St. George's Orthodox Church at Cheppad in Kerala faced demolition for widening of National Highway 66, but is now set to become a Centrally-

protected monument of national importance with Archaeological Survey of India recognition.

About St. George's Orthodox Church



- The church is one of the rarest in Kerala, having traditional Kerala church architectural pattern with rare and beautiful mural paintings on the walls of the altar.
- It is believed that the church was built in AD 950, but some experts say it was built in AD 1050.

Related Information

About Ancient Monument

- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 defines Ancient Monument as any structure, erection or monument, or any tumulus or place of interment, or any cave, rock-sculpture, inscription or monolith which is of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which has been in existence for not less than 100 years.

A "Monument of National Importance" is designated by the Archaeological Survey of India and includes the following:

- The remains of an ancient monument
- The site of an ancient monument

- The land on which there are fences or protective covering structures for preserving the monument
- Land by means of which people can freely access the monument

Recently declared Monument of National Importance

- The Vishnu Temple in Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand
- High Court Building in Nagpur, Maharashtra,
- The ancient Neemrana Baori in Rajasthan's Alwar district;
- The Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail in Odisha's Bolangir district;
- Two Mughal-era monuments in Agra — Haveli of Agha Khan and Hathi Khana

Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship

(Topic- GS Paper II– Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India has launched the Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship to recognize students, community workers or Self-Help Groups, SHGs and municipal or sanitary workers.
- The Fellowship has been launched under its **Waste to Wealth Mission**.

About Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship



The banner features the Government of India emblem on the left, followed by the text 'Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India'. In the center, there is a circular logo with the text 'WASTE TO WEALTH' and 'Swachh Bharat Mission'. To the right is the 'INVEST INDIA.GOV.IN' logo. Below these logos, the word 'launched' is written in a bold, black font. A large yellow rounded rectangle contains the text 'Swachhta Saarthi Fellowships' in a bold, blue font. On the right side of the banner, there is an illustration of a man in a dark t-shirt and light blue trousers using a long-handled tool to clean a surface. The background is a light blue and white pattern.

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- These scholarship are given to those who are engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably.
- This fellowship is aimed to empower interested students and citizens to continuously engage in their attempts to reduce waste in cities and rural areas.

There are three categories of awards under the fellowships.

- **Category-A** is Open to School students from 9th to 12th Standards engaged in waste management community work
- **Category-B** is Open to College students (UG, PG, Research Students) engaged in waste management community work.
- **Category-C** is open to citizens working in the community and through SHGs, municipal or sanitary workers working beyond specifications of their job requirement or deions.

Significance

- The fellowship is an initiative to empower young innovators who are engaged in community work of waste management or awareness campaigns or waste surveys or studies as Swachhta Saarthi and implement actions to reduce waste for a greener planet.
- The role of young students from schools and colleges and citizens working in the community through SHGs, or in independent capacity, is key in sensitizing the communities towards waste management and offer innovative solutions for conversion of waste to value.

Related Information

About Waste To Wealth Mission

- It is one of the nine national missions of the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).
- It aims to identify, develop, and deploy technologies to treat waste and generate energy, recycle materials and extract value from waste.
- The mission is the “**scientific arm**” of the **Swachh Bharat Mission**.

Objectives

- To support the development of new technologies that can help create a cleaner and greener environment.

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- To boost and augment the Swachh Bharat Mission and Smart Cities Project by leveraging science, technology and innovation.
- To create circular economic models that is financially viable for waste management.
- To streamline waste handling in India.

Significance

- The benefits of effective waste management are huge as it is predicted that India has the potential to generate 3GW of electricity from waste by 2050.

Freedom in the World 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- According to a report from a U.S. think-tank, Freedom House the Freedoms in India have reduced, resulting in India being classified as ‘partly free’.

About the Freedom in the World Report

- The report derives its methodology from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.
- **It covers 195 countries, awarding scores based on-**
 - **Political rights indicators** such as the electoral process, political pluralism and participation and government functioning.
 - **Civil liberties indicators** related to freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights.

Key highlights

- India’s score in the organisation’s annual Freedom in the World report this year – based on data from 2020 – was 67, a drop from 71/100 from 2020, which downgraded it from the free category.

India's Decline

Over the past 15 years, India experienced a precipitous score decline, culminating in a downgrade from Free to Partly Free in 2020



India received a score of 76 in the 2006 edition of *Freedom in the World*, covering the events of 2005. It received a score of 67 in the 2021 edition, covering 2020. All scores are on a scale of 0 to 100. For more information on the methodology, visit freedomhouse.org.



This infographic is from the *Freedom in the World 2021* report by freedomhouse.org.

Reason for Downgrading

- The democracy advocacy group noted that India's fall from the upper ranks of free nations could "have a particularly damaging impact on global democratic standards".
- The report said that the deterioration in political rights and civil liberties had "only accelerated after existing Prime minister reelection in 2019" and that judicial independence had also come under strain.

Love Jihad

- The report also made a note of Uttar Pradesh's 'love jihad' law to prohibit forced religious conversion through interfaith marriage and said that a number of Muslim men had been arrested for allegedly forcing Hindu women to convert to Islam.

Abrupt COVID-19 lockdown

- It further cited the abrupt COVID-19 lockdown "which left millions of migrant workers in cities without work or basic resources" and "resulted in the dangerous and unplanned displacement of millions of internal migrant workers".
- The lockdown, which had been announced by Prime Minister on March 24, 2020, prompted thousands of migrant workers, who were stranded, to undertake long journeys home on foot.

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The vilification of members of the Tablighi Jamaat

- Referring to the vilification of members of the Tablighi Jamaat, the report further said that Muslims were scapegoated and blamed for the spread of the coronavirus and faced attacks by vigilante mobs.

Attack on Press Freedom

- The Government authorities had used “security, defamation, sedition, and hate speech laws, as well as contempt-of-court charges, to quiet critical voices in the media”.

LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Women Empowerment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- LinkedIn has recently released the Opportunity Index, 2021.

About the index

- The index seeks to understand how people perceive opportunities and the barriers that stand in the way of achieving them.
- This year’s the index also focused to understand how women perceive opportunities, and how the gender gap is further slowing down career progress for working women in India amid the pandemic.

Key highlights

- In India, more than 4 in 5 working women (85 per cent) claim to have missed out on a raise, promotion, or work offer because of their gender, compared to the regional average of 60 per cent.
- Women in India have experienced the impact of gender on career development when compared to the Asia-Pacific region.
- About two-thirds of working women or 63 per cent and working mothers or 69 per cent said they have faced discrimination at work because of familial and household responsibilities.
- One in five or 22 per cent working women in India said their companies show a 'favourable bias' towards men at work when compared to the regional average of 16 per cent.

- About 37 per cent of the women said they are paid less than men while only 21 per cent of the men shared this sentiment.

About LinkedIn

- It is an American business and employment-oriented online service that operates via websites and mobile apps which was launched on May 5, 2003.
- The platform is mainly used for professional networking, and allows job seekers to post their CVs and employers to post jobs.

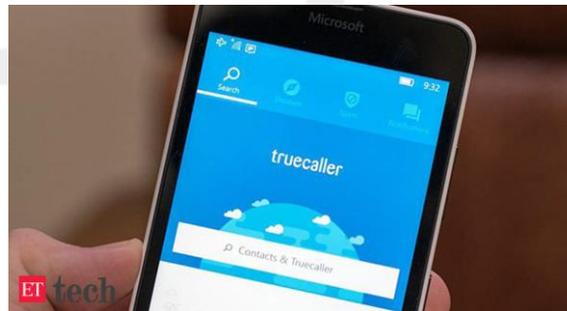
Truecaller launches Guardians, a safety app for women

(Topic- GS Paper II–Women Empowerment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Truecaller has launched Truecaller’s Guardians app.

About the app



- The True caller’s Guardians app helps women to share their location with family or friends at all or specific times and alerts them in case of an emergency.
- The app needs three permissions: user location, contacts to select and invite personal Guardians, and phone permission to show phone status.
- It uses Google Maps technology for location tracking.

Related Information

Government takes several initiatives for women's safety

Amendment of the Criminal law

- The Criminal Law was amended last year to prescribe more stringent penal provisions, including death penalty for rape of a girl below the age of 12 years.

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- Completion of investigation and trial in cases of sexual offence within two months has now been made mandatory.

Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences

- It is an online analytic tool for police called **Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences** was launched to monitor and track time-bound investigation in sexual assault cases.

Helpline number

- A pan-India single number 112 has been launched for all emergencies, with the computer-aided dispatch of field resources to the location of distress.

National Database on Sexual Offenders

- The Home Ministry launched the National Database on Sexual Offenders to facilitate investigation and tracking of sexual offenders across the country by law enforcement agencies.

One-Stop Centre Scheme

- One-Stop Centre Scheme has been implemented across the country which is exclusively designed to provide integrated services such as medical aid, police assistance, legal counselling, psycho-social counselling and temporary shelter to women affected by violence.

Exercise Desert FLAG

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Indian Airforce has participated in the **Exercise Desert FLAG VI**.

About Exercise Desert FLAG



- It is an annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise.
- It is hosted by the United Arab Emirates Air Force.

Objectives

- Its objective is to provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.
- The participating forces will get an opportunity to enhance their operational capabilities along with mutual exchange of best practices.
- The exercise will provide the participating forces, a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, experience, enhance operational capabilities and interoperability.

National Translation Mission

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance (Important Scheme), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Prime Minister has said that the country's education system should break through linguistic barriers in order to ensure that those in rural areas or from poor homes were not deprived of opportunities to let their talent flourish.
- This must be done from primary to higher education, with content creation in Indian languages for all subjects, whether medical, engineering, technology or management.
- The **National Language Translation Mission** was also key to ensuring this.

About National Translation Mission



- The National Translation Mission (NTM) is a scheme launched in 2008 which is being implemented through the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore.
- It helps to establish translation as an industry in general and to facilitate higher education by making knowledge texts accessible to students and academics in Indian languages.

- Under the scheme, the books of knowledge texts mostly text books of various subjects prescribed in Universities and Colleges are being translated in all Languages of the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India.
- NTM has published 6 bilingual dictionaries (English to Indian languages) in collaboration with Pearson Education, India.

Haryana's quota law

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Haryana government reserved 75% of private sector jobs for local candidates, renewing the debate on whether the government should force private companies to adopt its reservation policy in jobs.

About the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020

- It requires private companies to set aside for domiciles 75% of jobs up to a monthly salary of Rs 50,000 or as may be notified by the government from time to time.
- The law is recently applicable to all the companies, societies, trusts, limited liability partnership firms, partnership firms and any person employing 10 or more persons and an entity, as may be notified by the government from time to time shall come under the ambit of this Act.

Constitutional Provision

Article 16(4)

- The state draws its power from Article 16(4) of the Constitution, which says that the right to equality in public employment does not prevent the state from “making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State”.

Note :

- The Constitution has no manifest provision for private employment from which the state draws the power to make laws mandating reservation.

Do other countries take such affirmative action in employment?

- Affirmative action is adopted in many countries in the context of race and gender.

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- For example, in the US, although there is no statutory requirement for employers to have quotas, courts can order monetary damages and injunctive relief, including “such affirmative action as may be appropriate”, for victims of discrimination.
- This power comes from the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, colour, national origin, religion, and sex.
- **The Employment Equity Act** in Canada also protects minority groups, especially aboriginals from discrimination in federally regulated industries, even in the private sector.

Ease of Living Index

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister has released Ease of living index.

About the Ease of Living Index 2020

- The rankings under Ease of Living Index 2020 were announced for cities with a population of more than a million, and cities with less than a million people.
- The EOL Index assesses the well-being of citizens in 111 cities, including cities identified under the government's Smart Cities Mission.

The analysis categorises them into

- a. Million+ populated cities (those with a population of more than a million)
- b. Less than Million populated cities (those with a population of less than a million) along with all the cities under the Smart Cities Program

Background

- The EOL index was first launched in 2018.
- It relies on indicators encompassing 15 evaluation criteria, such as education, governance, economy, affordable housing, identity and culture, assured water supply, public open spaces, wastewater management, power, health, land use planning, safety and security, quality of environment, transportation and mobility, and solid waste management.

Linked with SDGs

- Ease of Living assessment standards is also linked with majority of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to the **SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities And Communities)**.

Highlights of the index

- Bengaluru emerged as the top performer in the Million+ category followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodara, Indore, and Greater Mumbai.
- Shimla has topped the list with less than a million population followed by Bhubaneshwar, Silvassa, Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurugram, Davangere and Tiruchirappalli.

Related Information

Municipal Performance Index 2020

- Housing and Urban Affairs Minister has also released Municipal Performance Index 2020.

About Municipal Performance Index 2020

- The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC and the three Municipal Corporations) across five verticals which comprise of 20 sectors and 100 indicators in all totality.
- The five verticals under MPI are Services, **Finance, Policy, Technology, and Governance**.

They also ranked them into

- a. Million+ populated cities (those with a population of more than a million)
- b. Less than Million populated cities (those with a population of less than a million) along with all the cities under the Smart Cities Program

Highlights

- Indore topped the ranking of municipalities with over 1 million populations, followed by Surat and Bhopal.
- The New Delhi Municipal Council was the best among civic bodies with under a million populations, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.

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North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Organisation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- India has recently proposed the inclusion of Iran’s Chabahar port in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- He also called for Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to be made part of the corridor.

About International North–South Transport Corridor



- It is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.
- The route primarily involves moving freight from India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia via ship, rail and road.

Objectives

- The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan, Bandar Anzali, etc.

- The aim of the corridor is not just to increase trade between member countries, but also to standardize tariffs and customs duties.

Members

- The current members are India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Bulgaria (observer).
- Azerbaijan and Armenia are heavily involved in the project with both countries currently building new train lines and roads to complete the missing links in the NSTC.

About Chabahar port



- Chabahar Port is a seaport in Chabahar located in south-eastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman.
- The port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost trade ties among the three countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi.
- It serves as Iran's only oceanic port, and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti.
- Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port can be easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan.
- It is considered to be a major transit point to connect with several Central Asian countries.

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Significance

- It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan etc.
- It has been termed the “**Golden Gate**” to these land-locked countries.

CSIR's Floriculture Mission

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Union Science and Technology Minister has launched the **CSIR's Floriculture Mission**.

About CSIR's Floriculture Mission

- It has been approved for implementation in 21 States and Union Territories of India.

Institutions Involved

- This Mission is being implemented in collaboration with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Directorate of Floriculture; Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC); Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Commerce; Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED); Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC), Kannauj, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and Universities.

Beneficial for Farmers

- The CSIR Floriculture Mission is expected to create opportunity for entrepreneurship development in floriculture.
- The mission will focus on commercial floral crops, seasonal/annual crops, wild ornaments and cultivation of flower crops for honey bee rearing.
- Floriculture will provide 5 times more return than the traditional crops.

Provide Employment

- Floriculture has the potential to provide employment to a large number of people through nursery raising, floriculture farming, entrepreneurship development for nursery trade, value addition and export”.

- India has diverse agro-climatic and edaphic conditions, and rich plant diversity, it shares only 0.6 % of global floriculture market.
- At least 1200 million USD worth of floriculture products are being imported by India every year from different countries”.

OTT platforms will not have to register: Centre

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has clarified that over-the-top (OTT) platforms will not have to register with the government, and no government nominee will be present in the self-regulatory body.
- The Centre on February 25 had notified new rules and guidelines for OTT platforms and digital news media.

Highlights

Under watch

On February 25, the government announced the new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, which introduced a 3-tier grievance redressal mechanism for OTT platforms

TIER 1 A grievance cell

TIER 2 A self-regulatory body of the OTT platforms

TIER 3 An inter-ministerial panel to look into complaints if they are not resolved at the first two levels



The OTT platforms will have to self-classify content into five age-based categories- U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+ and A (Adult). Platforms would be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as “A”.

- The rules focus on self classification of content instead of any form of censorship”.
- The platforms were expected to develop a grievance redressal mechanism to tackle complaints about content.
- These is no member will be appointed by the government.

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Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- The government of India has recently launched Sagar-Manthan: Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre.

About Sagar-Manthan- Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre



- It is a Maritime information system.
- It will enhance maritime safety, search and rescue capabilities, security, and marine environment protection.

Functions

- It has a real-time vessel tracking feature that can help seafarers and fishermen in times of need.
- It can also track foreign vessels within 1,000-km of India's coastline.
- It will provide help for other countries in case of an emergency.
- It will be operated by the Director-General of Shipping.

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Sharing Information

- India will be sharing this information system with Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

China gives green light for first downstream dams on Brahmaputra

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently China’s state-owned hydropower company POWERCHINA had signed “a strategic cooperation agreement” with the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government to “implement hydropower exploitation in the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River”.
- The dam built under the China’s new Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

Location of the dam

- The Great Bend of the Brahmaputra and the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon in Medog county, where the river turns sharply to flow across the border into f Arunachal Pradesh could be the potential spot for the project.

Previous Projects of China

- In 2015 China operationalised its first hydropower project at Zangmu in Tibet, while three other dams at Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha are being developed, all on the upper and middle reaches of the river.



Significance of the project

- It will play a significant role in realising China's goal of reaching a carbon emissions peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality in 2060.

Concerns for India

- India has been expressing concerns on Brahmaputra since 2015 when China operationalised its project at Zangmu.
- A dam at the Great Bend, if approved, would raise fresh concerns considering its location downstream and just across the border from Arunachal Pradesh.
- For India, quantity of water is not an issue because these are run of the river dams and will not impact the Brahmaputra flow. More importantly, Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent on upstream flows and an estimated 35% of its basin is in India.
- However, India is concerned about the Chinese activities affecting the quality of water, ecological balance and the flood management.
- India and China do not have a water sharing agreement. Both nations share hydrological data so it becomes important to share genuine data and have continuous dialogue on issues like warning of droughts, floods and high water discharges.

QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Union Education Minister has addressed at the unveiling of QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021.

About QS World University Rankings by Subject

- The QS World University Rankings by Subject ranks the world's top universities in individual subject areas, **covering 51 subjects**.
- The rankings aim to help prospective students identify the world's leading schools in their chosen field in response to high demand for subject-level comparisons.
- Each of the subject rankings is compiled using four sources.

These **four components** are combined to produce the results for each of the subject rankings, with weightings adapted for each discipline.

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1. Academic reputation

- The respondents are asked to list up to 10 domestic and 30 international institutions which they consider to be excellent for research in the given area.

2. Employer reputation

- The employers are asked to identify up to 10 domestic and 30 international institutions they consider excellent for the recruitment of graduates.

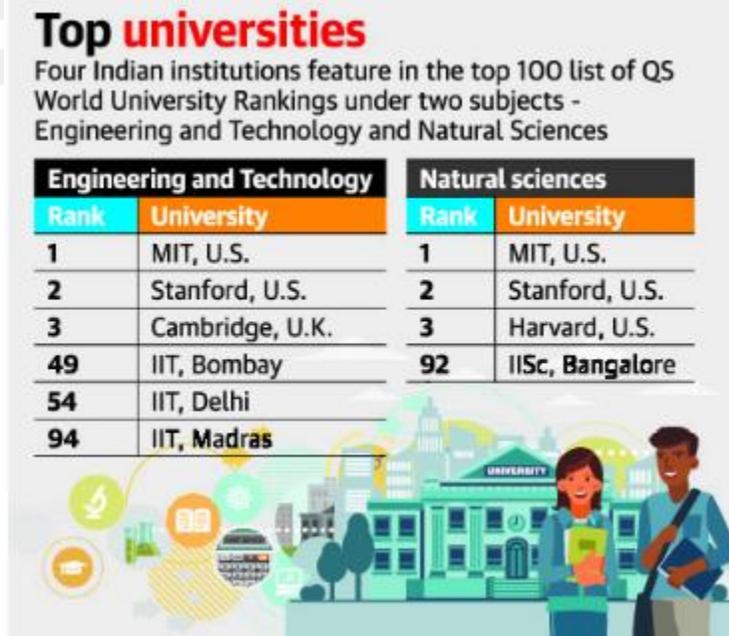
3. Research citations per paper

- A minimum publication threshold is set for each subject to avoid potential anomalies stemming from small numbers of highly cited papers.

4. H-index

- It is a way of measuring both the productivity and impact of the published work of a scientist or scholar.
- It is based on the set of the academic's most cited papers and the number of citations that they have received in other publications.

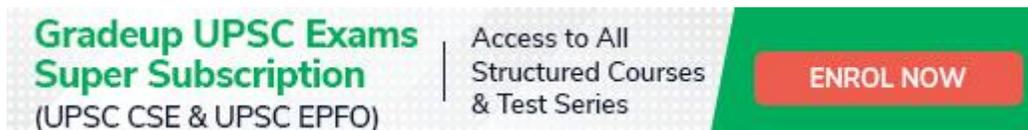
India's performance



Top universities
Four Indian institutions feature in the top 100 list of QS World University Rankings under two subjects - Engineering and Technology and Natural Sciences

Engineering and Technology		Natural sciences	
Rank	University	Rank	University
1	MIT, U.S.	1	MIT, U.S.
2	Stanford, U.S.	2	Stanford, U.S.
3	Cambridge, U.K.	3	Harvard, U.S.
49	IIT, Bombay	92	IISc, Bangalore
54	IIT, Delhi		
94	IIT, Madras		

- This year 12 Indian institutions have made it to the top 100 of the world.



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- The Indian Institute of Science broke into the top 100 in the natural sciences category of the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021.
- These are IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IISc Bangalore, IIT Guwahati, IIM Bangalore, IIM Ahmedabad, JNU, Anna University, University of Delhi, and O.P Jindal University.

The four new universities/ institutes in the top 100 subject rankings are:

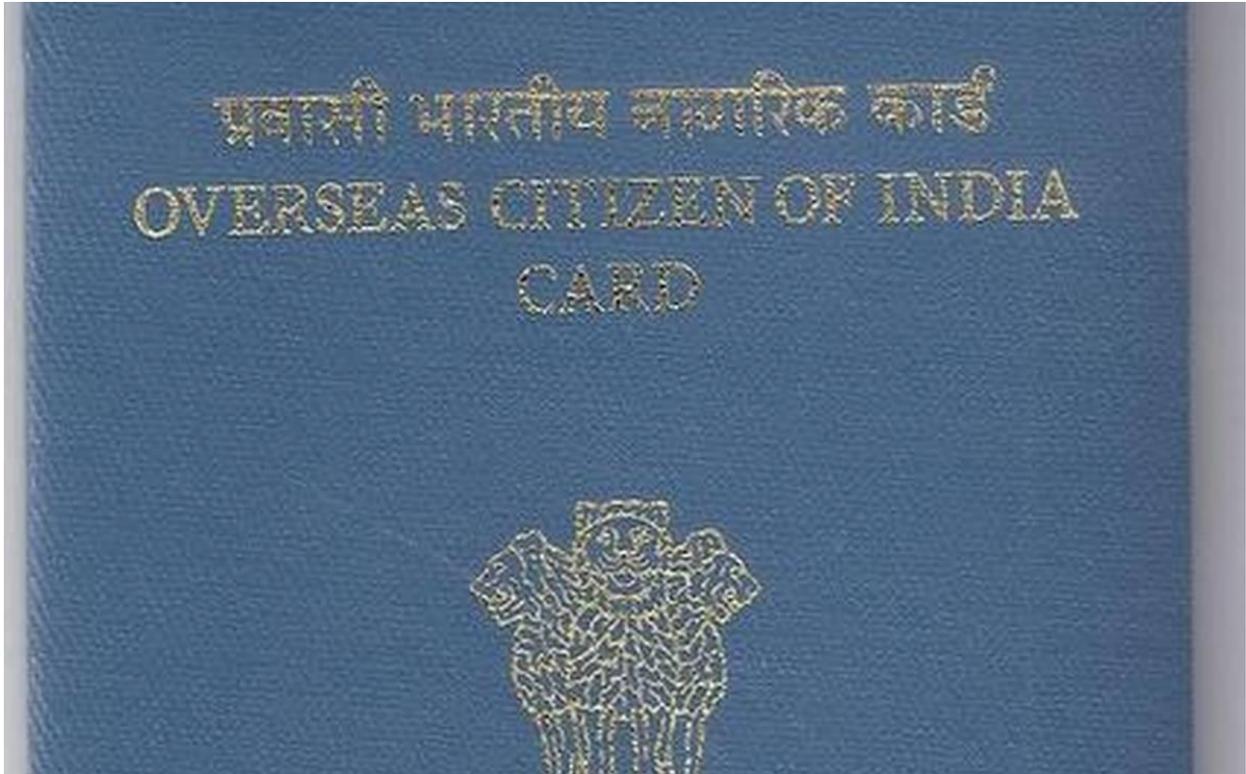
- Jawaharlal Nehru University (anthropology)
- Anna University (petroleum engineering)
- IIT-Guwahati (for petroleum engineering)
- O P Jindal Global University (law)

Only NRI quota seats based on entrance exams for OCI cardholders: MHA

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently reiterated through a gazette notification that Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cardholders can lay claim to “only NRI (Non Resident Indian) quota seats” in educational institutions based on all-India entrance tests.
- These tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or other such all-India professional tests.



Key Highlights

- The OCI cardholders will be required special permission from Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) or the Indian Mission concerned, for missionary or Tabligh or mountaineering or journalistic activities.
- The OCI cardholders will need permission if they want to undertake research, internship or employment in any foreign diplomatic missions, foreign government organisations in India.
- The special permit will be required of OCI cardholders to visit any place that falls in the protected or restricted or prohibited areas as specified by the government or competent authority.
- The OCI cardholder shall not be eligible for admission against any seat reserved exclusively for Indian citizens.

Significance of New Rules for OCI Cardholders

- The new rules have granted parity to them with the Indian nationals for airfare tariffs for domestic travel and entry fees to any national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, national monuments, historical sites and museums in the country.

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- The new rules granted OCIs the right of multiple entry lifelong visa to India for any purpose.
- The OCI cardholders will enjoy parity with Non Resident Indians (NRIs) in adoption of children, appearing in competitive exams, purchase or sale of immovable property barring agricultural land and farmhouses, and pursuing professions such as doctors, lawyers, architects, and chartered accountants.

About Overseas Citizens of India

- OCI citizens are of Indian origin but they are foreign passport holders and are not citizens of India.
- India does not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits under Section 7B (I) of the **Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs.**

Maratha reservation: SC seeks states' response on allowing over 50% quota

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently sought responses from all states on whether the 50% ceiling limit on reservation needs to be reconsidered.
- It is due to several States, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, have crossed the Rubicon and passed laws which allow reservation shooting over 60%.
- The ceiling was imposed by a nine-judge Constitution Bench in the **Indira Sawhney case in 1992**, wherein the court strictly held that reservation cannot exceed 50%.

Under scrutiny

The Constitution Bench will decide on these broad issues:

- Whether the *Indira Sawhney* judgment of 1992, which fixed reservation at 50%, requires a relook by a larger Bench "in the light of subsequent constitutional amendments, judgments and changed social dynamics of the society"
- Whether the Maratha quota law is covered by the exemption of "exceptional circumstances" by which reservation can cross the 50% mark
- Whether the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act deprives a State legislature of its power to enact a legislation to identify socially and economically backward classes within the State to confer quota benefits to them
- Whether Article 342A abrogates a State's power to legislate for or classify "any backward class of citizens"; and thereby, affects the federal policy/structure



Background

Indra Sawhney V/s Union of India (1992)

- In this case, the Supreme Court examined the scope and extent of Article 16(4).
- The court sustained the constitutional validity of 27% reservation for the OBCs with certain conditions (like total reservation should not exceed 50%, exclusion of creamy layer, no reservation in promotion).
- **In this case, 'Rule of Law' was added to the basic features of the constitution.**
- The Indra Sawhney judgment had categorically said “50% shall be the rule, and only in certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas population into mainstream the said 50% rule can be relaxed”.

Related Information

National Commission for Backward Classes

- Recently, the bench also asked states to respond to a 2018 Constitution (102nd amendment) Act brought about by Parliament, which gave constitutional recognition to National Commission for Backward Classes.

About National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

- National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) established on August 14, 1993, as a statutory body.
- But now, the 102nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2018 provides constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).
- This Commission was formed as an initiative to investigate the conditions and difficulties of the socially and educationally backward classes and thus make appropriate recommendations.

Background

- The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) was an **outcome of the Indra Sawhney case (Mandal Commission) of 1992.**
- In Indra Sawhney case of 1992, the Supreme Court had directed the government to create a permanent body to entertain, examine and recommend the inclusion and exclusion of various Backward Classes for benefits and protection.

- Previously the two Backward Class Commissions were appointed in the 1950s and 1970s under Kaka Kalelkar and B.P. Mandal respectively.

Constitutional Provision

- 102nd Constitution Amendment Act inserted **new Articles 338 B and 342 A**.
- The amendment also brings about changes in Article 366.
- Article 338B provides authority to NCBC to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.
- Article 342(A) introduces greater transparency as it is made mandatory to take the concurrence of Parliament for adding or deleting any community in the backward list.

Composition

- The National Commission for Backward Classes consists of five regulatory members: the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and three other members with a tenure period of three years.
- The conditions of service and tenure of office of the Chairperson, ViceChairperson and other Members are determined by the President.

Compensate those acquitted under UAPA

(Topic- GS Paper II–Internal Security, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, a local court in Surat acquitted 122 persons arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for participating in a meeting organised in December 2001 as members of Students’ Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a banned outfit.
- After their acquittal, some of the accused, and also activists from the minority community, demanded that they be compensated for being “illegally framed by the police” without any evidence against them.

About Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

- It was first promulgated in 1967.
- It aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Unlawful activity refers to any action taken by an individual or association intended to disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India.

- It is considered to be the predecessor of laws such as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).
- It is primarily an anti-terror law which is aimed at “more effective prevention of certain unlawful activities of individuals and associations and for dealing with terrorist activities”.
- **The UAPA cases are tried by special courts.**
- Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged. It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.
- Under the UAPA, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.

Recent Amendment in UAPA

- Parliament cleared the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019 to designate individuals as terrorists on certain grounds provided in the Act.
- The Act empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the National Investigation Agency, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award

(Topic- GS Paper II–Art and Culture, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently conferred with the 'Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award' by the Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA).

About Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award

- The Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award was instituted in 2016.

- It recognizes the commitment of leadership on the future of global energy and environment, and for offering solutions and policies for energy access, affordability and environmental stewardship.

About CERAWeek

- **It was founded in 1983 by Daniel Yergin.**
- It is an annual energy conference organized by the information and insights company IHS Markit in Houston, United States.
- The conference provides a platform for discussion on a range of energy-related topics.

List of International Awards received by Narendra Modi

- Order of Abdulaziz Al Saud - Saudi Arabia
- State Order of Ghazi Amir Amanullah Khan - Afghanistan
- Grand Collar of the State of Palestine Award - Palestine
- Order of St. Andrew award- Russia
- Order of Zayed Award - United Arab Emirates
- Champions of the Earth Award - United Nations Environment Programme
- Global Goalkeeper award - Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation award

Maitri Setu

(Topic- GS Paper I+ II–International Relation+ art and Culture , Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Prime Minister has inaugurated ‘Maitri Setu’ between India and Bangladesh via video conferencing.

About 'Maitri Setu

- The bridge has been built over Feni river which flows between Indian boundary in Tripura and Bangladesh.
- It has been named ‘Maitri Setu’ to symbolise growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.
- The bridge spanning 1.9 kilometres joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.

Significance

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- With this inauguration, Tripura is set to become the ‘Gateway of North East’ with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 km from Sabroom.

About Feni River



- It is a river in southeastern Bangladesh and Tripura state of India.
- The Feni River originates in South Tripura district and flows through Sabroom town and then enters Bangladesh.
- Muhuri River, also called Little Feni, from Noakhali District joins it near its mouth.

Cyber volunteer programme

(Topic- GS Paper II–Internal Security and Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that a “cyber volunteer” programme has been rolled out for “cyber hygiene promotion” and the services of volunteers would be utilised by the State police as per requirement.

About Cyber Crime Volunteer Framework

- It is an initiative which is a part of cyber hygiene promotion to bring together citizens to contribute in the fight against cybercrime in the country and assist State/UT LEAs (law enforcement agencies) in their endeavour to curb cybercrimes.
- The aim of the programme to enables a culture of surveillance and could create potential social distrust by encouraging civilians to report the online activities of other citizens.
- The volunteers will be enrolled and their services utilized by the respective State/UT Police Authorities, as per their requirement.”

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- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** has envisaged the Cyber Crime Volunteers Program to bring together citizens with passion to serve the nation on a single platform and contribute in the fight against cybercrime in the country

Related Information

International Initiatives

a. International Telecommunication Union

- It is a specialized agency within the United Nations which plays a leading role in the standardization and development of telecommunications and cyber security issues.

b. Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

- It is an international treaty that seeks to address Internet and computer crime (cybercrime) by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations.
- It came into force on 1 July 2004.
- **India is not a signatory to this convention.**

c. Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

- It brings together all stakeholders, i.e. Government, private sector and civil society on the Internet governance debate.
- It was first convened in October–November 2006.

Laws and Cyber security Preparedness of India

a. Information Technology Act, 2000

- The act regulates the use of computers, computer systems, computer networks and also data and information in electronic format.
- The act lists down among other things, following as offences:
 1. Tampering with computer source documents.
 2. Hacking with a computer system
 3. Act of cyber terrorism, i.e. accessing a protected system with the intention of threatening the unity, integrity, sovereignty or security of the country.
 4. Cheating using computer resources etc.

b. National Cyber security Policy, 2013

- It aims to protect information and information infrastructure in cyberspace, build capabilities to prevent and respond to cyber threats, reduce vulnerabilities and minimize damage from cyber.

Strategy

1. The **CERT-IN**-National nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.

2. **Central Information Security Officer** in all private and public organizations.

c. Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

- The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) was recently inaugurated by the Government.
- It will be set up under the newly created Cyber and Information Security (CIS) division of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It coordinates all activities related to implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAT) with other countries related to cybercrimes in consultation with the concerned nodal authority in the MHA.

The scheme has the following seven components:

- National Cybercrime Threat Analytics Unit (TAU)
- National Cyber crime Reporting
- Platform for Joint Cyber crime Investigation Team
- National Cyber crime Forensic Laboratory (NCFL) Ecosystem
- National Cyber crime Training Centre (NCTC)
- Cybercrime Ecosystem Management Unit
- National Cyber Research and Innovation Centre

d. National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal

- This portal is an initiative of Government of India to facilitate victims/complainants to report cyber crime complaints online.
- This portal caters to complaints pertaining to cyber crimes only with special focus on cyber crimes against women and children.
- Complaints reported on this portal are dealt by law enforcement agencies/ police based on the information available in the complaints.

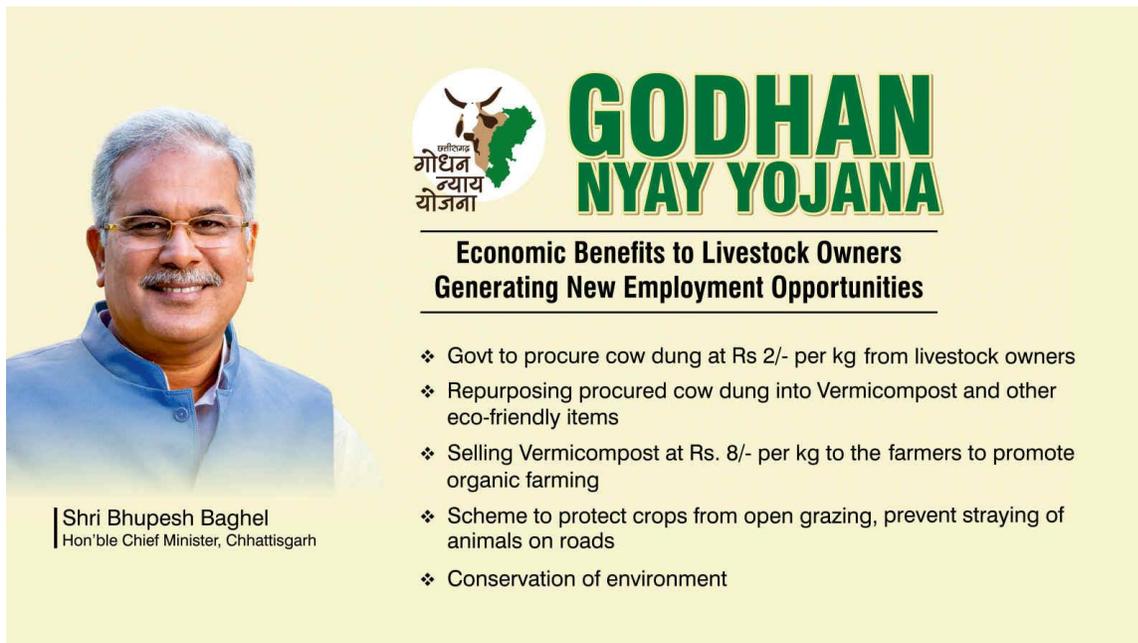
Godhan Nyay Yojana

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the **Standing Committee on Agriculture** asked the **Centre** to launch a scheme for procurement of cattle dung from farmers while citing the **Godhan Nyay Yojana** — Chhattisgarh government’s cow dung procurement scheme.

About Godhan Nyay Yojana



The graphic features a portrait of Shri Bhupesh Baghel, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, on the left. To his right is the logo for Godhan Nyay Yojana, which includes a cow and the text 'गोधन न्याय योजना' and 'GODHAN NYAY YOJANA'. Below the logo, the text reads 'Economic Benefits to Livestock Owners' and 'Generating New Employment Opportunities'. A list of benefits is provided:

- ❖ Govt to procure cow dung at Rs 2/- per kg from livestock owners
- ❖ Repurposing procured cow dung into Vermicompost and other eco-friendly items
- ❖ Selling Vermicompost at Rs. 8/- per kg to the farmers to promote organic farming
- ❖ Scheme to protect crops from open grazing, prevent straying of animals on roads
- ❖ Conservation of environment

Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

- It was launched by Chhattisgarh government.

Aim

- The scheme aims to put money in the pockets of people living in rural areas and also solve the problem of stray cattle.
- The scheme also aims to make cow rearing economically profitable and to prevent open grazing in the state, as well as help with the problem of stray animals on roads and in urban areas.
- Under the scheme, the Chhattisgarh government will purchase cow dung at the rate of **Rs 2 per kg** and sell it back at **Rs 8 per kg** after processing it into vermicompost.

Benefits of the scheme

- With implementation of this scheme, government aims to give a boost to rural economy and to create employment opportunities in the rural areas.
- It also provides employment opportunity.
- Gives boost in promoting organic farming.
- Proper disposal of waste produced by cattle, hence keeps the city and roads clean.
- It also helps to address the problem of stray cattle.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance (Scheme), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development in its report submitted to the Lok Sabha has said that, the Centre must increase the “meagre” pensions provided for poor senior citizens, widows and disabled people.
- The relevance of a marquee Scheme like National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) in reaching out to the poor and downtrodden section of society does not go amiss in the eyes of the Committee.

Little support | The National Social Assistance Programme is applicable to elders, widows and the physically challenged. **Here is a low-down:**



Pension: ₹200-₹500 a month for senior citizens in BPL households	Family benefit: ₹20,000 upon the death of a breadwinner aged 18-59 in BPL households
Widow Pension Scheme: ₹300-₹500 a month for widows aged over 40 in BPL households	Annapurna Scheme: 10 kg of food grains per month for senior citizens who are not receiving any pension
Disability pension: ₹300 per month for persons aged 18-79 with severe or multiple disabilities in BPL households	

About National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Rural Development.
- It came into effect from 15th August, 1995.
- It represents a significant step towards the fulfillment of the DPSP in **Article 41 of the Constitution.**

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- **Article 41** of the Constitution of India directs the State to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its economic capacity and development.
- It aims to provide financial assistance to the elderly, widows and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.

The National Assistance Program consists of five sub-schemes:

1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)

- It is a non-contributory old age pension scheme that covers Indians who are 60 years and above and live below the poverty line.

Eligibility

- All individuals above the age of 60 who live below the poverty line are eligible to apply for IGNOAPS.
- All IGNOAPS beneficiaries aged 60–79 receive a monthly pension of Rs. 300 (Rs. 200 by central government and Rs. 100 by state government).
- Those 80 years and above receive a monthly pension amount of Rs.500.

2. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)

- Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), introduced in the year 2009, provides BPL (Below Poverty Line) widows in the age group 40 to 59 (later revised 40 to 79 WEF 01.10.2012) with a monthly pension of Rs. 200 (later revised to Rs.300 WEF 01.10.2012) per beneficiary.
- This programme was started in 2009 under the ministry for rural development.

3. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)

Eligibility

- Individuals aged 18 years and above with more than 80% disability and living below the poverty line.

4. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)

- In the event of death of a bread-winner in a household, the bereaved family will receive lumpsum assistance of 20,000.
- The bread-winner should have been between 18–64 years of age. The assistance would be provided in every case of death of primary bread-winner in a household.

5. Annapurna Scheme

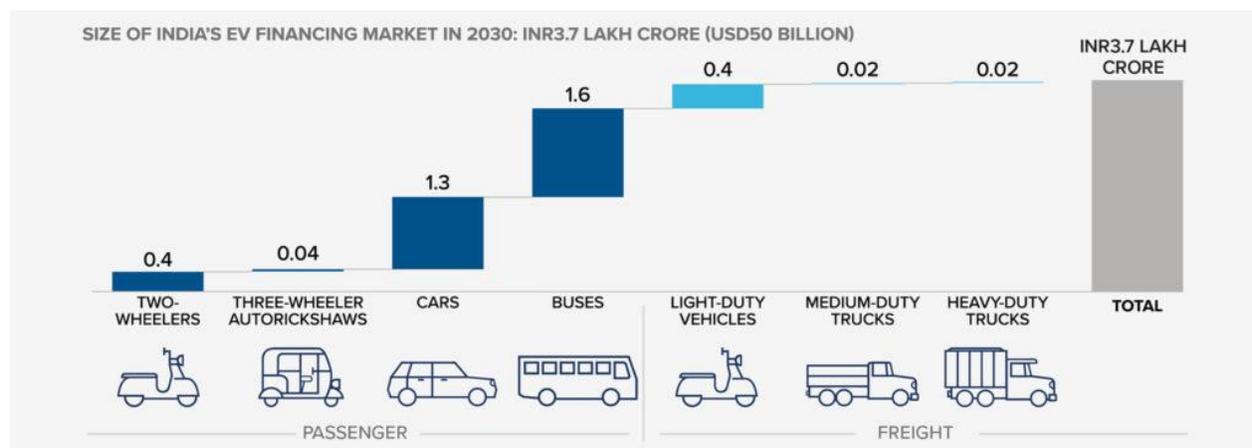
- This scheme aims to provide food security to meet the requirement of those senior citizens who, though eligible, have remained uncovered under the IGNOAPS.
- Under the Annapurna Scheme, 10 kg of free rice is provided every month to each beneficiary.

Mobilising Electric Vehicle Financing in India : Report

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- NITI Aayog and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) India has recently released a new report 'Mobilising Electric Vehicle Financing in India',



Key highlights

- The report highlights the role of finance in the India's transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and analyses that the transition will require a cumulative capital investment of USD 266 billion (Rs 19.7 lakh crore) in EVs, charging infrastructure, and batteries over the next decade.
- The report also identifies a market size of USD 50 billion (Rs 3.7 lakh crore) for the financing of EVs in 2030 about 80% of the current size of India's retail vehicle finance industry, worth USD 60 billion (Rs 4.5 lakh crore).
- The report further determines that investment in India's transition to electric mobility has the potential to create significant economic, social, and environmental benefits for the country.

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Related Information

Government initiatives to boost Electric Vehicle

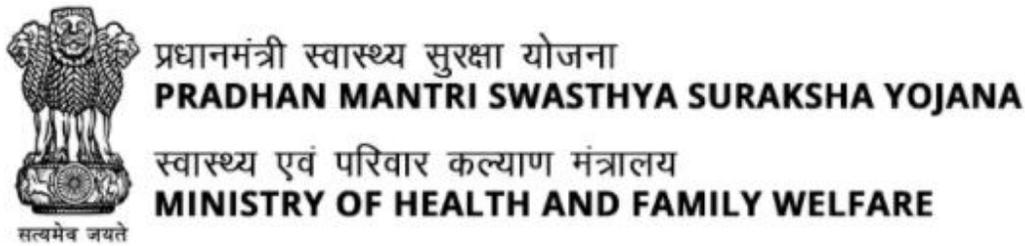
- National Electric Mobility Mission Plan,
- FAME-I and II
- National Mission for Transformative Mobility and Battery Manufacturing,
- Phased Manufacturing Program
- Advanced Chemistry Cell Production Linked Incentive

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi

(Topic- GS Paper II– Governance (Health Scheme) Source- The Hindu)

Why in the new?

- The Union Cabinet has recently approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN) as a **single non-lapsable reserve fund** for share of Health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under **Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007**.



Salient features of the PMSSN

- It is a non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account.
- The Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
- Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare namely,
 - Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)
 - Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)
 - National Health Mission
 - Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)
 - Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies

- Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.

Benefits:

- The major benefit will be: enhanced access to universal & affordable health care through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of financial year.

Note :

- In the budget speech 2018, the Finance Minister while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of **existing 3% Education Cess by 4% Health and Education Cess.**

Every third woman faces violence by men: WHO

(Topic- GS Paper II–Issue related with women, Source- Down to Earth)

Why in the news?

- According to a report released the World Health Organization revealed that, one in three women across the world, or around 736 million women, faced physical or sexual violence from their intimate partners or non-partners.
- The report titled is **Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018.**

About the Study

- WHO conducted the study on behalf of United Nations agencies and gathered data from 2000 to 2018.
- The new statistics replaced estimates on violence against women brought out in 2013.

Key highlights of the report

- One in four young women in the 15-24 years age group, who were in a relationship, experienced violence from their partners.
- Among those who have been in a relationship, the highest rates (16 per cent) of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months occurred among young women aged between 15 and 24.

- Around 37 per cent women in the least-developed countries reported being physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner.

Highest Prevalance

- The **highest prevalence was found in Oceania, South Asia (includes India) and sub-Saharan Africa.**

Lowest Report

- **Europe reported the lowest range (16–23 per cent) of intimate partner violence, followed by central Asia (18 per cent), eastern Asia (20 per cent) and south-eastern Asia (21 per cent).**

Method to tackle violence against Women

The report suggests the following methods countries could adopt to tackle violence against women:

- Sound gender transformative policies, from policies around childcare to equal pay, and laws that support gender equality,
- A strengthened health system response that ensures access to survivor-centred care and referral to other services as needed,
- School and educational interventions to challenge discriminatory attitudes and beliefs, including comprehensive sexuality education,
- Targeted investment in sustainable and effective evidence-based prevention strategies at local, national, regional and global levels, and
- Strengthening data collection and investing in high quality surveys on violence against women and improving measurement of the different forms of violence experienced by women, including those who are most marginalised.

No-confidence motion

(Topic- GS Paper II–Polity, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the no-confidence motion moved by the Congress against the Bharatiya Janata Party-Jannayak Janta Party coalition government in Haryana was defeated by 55 votes to 32.

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About No-confidence motion

- A Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to Lok Sabha and it remains in office till it enjoys the confidence of majority in Lok Sabha.
- Therefore, a motion of no-confidence is moved to remove the council of ministers and to remove the government from the office.
- According to the **Article 75** of the Indian Constitution, council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.
- As per **Article 164**, the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the State.
- That is the ministry stays in office as long as it enjoys the confidence of the majority of the members of the Lok Sabha or in other words, we can say that Lok Sabha can remove the ministry from the office by passing a no-confidence motion.
- **The Lok Sabha can remove the ministry from office by passing a noconfidence motion which needs the support of 50 members to be admitted.**

Article 118

- Article 118 of the Indian Constitution permits each house of Parliament to make laws for the conduct of business.
- Lok Sabha Rule 198 specifies the procedure for a motion of no-confidence.

Vaccine passports

(Topic- GS Paper II– Social Issue, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, **Israel became the first country** to introduce a **certification system** that allows those who have been vaccinated against **Covid-19 to access certain facilities and events.**

What are vaccine passports?

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- Vaccine passports will perform is that of digitising vaccination records across countries.
- They are supposed to function as proof that the holder has been vaccinated against Covid-19 and are, therefore, “safe”.
- The idea is modelled on the proof of vaccination that several countries required even before the pandemic.
- Travellers from many African countries to the US or India are required to submit proof that they have been vaccinated against diseases such as yellow fever.
- In addition to those like the ones issued by the Israeli government, several associations and non-profits have been issuing their own versions for international travel.

Related Information

IATA Travel Pas app

- The International Air Transport Association — the global trade body representing airlines — is developing an app called IATA Travel Pass that will provide airlines and other aviation industry stakeholders with a common platform to check for the proof of vaccination and its validity.

CommonPass app

- Non-profit Commons Project has been trying out an app called CommonPass, which contains a passenger’s vaccination record.

Benefits

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- The primary benefit will be to the tourism and the hospitality industries, which are both seen as being at the heart of Covid-19 spread and are the worst hit by the pandemic.
- This includes international air travel, which suffered massively because of the outbreak.

Immunity passports and release certificates

- **Chile has recently announced that it would push for “release certificates” for those individuals who had recovered from Covid-19.**
- The certificate would not prove immunity to the virus, but instead be issued to those who had finished a mandatory quarantine after testing positive for the disease.
- Other countries such as the UK, Italy and Germany have also considered issuing “immunity passports” and “risk-free certificates”.

About immunity certificates

- These certificates are based on the idea that the natural immunity a person develops to any infection will protect them from contracting the disease again.
- Once infected with a viral pathogen, the body’s innate immune response kicks in, which slows the spread of the virus and potentially helps not lead to any symptoms.
- This response is then followed by an “adaptive response”, wherein the body makes antibodies, which bind to the virus and help eliminate it.
- If this response is strong enough, it may even prevent re-infection from the same pathogen.

Concern/ issue

- World Health Organization (WHO) warned against using such certificates, since there was no evidence yet that a person infected with Covid-19 could not get the infection again.
- “There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from Covid-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection.

Difference between Immunity certificates Vs. Vaccine certificates

- The immunity passports are fundamentally different from vaccine certificates since the former incentivises infection and the latter incentivises getting vaccinated.
- Vaccine certificates may be an effective way to start lifting physical distancing measures, but this can also be implemented once a vaccine is ready.

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Govt. staff should not be appointed as State Election Commissioners, says Supreme Court

(Topic- GS Paper II–Polity, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently held that independent persons, and not government employees, should be appointed State Election Commissioners.

About State Election Commissioners

- The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats shall be vested in a State Election Commission consisting of a **State Election Commissioner**.

Appointed by

- **The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor.**
- The state legislature may make provision with respect to all matters relating to elections to the municipalities.

Constitutional provisions

- As per **Article 243(C3)** - the Governor when so requested by the State Election Commission, make available to the State Election Commission such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the SEC.
- **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.
- **Article 243K (2)** - It states that the tenure and appointment will be directed as per the law made by the state legislature.
- This gives power to states to amend rules unilaterally and even sometimes take ordinance routes to bypass legislative scrutiny like the recent example of Andhra Pradesh SEC

Process of removal

- The 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.

Related Information

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2nd Administrative Reforms Commission Recommendation

- The State Election Commissioner should be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of a collegium, comprising the Chief Minister, the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly.
- An institutional mechanism should be created to bring the Election Commission of India and the SECs on a common platform for coordination, learning from each other's experiences and sharing of resources.

Law Commission 255th Report on Electoral Reforms

- It recommended, adding a new sub-clause to Article 324 of the Constitution to provide for a separate independent and permanent Secretariat for the ECI along the lines of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Secretariats under **Article 98 of the Constitution**.
- Similar provisions can also be made for the State Election Commissions to ensure autonomy, and free and fair local body election.

Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- The Supreme Court has recently asked the Centre to respond to a plea challenging the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which freezes the status of places of worship as it was on August 15, 1947.

About Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

- This law was passed in which seeks to maintain the “religious character” of places of worship as it was in 1947 — except in the case of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, which was already in court.

Besides the Ayodhya dispute, the Act also exempted:

- any place of worship that is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site, or is covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958;
- a suit that has been finally settled or disposed of;

- any dispute that has been settled by the parties or conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence before the Act commenced.

Provisions of the act

- The clause declaring the objective of the law describes it as “an Act to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”.
- **Sections 3 and 4 of the Act** declare that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947 and that no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- **Section 4(2)** says that all suits, appeals or other proceedings regarding converting the character of a place of worship, that were pending on August 15, 1947, will stand abated when the Act commences and no fresh proceedings can be filed.

What are the issues ?

- The petition said Sections of the Act that dealt with the bar on legal claims were against **the principles of secularism.**
- “Section 2, 3, 4 not only offend right to pray, practice and propagate religion (Article 25), right to manage maintain administer places of worship-pilgrimage (Article 26), right to conserve culture (Article 29) but are also contrary to State’s duty to protect historic places (Article 49) and preserve religious cultural heritage (Article 51A),”.

Jal Shakti Ministry launches framework for water quality testing, monitoring

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti has recently launched a framework and guidelines for testing, monitoring and surveillance of drinking water quality as well as a Water Quality Information Management System (WQMIS), an online portal that provides detailed information on laboratories for this purpose.

About the Guidelines

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- The guidelines have been prepared in consultation with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- The guidelines specify work to be done in terms of surveillance and monitoring at the state, district, block/tehsil and village levels.
- The basic water quality parameters prescribed under the guidelines are
 - pH value, total dissolved solids, turbidity, chloride, total alkalinity, total hardness, sulphate, iron, total arsenic, fluoride, nitrate, total coliform bacteria, e.coli or thermo-tolerant coliform bacteria.

Related Information

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- It is the government envisages renewed efforts to provide tap water connection in **every rural household by 2024**.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
- The aim of 'Jal Jeevan Mission' (JJM) is to provide every rural household in the country a Functional Household Tap Connections for drinking water in adequate quantity of prescribed quality on regular and long-term basis at affordable service delivery charges leading to improvement in their living standards.
- Under this mission, the creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse, would be undertaken.

Funding pattern

- The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and states is 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 50:50 for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.

Following institutional arrangement has been proposed for the implementation of JJM

- a. National Jal Jeevan Mission at the Central level;
- b. State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) at State level;
- c. District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) at the district level; and

- d. Gram Panchayat and/ or its sub-committees i.e. Village Water Sanitation Committee (VWSC)/ Paani Samiti at village Level.

Situation in Myanmar after coup

(Topi- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- BBC)

Why in the news?

- Recently, at least four people were shot dead during protests in Myanmar as security forces continued their violent crackdown against dissent following last month's military coup.

Background

- Mass protests have been taking place across Myanmar since the military seized control on 1 February 2021.
- The Myanmar military has grabbed power in a coup - the third time in the nation's history since its independence from British rule in 1948.

About the Military Coup

- In the November 2020 parliamentary election, Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD) secured the majority of the seats.
- In the Myanmar's Parliament, the military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.
- When the newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to hold the first session of Parliament in 2021, the military imposed a state of emergency for one year citing massive voting fraud in the parliamentary elections.

Who is in charge now?

- Military commander-in-chief **Min Aung Hlaing** has taken power.
- He has long wielded significant political influence, successfully maintaining the power of the Tatmadaw - Myanmar's military - even as the country moved towards democracy.
- He has received international condemnation and sanctions for his alleged role in the military's attacks on ethnic minorities.
- In his first public comments after the coup, Gen Hlaing sought to justify the takeover.

- He said the military was on the side of the people and would form a "true and disciplined democracy".
- The military says it will hold a "free and fair" election once the state of emergency is over.

How have people reacted?

- The protests over the coup have been the largest since the so-called Saffron Revolution in 2007, when thousands of monks rose up against the military regime.
- Protesters include teachers, lawyers, students, bank officers and government workers.
- The military has imposed restrictions, including curfews and limits to gatherings.

Who is Aung San Suu Kyi?

- Aung San Suu Kyi became world-famous in the 1990s for campaigning to restore democracy.
- She spent nearly 15 years in detention between 1989 and 2010, after organising rallies calling for democratic reform and free elections.
- She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 while under house arrest.
- In 2015, she led the NLD to victory in Myanmar's first openly contested election in 25 years.

Democracy Report

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Wire)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, the Sweden's V-Dem Institute has released the fifth annual democracy report titled '**Autocratisation goes viral**'.

Key highlights

Global

- It highlights that the number of democratizing countries has dropped by almost half to 16, hosting a mere 4 per cent of the global population.
- The global decline during the past decade is steep and continues in 2020, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

- It notes an accelerating wave of autocratisation engulfing 25 nations, home to one-third of the world’s population.

Top 10 Autocratizing Countries (2010-2020)

TABLE 1: TOP-10 AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2010–2020

		CHANGE	LDI 2010	LDI 2020	REGIME TYPE 2010	REGIME TYPE 2020
1	Poland	-0.34	0.83	0.49	Liberal Democracy	Electoral Democracy
2	Hungary	-0.32	0.68	0.37	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
3	Turkey	-0.29	0.40	0.11	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
4	Brazil	-0.28	0.79	0.51	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Democracy
5	Serbia	-0.27	0.51	0.24	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
6	Benin	-0.26	0.55	0.29	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
7	India	-0.23	0.57	0.34	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
8	Mauritius	-0.23	0.73	0.50	Liberal Democracy	Electoral Democracy
9	Bolivia	-0.18	0.41	0.231	Electoral Democracy	Electoral Autocracy
10	Thailand	-0.17	0.34	0.17	Electoral Autocracy	Closed Autocracy

The classification of regime type is not only based on the LDI score but also the Electoral Democracy Index, as well as the extent to which elections overall have been free and fair. See Lührmann et al. (2018) for details.

India and V-Dem Institute's Democracy Report

- It has downgraded India from “the world’s largest democracy” to an “electoral autocracy”.
- **India is among the countries leading the ‘third wave of autocratisation’.**
- The report highlighted the reasons for such a downgrade are “muzzling” of the media, and overuse of defamation and sedition laws.
- India has moved from the top 50% of the 180 countries analysed by V Dem to the bottom 50%.
- In 2019, India was last among the 90 countries in the top 50% but in 2020, it is ranked 97th, falling into the bottom 50%.
- India’s score was at an all-time high at 0.57 (on a scale of 0-1) in 2013 but it had declined to 0.34 by the end of 2020.
- India has been regarded as autocratic as is Pakistan, and worse than both its neighbors Bangladesh and Nepal.

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- The report highlighted that the use of defamation “frequently used to silence journalists” and the use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) have placed constraints on civil society.
- The report notes that civil society is being increasingly muzzled while organisations aligned with the “Hindutva movement” have gained freedom.

About V-Dem Institute

- It is an independent research institute based at the University of Gothenburg, has published data-heavy worldwide democracy reports since 2017.
- In last year’s report, it had observed that India was on the verge of losing its status as a democracy.

SERB – PProject Information System & Management (SERB – PRISM)

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Down to Earth)

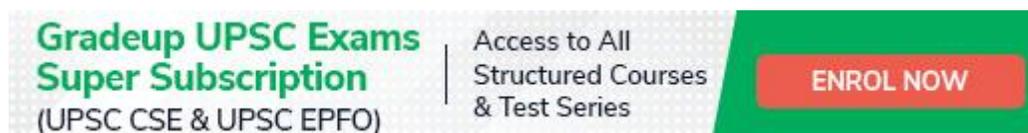
Why in the news?

- The Science and Engineering Board (SERB) has launched e-platform called Called ‘SERB – PProject Information System & Management (SERB – PRISM).

About ‘SERB – PProject Information System & Management (SERB – PRISM)

- The platform will provide a whole range of information regarding all projects sanctioned by SERB from 2011 onwards, including funding details, status, research summary and project output details such as publications and patents.
- Search facilities enable retrieval of information about projects by the names of Principal Investigators (PIs), institutions, topics and other keywords, as well as year-wise listing and project equipment that have been sanctioned by the Board for them.
- The portal is expected to work as a comprehensive tool to help forge stronger scientist-scientist, and science-society connections.
- Among other things, it will help researchers to look at research trends, learn about cutting-edge science, locate critical equipment in their vicinity and help seek collaborations across disciplines.

About Science and Engineering Research Board



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- It is a statutory body under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, established by an Act of the Parliament of India in 2009 (SERB ACT,2008).

Chaired by:

- The Board is chaired by the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Science and Technology.
- The Board was set up for promoting basic research in science and engineering and to provide financial assistance to scientists, academic institutions, R&D laboratories, industrial concerns and other agencies for such research.

Sinatra Doctrine

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- European Union has recently adopts '**Sinatra Doctrine**' to counter China's growing influence in Europe.

About Sinatra Doctrine

- "Sinatra Doctrine" was the name that the Soviet government of Mikhail Gorbachev used jokingly to describe its policy of allowing neighboring Warsaw Pact states to determine their own internal affairs.
- The doctrine would be based on two pillars:
 - a. Continuing cooperation with China in regards to address global challenges such as climate change, combating COVID-19 and regional conflicts,
 - b. Strengthening the European Union's (EU) strategic sovereignty by protecting technological sectors of its economy.
- 'Sinatra Doctrine' is being seen by scholars as a threat and a blowback to China's growing influence in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

Chinese investment

- Chinese investments in the 12 EU member states participating in the 17+1 initiative between 2010 to 2019 has been approximately 8.6 billion euros, whereas China's investment over the same period in Finland has been 12 billion euros or in the

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Netherlands has been 10.2 billion euros, which remained a major turn-off for these member countries.

- This mismatch between Beijing's economic promises and ultimate outcome has been a major reason for the discontent that the CEE member countries share with China.

Digital Green Certificates

(Topic- GS Paper II–health issue, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- European Commission has recently proposed to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe and free movement of citizens within the European Union (EU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **The certificates are expected to be rolled out by the summer, after countries have had the time to set up the required digital infrastructure.**

About the Digital Green Certificate



- A Digital Green Certificate is proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, has received a negative test result or has recovered from COVID-19.

Key features

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- The certificate will be in digital or paper format complete with a QR code and will be free of charge.
- The certificate can be issued by authorities, including hospitals, testing centres and health authorities.
- Once the proposal for digital certificates is finalised, it will be accepted in all EU countries and will help to ensure that the restrictions imposed in different areas within the EU can be lifted in a coordinated manner.

Benefits

- All EU citizens or third-country nationals who are legally staying in the EU will be able to use these digital certificates and thereby will be exempted from free movement restrictions.
- In case an EU member country requires a person to quarantine or undergo a test, it will have to notify the Commission and all other member states justifying its decision.

What is the need for such a document?

- In the EU and across the world, the tourism industry has been severely impacted due to the spread of the disease.
- Many countries have, therefore, been contemplating digital certificates or passports that will be proof that a person has been vaccinated or has recovered from COVID-19.

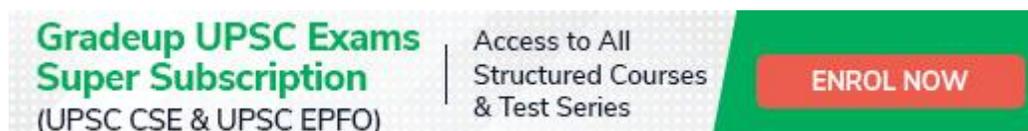
Recently approved Certificates

- In February 2021, **Israel became the first country to issue certificates called “vaccine passports”** that will allow vaccinated individuals to use some facilities and attend events.
- In May 2020, countries such as Chile had proposed “**release certificates**” meant for those who had recovered from COVID-19.
- But the World Health Organisation (WHO) had advised against using such certificates because of lack of evidence that a person infected with Covid-19 could not get the infection again.

[NIO launches project for mapping genetic diversity in Indian Ocean](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?



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- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Institute of Oceanography (CSIR-NIO), Goa, has recently initiated a project for mapping the genetic diversity of organisms and the effect of micronutrients and trace metals on them in the Indian Ocean.
- **It is under projects TraceBioMe.**

More about the Project TraceBioMe

- It is a 90-day long expedition onboard research and will be completed in two-legs till the end of May.
- The project envisages extensive sampling of water, sediments, planktons and various organisms in different parts of the Indian Ocean to study the presence of different kinds of organisms and the trace metals and micronutrients found therein using modern state-of-the-art molecular techniques as well classical techniques.
- **In the first phase, microscopic organisms will be investigated.**

Benefits

- The project helps to identify and characterise the genes and proteins in the ocean to understand the cellular-level operations of organisms in the ocean by utilising the emerging biomedical techniques, such as proteomics and genomics.
- These studies will help one understand cellular biochemistry and the response of ocean to the climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.
- This study will enable scientists to identify the factors controlling the changes in RNA and DNA in the oceans and various stressors impacting them.
- This will be used as tracers to track the causative factors and suggest possible solutions for their mitigation impacting society.
- In addition, these large pools of RNA and DNA library of the oceans would be utilised for future **bioprospecting in the Indian Ocean for human benefit.**

Significance

- The data generated under this programme will help in a long way to achieve the SDG14 goals, which aim at conserving and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

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EU joins India-led Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The European Union has recently joined India's Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) initiative.
- CDRI was launched in 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the UN Climate Change Summit.

About the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

- It is an international collaborative platform involving the public and private sector, aiming to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development.
- It was launched at the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in New York, US in 2019.
- The secretariat is based in New Delhi, India.

Framework of the Joint Rivers Commission

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Institution, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- India and Bangladesh have agreed to expand cooperation on issues relating to water resources including framework for sharing of river waters.
- This was decided during the India-Bangladesh Water Resources Secretary-level meeting under the framework of the Joint Rivers Commission which held recently.

About Joint River Commission

- The Joint River Commission was a bilateral working group established by India and Bangladesh in the Indo-Bangla Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace.
- **It was signed on March 19, 1972 and came into being in November, 1972.**

- As per the treaty, the two nations established the commission to work for the common interests and sharing of water resources, irrigation, floods and cyclones control.
- The studies and reports of the commission contributed directly to the efforts of both nations to resolve the dispute over the Sharing of Ganges Waters, facilitating bilateral agreements in 1975, 1978 and finally in 1996.

Related Information

About Teesta Water Dispute

- The Teesta water dispute is the most contentious issue between India and Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh has sought an “equitable” distribution of Teesta waters from India, on the lines of the **Ganga Water Treaty of 1996**, but to no avail.
- The failure to ink a deal had its fallout on the country’s politics, putting the ruling Awami League in a spot

About Teesta River

- It is a tributary of the Brahmaputra (known as Jamuna in Bangladesh) which flows through India and Bangladesh.

Origin

- It originates in the Himalayas and flows through Sikkim and West Bengal to merge with the Brahmaputra in Assam and (Jamuna in Bangladesh).
- It then enters the Bay of Bengal.

Note:

- The Teesta river water sharing agreement has not gotten signed yet, due to opposition from West Bengal because **River is a State subject**.

Cabinet approves closure of Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Union Cabinet has recently approved the closure of loss-making Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India Ltd (HHEC).

About Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India Ltd

- It is a central public sector undertaking (CPSE) under the administrative control of Ministry of Textiles.

Benefits

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- The approval will benefit the government exchequer in reducing recurring expenditure on salary and wages of the sick CPSE which is not in operation and earning no income, it said.

Note:

- HHEC has been incurring losses since financial year 2015-16 and is not earning sufficient income to meet its running expenses.
- There is little scope for its revival, necessitating closure of the company.
- The decision to close HHEC is in line with government's **strategic disinvestment policy**, under which CPSEs in non-strategic sectors will be privatised or closed.

Bihar Assembly passes Lokayukta Bill

(Topic- GS Paper II–Polity, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Bihar state assembly has passed the Bihar Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that proposes to punish people filing false cases before the anti- corruption ombudsman body to prevent any waste of time or misuse of the institution.

Key highlights of the bill

- The bill proposes that a case against a person filing a false case can be filed in the district court.
- If the person is found guilty of it or for giving false testimony or filed wrong affidavit, he/she will be sentenced to a jail term of upto three years besides a provision for fine.

Related Information

About Lokayukta

- Lokayukta is an anti-corruption authority or ombudsman – an official appointed by the government to represent the interests of the public.
- It investigates allegations of corruption and mal-administration against public servants and is tasked with speedy redressal of public grievances.

Background

- The Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Late Morarji Desai in 1966 recommended the setting up of the institution of Lokayukta.

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- The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013, commonly known as The Lokpal Act was passed by the Parliament of India in December 2013.
- It provides for the appointment of a Lokayukta “to investigate and report on allegations or grievances relating to the conduct of public servants.”
- It also called for establishment of **Lokpal** at the Centre.

Who is appointed as the Lokayukta?

- The Lokayukta is usually a former High Court Chief Justice or former Supreme Court judge and has a fixed tenure.

Selection

- The Chief Minister selects a person as the Lokayukta after consultation with the High Court Chief Justice, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Chairman of the Legislative Council, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly and the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council.
- The appointment is then made by the **Governor**.
- Once appointed, Lokayukta cannot be dismissed nor transferred by the government, and can only be removed by passing an impeachment motion by the state assembly.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain’ campaign (Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister has recently launched the ‘Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain’ campaign on World Water Day.
- The world water day is celebrated on **22nd March 2021**.

Background

- National Water Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti launched a campaign “Catch the Rain” with the tag line “Catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls” in 2020 to nudge the states and all stakeholders to create Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suitable to the climatic conditions and sub-soil strata, with people’s active participation.
- It is a massive awareness drive was launched on 21st December 2020 in collaboration with the "Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan" (NYKS) involving Youth Clubs in 623 districts across the country including Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

About ‘Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain’

- The Campaign will be undertaken across the country, in both rural and urban areas.
- The theme of the campaign is “**catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls**”.

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- It will be implemented from 22nd March 2021 to 30th November, 2021 - the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country.
- It will be launched as a Jan Andolan to take water conservation at grass-root level through people's participation.
- It is intended to nudge all stakeholders to create rainwater harvesting structures suitable to the climatic conditions and subsoil strata, to ensure proper storage of rainwater.

Government Initiative's for rain water harvesting

Government is implementing a number of schemes for rainwater harvesting which include

- a. Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal)
- b. Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation
- c. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme etc.

Aquifer Rejuvenation Project

- Central Ground Water Board is implementing Aquifer Rejuvenation Project through Artificial Recharge in selected over-exploited blocks in the country under Aspirational District Programme.
- As a part of this Scheme, check dams, percolation tanks, sub surface barriers, recharge shafts and piezometers have been constructed in Pulivendula block in Andhra Pradesh and Bachennapet in Telangana.

World Happiness Report 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Indian Society, Source- The Hindu)

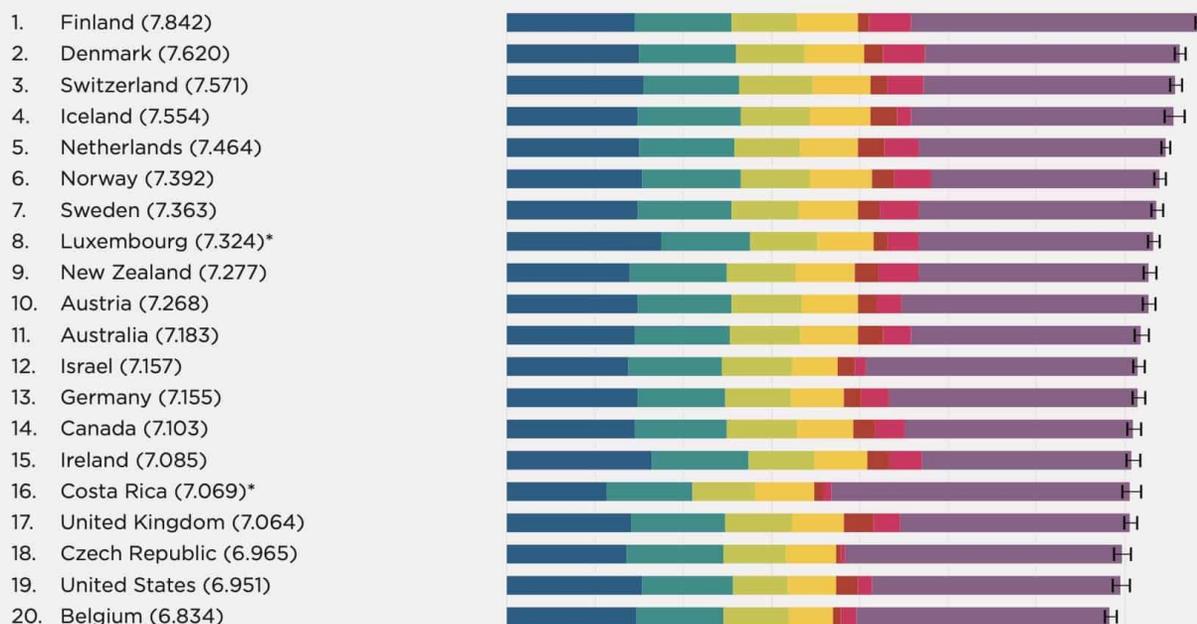
Why in the news?

- The United Nation Sustainable Development Solutions Network has released its annual report called “World Happiness Report, 2021”.
- It is the ninth ‘World Happiness Report’.
- The report was presented ahead of “**World Happiness day**” which is observed on March 20.
- This year it focuses on the effects of Covid-19 and how people all over the world have fared.

About the World Happiness Report

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Figure 2.1: Ranking of happiness 2018-2020 (Part 1)



- The report measures the subjective well-being by relying on three indicators namely,
 - a. Life Evaluation
 - b. Positive Emotions
 - c. Negative Emotions.
- The happiness study ranks the countries of the world on the basis of questions from the Gallup World Poll.
- The results are then correlated with other factors, including GDP and social security.

Methodology

- The rankings are based on polling which looks at six variables and respondents are asked to rate their own current lives on a 0-10 scale.
- The best possible life for them was evaluated as 10 while the worst possible life as 0.
 - a. Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (Purchasing Power Parity)
 - b. Social Support
 - c. Healthy life expectancy at birth
 - d. Freedom to make life choices
 - e. Generosity
 - f. Perceptions of corruption

Key Findings

- Finland was again titled as the World’s happiest country because the overall rankings remained similar to the index of 2020.

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- The other countries that performed well on the rankings are Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland and Netherlands.
- United States was ranked at 19th position.

Least Happy Country

- Afghanistan was titled as the ‘Least Happy’ country.

India’s ranking

- India has been ranked 139 out of 149 countries in the list of UN World Happiness Report 2021.
- In 2019, India was ranked 140th.
- Ten countries who have been ranked behind India in the year 2021 are Burundi, Yemen, Tanzania, Haiti, Malawi, Lesotho, Botswana, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Afghanistan.

Top Performers

- Finland ranked as the happiest country for the fourth consecutive year.
- Followed by Iceland, Denmark, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Norway.

Worst Performers

- Afghanistan (149) is the unhappy country followed by Zimbabwe (148), Rwanda (147), Botswana (146) and Lesotho (145).

20 states achieve ease of doing business reforms

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Livmint)

Why in the news?

- Recently, twenty states have implemented the ease of doing business reforms so far to raise additional financial resources of Rs 39,521 crore through open market borrowings.
- Most recently, five more states — Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Meghalaya and Tripura — have completed the reform process of “Ease of Doing Business” stipulated by the Department of Expenditure.

Background

- In view of the resource requirement to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India had on 17th May, 2020 enhanced the borrowing limit of the States by 2 percent of their GSDP.
- **Half of this special dispensation was linked to undertaking citizen centric reforms by the States.**

The four citizen centric areas for reforms identified were

- (a) Implementation of One Nation One Ration Card System
- (b) Ease of doing business reform

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- (c) Urban Local body/ utility reforms and
- (d) Power Sector reforms.

About Ease of doing business

- The ease of doing business is an important indicator of the investment friendly business climate in the country.

The reforms stipulated in this category are:

- Completion of first assessment of ‘District Level Business Reform Action Plan’
- Elimination of the requirements of renewal of registration certificates/approvals/licences obtained by businesses under various Acts.
- Implementation of computerised central random inspection system under the Acts wherein allocation of inspectors is done centrally, prior inspection notice is provided to the business owner, and inspection report is uploaded within 48 hours of the inspection.

Benefits

- States completing ‘Ease of Doing Business’ reforms are eligible for additional borrowing of 0.25 per cent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).
- Earlier, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Punjab and Telangana had also reported completion of this reform.

Exercise: Pabbi-Antiterror-2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Organization, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, during the 36th meeting of the Council of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on March 18 has decided to hold the joint exercise ‘Pabbi-Antiterror-2021’.

About Pabbi-Antiterror-2021

- It is an anti-terrorism exercise.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organization

- It is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

Current member

- The SCO comprises eight member states, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan;

Observer State

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- The SCO counts four observer states, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia;

Dialogue Partner

- The SCO has six dialogue partners, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
- The official working languages of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation are Chinese and Russian.
- The SCO Secretariat, based in Beijing, is the main permanent executive body of the SCO

India & SCO

- India hosted SCO's meeting on Urban Disaster Handling.
- It involves the joint mock exercise on urban earthquake search and rescue by National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).
- The 5th meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) 's Heads of Ministries and Department of Science and Technology was held in Russia.
- In this meeting, members have agreed to the India's proposal for hosting the Heads of Ministries (Prime Ministers) meeting in 2020.
- India will also host the SCO Forum of Young Scientists and Innovators in 2020.

About Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the SCO which serves to promote cooperation of member states against terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **The SCO Secretary-General and the Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of three years.**

Gram Ujala scheme

(Topic- GS Paper II– Governance (Scheme), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Union power and new and renewable energy minister has launched the "Gram Ujala Scheme" to provide the cheapest LED bulbs in the rural areas.

About Gram Ujala scheme

- The scheme offering the world's cheapest LED bulbs in rural areas at a mere ₹10.

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- Under the scheme, the bulbs are offered by the state-run Energy Efficiency Services Ltd's subsidiary Convergence Energy Services Ltd (CESL).
- “Gram Ujala programme will be financed entirely through **carbon credits** and will be the first such **programme in India**.
- **The claim of carbon credit is under the under the United Nations’ Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).**
- “Under the programme, 7 watt and 12 watt LED bulbs with three years’ warranty will be given to rural consumers against submission of working incandescent bulbs.
- The Gram Ujala programme will be implemented in villages of the 5 districts only and consumers can exchange a maximum of 5 LED bulbs.

First Phase of the scheme

- In the first phase, the scheme was launched from Arrah district in Bihar.
- In this phase around 15 million LED bulbs will be distributed in the villages of Arrah (Bihar), Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Nagpur (Maharashtra), and western Gujarat.

Background

- The government’s previous Ujala (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All) scheme had cut LED bulb prices to ₹70 apiece from around ₹310 in 2014.

Note :

- India is currently the second-largest LED market in the world by value, with the Ujala scheme likely to help avoid peak electricity demand of 9,428 megawatts.

Related Information

About Clean Development Mechanism

- The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), defined in Article 12 of the Protocol.
- It allows a country with an emission-reduction or emission-limitation commitment under the Kyoto Protocol (Annex B Party) to implement an emission-reduction project in developing countries.
- Such projects can earn saleable certified emission reduction (CER) credits, each equivalent to one tonne of CO₂, which can be counted towards meeting Kyoto targets.
- The mechanism is seen by many as a trailblazer.
- It is the first global, environmental investment and credit scheme of its kind, providing a standardized emissions offset instrument, CERs.
- A CDM project activity might involve, for example, a rural electrification project using solar panels or the installation of more energy-efficient boilers.
- The mechanism stimulates sustainable development and emission reductions, while giving industrialized countries some flexibility in how they meet their emission reduction or limitation targets.

Myanmar border shut amid strains over refugee crisis

(Topic- GS Paper II–International relations, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Mizoram Chief Minister held a virtual meeting with Foreign Minister of Myanmar amid the ongoing military crackdown following the February coup, even as India sealed all entry points along the border with the Southeast Asian neighbour and is closely monitoring them to prevent any Myanmar national from entering the country.

Background

- Following the February 1 coup when the Myanmar military overthrew the democratically elected government, around 300 Myanmar's nationals, including many policemen, have crossed into India and sought refuge.
- The whole of Myanmar is in turmoil and “innocent hapless citizens are being persecuted” by the military regime, who are supposed to be their guardians and protectors.
- The Myanmar area bordering Mizoram is inhabited by Chin communities, who are ethnically our brethren with whom we have been having close contacts throughout all these years even before India became independent.

About Free Movement Regime

- India and Myanmar have an arrangement called Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allows locals on both sides to go upto 16 km across the other side and stay up to 14 days.

Lok Sabha passes GNCTD amendment Bill 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- The Lok Sabha passed GNCTD amendment Bill 2021, a Bill that defines that the word “government” in Delhi means the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) and makes it mandatory for the elected government in the national capital territory to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action.

Key highlights of the bill

- The Bill amends the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 which provides a framework for the functioning of the Legislative Assembly and the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

- The Bill amends certain powers and responsibilities of the Legislative Assembly and the Lieutenant Governor.
- It further seeks to ensure that the Lieutenant Governor is necessarily granted an opportunity to exercise the power in select category of cases, in emergency.
- The Bill also gives powers to LG to make rules in matters which fall outside the preview of the Delhi Legislative Assembly.
- It has a provision that all executive action will be expressed to be taken in the name of the Lieutenant Governor.

The limits of POCSO

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- A single bench of the Madras High Court recently allowed a petition seeking to quash a **case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor.**

Aggravated penetrative sexual assault

- Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape.
- A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others.
- Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This means that any sex with a minor is rape.

Sexual tendencies of adolescents

- The judgment echoes the arguments that child rights activists have been making for years: by ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relations.
- The court reasoned that **adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during this time.**
- The implication is that people within this age group may be clubbed together notwithstanding the legal line drawn at 18.

- This informed the court's view of the relationship of the minor 'victim' with the accused respondent as being a loving, rather than an abusive, one.
- The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest.
- However, in doing this, it ignored the established precedent against quashing cases of rape, a heinous and serious offence, held by the Supreme Court to be a public concern, and not a private matter. Perhaps the court was persuaded in taking this course because of its observation that POCSO could not have been intended to bring such cases within its scope.
- In making this observation, the court relied on the Statement of Objects and Reasons of POCSO, which states that the law was enacted pursuant to Article 15 of the Constitution, which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.

POCSO Bill, 2011

- The Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha) which considered the POCSO Bill, 2011 had, in fact, criticised the clause providing for the possibility of consent in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18.
- It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence, instead of putting victims on trial as is often the case when the consent of the victim is in question.
- This would indicate that adolescent sexuality was not meant to be an exception to POCSO's bright-line approach.

A just verdict

- The judgment was intuitively just, even though it was not in line with precedent.
- It highlighted the urgent need for a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people.

- Courts need to be able to strike a balance between the limited but developing capacity of adolescents to consent to sexual interaction and their vulnerability to being groomed, abused, and exploited.
- For this to be possible, the legislature must provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address, so that valid conclusions may be drawn about what is the intent of the law, and what is clearly outside its purpose.

Centre to expand air bubble pact with more countries

(Topic- GS Paper II–International relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently External Affairs Minister has told the Rajya Sabha that the government wanted to expand the “air bubble” arrangement with more countries, and the priority would be Saudi Arabia, Kuwait in the west and Japan, China and Singapore in the east.

About Air bubble scheme

- Under the air bubble scheme, commercial airlines from specific countries are allowed to travel to and from India on a limited basis.
- Air bubbles or travel corridors are systems established between two countries that perceive each other to be safe and allow carriers of both the countries to fly passengers either way without any restrictions.
- It is an arrangement that was solely reserved for the Air India under the Vande Bharat mission — as full-scale international commercial air operations are yet to resume after the COVID-19 restrictions were implemented last year.
- It is different from repatriation flights, which are only one way and the passengers have to register themselves with the embassy to board such flights.

With which countries India has air bubble agreements?

- In July 2020, India had initially established travel bubbles with the United States, Germany and France. Since then, India has formed agreements with 10 other nations — United Kingdom, Canada, the Maldives, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Japan.

Benefits of a travel bubble

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- Establishing a travel bubble between two or more countries is always beneficial as it can directly boost the travel and tourism and hospitality industries of the concerned countries.
- A travel bubble is especially beneficial to the worst affected countries.

Note:

- The Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia were the first ones to create an air bubble, allowing free travel among themselves, while restricting outsiders.

Call for fresh polls if NOTA top count

(Topic- GS Paper II– Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently asked the Centre and the Election Commission of India to respond to a plea that fresh elections should be conducted in constituencies where the highest number of votes polled is NOTA (None of the above).

Concept of NOTA

- The NOTA stand as “None of the Above”.
- Many times it has been observed that if people do not want to vote for any candidate due to any local issue problems such as electricity, water, roads or criminal records of the candidate, then how will they register their protest so to empower the voice of the voters the Election Commission of developed a mechanism in the voting system so that people can get the right to reject all the candidates.
- So basically NOTA gives the right to voters in any constituency that if they do not want to vote for any of the candidates contesting the election; they can push the button of NOTA mentioned in the EVMs.
- The votes given to the NOTA are counted but they are considered illegal votes, i.e. NOTA votes don’t have any role in the result of the elections.

A report on NOTA votes cast in 2019 Lok Sabha election

- The high NOTA percentage was an indicator that people were frustrated with the state of affairs in their constituency, did not find any of the candidates worthy enough and therefore, even after reaching the polling station, decided to press the NOTA button.

- Bihar registered the maximum None of The Above (NOTA) votes of about 8 lakh, with the highest share of 5.04% reported from the **Gopalganj constituency**.
- Gujarat, where the highest of 3% was seen in Dahod, had only eight constituencies where the NOTA share was below 1%; while in Haryana, nine of the 10 seats registered less than 1% voters rejecting all candidates.
- In as many as 23 constituencies of Karnataka, NOTA vote share was again less than 1% and the highest of 1.39% was in Uttara Kannada in the State.
- In Kerala and Delhi, all the constituencies had below 1% NOTA share.

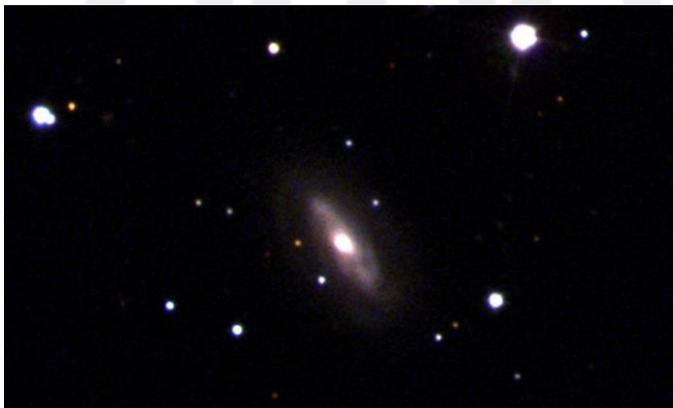
Galaxy J0437+2456

(Topic- GS Paper II– Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Scientists have discovered the first moving super massive black hole whose mass is about three million times that of our Sun.

About the black hole



- The black hole was travelling within its own galaxy, J0437+2456, which is around 228 million light years away from Earth.
- The super massive black hole is moving with a speed of about 110,000 miles per hour (177,027.84 kilometre per hour) inside the galaxy J0437+2456.

About black hole

- It is a region of space-time where gravity is so strong that nothing—no particles or even electromagnetic radiation such as light—can escape from it.

- The theory of general relativity predicts that a sufficiently compact mass can deform space-time to form a black hole.

Orunodoi scheme

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, out of the slew of beneficiary schemes the BJP government announced ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, the Orunodoi scheme.

About the scheme



- The scheme has been announced in 2020-21 Budgets.
- It was launched on 2nd October 2020.
- Under this scheme, a monthly assistance of Rs 830 is transferred to women members of marginalised families of Assam directly to their bank account.
- According to a Finance Department handout, the scheme gives “a choice to the poor and needy households on how they want to spend their money”.

Eligibility

- The applicant, a woman, has to be a permanent resident of Assam.
- The composite household income should be less than Rs 2 lakh per annum.

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- Families with specially-abled members and divorced/widowed/separated /unmarried women are prioritised.
- Poorer families, those without National Food Security Act (NFSA) or ration cards, are also given priority.

Iranian oil surge to China hurts OPEC efforts to tighten supply

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Organisation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- According to estimates by traders and analyst, China - the world's largest crude oil importer, is currently buying close to 1 million barrels a day of sanctioned crude, condensate and fuel oil from the Persian Gulf nation.
- Most refiners and traders around the world are reluctant to buy Iranian crude because of U.S. sanctions, which can result in repercussions like being cut off from the American banking system.
- However, the seemingly unstoppable rally in global crude prices is making the sharply discounted Iranian oil increasingly attractive to Chinese buyers including its independent refiners, which account for around a quarter of the country's crude-processing capacity.

Benefits to Iran

- Iran is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, **but is exempted from the supply restrictions.**
- However, China's preference for its cheap crude is displacing demand from OPEC countries like Angola as well as other producers like Norway and Brazil -- although the quality of oil from all of these countries is not identical.
- The increased Iranian flows are happening as the administration of President Joe Biden attempts to revive a nuclear deal with Tehran.
- The Persian Gulf supplier exported around 2.5 million barrels a day of oil before the sanctions were first imposed in 2018.

Related Information

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About OPEC



- It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

Founding Members

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. They were to become the Founder Members of the Organization.
- Currently, the **Organization has a total of 14 Member Countries.**

Objective

- To coordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers;
- An efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and
- OPEC membership is open to any country that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.

About OPEC+

- OPEC+ refers to the alliance of crude producers, who have been undertaking corrections in supply in the oil markets since 2017.
- OPEC plus countries include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.

- The OPEC and non-OPEC producers first formed the alliance at a historic meeting in Algiers in 2016.
- The aim was to undertake production restrictions to help revive a swinging market.

Note:

- Recently, the United States overtook Saudi Arabia as India's second biggest oil supplier in February 2021.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

(Topic- GS Paper II–Issue related with Women, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 that increases the time period within which an abortion may be carried out.
- The Bill was passed in March last year in the Lok Sabha.

About the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

MTP Act 1971	MTP amendment Bill 2020
One registered and recognized Medical Practitioner in opinion to terminate the pregnancy along with the consent of the mother is required to Terminate the pregnancy till 12th Week	 One registered and recognized Medical Practitioner in opinion to terminate the pregnancy along with the consent of the mother is required to Terminate the pregnancy till 20th Week
Two or more registered and recognized Medical Practitioner in opinion to terminate the pregnancy along with the consent of the mother is required to Terminate the pregnancy 12th to 20th Week (In case of Vulnerable women)	 Two or more registered and recognized Medical Practitioner in opinion to terminate the pregnancy along with the consent of the mother is required to Terminate the pregnancy from 20th to 24th Week (in case of vulnerable women)
It doesn't mention clearly about the confidentiality and privacy of the women and the case	This amendment emphasizes to protect the women's privacy and confidentiality of the data related to termination of pregnancy

- The bill seeks to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- It provides for enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women, but does not specify the category.

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- The bill leaves the categories to be defined by the states in the amendments to the MTP rules and includes survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women like differently-abled women and minors.
- Currently, **abortion requires the opinion of one doctor if it is done within 12 weeks of conception and two doctors if it is done between 12 and 20 weeks.**
- The bill allows abortion to be done on the advice of one doctor up to 20 weeks, and two doctors in the case of certain categories of women between 20 and 24 weeks.

Salient features of the Bill

- Proposing requirement for opinion of one provider for termination of pregnancy, up to 20 weeks of gestation and introducing the requirement of opinion of two providers for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation
- Enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules and would include 'vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, Minors) etc.
- Upper gestation limit not to apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by Medical Board.
- The composition, functions and other details of Medical Board to be prescribed subsequently in Rules under the Act.
- Name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorised in any law for the time being in force.

Unique ID for all land parcels by March 2022: Centre **(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Hindu)**

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Centre plans to issue a 14-digit identification number to every plot of land in the country within a year's time.
- It will subsequently integrate its land records database with revenue court records and bank records, as well as Aadhaar numbers on a voluntary basis,

About Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) scheme

- It will be a 14 digits Alpha–numeric unique ID for each land parcel based on Geo reference coordinate of vertices of international standard and compliance of Electronic

Commerce Code Management Association (ECCMA) standard and Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standards.

- It will provide compatibility so that all States can adopt it easily and help develop land bank and lead towards Integrated Land Information Management System (ILIMS).
- Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) is proposed to be rolled out in 10 States during FY 2020-21 and by 2021-22 in the entire country.

Benefits

- Its benefits are to ensure uniqueness in all transactions and keep the land records always up-to-date.
- It also help link of all property transactions gets established, delivery of citizen services of land records through a single window, sharing of land records data across departments, financial institutions and all stakeholders, standardization at data and application level would bring in effective integration and interoperability across departments.

'Move health to Concurrent list'

(Topic- GS Paper II–Polity, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Fifteenth Finance Commission Chairman N.K. Singh has said that, Health should be shifted to the Concurrent list under the Constitution.

Related Information

Distribution of Legislative Subjects

- Article 246 adopts a threefold distribution of legislative power between the Union and the states.
- The subject-wise distribution of this power is given in the three lists of the Seventh Schedule of the constitution:
 - a. The Union List- List-I
 - b. The State List- List-II
 - c. The Concurrent List- List-III

Union List

- Parliament has exclusive powers to make laws with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the Union List.
- It includes the matters of national importance and the matters which require uniformity of legislation nationwide.
- This list includes 98 subjects (originally 97) like defence, banking, foreign affairs, currency, atomic energy, insurance, communication, inter-state trade and commerce, census, audit and so on.

State List

- The state legislature has exclusive powers (not during emergency) to make laws with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the State List.\

- It includes the matters of regional and local importance and the matters which permit diversity of interest.
- This list includes 59 subjects (originally 66) like public order, police, public health and sanitation, agriculture, prisons, local government, fisheries, markets, theaters, gambling and so on.

Concurrent List

- The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 transferred five subjects to Concurrent List from State List i.e education, forests, weights and measures, protection of wild animals and birds, and administration of justice; constitution and organisation of all courts except the Supreme Court and the High Courts.
- Both, the Parliament and state legislature can make laws with respect to any of the matters enumerated in the Concurrent List.
- It includes the matters on which uniformity of legislation throughout the country is desirable but not essential.
- However State legislation operates to the extent that it is not in conflict with the Central legislation.
- This list has at present 52 subjects (originally 47) like criminal law and procedure, civil procedure, marriage and divorce, population control and family planning, electricity, labour welfare, economic and social planning, drugs, newspapers, books and printing press, and others.

Residuary Power

- The power to make laws with respect to residuary subjects i.e. the matters which are not enumerated in any of the three lists is vested in the Parliament.
- Parliament has power to make laws with respect to any part of the territory of India not included in a state even though that matter is one which is enumerated in the State List.
- This provision is related to the Union Territories or the Acquired Territories (if any).

Jal Shakti Ministry approves performance incentive to seven states

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently the Jal Shakti Ministry has approved Rs 465 crore as performance incentive grant to Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

More on the news

Best performing state

- Gujarat was among the best performing states in implementing JJM to ensure tap water supply to every household.

Criteria for performance incentive grant

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- It includes physical and financial progress under Jal Jeevan Mission.
- Currently, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa and Telangana have become 'Har Ghar Jal' states/UT, and every household in 55 districts and 85,000 villages of the country have tap water supply.

Related Information

About Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission has been formed after the restructured and subsumed the ongoing National Rural Drinking Water Programme(NRDWP) which will provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household** i.e., Har Ghar Jal Se Jal (HGNSJ) by 2024.

Objective

- It will provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural and urban households by 2024.
- It envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission" was being allocated Rs 3.6 lakh crore in the budget 2020.**

Focused area

- The mission focuses on integrated demand and supply-side management of water at the local level.
- The creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability measures as mandatory elements, like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse, would be undertaken in convergence with other government programmes/schemes.
- The Jal-Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of grey-water for agriculture and source sustainability.
- The Mission is based on a community approach to water and includes extensive Information, Education and Communication as a key component of the mission.
- **The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India has placed the subject of drinking water in the 11th Schedule.**

Funding Pattern:

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- The fund sharing pattern between the
 - a. Centre and states is 50:50
 - b. for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 90:10
 - c. for other states, and 100% for Union Territories.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

Institutional Arrangement:

1. National Jal Jeevan Mission (NJJM) at the Central level
2. State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) at the State level
3. District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) at the District level
4. Village Water Sanitation Committee (VWSC) at Village level

Village Action Plan (VAP):

- **Every village will prepare a Village Action Plan (VAP) which will have three components:**
 - a. Water source & its maintenance
 - b. Water supply
 - c. Grey-water (domestic wastewater) Management.

Need for and significance of the Mission:

- India has occupied 16% of the world population, but only 4% of freshwater resources.
- The major challenges to provide potable drinking water are depleting groundwater level, overexploitation and deteriorating water quality, climate change, etc. are
- It is an urgent requirement of water conservation in the country because of the decreasing amount of groundwater level.
- Jal Jeevan Mission will focus on integrated demand and supply management of water at the local level.

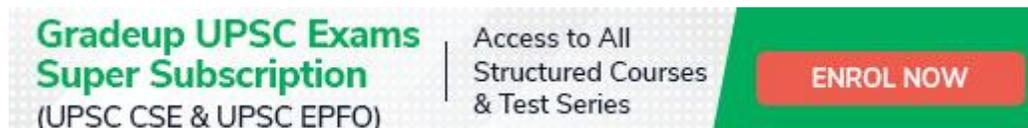
Indo-Korean friendship park

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, an Indo-Korean friendship park was jointly inaugurated by Defence Minister of India and Minister of National Defence of South Korea Suh Wook at Delhi cantonment.

Background



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- The park has been built to commemorate the contribution of Indian peacekeeping force during the Korean war of 1950-53.

Significance of Korea for India

- India and Korea Recently focused on boosting bilateral defence and military cooperation.
- South Korea has been a major supplier of weapons and military equipment to India.
- In 2019, the two countries finalised a roadmap for cooperation in joint production of various land and naval systems.

Japan to fund A&N, metro expansion

(Topic- GS Paper II–International relation, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, in the first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N), Japan has approved grant aid to improve the power supply in the islands.

More on the news

- Loan agreements were signed between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the government.

These projects including

- Bengaluru Metro's Phase 2 expansion plans
- Delhi Metro's Phase 4
- The grant would be used to procure 15MWh batteries as well as power system stabilisers to allow better utilisation of solar power generated in South Andaman.
- A loan was also extended for crop diversification in Himachal Pradesh and rural water supply with a focus on mitigating fluorosis in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu and Barmer districts.

Significance for Indo- Pacific

- Indo-pacific due to its geopolitical location play a crucial role in shared vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

Cooperation between Japan and India on these crucial islands demonstrate the commitment of both countries to realising a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific

Affordable Rental Housing and Complexes (ARHC) scheme

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- TOI)

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Why in the news?

- The Uttar Pradesh cabinets has recently approves the offering affordable rental housing for poor people living in cities

Beneficiaries

- Urban migrants/poor labourers, those belonging to economically weaker sections, low income groups including factory workers, educational institutions, people associated with hospitality and students will be the beneficiaries.
- Preference will be given to people belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, widows, working women, divyang and minorities, which will be subject to the provisions made

Background

- The Affordable Rental Housing and Complexes (ARHC) scheme has been launched by the government of India through the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** under '**self-reliant India**' campaign.
- It will be implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) to promote participation of private/public institutions for construction, operation and maintenance of rental housing complexes for urban migrants/poor, it said.

The scheme will be implemented under two models in the state.

- a. Model one involves converting vacant houses funded by the central or state government into an ARHC through an agreement.
 - b. Under the second model, ARHC will be built, operated and maintained by public/private entities on their available vacant land, it said.
- All projects under the scheme will be used for rental accommodation only for EWS/LIG category, urban migrants/poor for minimum 25 years.
 - If ARHC is used for any purpose other than rent, action will be taken against the agency concerned by the competent authority according to rules.

Vaccine wastage

(Topic- GS Paper II–Social Issue, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news ?

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- Recently Prime Minister has raised concerns on vaccine wastage emerging from the Covid-19 inoculation drive.

About Vaccine wastage

- Vaccine wastage is an expected component of any large vaccination drive, and a vaccine is procured from the maker with an estimated wastage.
- For each vaccine type, the wastage has to be within recommended limits.

How Wastage happens?

IN UNOPENED VIALS

- If the vaccine has crossed expiry date
- If it's exposed to heat
- If the vaccine has been frozen Breakage
- Missing inventory and theft

IN OPENED VIALS

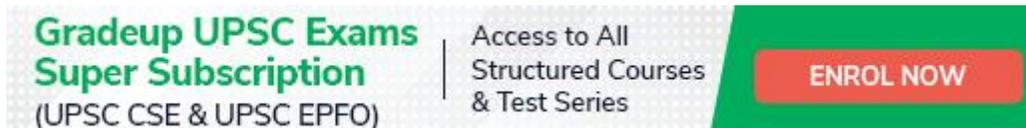
- While discarding leftover doses
- Not able to draw out the number of doses
- Vials submerged in water
- Suspected contamination
- Poor vaccine administration practices

DIFFERENT STAGES WHERE WASTAGE OCCURS

- At cold chain points
- District vaccine stores
- Vaccination session sit
- At all times, the issue of vaccine doses should match the registered list of beneficiaries:
 - Vials with earlier manufacturing dates should be prioritized
 - Supply frequency should be monitored closely

Ways to Prevent Wastage

- Sessions should be planned well.
- Each vaccine session should service maximum 100 beneficiaries.
- The Centre has advised not to open the vials if sites do not have minimum 10 people.



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- Train vaccinators: Some vaccinators end up drawing only nine doses against 10.

3rd phase of Indian Beamline Project

(Topic- GS Paper II–International relation, Source- TOI)

Why in the news?

- The third phase of the Indian beamline project has been recently set up under India-Japan Scientific and Technological Cooperation with special focus on industrial application research.
- The phase would increase the number of young researchers from India to be trained in advanced X-ray techniques of material research.

About Indian Beamline Project



- The Indian beamline has been constructed and maintained by Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP), Kolkata and Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bangalore; in Japanese synchrotron light source Photon Factory (PF) of High Energy Accelerator Research Organization (KEK), with support from Nano Mission, Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- This India-Japan Scientific and Technological Cooperation project was initiated between the DST and the KEK on 24 July 2007.
- In the first phase (2009-2015) of this project, an X-ray beamline (BL18B) was constructed by Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics in Photon factory.

- In the second phase (2016-2021), JNCASR and SINP jointly developed the beamline further to cater to the need of various users from India.

World Summit on Information Society Forum 2021

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Organisation, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021 is co-organized by International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD.

About World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum

- It is one of the world's largest annual gatherings of the 'ICT for development' community.
- The 2021 WSIS Forum will provide an opportunity to serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines in collaboration with the UN Agencies involved and provide information and analyses of the implementation of WSIS Action Lines since 2005.
- The forum underscores the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for modernization and transformation of the industry.
- The forum also promotes inclusive economic growth and stimulation of the national economies to meet the larger objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The Agenda and Programme for the Forum is built on the basis of official submissions received during the Open Consultation Process on Shaping the Themes and Format of WSIS Forum 2021.

Indian scenario

- India under the flagship program BharatNet, nearly 6,00,000 villages are being connected through laying of more than 4,00,000 Km length of optical fiber cable and use of satellite communication services

- Through submarine cable networks small and remote islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep and other inaccessible areas are being connected with funding from Government.
- The establishment of ITU Area office and Innovation Centre in India with involvement of SMEs, Academia and Startups in the region will go a long way in development of technologies, standards and solutions best suited for rural and remote areas of developing nations.

China, Iran sign a 25-year 'strategic pact'

(Topic- GS Paper II–International relation, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, China and Iran signing of a 25-year “strategic cooperation pact”.

Key Highlights of the Pact

- The agreement covers ‘political, strategic and economic’ components and seeks to deepen cooperation.
- The agreement would establish a blueprint for reciprocal investments in the fields of transport, ports, energy, industry and services.
- The agreement comes amid a major push from China to back Iran, as it deals with the continuing weight of sanctions from the U.S. administration.

Recent Development

- Recently China and Russia called for the U.S. to unconditionally return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as soon as possible and revoke the unilateral sanctions against Iran.
- The two nations have proposed the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform to converge a new consensus on resolving the security concerns of countries in the region.

New rule for polling agents

(Topic- GS Paper II–Governance, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- The Election Commission's recent decision to change the rules for appointing polling agents has sparked off a debate in West Bengal.

Who is a polling agent?

- A polling agent is a person appointed as a representative of a political party as it is not possible for a candidate to be physically present at every polling booth on the day of the elections.
- Therefore, the Election Commission allows a candidate to appoint a polling agent who keeps an eye on the voting process.

Role of a polling agent

- As per the Election Commission's rules, a polling agent should be familiar with the rules and procedures to conduct elections using EVMs and VVPATs, and with the working of these machines.
- Towards this end, a polling agent attends the demonstrations arranged by the Returning Officer, where the functioning and operation of these machines are explained.

How were they appointed earlier?

- As per the earlier practice, polling agents had to be voters of the same polling stations or at least the neighbouring polling stations of the booth where she has been posted at.

What does the new rule say?

- The Election Commission of India, revising the rule, has allowed a party to nominate a polling agent for any booth within the assembly segment where the person is an electorate of.
- So, any voter from within an Assembly constituency can be a polling agent of any booth within that constituency.

OCI cardholders no longer required to carry old Indian passports for travel

(Topic- GS Paper II–Polity, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, according to a government notification people of Indian origin and the Indian diaspora having Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cards are now not required to carry their old, expired passports for travel to India, as required earlier.

Background

- The Indian government has relaxed the provisions since last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The timeline has been extended multiple times so far.
- However, this is for the first time that the guidelines have been relaxed for carrying old passports and the new passports along with the OCI cards for overseas Indians.
- The **current OCI guidelines** that have been in force since 2005.

Benefits of OCI



- The Overseas Citizens of India or OCI card is issued to people of Indian origin globally which gives them almost all the privileges of an Indian national except for the right to vote, government service and buying agricultural land.
- The OCI card gives them visa-free travel to India.
- In a March 26, 2021 the Indian missions in the US said that in order to ease the travel of OCI cardholders, it has been decided that the “timeline for re-issuance of OCI cards in r/o OCI cardholders, who may be required to get their OCI card reissued has been extended until 31 December 2021.”

Why is an OCI card important?

- The OCI card, among other benefits, allows multiple entry, multi-purpose lifelong visa to an Indian-origin foreign national to visit India.
- Under the provisions of the OCI card, which gives the cardholder a lifelong visa to India, those below 20 years and above 50 years need to renew their OCI card every time they have their passport renewed.

9th 'Heart of Asia' conference

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Relation, Source- AIR)

Why in the news ?

- Recently External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has arrived in Tajikistan's to attend the 9th Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) ministerial conference.

Related Information

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About Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP)

- The Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process is an intergovernmental organisation established to provide a platform to discuss regional issues such as encouraging economic cooperation, encouraging security and political stability for Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours.
- The region-specific platform was launched in November 2011 to expand the scope of assistance in combating existential threats like terrorism, narcotics, poverty and extremism.
- It is a part of the Istanbul Process - a regional initiative on security and cooperation for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan - that was launched on November 2, 2011 in Turkey.
- This platform was established to address the shared challenges and interests of Afghanistan and its neighbors and regional partners.

Members

- It is comprised of 15 participating countries, 17 supporting countries, and 12 supporting regional and international organizations

India and Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference

- India co-hosted the 6th Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Amritsar, Punjab in December 2016.
- The platform's constructive role is also consistent with India's vision of achieving lasting stability and prosperity for Afghanistan, anchored in a regional environment that is united, stable, secure, pluralistic, democratic, and economically prosperous.

Tribal TB Initiative

(Topic- GS Paper II–Health Issue, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Health Ministry has recently launched 'Tribal TB Initiative' in pursuit of TB Mukta Bharat.

About Tribal TB Initiative

- It will focus on vulnerability mapping, active case finding & promote behavioral change at the ground level.
- TB Mukta Bharat initiative aims at the elimination of TB by 2025.

Reasons for 'Tribal TB Initiative

- In India, almost 104 million tribal population lives, across 705 tribes, accounting for 8.6 % of the country's population.
- The poor living standards like physical remoteness, malnutrition, and lack of hygiene lead to the tribal population getting vulnerable to TB.
- Currently, 177 tribal districts were identified as High-priority districts that are vulnerable.
- The Joint plan will primarily focus on 161 districts initially across 18 states which will include deploying improved vulnerability mapping techniques and organization of sensitization and capacity-building workshops for volunteers

About Tuberculosis (TB)

- It is caused by bacteria (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*) that most often affect the lungs.
- It is curable and preventable.
- World TB Day is observed on 24 March to earmark the discovery of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, a bacterium due to which TB is caused, by German microbiologist Dr. Robert Koch in 1882.

Government Initiative

Universal Immunization Programme

- The Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) launched by the Government of India in 1985 includes vaccination for 12 diseases including TB.

Nikshay Ecosystem

- It is the National TB information system which is a one-stop solution to manage information of patients and monitor program activity and performance throughout the country.

Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)

- This scheme is aimed at providing financial support to TB patients for their nutrition.

TB Harega Desh Jeetega Campaign

- It was launched In September 2019 it is showcasing the highest level of commitment for the elimination of TB.

Saksham Project

- It is a project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) that has been providing psycho-social counselling to DR-TB patients.

About Truenat

- It is a device which is small, battery operated and requires minimal training and is usable even in smaller settings such as the Primary Health Centre.
- It is a Diagnostic machine used to test drug-resistant tuberculosis.
- It uses a chip-based technology and takes just up to 60 minutes for a test, screening or confirmatory.

Note:

- Recently, **Union Territories of Lakshadweep and district of Badgam in Jammu and Kashmir have been declared TB Free on World TB Day.**

Economy, Science & Technology & Environment

Chinese cyber attack foiled: Power Ministry

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Chinese hacker groups also called ‘**Red Echo**’ targeted various Indian Power sector’s Regional Load Dispatch Centres (RLDCs) along with State Load Dispatch Centres (SLDCs).”
- National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) has informed the Power Ministry about the threat by Red Echo through a malware called **Shadow Pad**.

About National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)

- It is an organization of the Government of India created under Sec 70A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 (amended 2008), through a gazette notification.
- It is designated as the National Nodal Agency in respect of Critical Information Infrastructure Protection.

Vision

- To facilitate safe, secure and resilient Information Infrastructure for Critical Sectors of the Nation.

Mission

- To take all necessary measures to facilitate protection of Critical Information Infrastructure, from unauthorized access, modification, use, disclosure, disruption,

incapacitation or distraction through coherent coordination, synergy and raising information security awareness among all stakeholders.

About ShadowPad

- It is one of the largest known supply-chain attacks.
- It could potentially have targeted hundreds of organizations worldwide within a short span of time.

IIT-Delhi researchers develop technology to recycle e-waste

Why in the news?

- Recently, researchers at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi have developed a zero-emission technology to manage and recycle e-waste to wealth.

About the Research

- They have adopted a methodology that uses e-waste as an “Urban Mine” for metal recovery and energy production.
- Researchers said using their method, e-waste is shredded and pyrolyzed to yield liquid and gaseous fuels, leaving behind a metal-rich solid fraction.
- Using this technology, the leftover solid residue yields a 90-95% pure metal mixture and some carbonaceous materials.
- The carbonaceous material is further converted to aerogel for oil spillage cleaning, dye removal, carbon dioxide capture, and use in supercapacitors.

What is e-waste?

- E-waste is electronic products that are unwanted, not working, and nearing or at the end of their “useful life.”
- Example: Computers, televisions, VCRs, stereos, copiers, and fax machines are everyday electronic products.
- E-waste is particularly dangerous due to toxic chemicals that naturally leach from the metals inside when buried.

Arktika-M : Satellite to Monitor Climate in Arctic

Why in the news?

- Russia has recently launched its space satellite **Arktika-M** satellite to monitor the climate and environment in the

Arctic.



Reason behind study

- The Arctic has warmed more than twice as fast as the global average over the last three decades and Moscow is seeking to develop the energy-rich region, investing in the Northern Sea Route for shipping across its long northern flank as ice melts.
- Russia plans to send up a second satellite in 2023 and, combined, the two will offer round-the-clock, all-weather monitoring of the Arctic Ocean and the surface of the Earth.

About Arktika-M

- The Arktika-M will have a highly elliptical orbit that passes high over northern latitudes allowing it to monitor northern regions for lengthy periods before it loops back down under Earth.
- At the right orbit, the satellite will be able to monitor and take images every 15-30 minutes of the Arctic, which can't be continuously observed by satellites that orbit above the Earth's equator.
- The satellite will also be able to retransmit distress signals from ships, aircraft or people in remote areas as part of the international Cospas-Sarsat satellite-based search and rescue program.

Allow us to resume mining in Aravali Hills, Haryana tells SC

Why in the news?

- The Haryana government has appealed to the Supreme Court to permit it to resume mining in the Aravali Hills on the grounds that the pandemic had ground the State's economy to a halt.

Background

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- The mining in the region has been banned since 2002 under the Supreme Court orders, unless expressly permitted by the Union Environment Ministry.
- A 2018 report by a Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) said 25% of the Aravalli range has been lost due to illegal mining in Rajasthan since 1967-68.

Consequence of Mining

- The consequences of this mining have been a destruction of aquifers and deforestation.

About Aravali Hills

- The Aravalli Range (also spelled Aravali) is a mountain range in Northwestern India, running in a south-west direction, starting near Delhi, passing through southern Haryana and Rajasthan, and ending in Gujarat.
- The highest peak is Guru Shikhar at 1,722 metres (5,650 ft).
- The Aravalli Range, an eroded stub of ancient mountains, is the oldest range of Fold Mountains in India.

Himalayan serow

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Himalayan **serow** has been confirmed as the newest creature to be spotted in Assam.

About Himalayan serow

- Himalayan serow resembles a cross between a goat, a donkey, a cow, and a pig which is a medium-sized mammal with a large head, thick neck, short limbs, long, mule-like ears, and a coat of dark hair.



Geographical Location

- They are typically found at altitudes between 2,000 metres and 4,000 metres.
- They are known to be found in eastern, central, and western Himalayas, but not in the Trans Himalayan region.
- The Trans-Himalayas Mountain Region or Tibet Himalayan Region is located to the north of the Great Himalayas which consists of Karakoram, Ladakh, and Zaskar and Kailash mountain ranges.

Conservation Status

- These are listed as **Vulnerable** in IUCN Red list.
- **Under CITES: Appendix I**
- Under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: **Schedule I**

Related Information

About Mandarin ducks



- In February this year, birders had sighted the colourful Mandarin duck in the **Maguri-Motapung wetland** near eastern Assam's **Dibru-Saikhowa National Park**.
- **This duck was last spotted in Assam 118 years ago.**
- **Mandarin duck was first identified by Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758.**

Characteristics

- It is considered the most beautiful duck in the world.

Habitat

- It is native to East Asia but has established populations in Western Europe and America too.
- It breeds in Russia, Korea, Japan and northeastern parts of China.

In India

- The duck rarely visits India as it does not fall in its usual migratory route.
- It was recorded in 1902 in the Dibru River in the Ronggora area in Tinsukia (Assam).

Conservation Status

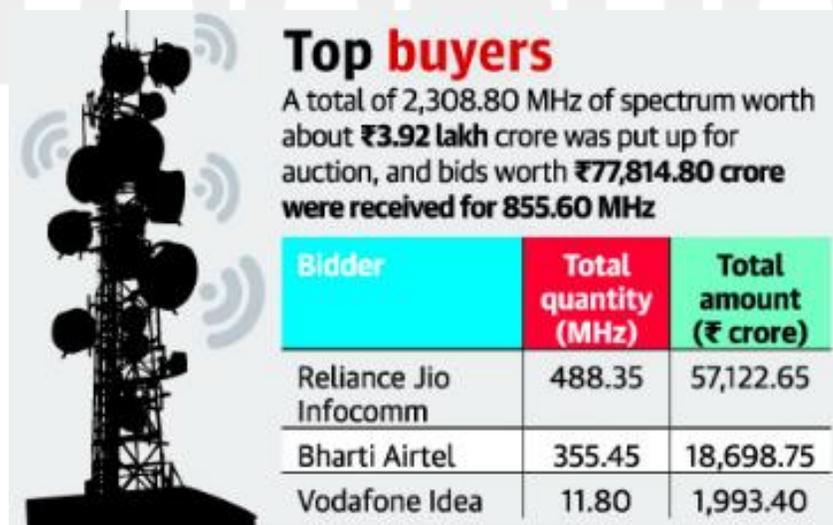
- They are listed as **Least Concern** in IUCN Red List.

Spectrum auction

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the telecom spectrum auctions concluded after bidding for a day and a half, with the Centre garnering ₹77,814.8 crore in revenues.
- Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Jio was the biggest bidder, acquiring 488.35 MHz of spectrum.



What are spectrum auctions?

- Devices such as cellphones and wireline telephones require signals to connect from one end to another.
- These signals are carried on airwaves, which must be sent at designated frequencies to avoid any kind of interference.
- **These airwaves are called spectrum**, which is subdivided into bands which have varying frequencies.

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- All these airwaves are sold for a certain period of time, after which their validity lapses, which is generally set at 20 years.
- The Union government owns all the publicly available assets within the geographical boundaries of the country, which also include airwaves.
- With the expansion in the number of cellphone, wireline telephone and internet users, the need to provide more space for the signals arise from time to time.
- To sell these assets to companies willing to set up the required infrastructure to transport these waves from one end to another, the central government through the DoT auctions these airwaves from time to time.

India, Japan back in Sri Lanka port project

(Topic- GS Paper III–International Relation, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently a month after walking out of an agreement with Delhi and Tokyo on jointly developing the partially built East Container Terminal (ECT), the Sri Lankan government, led by the Rajapaksa brothers, has decided to offer the West Container Terminal (WCT) to Indian and Japanese companies.
- Both India and Japan had expressed displeasure about Colombo “unilaterally” pulling out of the 2019 agreement.

Related Information

About West Container Terminal (WCT)

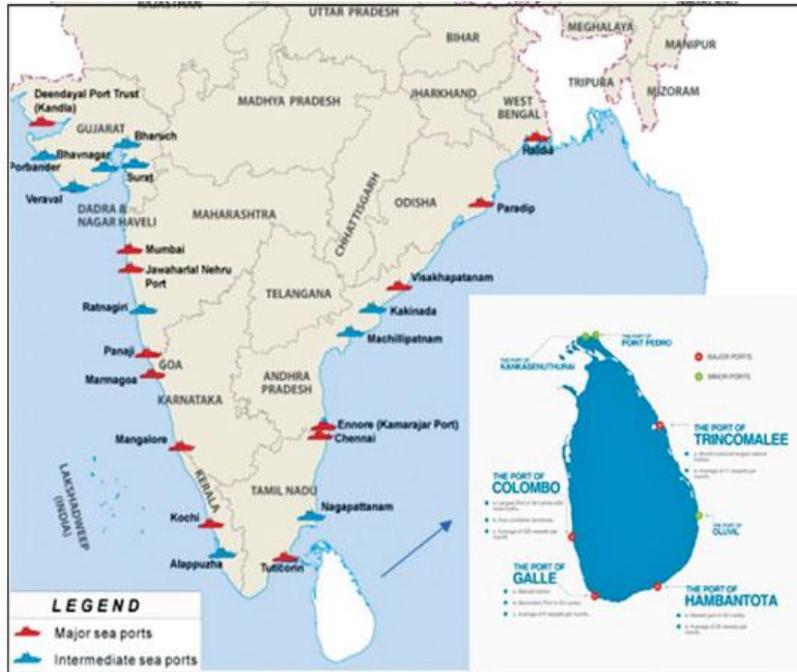


- The WCT will have a 1,400-metre quay wall, water depth of 20 metres, terminal area of about 64 hectares with an annual capacity of 2.6 million TEUs.
- India and Japan will jointly own 85 % stake in the planned WCT, on the lines of the Colombo International Container Terminals Ltd (CICT), in which China’s state-run

China Merchants Port Holdings Company Ltd holds 85 per cent stake and Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) holding the balance.

Fifth Container terminal

- It is the fifth container terminal at Colombo Port, is being offered to India and Japan after the Sri Lankan Cabinet on February 1 scrapped a tripartite memorandum of cooperation (MoC) signed in May 2019.



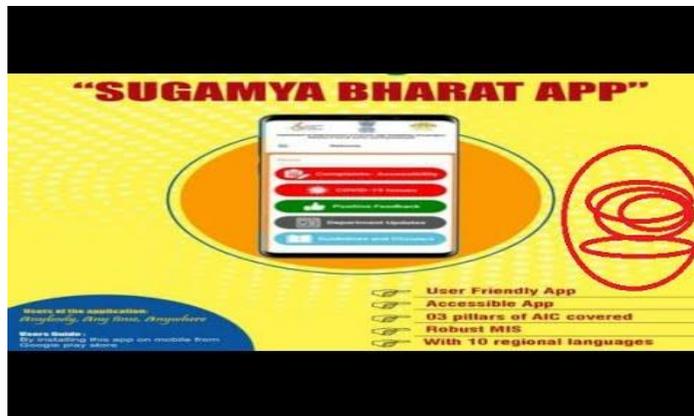
[Sugamya Bharat App](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment has recently launched the 'Sugamya Bharat' App.

About the Sugamya Bharat App



- It is a mobile application developed to sensitise and enhance accessibility within the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign.
- These pillar namely- the transportation sector, building an accessible environment and the ICT ecosystem in India.
- The app will aid the Accessible India Campaign towards making a barrier-free and conducive environment for Divyangjans (Persons with Disabilities – PwDs)

Features of the Sugamya Bharat App

- The App provides for five main features out of which four are directly related to enhancing accessibility.

They include:

- a. registration of complaints of inaccessibility across the broad pillars of the built environment
- b. transportation sector and Information and Communication Technology ecosystem
- c. Positive feedback of examples and best practices worth emulating being shared by people as Jan-Bhagidaari.
- d. It also includes Departmental s and guidelines and circulars related to accessibility.
- e. The fifth feature is a special feature meant only for Divyangjan for COVID related issues.

Other Features

- The app is available in 10 regional languages.
- The app is simple to use with an easy registration process.
- The Sugamya Bharat App will require only 3 mandatory fields such as Name, Mobile number and Email-id.

World Wildlife Day

(Topic- GS Paper III– Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- World Wildlife Day is celebrated every year on the 3rd of March since 2013.

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World Wildlife Day 2021 theme:

- The UN has announced the theme as “Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet.”
- This year, the day is dedicated to the livelihoods of communities that rely on forests, and the value of these ecosystems for both wildlife and all of humanity.



Background

- On 20 December 2013, the **Sixty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly** decided to proclaim 3 March as World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world’s wild fauna and flora.
- The date is the day of the adoption of the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973**, which plays an important role in ensuring that international trade does not threaten the species’ survival.
- The day is celebrated "as a way to **highlight the central role of forests, forest species and ecosystems services in sustaining the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people globally, and particularly of Indigenous and local communities with historic ties to forested and forest-adjacent areas,**"

[Australia Building World’s First Sanctuary for Platypus](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The WIRE)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, Australian conservationists unveiled plans to build the world’s first refuge for the platypus, to promote breeding and rehabilitation which are faces extinction due to climate change.

About Platypus

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- The platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*), sometimes referred to as the duck-billed platypus.

Unique Feature

- It is a semiaquatic, **egg-laying mammal** endemic to eastern Australia, including Tasmania.
- The platypus is the sole living representative of its family (*Ornithorhynchidae*) and genus (*Ornithorhynchus*), though a number of related species appear in the fossil record.
- It makes the Platypus an important subject in the study of evolutionary biology, and a recognisable and iconic symbol of Australia.

Conservation Status



Platypus

Ornithorhynchus anatinus

CITATION

Woinarski, J. & Burbidge, A.A. 2016. *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*. *Ti* 2016: e.T40488A21964009. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.1.RLTS.T40488A21964009.en>. Downloaded on 04 March 2021.



- These are listed under **Near Threatened** as per IUCN Red list.

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2023 Declared as International Year Of Millets

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics (Agriculture), Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The U.N. General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution sponsored by India and supported by over 70 nations declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets.
- The year **2018 has already been declared as the National Year of Millets by the Indian government.**

About Millets



- Millets are a group of highly variable small-seeded grasses, widely grown around the world as cereal crops or grains for fodder and human food.
- Millets are important crops in the semiarid tropics of Asia and Africa (especially in India, Mali, Nigeria, and Niger), with 97% of millet production in developing countries.
- The crop is favored due to its productivity and short growing season under dry, high-temperature conditions.
- The three major millet crops currently growing in **India are jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet) and ragi (finger millet).**
- India also grows a rich array of bio-genetically diverse and indigenous varieties of “small millets” like kodo, kutki, chenna and sanwa.

- Major producers include **Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana.**

About International Year of Millets

- It aimed at raising awareness about the health benefits of the grain and their suitability for cultivation under changing climatic conditions.
- The adoption of resolution will also draw focus for enhanced investments in research and development and extension services related to millets.

Contribute in achieving Sustainable Development Goals

- It will contribute to food security, nutrition, ensuring livelihoods and incomes of farmers, poverty eradication and the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly in regions that are drought prone or threatened by climate change.
- It will also help promote millets as a key component of the food basket.

Note:

- In April 2016, the U.N. General Assembly had proclaimed the U.N. Decade of Action on Nutrition from 2016 to 2025, recognising the need to eradicate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition worldwide.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, a massive fire has threatened to cause colossal damage to **Similipal Biosphere** — one of the largest biospheres of India.

About Similipal National Park

- It is the in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha which is also a Tiger Reserve.
- It was declared as a National Park in the year of 1980.
- It is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserve since 2009.
- It is part of the Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadgarh Elephant Reserve popularly known as Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve, which includes 3 protected areas i.e. Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadgarh Wildlife sanctuary and Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary.
- The park is surrounded by high plateaus and hills, **the highest peak being the twin peaks of Khairiburu and Meghashini.**
- Similipal National Park derives its name from the abundance of Semul or red silk cotton trees that bloom abundantly in the locality.

- It was formally designated a tiger reserve in 1956 and brought under Project Tiger in the year of 1973.
- The Government of Odisha declared Similipal as a wildlife sanctuary in 1979.

HC forms expert panel to discuss on treatment, therapy to rare diseases patients

(Topic- GS Paper II + III–Governance + Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Delhi High Court has recently set up a special committee to find a time-bound solution on ways to provide treatment and therapy options to patients suffering from rare diseases.
- The High Court's direction came while hearing a bunch of petitions filed by patients suffering from rare diseases such as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) and Hunter's syndromes

About the Committee

- It is a nine-member committee includes Renu Swarup, Secretary of Department of Biotechnology; Prof. Madhulika Kabra, AIIMS; I.C. Verma Director, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital; and Arun Shastry, Dystrophy Annihilation Research Trust (DART).

Functions

- The Committee has taken to indigenise the development of the therapies in India, and reasonable timelines required to be followed.

What is a rare disease?

- According to the World Health Organisation rare disease as an often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder with a **prevalence of 1 or less per 1,000 populations**.
- According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), **it is one in 2,500 people or less**.

Related Information

- **Recently** the Delhi High Court has 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.

Draft National Policy for Rare Diseases 2020

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- The draft policy provides for lowering the incidence of rare diseases based on an integrated preventive strategy.
- It aims to provide access to affordable health care to patients of rare diseases which are amenable to one-time treatment.
- The focus of the draft policy is on prevention of rare diseases as a priority for all the three groups of rare diseases identified by experts.

For the purpose of the policy the term rare diseases is categorised into 3 groups:

- a. Disorders amenable to one time curative treatment.
- b. Diseases requiring long term / lifelong treatment having relatively lower cost of treatment and benefit has been documented in literature and annual or more frequent surveillance is required.
- c. Diseases for which definitive treatment is available but challenges are to make optimal patient selection for benefit, very high cost and lifelong therapy.

Financial support

- A maximum of ₹15 lakh could be provided to each patient under the umbrella scheme of Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi and the beneficiaries would not be limited to families below the poverty line.
- It also would be extended to 40% of the population in accordance with the norms of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

About Duchenne muscular dystrophy

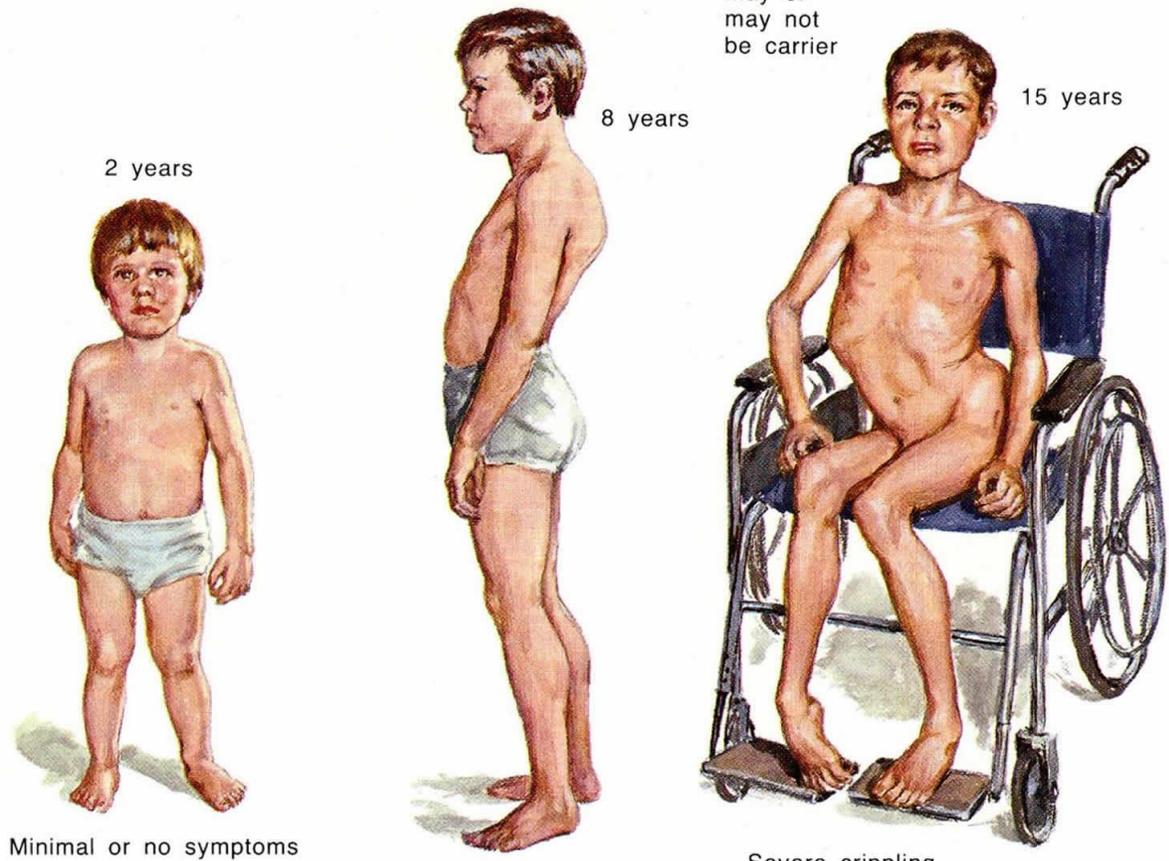
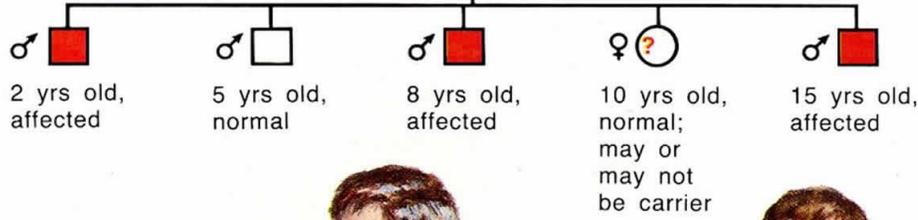
Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy

Sex-linked recessive inheritance

Mother normal, carrier

Father normal

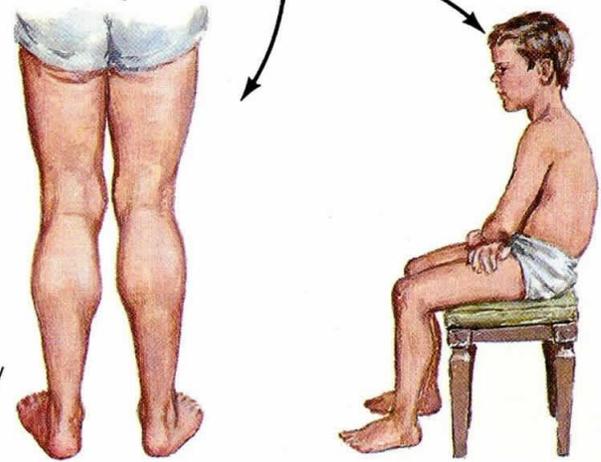
Only males affected, but females may be carriers



Minimal or no symptoms

Severe crippling deformities and contractures

Progression with age { Weakness, especially of pelvic girdle muscles; marked lordosis, enlarged calves



Calf muscles usually but not always enlarged

Lordosis disappears when child sits

- It is a genetic disorder characterized by progressive muscle degeneration and weakness due to the alterations of a protein called dystrophin that helps keep muscle cells intact.
- DMD is one of four conditions known as dystrophinopathies.
- The other three diseases that belong to this group are Becker Muscular dystrophy (BMD, a mild form of DMD); an intermediate clinical presentation between DMD and BMD; and DMD-associated dilated cardiomyopathy (heart-disease) with little or no clinical skeletal, or voluntary, muscle disease.

Symptoms

- Muscle weakness is the principal symptom of DMD.
- It can begin as early as age 2 or 3, first affecting the proximal muscles (those close to the core of the body) and later affecting the distal limb muscles (those close to the extremities).
- The disease primarily affects boys, but in rare cases it can affect girls.
- Usually, the lower external muscles are affected before the upper external muscles.
- The affected child might have difficulty jumping, running, and walking.
- Other symptoms include enlargement of the calves, a waddling gait, and lumbar lordosis (an inward curve of the spine).

About Hunter syndrome



Signs & Symptoms Of Hunter Syndrome

- Nose becomes broad
- Tongue is enlarged
- Cheeks become enlarged and rounded
- Lips thicken
- Enlarged head
- Hearing loss
- Heart valve issues
- Stiffness in joints
- Growth is restricted
- Compressed and damaged spinal cord

- Hunter syndrome is a rare, inherited disorder in which the body does not properly digest (break down) sugar molecules in the body.
- When these molecules build up in organs and tissues over time, they can cause damage that affects physical and mental development and abilities.
- Hunter syndrome is one of a group of diseases called mucopolysaccharidoses.
- It is also known as mucopolysaccharidosis type II, or MPS II.
- **The disorder almost always occurs in boys.**

[OPEC+ decision to extend oil output cuts will hit economic recovery](#)

(Topic- GS Paper II–International Organization, Source- The Hindu)

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Why in the news?

- Recently, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies - a group known as OPEC+, agreed to not to increase supply of crude oil.
- The decision was taken amid failure to achieve a more substantial recovery in demand amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



Implications for India

- India, Asia's third-largest economy, imports about 84% of its oil and relies on Middle Eastern supplies for meeting over three-fifths of its demand.
- India said that the decision could threaten the consumption led-recovery, impacting its economy post COVID-19 recovery.

Fiscal challenges

- Rising oil prices are posing fiscal challenges for India, where heavily-taxed retail fuel prices have touched record highs, threatening the demand-driven recovery.

About OPEC

- It is a permanent, intergovernmental organization, headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

Founding Members

- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. They were to become the Founder Members of the Organization.

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- Currently, the **Organization has a total of 14 Member Countries.**

Objective

- To coordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers;
- An efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and
- OPEC membership is open to any country that is a substantial exporter of oil and which shares the ideals of the organization.

About OPEC+

- OPEC+ refers to the alliance of crude producers, who have been undertaking corrections in supply in the oil markets since 2017.
- OPEC plus countries include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan.
- The OPEC and non-OPEC producers first formed the alliance at a historic meeting in Algiers in 2016.
- The aim was to undertake production restrictions to help revive a swinging market.

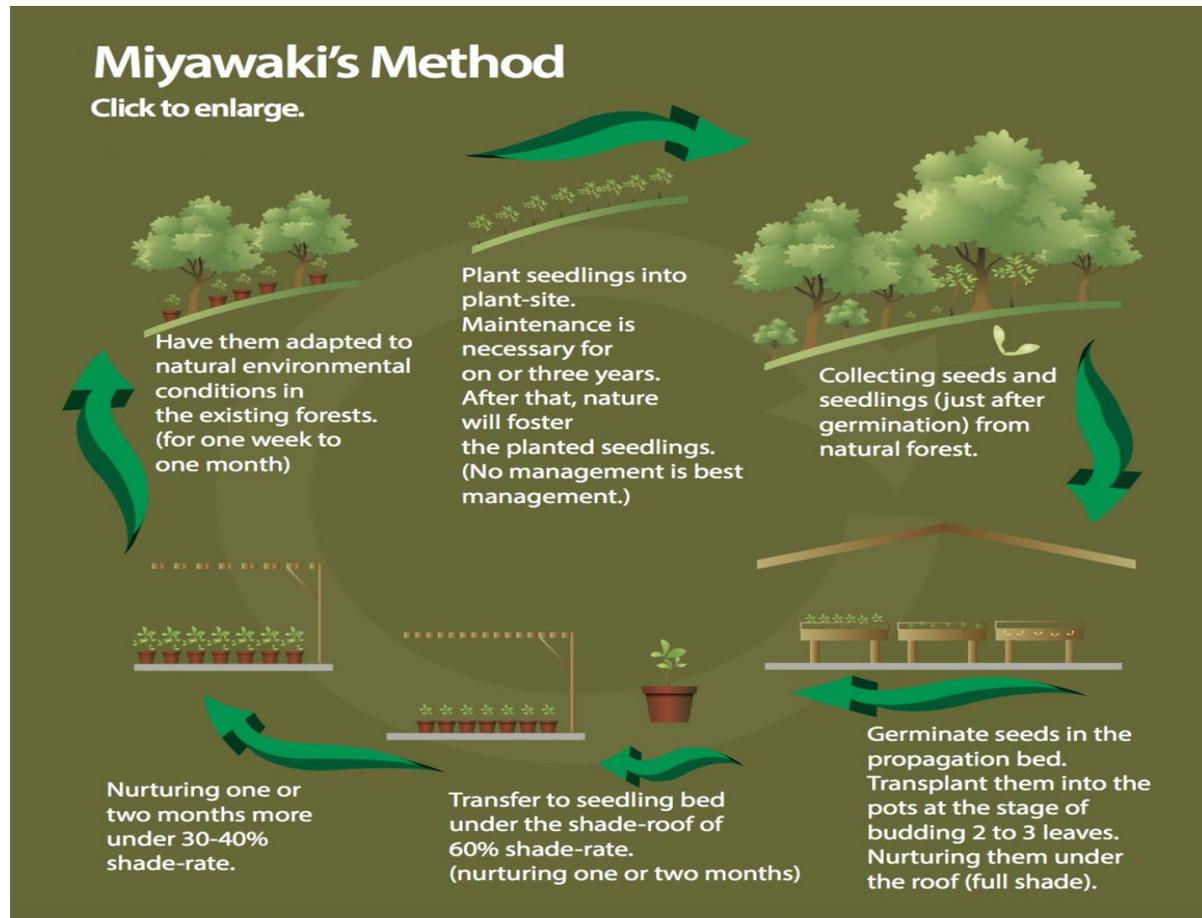
Miyawaki technique

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been recently using the Miyawaki method to create tiny urban forests in Metropolitan areas of Mumbai.

What is the Miyawaki Method?



- The Miyawaki method, also called the Potted Seedling Method, is an afforestation technique that uses native species to create dense, multilayered forests.
- It is based on the work of Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the 1980s.
- A central tenet in creating these forests is its use of indigenous species for plantations.

Components

- Three layers of greens – shrubs and undergrowth, medium-height trees and taller canopies – **are integral components of the Miyawaki forests.**

Benefits

- This method creates mini forests in which forests are grown 10 times faster and become 30 times denser and 100 times more biodiverse than those planted through conventional methods.
- These mini forests help lower temperatures in concrete heat islands, reduce air and noise pollution, attract local birds and insects, and create carbon sinks.

[Draft Coastal Zone Management Plan \(CZMP\)](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source-Indian Express)

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Why in the news?

- Recently, the draft Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) prepared by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai – an agency approved by the Centre – has stoked a controversy in Goa after the draft met with criticism from locals, environmentalists and political parties.

What is the Coastal Zone Management Plan?

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF), in a notification of January 6, 2011.
- The notification stated that it wanted to secure the livelihood of the fishing communities and other local communities living in the coastal areas, conserve and protect coastal stretches, their unique environment and marine area and promote development in a sustainable manner.
- The CRZ notification 2011 declared that the coastal stretches of the country and India's territorial waters, excluding Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands, as Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ).
- It also restricted the setting up and expansion of any industry, operations or processes and manufacture or handling or storage or disposal of hazardous substances there.
- The respective state governments and Union Territories were then directed to prepare Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMP) by identifying and classifying the CRZ areas.

About the Draft Report

- The primary purpose of a Coastal Zone Management Plan to describe proposed actions to address priority management issues in the coastal zone over a defined implementation period.

Issues with the draft CZMP

Violating the Environment Protection Rules, 1986

- The 30-day limit for suggestions and objections to the draft was not legal, as it was contrary to the 60-day limit provided by the Environment Protection Rules, 1986.

[DRDO tests Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet technology](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) successfully flight-tested Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology.

About Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)

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- It has been developed by Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).
- It is a missile propulsion system.
- The system is based on the concept of the Ramjet Engine principle which utilizes a solid fuelled air-breathing ramjet engine.

Related Information

About Ramjet

- It is sometimes referred to as a flying stovepipe or an athodyd (aero thermodynamic duct), is a form of airbreathing jet engine that uses the engine's forward motion to compress incoming air without an axial compressor or a centrifugal compressor.
- Because ramjets cannot produce thrust at zero airspeed, they cannot move an aircraft from a standstill.
- A ramjet-powered vehicle, therefore, requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.
- Ramjets work most efficiently at supersonic speeds around Mach 3 (2,300 mph; 3,700 km/h).
- This type of engine can operate up to speeds of Mach 6 (4,600 mph; 7,400 km/h).
- **Ramjets can be particularly useful in applications requiring a small and simple mechanism for high-speed use, such as missiles.**

Black-browed Babbler

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- Recently, a Black-Browed Babbler was rediscovered in southeastern Kalimantan, the part of Borneo that is administered by Indonesia after 170 years.

About the Black-browed Babbler



- Its scientific name is **Malacocincla perspicillata**.
- It is a songbird species in the family Pellorneidae.
- The species is endemic to Borneo.
- Only a single specimen, collected in the nineteenth century was known, until the bird was rediscovered in Indonesia during 2020.

Conservation status

- As per IUCN Red list its is under the ‘**Data Deficient**’

New umbrella entities (NUEs)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Indian Express)

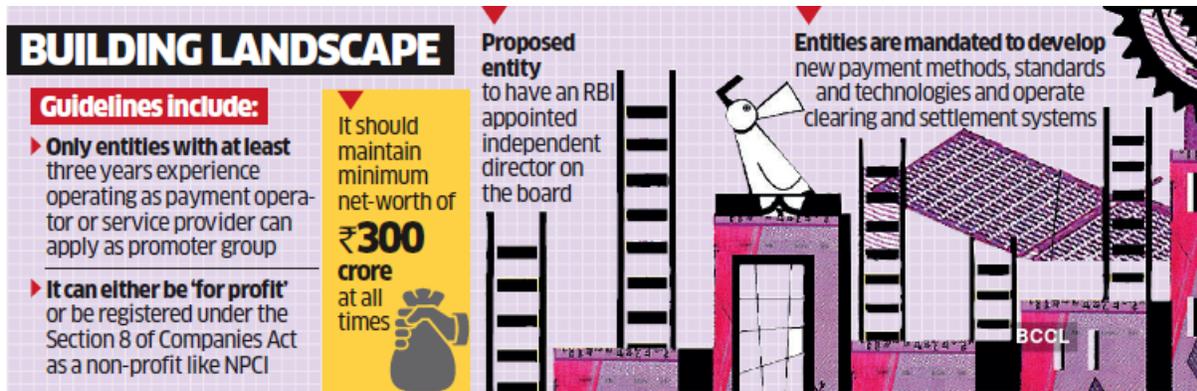
Why in the news?

- Recently, from Reliance and Tata to Amazon and Paytm, companies with any presence in India’s tech or financial services ecosystem are making a beeline to set up new umbrella entities (NUEs) for payment systems.
- The RBI has set a deadline of March 31 for firms to submit their applications for setting up NUEs.
- It is an idea floated by the Reserve Bank of India to create an alternate mechanism to the existing National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

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BUILDING LANDSCAPE

Guidelines include:

- ▶ Only entities with at least three years experience operating as payment operator or service provider can apply as promoter group
- ▶ It can either be 'for profit' or be registered under the Section 8 of Companies Act as a non-profit like NPCI

It should maintain minimum net-worth of **₹300 crore** at all times

Proposed entity to have an RBI appointed independent director on the board

Entities are mandated to develop new payment methods, standards and technologies and operate clearing and settlement systems

BCCL

What are NUEs?

- As envisaged by the RBI, an NUE will be a non-profit entity that will set-up, manage and operate new payment systems, especially in the retail space such as ATMs, white-label PoS; Aadhaar-based payments and remittance services.
- In addition to this, they will develop new payment methods, standards and technologies as well as operate clearing and settlement systems.

Which players are planning to set up NUEs?

- Only those entities that are owned and controlled by Indian citizens with at least three years of experience in the payments segment can become promoters of NUEs.
- Foreign investment is allowed in NUEs as long as they comply with the existing guidelines.

What is the need for NUEs?

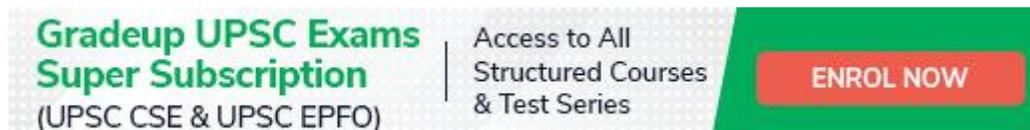
- Currently, the umbrella entity for providing retail payments system is NPCI, which is a non-profit entity, owned by banks.
- NPCI operates settlement systems such as UPI, AEPS, RuPay, Fastag, etc.
- Players in the payments space have indicated the various pitfalls of NPCI being the only entity managing all of retail payments systems in India.
- RBI's plan to allow other organisations to set up umbrella entities for payments systems aims to expand the competitive landscape in this area.
- For the players planning to establish these NUEs, the aim is to get an even bigger share in the digital payments sector.

Economic Freedom Index 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Heritage Foundation an US conservative think-tank body has released 'The Index of Economic Freedom 2021.'



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Key Findings

- Singapore tops the index followed by New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, and Ireland.
- Hong Kong was left out of the 2021 index calculation for the first time.
- It is because of China's increasing control over the city's economic policies. Hong Kong topped the index for 25 out of 26 years except for 2020.

Index and India

- India ranked 121st in the index with a score of 56.5 points under the category of 'mostly unfree'.
- In Asia-Pacific, India ranked 26th among the 40 countries.

Recommendation

- The Indian economy remains in the mid-range of the mostly unfree category.
- A move toward greater economic freedom would require substantial and broad-based reforms.
- In addition to taking steps to improve fiscal health and strengthen the rule of law, the government would need to increase financial freedom and reform the tax code, the investment regime, and the labour code.

About Economic Freedom Index

- The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom is an annual guide published to measure the progress made in advancing economic freedom which it claims brings greater prosperity.

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- It has been created in 1995 by US conservative think-tank body ‘The Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal.

Coverage

- The Index covered economic freedoms in 184 countries.

Parameters

The index measures 12 indicators grouped into four broad categories of economic freedom:

- a. Rule of Law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness)
- b. Government Size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health)
- c. Open Markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).
- d. Regulatory Efficiency (business freedom, labour freedom, monetary freedom)

Score

- Each of these twelve economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100.
- Score 0 is the least economic freedom and score 100 is the highest economic freedom.

INS Karanj - third Kalvari class Submarine

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The Indian Navy has recently inducted the third Scorpene-class conventional diesel-electric submarine, INS Karanj, into service which is a part of six being built **under Project-75**.

About Project 75



Under the Project 7, **six scorpion submarines** being indigenously built at **Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), Mumbai with help of French naval defence and Energy Company DCNS.**

The name of the Submarines is:

- (a) The first submarine of the class Kalvari joined service in December 2017.
- (b) The second submarine of the class Khanderi May 2019
- (c) **The third in the Scorpene series Karanj.**
- (d) The last two submarines are Vagir and Vagsheer.

Salient features

- These are diesel-electric attack submarines equipped with an anti-ship missile.
- The first four submarines will be conventional, while the last two will be equipped with the Air Independent Propulsion system, which will enable them to stay underwater for a longer duration.

Exercise DUSTLIK II

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, India - Uzbekistan joint military exercise DUSTLIK II commenced in Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet in Uttarakhand.
- This is the Second Edition of annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies.

About First Edition

- **The first edition of the exercise was held in Uzbekistan in November 2019.**



Significance:

- Uzbekistan is important to India for security and connectivity to the Central Asian region and also Iran; it is also one alternative India has with respect to Afghanistan.
- Security concerns stemming from the conflict in Afghanistan is one of the major challenges for India's involvement in Central Asia.
- The joint exercise also provides impetus to the ever growing military and diplomatic ties between the two nations and also reflects the strong resolve of both nations to counter terrorism.

Prompt corrective action

(Topic- GS Paper III–Banking, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken out IDBI Bank from the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, subject to certain conditions and continuous monitoring.
- The bank was put under PCA framework in May 2017, slapping curbs on expansion, investments and lending.

About Prompt Corrective Action

- It is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
- The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip below certain norms on three parameters

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- a. Capital ratios
- b. Asset quality
- c. Profitability.

Three level Risk threshold

- It has three risk threshold levels (**1 being the lowest and 3 the highest**) based on where a bank stands on these ratios.

First Threshold

- Banks with a capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) of less than 10.25 per cent but more than 7.75 per cent fall under threshold 1.

Second Threshold

- Those with CRAR of more than 6.25 per cent but less than 7.75 per cent fall in the second threshold.

Third threshold

- In case a bank's common equity Tier 1 (the bare minimum capital under CRAR) falls below 3.625 per cent, it gets categorised under the third threshold level.
- Banks that have a net NPA of 6 per cent or more but less than 9 per cent fall under threshold 1, and those with 12 per cent or more fall under the third threshold level.
- On profitability, banks with negative return on assets for two, three and four consecutive years fall under threshold 1, threshold 2 and threshold 3, respectively.

On breach of any of the risk thresholds mentioned above, the RBI can invoke a corrective action plan.

- Depending on the threshold levels, the RBI can place restrictions on dividend distribution, branch expansion, and management compensation.
- Only in an extreme situation, breach of the third threshold, would identify a bank as a likely candidate for resolution through amalgamation, reconstruction or winding up.

Why is it important?

- As most bank activities are funded by deposits which need to be repaid, it is imperative that a bank carries a sufficient amount of capital to continue its activities.
- PCA is intended to help alert the regulator as well as investors and depositors if a bank is heading for trouble.
- The idea is to head off problems before they attain crisis proportions.
- It helps RBI monitor key performance indicators of banks, and taking corrective measures, to restore the financial health of a bank.

Cabinet paves way for raising FDI limit in insurance sector to 74%

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- The Hindu)

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Why in the news?

- The Union cabinet has approved changes to the Insurance Act for increasing the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit to 74 per cent from the present 49 per cent.

Background

- In Budget speech for 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had proposed the increase to allow foreign ownership and control with safeguards.

Present Scenario

- As of March 2020, average foreign investment in 23 life insurance companies was 37.41 per cent. Only in nine private life insurers, the foreign investment has touched 49 per cent.

Benefits

- The increase of the FDI limit will provide insurance companies with committed funds to improve the penetration of insurance in the country.
- It will also bring in better technical know-how, innovation, and new products to the advantage of the consumers.
- It will make the insurance sector more competitive, transparent, and efficient which will ultimately improve business prospects and lead to greater employment generation in the country.

Related Information

In Indian FDI is allowed under two modes

- a. **Automatic route** : In this route companies don't need government approval.
- b. **Government route** : In this companies need a go-ahead from the centre.

New FDI policy

- Recently, India has revised its FDI rules amid the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Under the revised norms, the automatic route is now closed to investors from India's land neighbours, with special reference to China.
- India shares land borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- This new regulation is based on the fear that China may take advantage of the rock-bottom valuations of the firms of national importance in the backdrop of the lockdown.
- For example, recently People's Bank of China purchased shares of HDFC Bank at a very low price.

Revised FDI Rules

- Those companies in any country that shares a border with India will have to approach the government for investing in India and not go via the automatic route.

- Investors from countries not covered by the new policy only have to inform the RBI after a transaction rather than asking for prior permission from the relevant government department.

Note:

- Currently, Insurance penetration stands at just 3.71% of the GDP in the country.

Astronomers discover most distant “Quasar P172+18”

(Topic- GS Paper III– Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- An international team of astronomers have discovered the most distant ‘radio-loud’ quasar known as P172+**18** with the help of European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope (ESO’s VLT).

About Quasar, P172 + 18



☛ An artist's rendition of the most distant quasar which is not as 'radio-loud' as the new discovery

- The quasar (**P172 + 18**) emitted wavelengths which had a redshift of 6.8.
- Only three other ‘radio-loud’ sources with redshift greater than six have been discovered so far and the most distant one had a redshift of 6.18.
- The higher the redshift of the radio wavelength, the farther away is the source.
- It is also one of the fastest accreting quasars, which means it is accumulating objects from the galaxy at an enormous speed.
- **Redshift** is an increase in the wavelength and corresponding decrease in the frequency and photon energy of electromagnetic radiation (such as light).

About Quasar

- According to a paper published in The Astrophysical Journal March 8, 2021, Quasar’s took 13 billion years light to reach earth.

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- Quasars are very luminous objects in faraway galaxies that emit jets at radio frequencies.
- They are only found in galaxies that have supermassive blackholes which power these bright discs.
- However, 90 per cent of them do not emit strong radio waves, making this newly-discovered one special.

Significance

- The high-volume radio quasar may provide astronomers with information on how black holes were able to grow so rapidly after the Big Bang.

Kala-azar

(Topic- GS Paper III– Science and Technology, Source- Down to Earth)

Why in the news?

- Seven new cases of Kala-azar or Visceral Leishmaniasis have been reported in the last one week in Bihar’s Muzaffarpur district.

About Leishmaniasis



☐ Kala-azar or Visceral Leishmaniasis is caused by the bite of the female sand fly. Photo: Wikipedia

- It is a neglected tropical disease.
- It is caused by a parasite called Leishmania, which is transmitted through the bite of female sand fly.

There are three types of leishmaniasis:

- a. Visceral leishmaniasis, which affects multiple organs and is the most serious form of the disease.
- b. Cutaneous leishmaniasis, which causes skin sores and is the most common form.

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- c. Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis, which causes skin and mucosal lesions.

About Visceral leishmaniasis

- It is commonly known as Kala-azar in India, is fatal in over 95% of the cases, if left untreated.

Missed Dead line

- **The state government's efforts to eradicate the disease in the state by 2022.**
- Bihar has already missed the Kala-azar elimination target four times since 2010.
- The first deadline was 2010, under the National Health Programme, followed by 2015.
- It was later extended to 2017 and 2020 due to the government's failure to eliminate Kala-azar.

India and Neglected Tropical Diseases

- India is home to the world's largest absolute burden of at least 11 of this major neglected tropical disease, including dengue, hookworm disease and rabies.
- These diseases debilitate, disfigure, and can even be fatal to those affected.
- India has successfully eliminated certain infectious diseases—such as guinea worm, trachoma, and yaws—in recent year.

Recent policies on neglected diseases research in India

- **The National Health Policy (2017)** sets an ambition to stimulate innovation to meet health needs and ensure that new drugs are affordable for those who need them most. Still, it does not specifically tackle neglected diseases.
- **The National Policy on Treatment of Rare Diseases (2018)** includes tropical infectious diseases and identifies a need to support research on rare diseases treatments.
 - It has not yet prioritised diseases and areas for research funding or how innovation would be supported.
- **The Draft National Pharmaceutical Policy (2017)** states that one of its objectives is to create an enabling environment to develop and produce innovator drugs.
 - Still, the policy does not mention drugs for neglected tropical diseases.
- **The National Biotechnology Development Plan (2015-2020)** seeks to encourage the preclinical and clinical development of vaccines against rotavirus, cholera, typhoid, rabies (human (DNA) based), malaria, dengue, tuberculosis, and Japanese encephalitis.

[AsterX2021: First Military Exercise in Space](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III– Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

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Why in the news?

- France launched its first military exercise in space called **AsterX2021** to evaluate its ability to defend its satellites and other defense equipment from an attack.

About the AsterX2021



- The exercise, codenamed "AsterX" in memory of the first French satellite from 1965, will be based on 18 simulated events in an operations room.
- The aim of the exercise is to evaluate French military's ability to defend its satellites and other defense equipment from an attack.
- Under the exercise, the French military will monitor a potentially dangerous space object as well as a threat to its own satellite from another foreign power possessing a considerable space force.
- The new US Space Force and German space agencies are taking part in the French exercises.
- The military drill is part of the French government's strategy to make the country the world's third-largest space power.

Potential threats

- In 2017, a Russian "spy-satellite" had tried to approach a Franco-Italian satellite in what Paris called "an act of espionage."
- **Russia's Olymp-K** attempted to intercept transmissions from the **Athena-Fidus satellite** which is used by both **Italian and French armies for secure communications**.
- In 2020, the United States also accused Russia of having "conducted a non-destructive test" of an anti-satellite weapon from space.

Cut benzene emission at fuel outlets, says committee

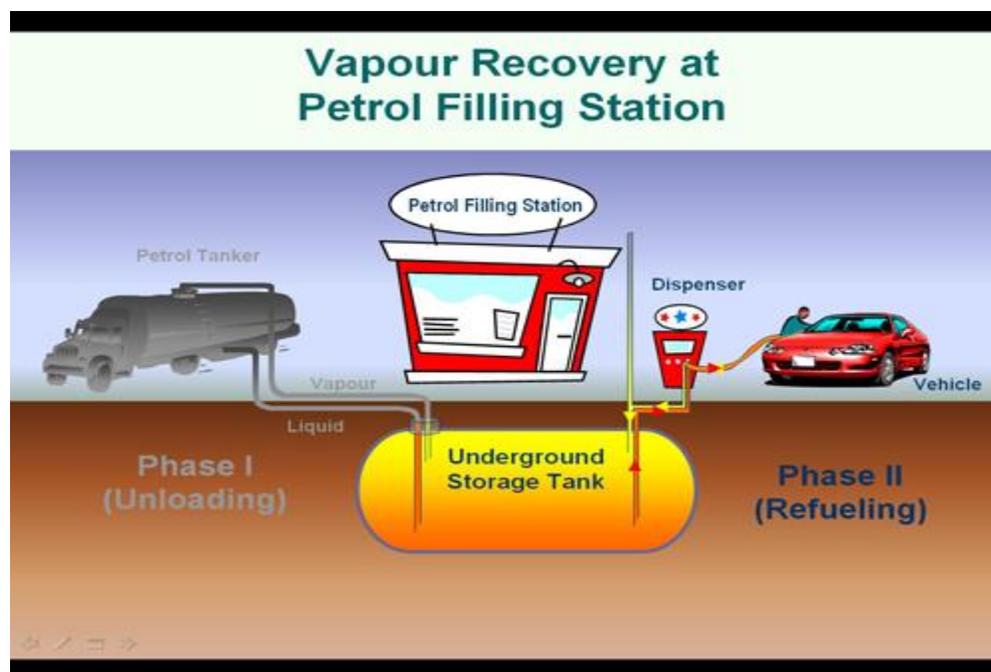
(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology , Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a joint committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to study air pollution in Kerala has recommended the installation of vapour recovery system at fuelling stations and retrofitting of diesel vehicles with particulate filters to improve air quality.

What is a vapour recovery system?

- A vapour recovery system helps to collect petrol vapour released during unloading and refueling back to the petrol tanker and underground storage tank, respectively.



About Benzene

- It is a chemical that is a colourless or light yellow liquid at room temperature.
- It has a sweet odour and is highly flammable.
- Benzene is formed from both natural processes and human activities.

Sources

- **Natural sources** of benzene include **volcanoes and forest fires**.
- Benzene is also a natural part of **crude oil, gasoline, and cigarette smoke**.
- **Motor vehicles account for approximately 85% of the total benzene emissions.**

Other sources of Benzene emissions

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- a. petrol refuelling stations
- b. volatile organic compounds
- c. particulate matter 2.5 concentration.

Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, more banks might be added to the Reserve Bank of India's list of "systemically important banks" due to changes in the pecking order after the merger of state-run lenders.

About Domestic Systemically Important Bank (D-SIBs)

- Domestic Systemically Important Bank means that the bank is too big to fail.
- According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), some banks become systemically important due to their size, cross-jurisdictional activities, complexity and lack of substitute and interconnection.
- Banks whose assets exceed 2% of GDP are considered part of this group.
- The RBI stated that should such a bank fail, there would be significant disruption to the essential services they provide to the banking system and the overall economy.

Background

- The Reserve Bank had issued the Framework for dealing with Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs) on July 22, 2014.
- The D-SIB framework requires the Reserve Bank to disclose the names of banks designated as D-SIBs starting from 2015 and place these banks in appropriate buckets depending upon their Systemic Importance Scores (SISs).
- Based on the bucket in which a D-SIB is placed, an additional common equity requirement has to be applied to it.

Foreign bank as Global Systemically Important Bank

- In case a foreign bank having branch presence in India is a Global Systemically Important Bank (G-SIB).
- It has to maintain additional CET1 capital surcharge in India as applicable to it as a G-SIB, proportionate to its Risk Weighted Assets (RWAs) in India, i.e., additional CET1 buffer prescribed by the home regulator (amount) multiplied by India RWA as per consolidated global Group books divided by total consolidated global Group RWA.
- Presently, **the State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank** have been identified as DSIBs in India.
- **SBI and ICICI Bank were part of the first of D-SIBs released in 2015, and HDFC Bank was included in 2017.**

Significance

- Should such a bank fail, there would be significant disruption to the essential services they provide to the banking system and the overall economy.
- The too-big-to-fail tag also indicates that in case of distress, the government is expected to support these banks.
- Due to this perception, these banks enjoy certain advantages in funding. It also means that these banks have a different set of policy measures regarding systemic risks and moral hazard issues.

Note:

- As per the framework, from 2015, every August, the central bank has to disclose names of banks designated as Domestic Systemically Important Bank.

India's economy projected to record stronger recovery in 2021: UNCTAD

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- According to UN report, India's economy estimated to contract by 6.9 per cent in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic is forecast to record a "stronger recovery" in 2021 and grow by 5 per cent.
- The report, '**Out of the frying pan Into the fire?**' has published recently as an update to the Trade and Development Report 2020 by UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Key highlights

- The report described the year 2020 as **Annus horribilis** saying although warnings about the spread of viruses have become more frequent in recent years, nobody anticipated the arrival of COVID-19 or its dramatic global impact.

Global

- The US, which contracted by 3.5 per cent in 2020, is forecast to grow by 4.5 per cent this year.
- China is projected to record an 8.1 per cent growth in 2021.

India and Report

- India is estimated to contract by 6.9 per cent in 2020 and then forecast to record a 5 per cent GDP growth in 2021.
- The September 2020 report by UNCTAD had said that India's economy was forecast to - contract by 5.9 per cent in 2020 and recover to 3.9 per cent in 2021.
- India's growth performance in 2020 fell below our mid-2020 expectations.
- The report noted that the deeper than expected downturn in 2020 explains in part the stronger recovery now projected for 2021 for India.

- The accumulated real income loss relative to pre-COVID-19 trend, 2020-2021 (% of GDP) for India is 27.7 per cent.

Related Information

About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

- It is a permanent organ of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, established in 1964 to promote trade, investment, and development in developing countries.
- It's headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is a part of UN Secretariat.

Other Reports published by UNCTAD

- a. Trade and Development Report
- b. World Investment Report
- c. The Least Developed Countries Report
- d. World Economic Situation and Prospects
- e. Information and Economy Report
- f. Technology and Innovation Report
- g. Commodities and Development Report

Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project

(Topic- GS Paper III–Infrastructure, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

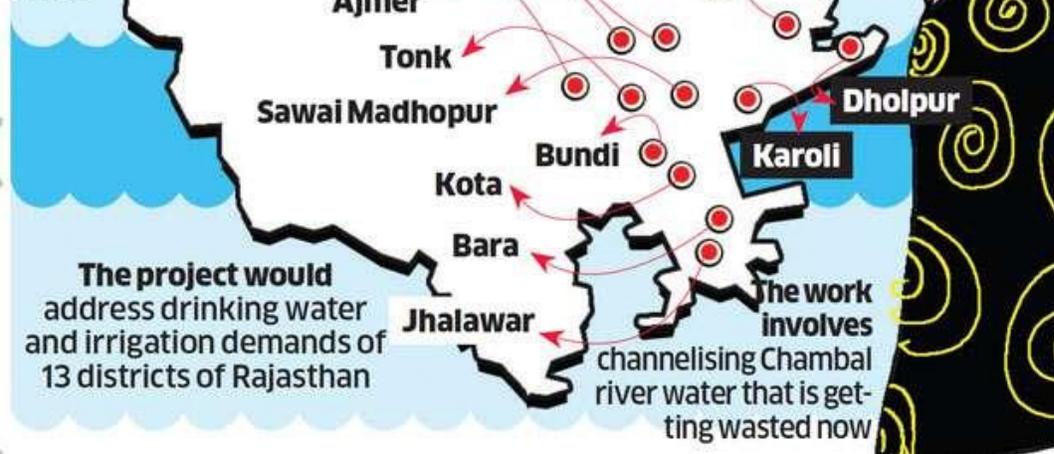
- Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has been strongly demanding national project status for the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP).

About Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP)

Hydropolitics in Desert State

Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project is all set to get Union Cabinet approval within this month

The ₹40,451-crore project will be done in 3 phases and is proposed to be completed in seven years



BENEFITS FOR EASTERN RAJASTHAN

- The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project aims to harvest surplus water available during the rainy season in rivers in southern Rajasthan such as Chambal and its tributaries including Kunnu, Parvati, Kalisindh.
- The water of the canal is also used in south-eastern districts of the state where there is a scarcity of water for drinking and irrigation.

What will be the benefits estimated in the project?

- According to the Rajasthan Water Resources Department, ERCP is estimated to create an additional command area of 2 lakh hectares and an area of 4.31 lakh hectare will get irrigation facilities because of this project.
- The ERCP also intends to improve the groundwater table in rural areas of the state, positively influencing the socio-economic conditions of people from these areas.

Related Information

About National project status

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- The main advantage of a project which has received national project status is that 90 % of the funding for the project will be given by the central government.
- The progress of work of National Project is monitored by Central Water Commission (CWC).
- A High Powered Steering Committee headed by Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation also reviews the implementation of National Projects.

Criteria

The criteria for selection of National Project will be as under:

- International projects where usage of water in India is required by a treaty or where planning and early completion of the project is necessary in the interest of the country.
- Inter-State projects which are dragging on due to nonresolution of Inter-State issues relating to sharing of costs, rehabilitation, aspects of power production etc., including river interlinking projects.
- Intra-State projects with additional potential of more than 2, 00,000 hectare and with no dispute regarding sharing of water and where hydrology is established.

NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar ignores tribal, ecological concerns

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, more than 150 sq. km. of land is being made available for Phase I of a NITI Aayog-piloted ‘holistic’ and ‘sustainable’ vision for Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost in the Andaman and Nicobar group.
- This amounts to nearly 18% of the 910 sq. km. island, and will cover nearly a quarter of its coastline.
- The overall plan envisages the use of about 244 sq. km. – a major portion being pristine forest and coastal systems.
- Projects to be executed in Phase I include a 22 sq. km. airport complex, a transshipment port (TSP) at South Bay.
- It is parallel-to-the-coast mass rapid transport system and a free trade zone and warehousing complex on the south western coast.

Background

- In mid-2020 the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) was designated as the nodal agency for the process.
- In January, 2021, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) denotified the entire Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to allow for the port there.

Threat to ecological uniqueness

- Nicobar megapode is the globally endangered bird unique to the Nicobars.

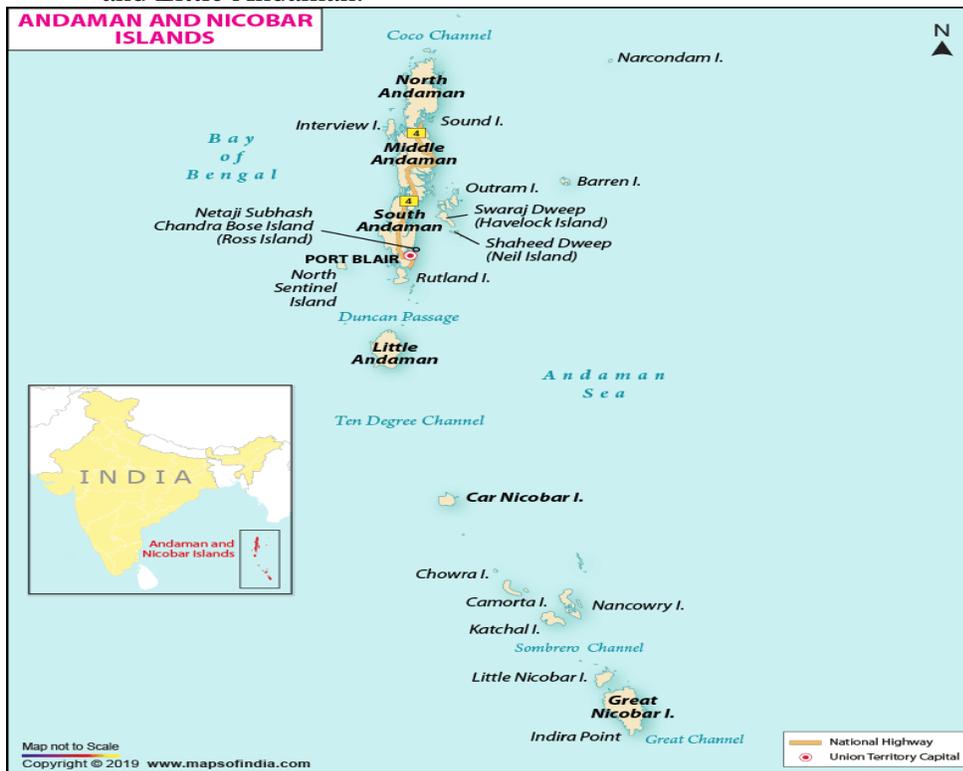
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- Galathea Bay as one of the ‘Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas’ and ‘Important Marine Turtle Habitats’ in the country.
- It is included in Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)-I, the zone with maximum protection
- The project is also threat to Shompen community which is important foraging grounds for this hunter-gatherer nomadic community.

Related Information

Demographics of Andaman & Nicobar islands

- The Andaman Island has divided into four different regions namely North, Middle, South and Little Andaman.



The Andamans is home to five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTGs).

- a. Sentinelese
- b. Jarawa
- c. Great Andamanese
- d. Onge
- e. Shompen

Great Andamanese

- They are inhabited on Strait Island is the part of North and Middle Andaman district.
- The population of Great Andamanese is fewer than 50 alive today.

Jarawa

- South Andaman and Middle Andaman Islands is inhabited by the Jarawa tribes, there are only 300-400 people of this community alive today.

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Sentinelese

- North Sentinel Island is part of North Andaman region which is home to the Sentinelese tribe, only 50-100 tribes are alive today.

Onge

- The Little Andaman Island is home to Ongetribes, these tribes are fewer than 100.

Shompen Tribe

- Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has identified Shompens are in four heterogeneous groups viz. northeastern, western, southern and central groups and each having a different dialect.
- Current population is estimated between 200 to 300.

Characteristic features of Aandaman and Nicobar

- There are 6 aboriginal tribes in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- On the basis of features, they can be divided into Negrito and Mongoloid
- Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese are **Negrito** while Nicobarese and Shompen are **Mongoloid**.
- The Sentinelese is a pre-Neolithic people who have inhabited North Sentinel Island for an estimated 55,000 years without contact with the outside world.
- Shompens and Nicobarese seem to be descendents of primitive Malaysians.
- These tribes still keep a separate entity and don't cover their bodies.
- The tribal groups in the two respective regions have very little in common in the ethnic, linguistic or cultural sense.

RBI sets up 5-member panel to screen new bank licences

(Topic- GS Paper III– Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up a five-member Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC) for evaluating applications for universal banks and small finance banks.

About Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC)

- The Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC) comprising eminent persons with experience in banking, financial sector and other relevant areas, will evaluate the applications thereafter.

Members

- The committee is headed by former RBI Deputy Governor Shyamala Gopinath.

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- The other members of the panel include RBI Central Board Director Revathy Iyer, National Payments Corporation of India Chairman B Mahapatra, former Canara Bank Chairman T N Manoharan and former Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Chairman Hemant Contractor.

Tenure

- The tenure of Standing External Advisory Committee will be for three years.

Guidelines for bank licensing

- According to the guidelines on on-tap licensing of universal banks issued in August 2016, resident individuals and professionals having 10 years of experience in banking and finance at a senior level are also eligible to promote universal banks.
- However, large industrial houses are excluded as eligible entities but are permitted to invest in the banks up to 10 per cent.

Methylobacterium ajmalii

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- **Recently Methylobacterium ajmalii is a bacteria** found on International Space Station named after Indian biodiversity scientist Seyed Ajmal Khan.

About the discovery

- Researchers from the University of Hyderabad, working with NASA, have described the discovery and isolation of four strains of bacteria belonging to the family Methylobacteriaceae from different locations aboard the ISS.
- While one strain was identified as **Methylobacterium rhodesianum** bacteria, the other three strains were previously undiscovered.

Significance

- It is a rod-shaped bacteria found in ISS are involved in nitrogen fixation, plant growth and biocontrol activity against plant pathogens.
- According to the researchers, this bacteria may hold the key to growing crops in space.

About International Space Station

- The International Space Station (ISS) is a modular space station (habitable artificial satellite) in low Earth orbit.
- It is a multinational collaborative project involving five participating space agencies: NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), and CSA (Canada).
- The ownership and use of the space station is established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.

- The station serves as a microgravity and space environment research laboratory in which scientific research is conducted in astrobiology, astronomy, meteorology, physics, and other fields.
- The ISS is suited for testing the spacecraft systems and equipment required for possible future long-duration missions to the Moon and Mars.

Ultimate military strength Index

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a Defence **Website Military Direct** has released a study titled “**Ultimate military strength Index**”.

About Ultimate military strength index

- The Ultimate military strength index ranks the strongest military forces in the world.

Calculated by

- It was calculated after taking into consideration various factors including budgets, number of inactive and active military personnel, total air, sea, land and nuclear resources, average salaries, and weight of equipment.
- The factors include budgets, average salaries, number of inactive and active military personnel.
- The index also includes total air, sea, land, and nuclear resources and the weight of equipment.

Key Findings

Global Level

- China has the strongest military force in the world which is followed by USA, Russia, India, and France.
- The US is the world’s biggest military spender with a budget of USD 732 billion per year which is followed by China (USD 261 billion) and India.
- The index is based on the number of air, sea, land resources the Ultimate military strength index predicted a winner in terms of hypothetical conflicts.
- The report predicts China would win by sea, the USA would win by air, and Russia by land in this hypothetical conflict.

India and Index

- India has the fourth strongest military force in the world.
- India is the world’s third-biggest military spender. According to the index India spends almost a budget of USD 71 billion.

India emerges global manufacturing hub for Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Hyderabad-headquartered Gland Pharma had recently inked a pact with Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to supply 252 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V.

About Sputnik V

- The vaccine has been called Sputnik V, named after the first artificial Earth satellite, Sputnik-I launched by the Soviet Union.
- This vaccine has been developed by Moscow’s Gamaleya Institute in collaboration with the Russia’s defence ministry.
- **It is the first Covid-19 vaccine to be approved.**
- The vaccine is based on the DNA of a SARS-CoV-2 type adenovirus, a common cold virus

Efficacy

- It has shown 91.6 per cent efficacy in trials, much higher than the efficacy of Covishield, the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine made by Serum Institute of India (SII), and Covaxin made by Bharat Biotech, which are currently being administered in India.
- Covishield has an efficacy of around 53 per cent if the two doses are administered four weeks apart, while a longer gap of 12 weeks can raise efficacy to 79 per cent.
- Oxford-AstraZeneca had said the vaccine has a 62 per cent efficacy overall. Covaxin, on the other hand, has 80.6 per cent efficacy, according to interim data from phase-3 clinical trial.

Related Information

Longer gap between two doses of Covishield will ensure more coverage’

- The Central government's directive, which states that the second dose of the Covishield vaccine can be taken between four to eight weeks, is likely to ensure that more people in Karnataka are covered in the first dose.

Benefits

- Some people who have taken the first dose may delay taking the second dose. Because of this, we may get more time to vaccinate more people with the first dose.”

Shetrunjay Dunagar Reserve Forest

(Topic- GS Paper III– Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- Recently, the fire started in revenue area of Kanjarda village of Palitana taluka which spread to the adjoining Shetrunjay Dungar Reserve Forest, engulfed an area of around 200 hectares before the forest department brought it under control.

About Shetrunjay Dunagar Reserve Forest

- Shatrunjaya or Shetrunjaya hills located in Bhavnagar district, Gujarat, India.
- They are situated on the banks of the Shetrunji River.
- The Shetrunjay Dunagar Reserve Forest, a patch of hilly, dry and deciduous forest.
- It is also a home to **Asiatic lions** and leopards as well as herbivores such as blue bulls.

Related Information

About Asiatic lion



- They are also known as Indian Lion.
- The scientific name is *Panthera Leo Persica*.
- Its current range is restricted to the **Gir National Park and environs in the Indian state of Gujarat.**

Conservation status

- It is listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- It is listed in **Appendix I of CITES**
- It is listed as **Endangered** as per IUCN Red List.

Great Indian Bustard

(Topic- GS Paper III– Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The Supreme Court has recently intervened on behalf of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustards over the birds falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their dwindling natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

About Great Indian Bustards



- It is one of the heaviest flying birds which can grow up to one metre in height.
- It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.

Distribution and habitat

- This species was formerly widespread in India and Pakistan.
- In India, the bird was **historically found** in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- Today the bustard is restricted to isolated pockets in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (shared with Pakistan)

Conservation Status

- They are categorised as critically endangered under the IUCN Red data list.
- These birds are protected under CITES Appendix I,
- Under the Schedule 1 (Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002).

Protected areas in India for Great Indian Bustard

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- Desert National Park Sanctuary — Rajasthan
- Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary – Andhra Pradesh
- Karera and Ghatigaon Sanctuary Sanctuary - Madhya Pradesh
- Gaga Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat
- Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Maharashtra.

Energy-efficiency enterprise (E3) certifications programme

(Topic- GS Paper III– Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news ?

- Minister for Power has recently launched the “Energy Efficiency Enterprise(E3) Certifications Programme” for the Brick manufacturing Sector.

About Energy Efficiency Enterprise (E3) Certification Programme:

- It is a certification scheme which aims to recognise burnt clay brick manufacturers for adopting energy-efficient manufacturing.
- Furthermore, it encourages customers to source bricks from such E3 certified manufacturing units.
- The E3 certification will be provided by the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**.

How will the E3 certification be awarded?

- Brick Manufacturing Enterprises need to meet the minimum Specific Energy Consumption performance criteria.
- The criteria can be met by Brick Manufacturing Enterprises by adopting a combination of measures, such as:
 - a. improving energy efficiency in manufacturing
 - b. Producing bricks having lower (bulk) densities e.g. porous, perforated and hollow bricks.

Significance

- The programme will help the brick industry shift towards more efficient technologies.
- The implementation of E3 certification will lead to multiple benefits in terms of energy savings in brick manufacturing process and improved quality of bricks.
- It will also help save cost for builders as well as energy savings to occupiers of buildings due to better thermal comfort and improved insulation properties.

‘India’s arms imports down by 33%’

(Topic- GS Paper III– Defence, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- According to a report from Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the arms imports of India decreased by 33% between 2011-15 and 2016-20 while India continues to remain the second largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia.

Key Highlights

- The overall drop in arms imports between 2011-15 and 2016-20 seems to be mainly due to its complex and lengthy procurement processes, combined with its attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian arms by diversifying its network of arms suppliers.
- **Russia largest supplier:** Russia was the largest arms supplier in both years.
- However, Russia's deliveries dropped by 53% between the two periods and its share of Indian arms imports fell from 70 to 49%.
- The U.S. was the second largest arms supplier to India in 2011–15 but in 2016–20 India's arms imports from the U.S. were 46% lower than in the previous five-year period, making the U.S. the fourth largest supplier in 2016-20.
- France and Israel were the second and third largest arms suppliers in 2016-20.
- India's arms imports from France increased by 709% while those from Israel rose by 82%.

About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

- It is an international institute based in Stockholm (Sweden).
- It was founded in 1966 and provides data, analysis and recommendations for armed conflict, military expenditure and arms trade as well as disarmament and arms control
- It is dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.

Project RE-HAB

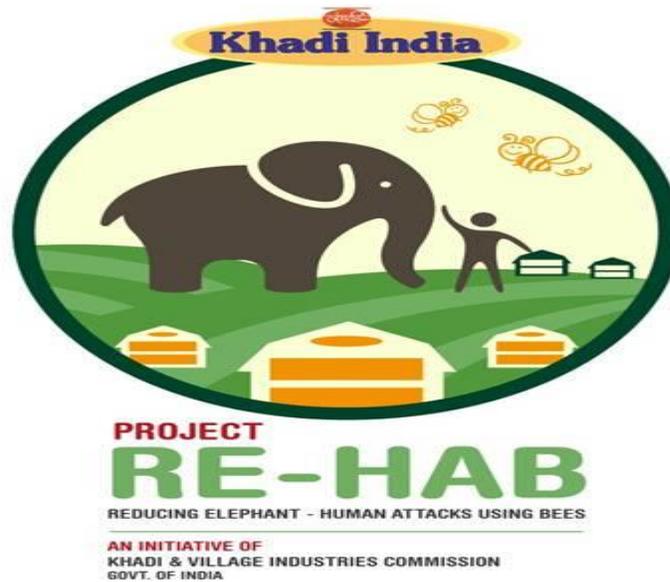
(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) have recently launched a pilot Project RE-HAB, in which creating “bee-fences” to mitigate human – elephant conflicts in the country.

About Project RE-HAB

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- The pilot project was launched at four locations around village Chelur in Kodagu district of Karnataka.
- These spots are located on the periphery of **Nagarhole National Park and Tiger Reserve** and prone to human-elephant conflicts.

Objective

- The objective of Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant – Human Attacks using Bees) is to thwart elephant attacks in human habitations using honey bees and thus reducing loss of lives of both, humans as well as elephants.
- Project RE-HAB is a sub-mission under **KVIC's National Honey Mission**.
- In this Project RE-HAB uses bee boxes as a fence to prevent the attack of elephants.

How its works?

- The boxes are connected with a string so that when elephants attempt to pass through, a tug or pull causes the bees to swarm the elephant herds and dissuade them from progressing further.
- Bee boxes have been placed on the ground as well as hung from the trees to block the passage of elephants.
- High resolution, night vision cameras have been installed at strategic points to record the impact of bees on elephants and their behavior in these zones.

Related Information

About the World Elephant Day

- **World Elephant Day celebrated on August 12** every year which is dedicated to the preservation and protection of the world's elephants.

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- **The goal of World Elephant Day** is to create awareness on elephant conservation, and to share knowledge and positive solutions for the better protection and management of wild and captive elephants.
- The current population estimates indicate that there are about 50,000 -60000 Asian elephants in the world of which more than 60 % of the population are held in India.

Conservation Status

- **Asian elephants** are listed as “**Endangered**” on the IUCN Red List of threatened species.
- Indian Elephant has also been listed in the **Appendix I of the Convention of the Migratory species**.

Post-vaccine blood clots a form of rare cerebral thrombosis?

(Topic- GS Paper III–Health + Science and Technology, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Scientists at the Germany-based Paul-Ehrlich-Institute report that the blood clots observed in some of those vaccinated are a “special form of very rare cerebral vein thrombosis”.
- This corresponds to a deficiency in platelets and bleeding following vaccination with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.
- The recommendations from the institute were the reason Germany put on hold ongoing vaccinations until a full review by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

European Union nations suspend use

- Denmark was the first country to suspend the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on March 11 as a precautionary measure.
- Iceland and Norway followed suit.
- Bulgaria also suspended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as it probed caused the death of a woman with several underlying conditions who was inoculated. Sweden and Latvia, too, have suspended use.

Concern with India

- India also is reliant on Covishield, which is based on the AstraZeneca vaccine, and forms the bulk of the nearly 30 million vaccines that have been so far administered to the population.
- However, officials say no instances of such blood clots have been reported so far.

Related Information

About Cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT)

- It is a blood clot of a cerebral vein in the brain.
- This vein is responsible for draining blood from the brain.
- If blood collects in this vein, it will begin to leak into brain tissues and cause a hemorrhage or severe brain swelling.
- When caught early, CVT can be treated without causing life-threatening complications.

NGT forms Oversight Committee to prevent unscientific mining in Meghalaya

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the National Green Tribunal Monday has formed an Oversight Committee of 12 members to prevent unscientific and unregulated mining in the state.

About the Oversight Committee

- The Committee is headed by Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- The Committee may meet within one month, take stock of situation and plan future course of action.
- Its task will be to take forward compliance of judgment of the Supreme Court and further orders of this Tribunal for preventing unscientific and unregulated mining, handling the already mined material and all other incidental issues.

About Rat-hole mining

- It involves digging of narrow tunnels, usually 3-4 feet high, for workers to enter and extract coal.
- The horizontal tunnels are often termed "rat-holes", as each just about fits one person.
- The green bench has prohibited mining in the entire state of Meghalaya but allowed transportation of extracted coal kept in the open with due "checks and balances"

IFSCA allows banks in IFSCs to undertake portfolio management, investment advisory services

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

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- International Financial Services Centers Authority (IFSCA) has recently approved the inclusion of portfolio management and investment advisory services in the permitted activities for banking units at IFSCs.
- The IFSCA also approved the Market Infrastructure Institutions Regulations, which will provide more flexibility in the shareholding of MIIs in the IFSC.

Benefits of Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs)

- The market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) viz stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories are of critical importance in the growth and stability of any financial system.
- The MII regulations, approved by the authority, will provide more flexibility in terms of shareholding of MIIs in IFSC (including the option of a consortium of MIIs recognised in India, IFSC or FATF compliant foreign jurisdiction holding shareholding of the MIIs in IFSC).
- It also enhanced governance norms and ensures adequate risk management by MIIs, in addition to other general obligations.
- The MII regulations are also in line with the global standards, keeping in mind the twin objectives of development of MIIs with adequate safeguards to ensure stability and continuity of the MIIs in IFSC.

About the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA)

- It has been established on April 27, 2020 under the International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019.
- It is headquartered at GIFT City, Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

Role of IFSCA

- The IFSCA is a unified authority for the development and regulation of financial products, financial services and financial institutions in the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in India.
- At present, the GIFT IFSC is the maiden international financial services centre in India.
- Prior to the establishment of IFSCA, the domestic financial regulators, namely, RBI, SEBI, PFRDA and IRDAI regulated the business in IFSC.

Objective

- The main objective of the IFSCA is to develop a strong global connect and focus on the needs of the Indian economy as well as to serve as an international financial platform for the entire region and the global economy as a whole.

What are the services an IFSC can provide?

- Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments
- Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds

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- Wealth management
- Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization, which provides a business opportunity for financial intermediaries, accountants and law firms.
- Global and regional corporate treasury management operations that involve fund-raising, liquidity investment and management and asset-liability matching
- Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance
- Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations

'World Air Quality Report, 2020'

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, 'World Air Quality Report, 2020' has been released by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company specialising in protection against airborne pollutants, and developing air quality monitoring and air cleaning products.

About the global cities ranking report

- It is based on PM2.5 data from 106 countries, which is measured by ground-based monitoring stations, most of which is operated by government agencies.
- The report also reveals the impact of COVID-19 lockdown and behavioural changes on global particulate pollution (PM2.5) levels.

Key highlights of the report

CAUSE FOR CONCERN
Of the 15 most polluted cities, 13 were in India

Rank	City	2020 AVG PM2.5
1	Hotan, China	110.2*
2	Ghaziabad	106.6
3	Bulandshahr	98.4
4	Bisrakh Jalalpur	96
5	Bhiwadi	95.5
6	Noida	94.3
7	Greater Noida	89.5
8	Kanpur	89.1
9	Lucknow	86.2
10	Delhi	84.1
11	Faridabad	83.3
12	Meerut	82.3
13	Jind	81.6
14	Hisar	81.1
15	Kashgar, China	81

*Unit: $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
SOURCE: 2020 WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT

- Bangladesh and Pakistan were the countries in 2020 with worse average PM2.5 levels than India.
- China ranked 11th in the latest report, a deterioration from the 14th in the previous edition of the report.
- In the 2020 report, 106 countries were evaluated.
- The pollution levels are weighted averages, meaning that the population of a country influences the pollution values reported.
- In 2020, 84% of all monitored countries observed air quality improvements.
- Other improvements in major cities over 2019 included an 11% drop in Beijing, a 13% drop in Chicago, a 17% drop in Paris and a 16% drop in London and Seoul.
- However, of the 106 monitored countries, only 24 met the World Health Organization annual guidelines for PM 2.5.
- When ranked by cities, Hotan in China was the most polluted, with an average concentration of $110.2 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, followed by Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh at 106.

India and Report

- **Of the 15 most polluted cities, 13 were in India.**
- Delhi remained the most polluted capital city in the world but India, on the whole, had improved its average annual PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels in 2020 than in 2019.
- Besides Delhi, the 21 other Indian cities among the 30 most polluted cities in the world are Ghaziabad, Bulandshahar, Bisrakh Jalalpur, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Agra and Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Bhiwari in Rajasthan, Faridabad, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad, Bandhwari, Gurugram, Yamuna Nagar, Rohtak and Dharuhera in Haryana, and Muzaffarpur in Bihar.

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- Ghaziabad is the second most polluted city in the world followed by Bulandshahar, Birsakh Jalalpur, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow and Bhiwari.

Major Sources of India's air Pollution include

- Transportation
- biomass burning for cooking
- Electricity generation
- Industry
- Construction
- Waste burning
- Episodic agricultural burning.

Note:

- The transportation sector is one of the major contributors to India's leading PM2.5 emission sources across cities.

Equalisation Levy tax

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- The United States Trade Representative has recently proposed the actions against India and some other countries that have imposed or are considering imposing digital service taxes (DSTs) or equalization levy (EL) under section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 on grounds of discrimination against the US-based digital companies.
- Other countries in retaliation for their digital services taxes are Austria, Britain, India, Italy, Spain and Turkey.

About Equalisation Levy

- Equalisation Levy was introduced in India in 2016, with the intention of taxing the digital transactions i.e. the income accruing to foreign e-commerce companies from India.
- It is one of the recommendations of the **BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) Action Plan**.
- -It is aimed at taxing business to business transactions
- The taxes target in-country revenues of digital services platforms, such as Facebook, Google, and Amazon.com.
- The EL fixed at 2% is applicable to non-resident e-commerce operators not having a permanent establishment in India.

Applicability of Equalisation Levy

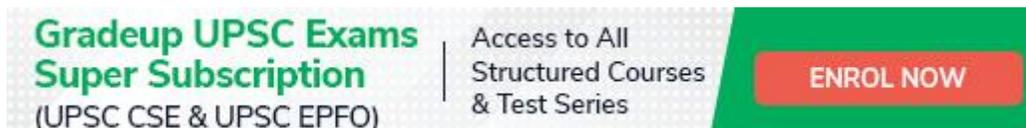
It is a **direct tax**, which is withheld at the time of payment by the service recipient. The two conditions to be met to be liable to equalisation levy:

- The payment should be made to a non-resident service provider;
- The annual payment made to one service provider exceeds Rs. 1, 00,000 in one financial year.

Services Covered Under Equalisation Levy

The following services covered:

- Online advertisement;



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- Any provision for digital advertising space or facilities/ service for the purpose of online advertisement;
- As and when any other services are notified will be included with the aforesaid services.

Exercise Desert Flag

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Exercise Desert Flag –VI has been successfully culminated with de-induction of the Indian contingent from UAE.

About Exercise Desert Flag -IV

- It is an annual multi-lateral large force employment exercise hosted by UAE.
- The six countries UAE, USA, France, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain apart from India participated with aerial assets.
- **Observer forces:** Jordan, Greece, Qatar, Egypt and South Korea participated as observer forces.
- The aim for the participating crew and specialist observers was to expose them to operational environment in scenarios requiring multinational forces working together.

Objectives of the exercise

- Expose coalition participating forces to large force employment;
- Sharpen tactical capabilities;
- Enhance interoperability along with fostering closer relations between the participating forces.

16th Global Wind Report 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- According to a new report titled ‘Global Wind Report 2021, released by the Global Wind Energy Council, the year 2020 was the best year in history for the global wind industry as this sector installed 93GW of new capacity in 2020.



Key highlights of the report

- The US and China installed 75% of new installations in 2020 and account for over half of the world’s total wind power capacity.

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- At present there is 743 GW of wind power capacity worldwide, helping to avoid over 1.1 billion tonnes of CO₂ globally – equivalent to the annual carbon emissions of South - America.
- The 93GW represents a 53% year-on-year increase.

Needs for more wind power installation

- The global wind power industry needs to install capacity three times faster over the next decade in order to achieve the net-zero targets by 2050.
- The world needs to install a minimum of 180 GW of new wind energy every single year to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.
- It will need to increase the capacity to 280GW annually to meet the net-zero emission targets by 2050.

Related Information

About Global Wind Energy Council

- It was established in 2005 to provide a credible and representative forum for the entire wind energy sector at an international level.

Mission

- GWEC's mission is to ensure that wind power is established as one of the world's leading energy sources, providing substantial environmental and economic benefits

African elephants face growing risk of extinction: IUCN Red List

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the new assessments by the International Union for Conservation of Nature underscore the persistent pressures faced by the two species of elephants in Africa due to poaching for ivory and human encroachment.

Related Information



World Elephant Day

- World Elephant Day is celebrated on August 12 is an international annual event, dedicated to the preservation and protection of the world's elephants.
- The goal of World Elephant Day is to create awareness on elephant conservation, and to share knowledge and positive solutions for the better protection and management of wild and captive elephants.

About Elephant

There are three subspecies of Asian elephant – the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan.

- The Indian has the widest range and accounts for the majority of the remaining elephants on the continent.

Conservation Status

African elephants

- According to IUCN Red List of threatened species status the African elephants are listed as “**vulnerable**” and Asian elephants as “**endangered**”.
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) status- Appendix I.
- Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants.

Indian Elephant

- Indian Elephant has also been listed in the **Appendix I of the Convention of the Migratory species** in the recently concluded Conference of Parties of CMS 13 at **Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat in February 2020.**

Conservation Efforts

SURAKHSYA Portal for “Project Elephant”

- The Union Environment Minister has recently launched National Portal on Human Elephant conflict called “SURAKHSYA”.
- The portal aims to collect real time information and will also manage conflicts on real time basis.
- The portal will help to set data collection protocols, data visualization tools and data transmission pipelines.

Other initiatives

- The **Project Elephant** launched by the Government of India in the year 1992 as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
- ‘**Gaj Yatra**’, a nationwide campaign to protect elephants, was launched on the occasion of World Elephant Day in 2017 which highlight the necessity of securing elephant corridors.
- The campaign is planned to cover 12 elephant range states.
- The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), had come out with a publication on the right of passage in **101 elephant corridors of the country in 2017**, stressed on the need for greater surveillance and protection of elephant corridors.
- The **Monitoring the Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme** launched in 2003 is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.

Hypnea indica and Hypnea bullata: New species of red algae

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently two new species of Red algae known as **Hypnea indica and Hypnea bullata** have been found on the west and south east coasts of India.



Hypnea indica sp. nov.

Hypnea bullata sp. nov.

About Red algae or Rhodophyta

- It is a distinctive type of species that are mostly found in the freshwater lakes and are the oldest type of eukaryotic algae.
- They are red in colour due to the presence of a pigment called chlorophyll A, phycoerythrin, and phycoerythrin.
- They are the distinctive type of species, mostly found in the deep freshwater bodies.

Importance of red algae

- Red algae form an important part of the ecosystem and are consumed by various organisms such as crustaceans, fish, worms and even humans.
- Red algae are also used to produce agar that is used as a food additive.
- They are rich in calcium and also used in vitamin supplements.

National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) bill 2021 (Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- PIB)

Why in the news?

- Parliament has recently passed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill 2021.

Key Highlights of the bill

- The Bill seeks to establish the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID) as the principal development financial institution (DFIs) for infrastructure financing.
- It includes development of bonds and derivatives markets which are required for infrastructure financing.

About National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development

- It will be set up as a corporate statutory body.

- It will have the authorized share capital of **one lakh crore rupees** along with financial and developmental objectives.
- It will act as a catalyst for the ecosystem of infrastructure funding and answerable to the Parliament.
- It will be managed by chairman & board nominated professionals who will be appointed by Government.
- Shares of NBFID may be held by (i) central government, (ii) multilateral institutions, (iii) sovereign wealth funds, (iv) pension funds, (v) insurers, (vi) financial institutions, (vii) banks, and (viii) any other institution prescribed by the central government.
- Initially, the central government will own 100% shares of the institution which may subsequently be reduced up to 26%.

Financial objectives of NBFID

- Financial Objectives includes- to lend, invest or pull investments directly or indirectly for infrastructure projects entirely or partly in India.

Related Information

About Development Financial Institution (DFIs)

- DFIs are set up for providing long-term finance for such segments of the economy where the risks involved are beyond the acceptable limits of commercial banks and other ordinary financial institutions.
- Unlike banks, DFIs do not accept deposits from people
- They source funds from the market, government, as well as multi-lateral institutions, and are often supported through government guarantees.

International ranger award

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- AIR)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Mahinder Giri, a range officer who has been deployed at Motichur range of Rajaji Tiger Reserve (RTR) for the past few years, has become the only ranger from Asia to win the prestigious International Ranger Award.
- The award has been announced for 10 professionals across the globe by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), “based on their **contribution towards conservation**”.

About International ranger award

- The award was created in 2020 by IUCN and WCPA in collaboration with International Ranger Federation, Global Wildlife Conservation, and Conservation Allies.
- The aim of the award to highlight and felicitate the extraordinary work that rangers do in protected and conserved areas worldwide.

Shaheen 1-A missile

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- PIB)

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Why in the news?

- Pakistan has recently successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile also called **Shaheen 1-A**.

About Shaheen 1 –A

- It is a surface to surface ballistic missile with the aim of re-validating various design and technical parameters of weapon system including the advanced navigation system.
- It has a range of 900 kilometres.

Features

- The missile comprise of a sophisticated and advanced guidance system which makes it a highly accurate missile system.

Related Information

About Shaheen-I

- It is a land-based supersonic and short-to-medium range surface-to-surface guided ballistic missile of Pakistan.
- It was jointly designed and developed by joint venture of NESCOM and National Defence Complex (NDC).
- It has an optimal range of 750 km which is propelled by two-stage solid-fuel rocket motor.
- It can deliver conventional as well as nuclear payload much faster than liquid fuelled missiles like Ghauri.

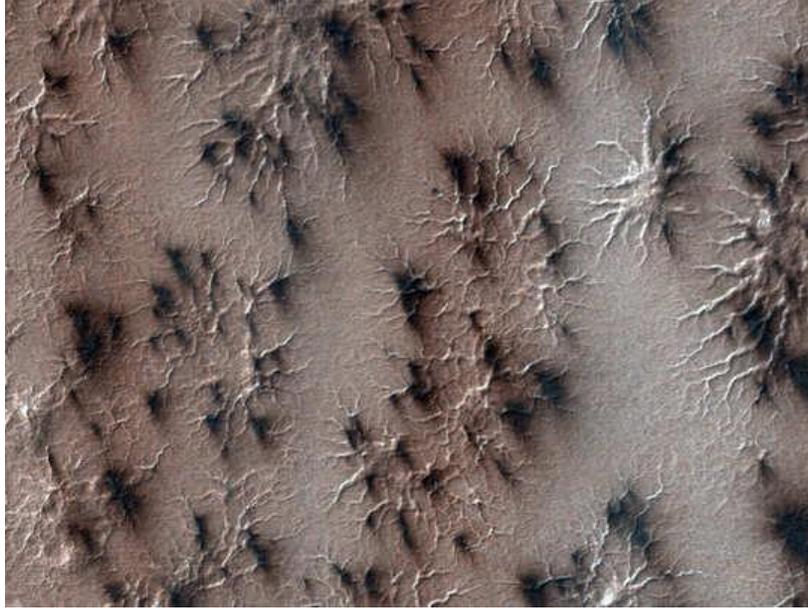
Spiders' on Mars: Scientists Reveal the Bizarre Blobs Sprawling Across the Martian Surface

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a new study has explained the mystery behind ‘spiders from Mars.’
- The Spiders are also known as the Araneiforms, the strange-looking negative topography radial system of the dendritic troughs.

About the Study



- The study provides the first physical evidence supporting that these spiders are a byproduct of shifting seasons of Mars and formed by the **sublimation of CO₂ ice**.
- The Mars atmosphere contains mostly CO₂, and as temperature drops in winter, the gas deposits on the surface as frost and ice.
- As the temperature rises, it directly turns from solid to gas through a process known as sublimation.
- According to Scientists, the species resemble tree branches and fork lightning and are not found on Earth.

Asteroid Apophis

(Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- The USA's NASA space agency has ruled out the possibility of the dreaded asteroid Apophis causing any damage to the Earth for the next 100 years.

About Apophis



- It was discovered in 2004, after which NASA had said that it was one of the asteroids that posed the greatest threat to Earth.
- It was named after the ancient Egyptian god of chaos and darkness,

Threatened to Earth

- Apophis was predicted to come threateningly close to us in the years 2029 and 2036, but NASA later ruled these events out.
- There were still fears about a possible collision in 2068, however.

Related Information

About asteroids

- Asteroids are rocky objects that orbit the Sun, much smaller than planets. They are also called minor planets.
- According to NASA, 994,383 is the count of known asteroids, the remnants from the formation of the solar system over 4.6 billion years ago.

Asteroids are divided into three classes.

- a. First, those found in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, which is estimated to contain somewhere between 1.1-1.9 million asteroids.
- b. The second group is that of trojans, which are asteroids that share an orbit with a larger planet.
 - NASA reports the presence of Jupiter, Neptune and Mars trojans.
 - In 2011, they reported an Earth Trojan as well.
- c. The third classification is Near-Earth Asteroids (NEA), which have orbits that pass close by the Earth.

- Those that cross the Earth's orbit are called Earth-crossers. More than 10,000 such asteroids are known, out of which over 1,400 are classified as **potentially hazardous asteroids (PHAs)**.

NISAR: Joint Earth Observing Mission of NASA and ISRO (Topic- GS Paper III–Science and Technology, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite called NISAR, which will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.
- The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh) into a near-polar orbit.

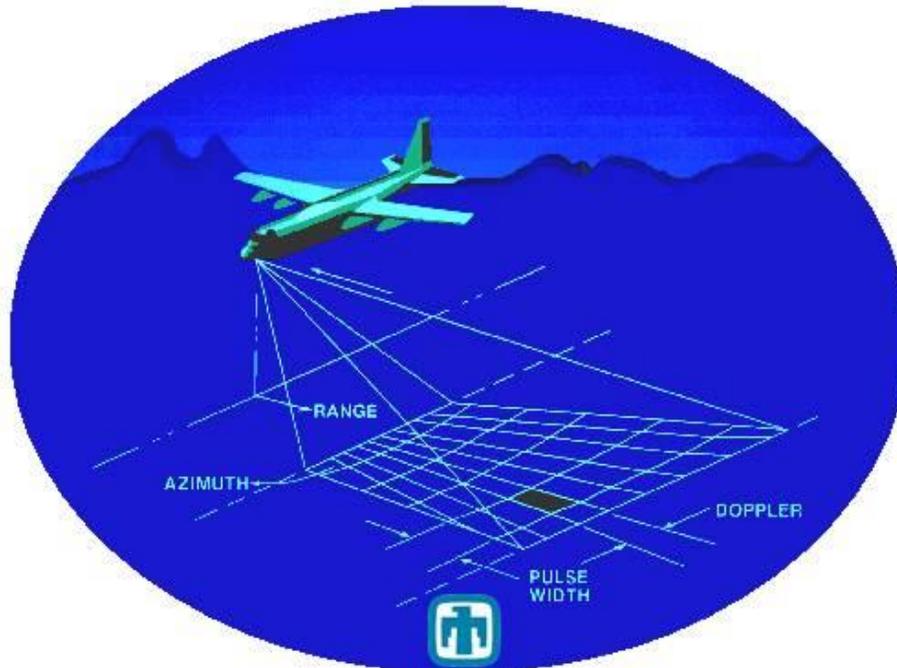
About NISAR

- The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR.
- SAR here refers to the Synthetic Aperture Radar that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth.
- The mission aims at co-developing dual-frequency synthetic aperture radar on an Earth observation satellite.
- NISAR will be the first satellite mission to use two different radar frequencies (L-band and S-band) to measure changes in our planet's surface less than a centimetre across.
- The NASA-ISRO SAR mission will observe Earth and measure its changing ecosystem and masses globally.

Significance

- NISAR will be equipped with the largest reflector antenna ever launched by NASA.
- Its primary goals include tracking subtle changes in the Earth's surface, spotting warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions, helping to monitor groundwater supplies and tracking the rate at which ice sheets are melting.

About Synthetic-aperture radar



- It is a form of radar that is used to create two-dimensional images or three-dimensional reconstructions of objects, such as landscapes.
- SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images.
- SAR uses the motion of the radar antenna over a target region to provide finer spatial resolution than conventional beam-scanning radars.

Mounted on

- It is typically mounted on a moving platform, such as an aircraft or spacecraft, and has its origins in an advanced form of side looking airborne radar (SLAR).
- The distance the SAR device travels over a target in the time taken for the radar pulses to return to the antenna creates the large synthetic antenna aperture (the size of the antenna).
- Typically, the larger the aperture, the higher the image resolution will be, regardless of whether the aperture is physical (a large antenna) or synthetic (a moving antenna) – this allows SAR to create high-resolution images with comparatively small physical antennas.

World Development Report 2021

(Topic- GS Paper III–Economics, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives has been released by World Bank.

Key highlights of the Report

- Most countries have shied away from an open-data policy — more so countries with developing economies, according to a recent World Bank report.

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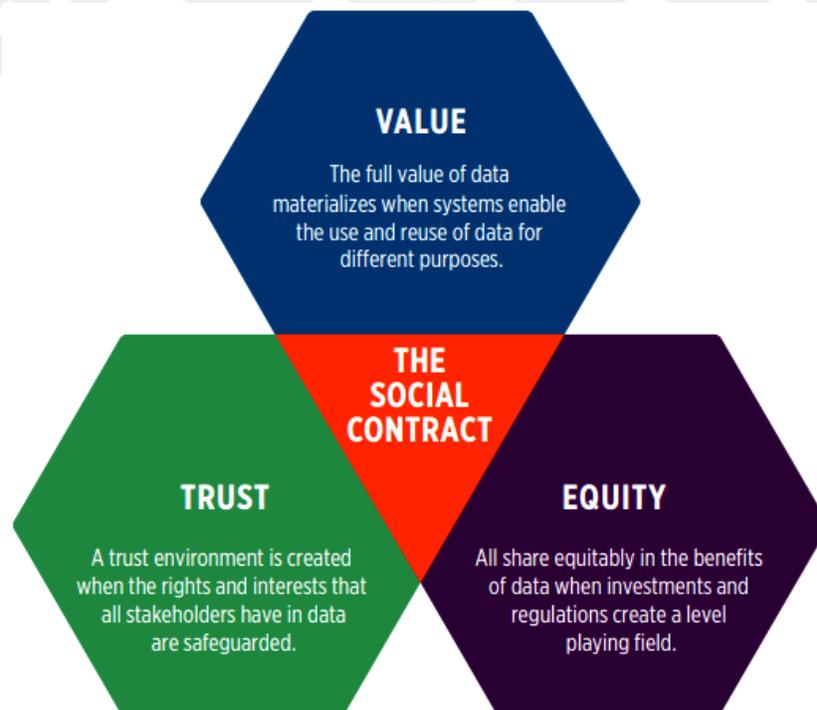
- Only 11 per cent low-income countries consistently made available with a license classifiable as 'open', the report flagged.
- The comparable rate for lower-middle-income countries was 19 per cent, for upper-middle-income countries 22 per cent and high-income countries 44 per cent.
- Public intent data should be safeguarded as a global public good and resource to achieve equitable and sustainable development, the report released March 25, 2021 underscored.

Public intent data, a foundation of public policies, can bring value to development by:

- Improving service delivery
- Prioritising scarce resources
- Holding governments accountable and empowering individuals

Challenges posed by report

- **Underinvestment in public intent data systems:** Only half the countries had a national statistical plan that was fully funded as of 2019. While 93 per cent of high-income countries had a fully funded national statistical plan, not a single low-income country had one.
- **Gaps in data on women and girls were particularly severe:** Only 10 of the 54 gender-specific indicators (19 per cent) in the United Nations-mandated sustainable development goals were widely available.
- Only 24 per cent of the available gender-specific indicators were from 2010 or later.
- The report acknowledged that gender impacts of the pandemic have been incompletely measured due to gaps in sex-disaggregated data.



India and the report

Data gaps in India

- The report echoed concerns on assessment of global poverty by World Bank, which has been skewed due to absence data on poverty from India.
- India monitors 54 out of the 130 SDG indicators.
- While the overall number of monitored indicators has gone up, the country has dropped four indicators from its tracking list pointed out the State of India's Environment In figures, 2020.
- The report underlined importance of updated granular data, it called for strategic repurposing of existing data. Using data collected for public or commercial purposes, by traditional or modern methods does not diminish their value to be reused for some other purpose.
- Data, that is, are inexhaustible.

Related Information

Other Reports Published by World Bank

- a. World Development Report
- b. Human Capital Index (Prepared as a part of World development Report)**
- c. Global Economic Prospect (GEP) Report
- d. Remittance Report
- e. Ease of Living Index
- f. India Development Update
- g. Global Financial Development Report
- h. Energy Efficiency Implementation Readiness
- i. Regulatory Indicators for Sustainable Energy (RISE)
- j. Logistics Performance Index
- k. Report : A Glass Half Full: The promise of Regional Trade in South Asia
- l. Universal Health Coverage Index (World Bank +WHO)

[Nacaduba sinhala ramaswamii: A new butterfly species](#)

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a new sub-species of the six line blue butterfly named Nacaduba sinhala ramaswamii found at the Agasthyamalais in the Western Ghats.
- It is the first time that a butterfly species was discovered by an all-Indian research team from the Western Ghats.



About Line Blues Butterfly

- Line Blues are small butterflies belonging to the subfamily Lycaenidae.

Distribution

- Their distribution ranges from India and Sri Lanka to the whole of southeastern Asia, Australia and Samoa.

Micro forests

(Topic- GS Paper III–Environment, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has underlined the role of micro forests in minimising the havoc caused by cyclones in coastal areas.

Background

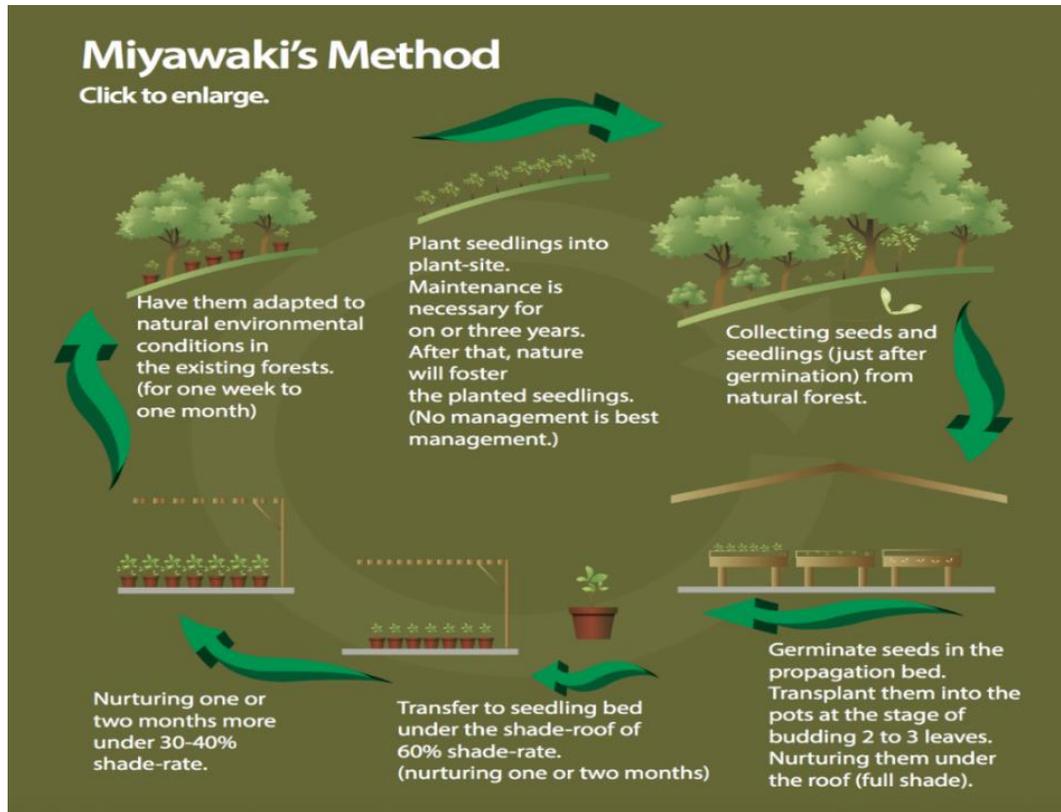
- India's first micro forest will be built in Raipur, Chattisgarh.
- Approximately, 19 acres of land which housed around 70 government office buildings will be converted into micro forest in order to create an oxy-zone.
- The micro forest will provide fresh air to Raipur.

Related Information

About Miyawaki technique

- Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) has been recently using the Miyawaki method to create tiny urban forests in Metropolitan areas of Mumbai.

What is the Miyawaki Method?



- The Miyawaki method, also called the Potted Seedling Method, is an afforestation technique that uses native species to create dense, multilayered forests.
- It is based on the work of Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the 1980s.
- A central tenet in creating these forests is its use of indigenous species for plantations.

Components

- Three layers of greens – shrubs and undergrowth, medium-height trees and taller canopies – **are integral components of the Miyawaki forests.**

Benefits

- This method creates mini forests in which forests are grown 10 times faster and become 30 times denser and 100 times more biodiverse than those planted through conventional methods.
- These mini forests help lower temperatures in concrete heat islands, reduce air and noise pollution, attract local birds and insects, and create carbon sinks.

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Exercise Vajra Prahar

(Topic- GS Paper III–Defence, Source- Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the 11th edition of Exercise VAJRA PRAHAR 2021 was conducted at Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh.

About Exercise Vajra Prahar

- It is an Indo-US Joint Special Forces exercise.
- Its aim is to promote military relations between the two countries by enhancing interoperability and mutual exchange of tactics between Special Forces.
- It is conducted alternatively between India and the United States to share the best practices and experiences in areas such as joint mission planning and operational tactics.

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